



Northern School for Autism

“Learning for Life”

Child Safety Policy

PURPOSE

Northern School for Autism’s Child Safe Policy sets out the school’s commitment and approach to creating and maintaining a child safe organisation where children and young people are safe and feel safe, and provides the policy framework for the school’s approach to the Child Safe Standards.

Embedding an organisational culture of child safety is critical to reducing the risk of child abuse in schools.

Organisational culture can be defined as a set of values, expectations and standards that influence the behaviour of the members of an organisation. The organisational culture defines what constitutes acceptable and unacceptable behaviour by people within the organisation.

To successfully embed a culture of child safety, a commitment to **zero tolerance of child abuse** must be led by the school governing authority. This commitment must be shared, openly and transparently, by all members of the school community, including staff (including school employees, contractors and volunteers), parents and families, visitors and children.

The quality of the workforce is the major factor driving improvement in schools. The Department supports a culture of leadership, learning and renewal in all workplaces with opportunities for career development and advancement. Excellent service provision can only happen when the right people are attracted, recruited, and supported to do their jobs as effectively as possible.

The Department has the responsibility to protect and provide for the welfare and safety of students and staff and to maintain the security of resources and assets by requiring and maintaining high standards of professional behaviour and conduct from employees. In order to meet its responsibilities, the Department must be satisfied that only those who meet the highest standards of integrity and suitability are employed. In addition, the principal must be satisfied that the prospective employee is suitable for child-connected work.

SCOPE

This policy applies to all staff, volunteers, and contractors in the school environment, whether or not they work in direct contact with children or young people. This policy also applies to school council members where indicated.

The policy will apply to the school environment (see Definitions section). The policy covers both school hours and outside of school hours.

Reservoir Campus
16-18 Gertz Avenue
RESERVOIR VIC 3073
Phone: (03) 9462 5990
Fax: (03) 9460 8058

Lalor Campus
2-4 Lyndon Street
LALOR VIC 3075
Phone: (03) 9464 3480
Fax: (03) 9464 4713

northern.sch.autism@education.vic.gov.au
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GUIDANCE

Child Safe Standard 1 provides part of the overarching framework for all the Child Safe Standards, alongside Child Safe Standard 2 which requires a policy or commitment to child safety.

This policy outlines what is required of schools for compliance with Ministerial Order 870 and provides the Northern School for Autism’s strategies and practices within the school to embed an organisational culture of child safety.

Governance arrangements, underpinned by a firm commitment from school leadership to a school’s values and standards are the starting point to embedding a culture of child safety.

Strategies that seek to prevent harm and neglect (including physical, sexual, emotional, neglect, racial and cultural or religious abuse) all contribute to a child safe culture. It is therefore critical that child safety is part of the everyday thinking and practice of all within the school community.

It is important to maintain the momentum of a child safe culture by monitoring performance and checking that child safety continues to be prominent in the school’s governance and planning.

The Child Safe Standards apply to all organisations involved in child-related work in Victoria.

Ministerial Order No. 870 provides the framework for how schools are required to comply with the Standards. Overall responsibility for ensuring compliance rests with the Victorian Registration and Qualifications Authority (VRQA).

In relation to Standard 1, the Ministerial Order states that:

“The school governing authority must:

1. develop strategies to embed a culture of child safety at the school
2. allocate roles and responsibilities for achieving the strategies
3. inform the school community about the strategies, and allocated roles and responsibilities
4. put the strategies into practice, and inform the school community about these practices
5. periodically review the effectiveness of the strategies put into practice and, if considered appropriate, revise those strategies.”

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DEFINITIONS

Child abuse

Child abuse includes:

- any act committed against a child involving:
 - a sexual offence; or
 - grooming; and
- the infliction, on a child, of:
 - physical violence; or
 - serious emotional or psychological harm; and
- serious neglect of a child.

Child-connected work

Child-connected work means work authorised by the school, school council, or Secretary of the Department of Education and Training and performed by an adult in a school environment while children are present or reasonably expected to be present.

Child safety

Child safety encompasses matters related to protecting all children from child abuse, managing the risk of child abuse, providing support to a child at risk of child abuse, and responding to incidents or allegations of child abuse.

School environment

School environment means any physical or virtual place made available or authorised by the school for use by a child during or outside school hours, including:

- a campus of the school;
- online school environments (including email and intranet systems); and
- other locations provided by the school for a child's use (including, without limitation, locations used for school camps, sporting events, excursions, competitions, homestays, and other school activities or events)
- Norris Bank Satellite Classrooms.

School staff

School staff means an individual working in a school environment who is:

- employed by the Department of Education and Training;
- directly engaged or employed by the school council; or
- a volunteer or a contracted service provider (whether or not a body corporate or any other person is an intermediary).

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STATEMENT OF COMMITMENT TO CHILD SAFETY AND CHILD SAFETY PRINCIPLES

Northern School for Autism is committed to the safety and wellbeing of all children and young people. This will be the primary focus of our care and decision-making.

The school's approach to creating and maintaining a child safe school environment is guided by our acceptance of the universal values –

Every member of the school community has a right to fully participate in an educational environment that is safe, supportive and inclusive.

Everyone deserves to be treated with respect and dignity.

At Northern School for Autism our values guide the decision and behaviours of all member of our school community including in relation to child safety:

-  Trust
-  Understanding
-  Safety

We **trust** ourselves, our school and each other to implement a teaching and learning program that builds on our strengths.

Our community **understands** the importance to support us by providing an inclusive environment where we can thrive.

Our school provides us a **safe** learning environment where we can practice behaviours that help us become valued members of the community.

Northern School for Autism has **zero tolerance of child abuse**, and all allegations and safety concerns will be treated very seriously and consistently with our robust policies and procedures.

- Our updated School Strategic Plan will contain statements about the school's commitment to developing a child safe culture.
- Our Child Safe Code of Conduct lists acceptable and non-acceptable behaviours.
- We have child safe policies to identify, remove or reduce, and respond to suspected child abuse.
- Where applicable, all our policies have the objective of having in place strategies to enhance our child safety standards.
- Our school policies consistently affirm that the safety and wellbeing of children is a high priority for Northern School for Autism.

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- Where possible, we choose to use the term “child” rather than “student”.

We are committed to providing a child safe environment where children and young people are safe and feel safe, and their voices are heard about decisions that affect their lives. Our child safe policies, procedures, strategies and practices will be inclusive of the needs of all children, particularly Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, children from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, children with disabilities, and children who are vulnerable.

Every person involved in the Northern School for Autism has a responsibility to understand the important and specific role they play individually and collectively to ensure that the wellbeing and safety of all children and young people is at the forefront of all they do and every decision they make.

Child safety principles

In its planning, decision-making and operations, the Northern School for Autism will:

1. Take a preventative, proactive and participatory approach to child safety.
2. Value and empower children to participate in decisions which affect their lives.
3. Foster a culture of openness that supports all persons to safely disclose risks of harm to children.
4. Respect diversity in cultures and child rearing practices while keeping child safety paramount.
5. Provide written guidance on appropriate conduct and behaviour towards children.
6. Engage only the most suitable people to work with children and have high quality staff and volunteer supervision and professional development.
7. Ensure children know who to talk with if they are worried or are feeling unsafe, and that they are comfortable and encouraged to raise such concerns.
8. Report suspected abuse, neglect or mistreatment promptly to the appropriate authorities.
9. Share information appropriately and lawfully with other organisations where the safety and wellbeing of children is at risk.
10. Value the input of and communicate regularly with families and carers.

POLICY

Strategies to embed a child safe culture

The Northern School for Autism’s culture encourages staff, students, parents/carers and the school community to raise, discuss and scrutinise child safety concerns. This makes it more difficult for abuse to occur and remain hidden.

All child safety documents, including this policy, the Child Safe Code of Conduct, the school’s Child Safety Responding and Reporting Obligations (including Mandatory Reporting) Policy and Procedures, [*Identifying and Responding to All Forms of Abuse in Victorian Schools*](#) and the [Four Critical Actions for Schools](#) are readily available online and in hard copy at NSA Administration Offices for all staff and students to read at any time.

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Child safety is everyone's responsibility. **All school staff** are required to:

- Act in accordance with the school's Child Safe Code of Conduct, which clearly sets out the difference between appropriate and inappropriate behaviour.
- Act in accordance with the Child Safety Responding and Reporting Obligations (including Mandatory Reporting) Policy and Procedures at all times, including following the [Four Critical Actions for Schools](#) where necessary.
- Undertake annual guidance and training on child safety.
- Act in accordance with their legal obligations, including:
 - Failure to disclose offence (applies to all adults)
 - Duty of care (applies to all school staff)
 - Mandatory reporting obligations (applies to all mandatory reporters, including teachers, principals, registered psychologists, and registered doctors and nurses)
 - Failure to protect offence (applies to a person in a position of authority within the school)
 - Reportable conduct obligations (applies to all school staff in reporting conduct to the Principal, and applies to the Principal in reporting to Employee Conduct Branch)
 - Organisational duty of care (applies to the school as an organisation)
 - For more information on these obligations, see [Identifying and Responding to All Forms of Abuse in Victorian Schools](#).

As part of the Northern School for Autism's child safe culture, **school leadership** (including the Principal and Assistant Principals) will:

- Consider the diversity of all children, including (but not limited to) the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, children from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, children with disabilities, and children who are vulnerable, when implementing the Child Safe Standards.
- Ensure that child safety is a regular agenda item at school leadership meetings and staff meetings.
- Encourage and enable staff professional learning and training to build deeper understandings of child safety and prevention of abuse.
- Ensure that no one is prohibited or discouraged from reporting an allegation of child abuse to a person external to the school or from making records of any allegation.

As part of the Northern School for Autism's child safe culture the **Child Safety Officer** (the Principal) will:

PROVIDE AUTHORITATIVE ADVICE

- Act as a source of support, advice and expertise to staff on matters of child safety.
- Liaise with the school leaders to maintain the visibility of child safety.
- Lead the development of the school's child safety culture, including being a child safety champion and, with the assistance of the Leadership Team, provide coordination in communicating, implementing, monitoring, enhancing and reporting on strategies to embed a culture of child safety.

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RAISE AWARENESS

- Ensure the school's policies are known and used appropriately.
- Ensure the school's child safety policy is reviewed in the context of school self-evaluation undertaken as part of the school accountability framework.
- Ensure the child protection policy is available publicly and parents are aware of the fact that referrals about suspected abuse or neglect may be made and the role of the school in this.
- Be alert to the specific needs of children in need, those with special educational needs and young carers.
- Encourage among all staff a culture of listening to children and taking account of their wishes and feelings in any measures to protect them.

TRAIN

- Being authoritative in providing advice by:
- Keeping their skills up to date with appropriate training
- Having a working knowledge of how the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) and Community Service Organisations conduct a child protection case conference to be able to attend and contribute to these effectively when required to do so.
- Be able to keep detailed, accurate, secure written records of concerns and referrals.
- Ensure each member of staff has access to and understands the school's child safety policy and procedures, especially new and part time staff. (Staff Administration Manual, Induction, Staff Meetings and Briefings)
- Make sure staff are aware of training opportunities and the latest DHHS and DET policies and guidance.

As part of the Northern School for Autism's child safe culture, **school mandatory reporting staff** are required to:

- Complete the [Protecting Children – Mandatory reporting and other obligations](#) online module every year.
- Read the school's Child Safety Code of Conduct on induction, and maintain familiarity with that document
- Read the school's Child Safety Responding and Reporting Obligations (including Mandatory Reporting) Policy and Procedures on induction, and maintain familiarity with that document
- Read the school's Child Safe Policy (this document) on induction, and maintain familiarity with the document.

As part of the Northern School for Autism's child safe culture, in performing the functions and powers given to them under the *Education and Training Reform Act 2006*, the **School Council and School Council members** will:

- Ensure that child safety is a regular agenda item at School Council meetings. [to show that the school is embedding a culture of child safety and School Council members are informed and understand the issues.]

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- Consider the diversity of all children, including (but not limited to) the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, children from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, children with disabilities, and children who are vulnerable, when making decisions regarding the Child Safe Standards
- Undertake annual guidance and training on child safety, such as the [Child Safe Standards School Council Training PowerPoint](#).
- Approve the Child Safe Code of Conduct to the extent that it applies to School Council employees and members, and if updated, note the new document in its school council meeting minutes
- When hiring employees, ensure that selection, supervision and management practices are child safe (unless delegated to the Principal).

School leadership will maintain records of the above processes.

Roles and responsibilities

School leaders will ensure that each person understands their role, responsibilities and behaviour expected in protecting children and young people from abuse and neglect. Staff will comply with the school's Child Safe Code of Conduct, which sets out clearly the difference between appropriate and inappropriate behaviour.

Specific child safety responsibilities:

- The Principal, in consultation with School Leadership, is responsible for reviewing and updating the Child Safe Policy every two years.
- The Principal, in consultation with School Leadership, is responsible for monitoring the school's compliance with the Child Safe Policy. The school community should approach the Principal/Assistant Principal if they have any concerns about the school's compliance with the Child Safe Policy.
- The Principal is responsible for informing the school community about this policy, and making it publicly available on the school's website.
- Other specific roles and responsibilities are named in the Northern School for Autism's other child safe policies and procedures, including the Child Safe Code of Conduct, Child Safe Responding and Reporting Obligations Policy and Procedures, and risk assessment register.

Recruitment

The Northern School for Autism follows the Department's Recruitment in Schools Guide to ensure child safe recruitment practices, available on the [Department's website](#).

This provides comprehensive policy and information concerning recruitment in schools including the following:

- staffing profile

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- vacancy management
- advertising vacancies
- employees with priority status
- selection
- qualifications
- employment, promotion or transfer
- review or grievance

NSA will ensure that each job or category of job for school staff that involves child connected work will have a clear statement that sets out:

- The job requirements, duties and responsibilities regarding child safety; and
- The job occupant's essential or relevant qualifications, experience and attributes in relation to child safety
- All applicants for the jobs that involve child-connected work for the school will be informed about the school's child safety practices including the Code of Conduct.

Volunteers, Visitors and Contractors

All prospective volunteers are required to comply with our school's *Volunteers in Schools Policy*, including in relation to assessing the suitability of prospective volunteers and obtaining checks required under this policy. A valid Working with Children Check will be required in compliance with this policy for all volunteers who are working with students. Please refer to *Volunteers in Schools Policy*

All visitors to NSA are required to report to the school office on arrival (see exceptions in relation to parents/carers in the *Visitors to the Schools Policy*).

NSA will ensure that our school's Child Safety Code of Conduct is available and visible to visitors when they sign in.

Regular Contractors will be required to undergo OHS Contractor Induction. In addition to the Contractor Handbook, contractors will receive the NSA Child Safe Code of Conduct. Irregular Contractors will be treated as "Visitors" for this purpose.

Training and supervision

Training and education are important to ensure that everyone in the school understands that child safety is everyone's responsibility.

Our school culture aims for all staff and volunteers (in addition to parents/carers and children) to feel confident and comfortable in coming forward with any allegations or suspicions of child abuse or child safety concerns. We train our staff and volunteers to identify, assess, and minimise risks of child abuse and to detect

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potential signs of child abuse. In compliance with MO 870, this training occurs annually or more often as required.

We also support our staff and volunteers through ongoing supervision to develop their skills to protect children from abuse, to promote the cultural safety of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and children from linguistically and/or diverse backgrounds, and the safety of children with a disability and vulnerable children.

New employees and volunteers will be inducted into the school, including by being referred to the Child Safe Policy (this document), the Child Safe Code of Conduct, and Child Safety Responding and Reporting Obligations (including Mandatory Reporting) Policy and Procedures on the school website and Staff Administration Manual. The CRT staff are provided with a copy of our Child Safe Code of Conduct which requires their signature. They will also be supervised regularly to ensure they understand our school's commitment to child safety, and that their behaviour towards children is safe and appropriate. All employees of our school will be monitored and assessed via regular performance review to ensure their continuing suitability for child-connected work. Any inappropriate behaviour will be reported by school staff to the Principal or Assistant Principal and will be managed in accordance with the Northern School for Autism's Child Safety Responding and Reporting Obligations (including Mandatory Reporting) Policy and Procedures where required.

Post-Employment Supervision and Ongoing Training

- NSA has in place a rigorous professional learning program for all staff.
- New staff are provided with information about matters such as the philosophy, vision, mission and values of the school, curriculum, students with medical conditions, school policies, OH&S and routine matters e.g. yard duty requirements, during inductions.
- Graduate teachers are provided with additional induction opportunities generally over several school terms, including strategies to enhance teaching and learning.
- Mentoring, coaching and in-house training strategies are used for all staff.
- All staff must have a Professional Learning Plan based on the school's Professional Learning Plan which is linked to the School Strategic Plan.
- Leadership development opportunities are a key component of the school's professional learning program for senior staff.
- There is a significant budget allocation made for professional learning.
- The school regularly will provide information, training and education for School Council, staff and volunteers about child safety
- The school will support staff to build resilience and cope with child abuse incidences
- As part of the process, the school will monitor the currency of all VET, Working with Children and other Suitability Checks and advise staff, volunteers and external providers two months before the expiration date.
- Leading Teachers model and coach staff weekly

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Reporting a child safety concern or complaint

The school has clear expectations for all staff and volunteers in making a report about a child or young person who may be in need of protection. All staff (including School Council employees) must follow the school’s Child Safety Responding and Reporting Obligations (including Mandatory Reporting) Policy and Procedures including following the [Four Critical Actions for Schools](#) if there is an incident, disclosure or suspicion of child abuse. Immediate actions should include reporting their concerns to DHHS Child Protection, Victoria Police and/or another appropriate agency and notifying the Principal or a member of the School Leadership Team of their concerns and the reasons for those concerns.

Northern School for Autism will never prohibit or discourage school staff from reporting an allegation of child abuse. The school will always take action to respond to a complaint in accordance with the school’s Child Safety Responding and Reporting Obligations (including Mandatory Reporting) Policy and Procedures. In accordance with Action 4 of the Four Critical Actions for Schools, Northern School for Autism will provide ongoing support for students affected by child abuse.

The Child Safety Responding and Reporting Obligations (including Mandatory Reporting) Policy and Procedures can be found on the School website <https://www.northernautism.vic.edu.au/policies-protocols>

Risk reduction and management

The Northern School for Autism believes the wellbeing of children and young people is paramount, and is vigilant in ensuring proper risk management processes, found in the school’s risk assessment register. The school recognises there are potential risks to children and young people and will take a risk management approach by undertaking preventative measures.

We will identify and mitigate the risks of child abuse in school environments by taking into account the nature of each school environment, the activities expected to be conducted in that environment and the characteristics and needs of all children expected to be present in that environment.

The Northern School for Autism monitors and evaluates the effectiveness of the actions it takes to reduce or remove risks to child safety. More information can be found in the school’s risk assessment register.

Listening to, communicating with and empowering children

The Northern School for Autism has developed a safe, inclusive and supportive environment that involves and communicates with children, young people and their parents/carers. We encourage child and parent/carer involvement and engagement that informs safe school operations and builds the capability of children and parents/carers to understand their rights and their responsibilities. Our school is committed to supporting and encouraging students to use their voice or communication device to raise and share their concerns with a trusted adult at any time of need.

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Students can access information on how to report abuse from Protect Posters (aimed at students) that will be placed in student community areas and Child safety related discussions are held in classtime. Teachers will implement explicit teaching sessions to give students appropriate information to keep them safe.

When the school is gathering information in relation to a complaint about alleged misconduct with or abuse of a child, we will listen to the complainant's account and take them seriously, check understanding and keep the child (and/or their parents/carers, as appropriate) informed about progress.

The school will promote the Child Safe Standards in ways that are readily accessible, easy to understand, and user-friendly to children, including:

- All of our child safety policies and procedures will be available for the students and parents on our website and at NSA Administration Offices.
- PROTECT Child Safety posters will be displayed across the school.
- School newsletters will inform students and the school community about the school's commitment to child safety, and strategies or initiatives that the school is taking to ensure student safety.
- As part of our Strategies to Promote the Participation and Empowerment of Children Policy, age-appropriate discussion of child safety issues with students is a feature of our child safe approach.
- NSA is using the Resilience, Rights and Respectful Relationships (RRRR) resources, to deliver respectful relationships and resilience education to our students.
- As part of our Child Safety staff training/meetings mandatory reporters and other school staff are briefed on the Four Critical Actions.
- The whole school is encouraged to contribute to risk assessment and mitigation.

The school will use its health and wellbeing programs to deliver appropriate education to its students about:

- standards of behaviour for students attending the school;
- healthy and respectful relationships (including sexuality);
- resilience (one of the school's prime values);
- child abuse awareness and prevention.

At Northern School for Autism teachers are delivering specific programs, including bullystoppers, Respectful Relationships, sexuality education, and e-smart education programs. All programs are adapted to cater for individual communication and cognitive learning styles.

Communications

This school is committed to communicating our child safety strategies to the school community through:

- Ensuring that the Child Safe Policy (this document) Code of Conduct and the Child Safety Responding and Reporting Obligations (including Mandatory Reporting) Policy and Procedure are available on the school website.
- Once per term reminders in the school newsletter of our school's commitment to child safety.

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- Ensuring that child safety is a regular agenda item at school leadership meetings, staff meetings and School Council meetings for discussion.
- NSA communicates child safety strategies, such as discussing them at school tours with prospective parents, at parent information sessions or in class, and/or by placing posters throughout the school.

Confidentiality and privacy

This school collects, uses and discloses information about particular children and their families in accordance with Victorian privacy law and other relevant laws. The principles regulating the collection, use and storage of information is included in the Department of Education and Training's [Schools' Privacy Policy](#).

FURTHER INFORMATION & RESOURCES

Related policies and documents include:

- Code of Conduct <https://www.northernautism.vic.edu.au/policies-protocols>
- Child Safety Responding and Reporting Obligations (including Mandatory Reporting) Policy and Procedures <https://www.northernautism.vic.edu.au/policies-protocols>
- Risk assessment register
- [Identifying and Responding to All Forms of Abuse in Victorian Schools](#)
- [Four Critical Actions for Schools](#)
- [Recording your actions: Responding to suspected child abuse – A template for Victorian schools](#)
- [Identifying and Responding to Student Sexual Offending](#)
- [Four Critical Actions for Schools: Responding to Student Sexual Offending](#)
- [Policy and Advisory Library – Duty of Care](#)
- [Policy and Advisory Library – Child Protection Reporting Obligations](#)
- [Schools' Privacy Policy](#).

Please refer also to the school's existing policies all of which are designed to create a safe environment for children:

- *Bullying Prevention & Response Policy*
- *Digital Learning in Schools policy*
- *Duty of Care*
- *Incursions (Safety of Children Working with External Providers) policy*
- *Camps and Excursions (inc local excursions) policy*
- *Photographing, Filming & Recording Children*
- *Student Wellbeing & Engagement policy*
- *Volunteers in Schools*
- *Visitors to the School Policy*
- *Yard Duty and Supervision Policies (Reservoir and Lalor)*

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<https://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/teachers/health/childprotection/Pages/safeenviro.aspx>
<https://www2.education.vic.gov.au/pal/child-safe-standards/policy>
https://www.education.vic.gov.au/Documents/about/programs/health/protect/FourCriticalActions_ChildAbuse.pdf
https://www.education.vic.gov.au/Documents/about/programs/health/protect/ChildSafeStandards_Poster.pdf
<https://www2.education.vic.gov.au/pal/recruitment-schools/overview>
<https://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/teachers/health/childprotection/Pages/default.aspx>
<https://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/teachers/health/childprotection/Pages/understanding-css.aspx>

Policy evaluation and review

This policy, first developed in this format in March 2020 and updated in September 2020, will be reviewed every two years or if guidelines change

This August 2021 update is scheduled for review in August 2023.

School council approval not required for this policy, but the Principal may choose to table this policy with Council for noting

This August 2021 update was presented to school council for noting on 9th September 2021

Reservoir Campus
16-18 Gertz Avenue
RESERVOIR VIC 3073
Phone: (03) 9462 5990
Fax: (03) 9460 8058

Lalor Campus
2-4 Lyndon Street
LALOR VIC 3075
Phone: (03) 9464 3480
Fax: (03) 9464 4713

northern.sch.autism@education.vic.gov.au
<http://www.northernautism.vic.edu.au/web/>