Catholic Schools

Child Safe Schools

CECV Statement of Commitment to Child Safety

A safe, nurturing and empowering culture for all children and young people in Catholic schools.

This statement has been updated in light of the revised Child Safe Standards coming into effect from 1 July 2022 and the supporting Ministerial Order No. 1359.

> *Every person, created in the image and likeness of God, is unique and has an intrinsic and inalienable dignity (Pontifical Council for Promoting New Evangelization 2020, n. 379).*

The Catholic Education Commission of Victoria Ltd (CECV) holds the care, safety and wellbeing of children and young people as a central and fundamental responsibility of Catholic education. This commitment is drawn from and inherent to the teaching and mission of Jesus Christ, with love, justice and the sanctity of each human person at the heart of the gospel.

This statement is intended to reaffirm the central focus on child safety across Catholic education in Victoria, built around a unified understanding of the moral imperative and overarching commitments that underpin our drive for continual improvement, and embedding a culture of 'no tolerance' for child abuse in our schools and organisations.

> *The characteristic element of the Catholic school, in addition to pursuing 'cultural goals and the human formation of youth', consists in creating 'for the school community a special atmosphere animated by the Gospel spirit of freedom and charity'. To this end, the Catholic school aims … 'to order the whole of human culture to the news of salvation so that the knowledge the students gradually acquire of the world, life and [humanity] is illumined by faith'. In this way, the Catholic school prepares pupils to exercise their freedom responsibly, forming an attitude of openness and solidarity (Congregation for Catholic Education 2022, n. 16).*

The CECV has a universal expectation for the protection of children. It is resolutely committed to ensuring that all those engaged in Catholic education in Victoria promote the inherent dignity of children and young people, and their fundamental right to be respected and nurtured in a safe school environment.

Catholic schools have a moral, legal and mission-driven responsibility to create nurturing school environments, where all children and young people are respected and have agency, their voices are heard, and they are safe and feel safe.

The CECV recognises that some children and young people are more vulnerable than others, and commits to providing the care and services required to support them and their families, and to ensure their safety within all Catholic schools.

Catholic schools will take prompt action to have any allegations of abuse concerning children and young people appropriately referred and investigated when raised. While the context and reality at each Catholic school will differ, the fundamental issues of understanding effective practices in child safety, and identifying and responding to child harm remain the same. All schools must strive for continual improvement that is responsive to emerging thinking, evidence and practice, so as to eliminate the potential for abuse to occur.

Creating child-safe school environments is a dynamic process that involves active participation and responsibility by school governing authorities, schools, families and their communities. It is marked by collaboration, vigilance and proactive approaches across policies, procedures, curriculum and practices.

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

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The CECV commits to providing **a safe, nurturing and empowering culture** for all children and young people in Victorian Catholic schools through:

Upholding the primacy of the safety and wellbeing of children and young people

At all times, the ongoing safety and wellbeing of children and young people will be the primary focus of care and decision-making. In addition to the universal focus on safety and wellbeing, schools need to pay attention and attend to the needs of their students who are most vulnerable.

To create and maintain a safe and nurturing culture, schools will actively and continually develop and review all policies, processes and practices, informed by their governing authority, emerging thinking and evidence.

Empowering families, children, young people and staff to have a voice and raise concerns

Schools, in partnership with families, will ensure children and young people are informed of their rights, and are engaged and active participants in decision-making processes, particularly those that have an impact on their safety.

This means that the views of children, young people and families are taken seriously, and their concerns are addressed in a just and timely manner. Children and young people are also taught to raise concerns, gaining the necessary skills and knowledge to understand and maintain their personal safety and wellbeing, and the safety and wellbeing of their peers, through educational approaches and programs.

Implementing rigorous risk management and employment practices

Schools will systematically and continually identify and assess risks to child safety, and will eliminate (where possible) or reduce all potential sources of harm in both physical and online environments. Effective risk management is embedded in school life through effective, transparent and well-understood policies, procedures and practices.

Schools will employ highly competent and professional staff who are formed and challenged to maintain the safety of all students. The high quality of staff appointments will be upheld through rigorous employment and review processes and practices, which include a demonstrated knowledge of child safety.

Catholic education will stay abreast of legislation, and will meet the legislative duties to protect the safety and wellbeing of children and young people in its care, including meeting the minimum requirements for compliance with the Child Safe Standards for schools and school boarding premises as set out in Ministerial Order No. 1359. This is in addition to ongoing work to support child safety, including mandatory reporting, reportable conduct, information sharing and complaints management.

References

Congregation for Catholic Education 2022, *The Identity of the Catholic School for a Culture of Dialogue*, The Holy See, accessed 30 May 2022 https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/ccatheduc/documents/rc_con_ccatheduc_doc_20220125_istruzione-identita-scuola-cattolica_en.html.

Pontifical Council for Promoting New Evangelization 2020, *Directory for Catechesis*, St Pauls Publications, New South Wales.