



St Margaret's School
Berwick Grammar School



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CHILD SAFE POLICY

St Margaret's School is defined as St Margaret's School, Berwick Campus (SMS) and Berwick Grammar School, Officer Campus (BGS).

Rationale

Ministerial Order No. 870- *Child Safe Standards - Managing the risk of child abuse in schools* is a key part of the Government's response to the recommendations of the Victorian Parliamentary Inquiry into the Handling of Child Abuse by Religious and other Non-Government Organisations.

The Inquiry's *Betrayal of Trust* report made a number of recommendations aimed at protecting children from all forms of abuse and neglect. In particular, the *Betrayal of Trust* report recommended that the government implement minimum standards for maintaining 'child-safe environments' for all organisations with direct and regular contact with children. The Government released new minimum Child Safe Standards which aim to create child safe cultures and environments in organisations that work with children.

The child safe standards are as follows:

In complying with the child safe standards an applicable entity to which the standards apply must include the following principles as part of their response to each standard:

- promoting the cultural safety of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children
- promoting the cultural safety of children from culturally and/or linguistically diverse backgrounds
- promoting the safety of children with disability.

To create and maintain a child safe school, the school developed and implemented the following:

- Standard 1:** *Strategies to embed an organisational culture of child safety, including through effective leadership arrangements.*
- Standard 2:** *A child safe policy or statement of commitment to child safety.*
- Standard 3:** *A code of conduct that establishes clear expectations for appropriate behaviour with children.*
- Standard 4:** *Screening, supervision, training and other human resources practices that reduce the risk of child abuse by new and existing personnel.*
- Standard 5:** *Processes for responding to and reporting suspected child abuse.*
- Standard 6:** *Strategies to identify and reduce or remove risks of child abuse.*
- Standard 7:** *Strategies to promote the participation and empowerment of children.*



St Margaret's School is committed to the safety and wellbeing of children and young people. This policy consolidates a series of policies which have been developed and implemented by St Margaret's School to create a safe **school environment**¹, in alignment with our core values of Compassion, Integrity, Determination and Social Responsibility. Our school community recognizes the importance of, and a responsibility for, ensuring our school is a safe, supportive and enriching environment which respects and fosters the emotional, psychological and physical wellbeing of its students, enabling them to thrive in their learning and development.

Our commitment to child safety

St Margaret's School is committed to **child safety**².

We have **zero tolerance of child abuse**³, and all allegations and safety concerns will be treated very seriously and consistently with our robust policies and procedures.

We want children to be safe, happy and empowered. We support and respect all children, as well as our staff and volunteers.

We are committed to the safety, participation and empowerment of all children.

We have legal and moral obligations under the *Children, Youth and Families Act 2005*, to contact authorities when we are worried about a child's safety. This is outlined in the *school's Child Protection and Mandatory Reporting Policy*, which we follow rigorously.

St Margaret's School is committed to preventing child abuse and identifying risks early, and removing and reducing these risks. This applies to all school environments, including physical and online environments.

St Margaret's School has robust human resources and recruitment practices for all staff and volunteers and is committed to regularly training and educating our staff and volunteers on child abuse risks.

We support and respect all children, as well as our staff and volunteers. We are committed to the cultural safety of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, the cultural safety of children from a culturally and/or linguistically diverse backgrounds, and to providing a safe environment for children with a disability.

We have specific policies, procedures and training in place that support our leadership team, staff and volunteers to achieve these commitments.

If you believe a child is at immediate risk of abuse phone 000.

¹ **School environment** means any physical or virtual place made available or authorized by the school governing authority for use by a child during or outside of school hours.

² **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

³ **Child abuse** includes-

- any act committed against a child involving-
 - a sexual offence or
 - an offence under Section 49B (2) of the *Crimes Act 1958* (grooming)
- the infliction, on a child, of-
 - physical violence including corporal punishment or
 - serious emotional or psychological harm
- serious neglect of a child.

Our Students

This policy is intended to empower children who are vital and active participants in our school. We involve them when making decisions, especially about matters that directly affect them. We listen to their views and respect what they have to say.

We promote diversity and tolerance, and people from all walks of life and cultural backgrounds are welcome. In particular, we:

- promote the cultural safety, participation and empowerment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children
- promote the cultural safety, participation and empowerment of children from culturally and/or linguistically diverse backgrounds
- ensure that children with a disability are safe and can participate equally.

Our Staff and Volunteers

All of our staff⁴ and volunteers must agree to abide by our *Responsible Behaviour Policy*, *Child Safe Policy* and *Child Safety Code of Conduct* (acceptable and unacceptable behaviour) which specifies the standards of conduct required when working with children. Relationship boundaries are carefully explained and staff are directed to avoid behaviours and actions which could place students and staff at risk of harm or of allegations of harm. *‘Teachers are always in a professional relationship with the students in their school, whether at school or not.’*⁵

All staff position descriptions include a statement concerning the staff member’s position in context, roles, responsibilities and accountabilities with respect to child protection.

Training and supervision

Training and education is important to ensure that everyone at St Margaret’s School understands that child safety is everyone’s responsibility.

St Margaret’s School’s culture aims for all staff and volunteers to feel confident and comfortable in discussing any allegations 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 potential signs of child abuse.

Furthermore, the school supports its staff and volunteers through ongoing supervision to:

- develop their skills to protect children from abuse
- promote the cultural safety of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children,
- promote the cultural safety of children from linguistically and/or diverse backgrounds
- promote the safety of children with disability.

New employees and volunteers undergo a staff induction which emphasises duty of care, our commitment to child safety and that everyone has a role to play in protecting children from abuse, as well as checking that their behaviour towards children is safe and appropriate. Any inappropriate behaviour will be reported through appropriate channels, including the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) and Victoria Police, depending on the severity and urgency of the matter. Please refer to the school’s *Child Protection and Mandatory Reporting Policy*. All staff are required to complete the online training module on *Protecting Children – Mandatory Reporting and Other Obligations*.

⁴ School staff means in a non-government school, an individual working in a school environment who is:

- directly engaged or employed by a school governing authority
- a volunteer or contracted service provider
- a minister of religion.

⁵ Victorian Institute of Teaching, *Victorian Teaching Profession Codes of Conduct and Ethics*



Recruitment

St Margaret's School takes all reasonable steps to employ skilled people to work with children. We develop selection criteria and advertisements which clearly demonstrate our commitment to child safety and an awareness of our social and legislative responsibilities. The school understands that when recruiting staff and volunteers we have ethical and legislative obligations.

All applicants applying for *child connected work*⁶ at St Margaret's School are informed of our *Child Safe Policy*, *Child Protection and Mandatory Reporting Policy*, *Child Safety Code of Conduct*, *Responsible Behaviour Policy* and our **zero tolerance of child abuse**.

We take all reasonable steps to employ skilled people to work with children.

- We use a combination of pre-employment screening processes when employing staff. These processes include: developing a selection criteria and advertisements which clearly demonstrate our commitment to child safety and an awareness of our social and legislative responsibilities.
- Relevant checks are carried out to verify the applicant's identity, employment history and qualifications.
- Applicants selected for interview are subjected to rigorous questioning.
- Reference checks are carried out and include suitability to work with children.
- All teachers must be registered with the Victorian Institute of Teaching (VIT).
- All members of staff, including volunteers, must hold a current Working with Children Check and provide evidence of this Check.

Fair procedures for personnel

The safety and wellbeing of children is our primary concern. We are also fair and just to personnel. The decision we make when recruiting, assessing incidents and undertaking disciplinary action will always be thorough, transparent and based on evidence.

We record all allegations of abuse and safety concerns using our *Child Safety Incident Report*, including investigation updates. All records are securely stored.

Privacy

All personal information considered and recorded will respect the privacy of the individuals involved, whether they be staff, volunteers, parents or children, unless there is a risk to someone's safety. The school has safeguards and practices in place to ensure any personal information is protected. Everyone is entitled to know how this information is recorded, what will be done with it, and who will have access to it. Refer also to the school's *Privacy Policy*.

Legislative responsibilities

Our organisation takes our legal responsibilities seriously, including:

- **Failure to disclose:** Reporting child sexual abuse is a community-wide responsibility. All adults in Victoria who have a reasonable belief that an adult has committed a sexual offence against a child under 16 have an obligation to report that information to the police
- **Failure to protect:** People of authority in our organisation will commit an offence if they know of a substantial risk of child sexual abuse and have the power or responsibility to reduce or remove the risk, but negligently fail to do so
- Any personnel who are **mandatory reporters** must comply with their duties.

⁶ **Child connected work** means work authorised by the school governing authority and performed by an adult in a school environment while children are present or reasonably expected to be present.

Risk management

St Margaret's School is required to protect children and proactively manage risks of abuse to our children.

We have risk management policies and procedures to;

- identify, assess, and take steps to minimise child abuse risks
- detect suspected child abuse
- safeguard the child and
- report suspected child abuse to the appropriate authorities.

Allegations, concerns and complaints

St Margaret's School takes all allegations seriously and has practices in place to investigate thoroughly and quickly. We work to ensure all children, families, staff and volunteers know what to do and who to tell if they observe or are a victim and if they notice inappropriate behaviour. We all have a responsibility to report an allegation of abuse if we have a reasonable belief that an incident took place.

If an adult has a **reasonable belief** that an incident has occurred, then they must report the incident. Factors contributing to reasonable belief may be:

- a child states they or someone they know has been abused (noting that sometimes the child may in fact be referring to themselves)
- behaviour consistent with that of an abuse victim is observed
- someone else has raised a suspicion of abuse but is unwilling to report it
- observing suspicious behaviour.

Supporting Policies

Acceptable Use of Communications Systems

Anti-bullying, Harassment and Violence Policy

Child Protection and Mandatory Reporting Policy

Child Safety Code of Conduct

Critical Incident Plan

Privacy Policy

Responsible Behaviour Policy

Raising Complaints and Concerns Policy

Student Supervision

Student Wellbeing

Responsibility for this Policy

Principal, Vice Principal, Head of Junior School and Chief Financial Officer

Policy Location

This Policy is published on Teacher Kiosk, Parent Lounge and Student Café

Policy Review

Policy will be reviewed every 2 years or as circumstances dictate.

Issued: July 2016

Reviewed: March 2017

Reviewed: May 2019