



STANDARD 1

Strategies to Embed an Organisational Culture of Child Safety, Including Through Effective Leadership Arrangements

Background Information and Rationale

- Victoria's Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities (the Charter) outlines the basic human rights of all people. It was introduced in Victoria through the *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006*.
- The Charter requires that governments, local councils and other public authorities not act inconsistently with the Charter and hence the introduction of the seven Child Safe Standards.
- Ministerial Order (MO) 870 which came into effect 1 August 2016, provides the framework for how schools will be required to comply with the Standards. Overall responsibility for ensuring compliance rests with the Victorian Registration and Qualifications Authority (VRQA).
- The Ministerial Order specifies the following requirements for schools regarding Standard 1:
 - “The school governing authority must
 - (a) develop strategies to embed a culture of child safety at the school
 - (b) allocate roles and responsibilities for achieving the strategies
 - (c) inform the school community about the strategies, and allocated roles and responsibilities
 - (d) put the strategies into practice, and inform the school community about these practices;
and
 - (e) periodically review the effectiveness of the strategies put into practice and, if considered appropriate, revise those strategies.”
- MO 870 identifies five elements of the Standard 1 requirement, including developing strategies, allocating roles and responsibilities, informing the school community, putting the strategies into practice, and periodic review. If a school is satisfied that its culture of child safety meets or exceeds the minimum standard in the Ministerial Order, the school needs to ensure that it can demonstrate the strength of its organisational culture to the VRQA.
- All staff and volunteers in organisations providing services to children need to recognise the importance and legislative implications, of keeping children safe. Under this Standard, organisations need to establish new ways or build on existing systems to embed or improve on a culture of child safety throughout all levels of their organisation.
- Preventing child abuse and responding to allegations is everyone's business. The Child Safe Standards aim to drive cultural change in organisations so that protecting children from abuse is embedded in everyday thinking and practice. To engage this cultural change, schools need to:
 - help leaders create an organisational culture that protects children from abuse
 - ensure the school's policies and practices reflect a commitment to child safety
 - ensure leadership is aware of allegations and substantiated cases of abuse and responds in ways that protect children from abuse
 - ensure staff and volunteers know and understand the organisation's commitment to child safety
 - commit to continuous improvement through regular reviews and updating policies and practices, and being open to scrutiny.

Reservoir Campus
16-18 Gertz Avenue
RESERVOIR VIC 3072
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@edumail.vic.gov.au
<http://www.northernautism.vic.edu.au/web/>



- To comply with the Child Safe Standards, an organisation must include the following principles as part of each standard:
 - promoting the cultural safety of Aboriginal children
 - promoting the cultural safety of children from culturally and/or linguistically diverse backgrounds
 - promoting the safety of children with a disability
- The school may already use good leadership strategies. Leaders can use this resource to help protect children from abuse by embedding child safety in the school's everyday thinking and practice.
- Whilst working with children can be very rewarding, it also brings additional responsibilities.
- Schools must act to protect children from abuse and build an environment where children feel respected, valued and encouraged to reach their full potential. This requires a culture of child safety to be embedded throughout the organisation so that child safety is part of everyone's everyday thinking and practice. Such a culture is achieved through proactive leadership in demonstrating the appropriate values, attitudes and behaviours of an organisation.
- A child safe environment is the product of a range of strategies and initiatives. The school should foster a culture of openness, inclusiveness and awareness. Children and adults should know what to do if they observe or are subject to abuse or inappropriate behaviour.

Purpose

- To ensure Northern School for Autism complies with the legislative requirements of MO 870.
- To identify those aspects of school leadership that will help to embed an organisational culture of child safety.
- To ensure the school demonstrates its commitment to creating a child safe environment.
- To raise awareness within the school community of the importance of child safety.
- To ensure the promotion of:
 - the cultural safety of Aboriginal children if applicable
 - the cultural safety of children from culturally and/or linguistically diverse backgrounds
 - the safety of children with a disability

Definitions

At Northern School for Autism, the School Leadership Team comprises ten members:

Principal - Pamela Mathieson

Assistant Principal, Reservoir Campus - Andrea Wallace

Assistant Principal, Reservoir Campus – Simon Williamson

Assistant Principal, Lalor Campus – Barry Van Weeghel

Leading Teachers - Maria Saric, Sue O'leary, Dina Milides, Trudy Williams, Sarah Adams and Sarah White.

Child Safe Officer – a person who a point for contact for children who feel unsafe or who wish to disclose abuse. At this school, the role is shared by two Student Welfare Officers Andrea Wallace Reservoir Campus and Brad Harris Lalor Campus .

The School Council is the governing body and is responsible for ratifying all policies developed by the school.

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In all Standards, the term “child” applies to any person under the age of 18 years. (For the glossary of all terms, please refer to Appendix 1).

Implementation

- The safety and wellbeing of our school population is our highest priority and our first consideration.
- We have **zero tolerance of child abuse**, and all allegations and safety concerns will be treated very seriously and consistently with our robust policies and procedures.
- To reinforce the message to be conveyed within the Standards, the school has consciously chosen to use the term ‘child’ or ‘children’ rather than ‘student/students’. The exception is where the term ‘student’ is integral to the name of a document.
- The Leadership Team at Northern School for Autism will take a preventative, proactive and participatory approach to child safety issues.
- It is seen as vital that the Leadership Team has a clear understanding of how developed the school’s child safety approaches are.
- The school recognises that developing a child safe environment is an ongoing process and will not be achieved in the short term.
- Implementing the Child Safe Standards requires an ongoing commitment. It will not be achieved in one activity or exercise. However, this does not have to be a complex process and will involve:
 - regular staff briefings and discussions
 - taking every opportunity to provide information to the parent community e.g. through Newsletter articles, meetings with Parent Organisations as applicable
 - regular updates to School Council (a regular agenda item)
- To begin the process of assessing how child safe the school is, the Leadership Team is systematically completing the Child Safety Review.
- Existing policies have been reviewed and updated to stress the importance the school places on child safety with sentences such as the first two dot points above. This includes the *Child Safe Policy* (November 2015) which has had additions and amendments as the school gained a better understanding of a child safe culture.
- The school’s Vision, Mission & Values Statement will include child safety as a key component.
- The Leadership Team has developed an interim response to the seven Child Safe Standards and collaboratively will review each Standard when more information comes to hand.
- When the next School Strategic Plan is developed, it is expected that school goals will relate to the development of a child safe culture.
- The components of the school’s child safe culture are:

Child Safety Review

Over a period of time, and with broad consultation, the school will complete the Child Safety Review as it will help the school to identify what is currently in place and what needs to be developed.

We consider that children have a unique voice and are able to contribute to discussions about how they interact with the school. Through already established forums and in an age-appropriate manner involving class discussions and focus groups, children will be asked what makes them feel safe and unsafe. The school will provide opportunities for opinions to be provided confidentially. Children will be told about what the school

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is doing to help keep them safe, ensuring the experience is a positive one. We will consistently let children know that their views are valued and respected.

The school will set aside Staff Meeting time so that all staff, teaching and non-teaching, will be given an opportunity to participate in the review to help to identify areas of risk of harm or injury and encourage everyone involved in the school to take a proactive approach to reducing risk.

The already established Consultative Committee, Professional Learning Teams and the staff as a whole will provide input. Other forums such as hosted meetings, newsletter articles, surveys and questionnaires will be provided so that School Council, parents, the community and volunteers can provide input into the review.

The review will be completed systematically with an invitation to participate and a date always set for the next section to be addressed. In that way, there will always be a reassurance the work being undertaken is of paramount importance to the school over the long term.

When the school has completed the Child Safety Review we will have identified the areas in which we need to improve. At this point, an Action Plan will be developed.

Leadership and Staff Responsibilities

The Leadership Team is responsible for embedding a culture of child safety in the school.

The Leadership Team will take the lead in protecting children from abuse.

However, staff have the responsibility to make school leadership aware of child abuse allegations and risks so that appropriate action can be taken.

All allegations of child abuse and child safety concerns are treated very seriously by this school. This includes complying with all legal requirements, including reporting suspicions of child abuse to police or the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) Child Protection as soon as practicable.

If any staff member believes a child is at immediate risk of abuse, they must immediately phone 000 and ask for police. In an emergency, this action is to occur without consultation.

(Failure to disclose the information to police is a criminal offence, except in limited circumstances such as where the information has already been reported to DHHS Child Protection.)

Identification and Analysis of Risk of Abuse

The school will adopt an approach to prevent, detect and respond to child abuse risks. This includes a risk management strategy and policy that sets out how the school identifies, assess, and takes steps to reduce or remove child abuse risks. Please refer to Standard 6.

Risk analysis always forms part of our preparation for school camps and some excursions. The analysis will now include possible potential for child abuse. The school's Incursions (*Safety of Children Working with External Providers*) Policy already has strategies to minimise the risk of abuse.

Development of a Child Safe Policy

The school has developed a child safe policy which outlines our commitment to promoting children's wellbeing and protecting children from abuse. Please refer to the school's policy documents and to Standard 2.

Development of a Code of Conduct

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The school has developed a code of conduct for staff, teaching and non-teaching, which specifies the standards of conduct and care required when working and interacting with children. The *Staff Code of Conduct Policy (General)* references the *Child Safe Policy* and explicitly prohibits any staff member from communicating with children on social media. It also informs staff of the need for a current Working with Children Check which is recorded on CASES21.

The school's *Student Engagement Policy*, the *Bullying & Harassment Policy*, the *Internet/Social Media Policy* and the *Mobile Phone, Student Use Policy* also describe appropriate interaction between children. Please refer to Standard 3.

Choosing Suitable Employees and Volunteers

The school will take all reasonable steps to ensure that it engages the most suitable and appropriate people to work with children. This includes police record and identity checks, Working with Children Checks where required, face-to-face interviews and detailed reference checks from previous employers, including from the applicant's most recent line manager. The school's *Incursions (Safety of Students Working with External Providers) Policy* and the *Working with Children Checks – Staff & Volunteers Policies* have details of the steps the school will take to promote a child safe environment. Please refer to the Standard 4.

Visitors to the School

The school has made clear decisions about what category of visitor is welcome in the school and the steps the school will take to ensure safety of children. Please refer to the school's *Visitors to the School Policy* and the *Photographing & Filming Students Policy*. Please refer to the Standard 4.

Support, Training, Supervision and Enhancement of Performance

The school will ensure that volunteers and employees who work with children have ongoing supervision, support and training so that their performance is developed and enhanced to help protect children from abuse. In particular, leadership need to understand their responsibilities. New staff and trainee teachers if applicable, will be trained as part of the induction process.

The school has a Student Welfare Officer (SWO). The SWO already is a point of contact for others who have questions or concerns or want to report an allegation of abuse. The school would enhance the role to include Child Safe responsibilities including the promotion of child safety within the school and the community. Additional training in child safety issues will be provided. Duties will be listed in the job description. Please refer to Standard 4.

Promoting Inclusion

The school values diversity and will be inclusive to all children and families. In particular, the school will establish a culture that supports:

- cultural safety for Aboriginal children, for example by working in partnership with Aboriginal peoples and Aboriginal community controlled organisations if applicable
- cultural safety for children from culturally and/or linguistically diverse backgrounds, for example by using inclusive language and images in policy documents, and communications such as the website and newsletters

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- the safety of children with a disability, for example by ensuring the school is accessible to everyone and ensuring appropriate training and supervision of staff and volunteers working with children with a disability.

The school understands that for Aboriginal people, culture is about family networks, Elders and ancestors. It is about relationships, languages, dance, ceremony and heritage. Culture is about spiritual connection to lands and waters. It is the way stories are passed on and knowledge given to babies and children. It is how people are greeted. It is looking for connection. It is about all the parts that bind us together.

The school recognises that creating a physical environment that is respectful of Aboriginal culture is an important first step. Symbols and images that surround a place send an important message about respect. By acknowledging the Country in which the school is located, we are demonstrating our willingness to learn, understand and respond to the diversity of Aboriginal cultures. As part of the policy review process, the school will consider whether or not 'Acknowledgement of Country' should form part of its ceremonies.

The school recognises that cultural safety is living in an environment that is safe for people, where there is no assault, challenge or denial of their identity, of who they are or what they need. It is about shared respect, shared meaning, shared knowledge and experience, of learning, living and working together with dignity and truly listening.

The school recognises that promotion of cultural safety of children from culturally and/or linguistically diverse backgrounds involves:

- ensuring the school clearly demonstrates a zero tolerance of discrimination
- being respectful, inclusive and welcoming of families from a range of backgrounds
- recognising times of importance to different cultures
- ensuring the physical environment has a positive image of a range of cultures, in terms of decoration and artwork
- employing staff that are representative of the local community
- actively seeking out and talking to families about how they would like to be involved
- asking about the best way to provide information to children and families

The school recognises that promotion of the safety of children with a disability involves:

- acknowledging that children with a disability are particularly vulnerable and ensure risk assessment processes considers their needs
- ensuring the school clearly demonstrates a zero tolerance to discrimination and actively welcomes all children
- making sure the environment does not pose access difficulties
- being responsive to families regarding specific measures that may be required to ensure the safe participation of a child with a disability
- supporting staff, other children and their families to understand and be inclusive of people with a disability
- thinking about how the school can encourage participation and feedback from children with a disability and their families

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The school's definition of 'disability' extends to children with a medical condition such as diabetes, epilepsy, anaphylaxis or blood-borne viruses and has developed policies to support these children.

The school recognises that respecting diversity means:

- valuing and respecting people's beliefs
- building responsive relationships
- communicating openly and honestly to find out how best to be inclusive and respect cultural needs
- examining our personal ideas, customs and beliefs
- respecting that the beliefs of one person may not be the same as another
- acknowledging and respecting that others can hold different beliefs of equal significance

The school's *Anti-Discrimination Policy* describes the school's commitment to providing teaching and learning environments that are free from discrimination in all forms, including those based on race, ethnicity, gender, ability, disability, sexuality and religion. Anti-discrimination extends to the school's dress code so that children are treated equally with the rights of individual children balanced against the best interests of the school community as a whole when developing and implementing their dress codes.

Empowering and Promoting the Participation of Children in Decision-Making

The school promotes the involvement and participation of children in developing and maintaining a child safe environment as far as practicable in a specialist environment. Ideas from children are sought formally by completion of the annual Student Attitude to School Survey which specifically addresses feelings of safety, informally as described above.

Professional Learning

The school has a strong commitment to ongoing professional learning for all staff.

There is an annual briefing for mandatory reporting protocols which is a component of induction for new staff. This will be extended to include volunteers and external providers.

Staff are given information about a number of school policies with an emphasis now placed on the child safe related policies.

- The school will know it has successfully implemented Standard 1 when:
 - there are clear and transparent arrangements for leadership to be made aware of child safety issues
 - policies and practices prioritise child safety and promote shared responsibility – not just at a leadership level – by outlining all staff and volunteer responsibilities
 - policies and procedures include the steps staff, volunteers, children or their families should take if they have concerns about the organisation's leadership in regard to child safety
 - child safety is a core part of public and internal messaging
 - a culture exists where staff, volunteers, children and families feel comfortable and supported when talking about any child safety concerns.
 - a culture exists of supporting cultural safety for Aboriginal children, and the organisations working in partnership with Aboriginal peoples and Aboriginal community controlled organisations to improve safety for Aboriginal children

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- a culture exists of supporting cultural safety for children from culturally and/or linguistically diverse backgrounds
- a culture exists of supporting safety for children with a disability

Evaluation

- This Standard will be reviewed after the completion of the child safe review process and then as part of the school’s three-year review cycle or if guidelines change (latest information July 2016).

This document, Standard 1, was ratified by School Council on 1st September 2016
 This update was ratified on the 7th of December 2017

References:
 Creating a Child Safe Organisation Guide p.16
 An Overview of the Victorian Child Safe Standards State of Victoria, DHHS November 2015
 and
 Protect – Identifying All Forms of Child Abuse in Victorian Schools 2016

Appendix A

Glossary of Terms

Term
The Act
Aboriginal child
Child abuse
Children from culturally and/or linguistically diverse backgrounds
Child
Child safety
Child safe organisation

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Northern School
for Autism

"Learning for Life"

Term

Cultural competency

Cultural abuse

Cultural safety for Aboriginal children

Cultural safety for children from culturally and/or linguistically diverse backgrounds

Children with a disability

Organisation

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