



Child Safety and Wellbeing Policy

1. Introduction

Methodist Ladies' College (MLC) has a proud history of providing students with a safe and nurturing environment in which to prosper and thrive. This Child Safety & Wellbeing Policy is an overarching policy that provides the key elements of our approach as a child safe organisation. It forms the foundation of the College's procedures, practices, decision-making processes and ultimately the College's culture with respect to child safety.

MLC's Child Safety & Wellbeing Policy is to be read and understood in conjunction with, the Victorian Child Safe Standards, Ministerial Order 1359: Implementing the Child Safe Standards – Managing the Risk of Child Abuse in Schools (and Boarding Premises).

2. Purpose

The MLC Child Safety and Wellbeing Policy outlines the key elements of our approach to implementing Ministerial Order 1359, which sets out how the Victorian Child Safe Standards apply in school and school boarding environments and to the College as a child safe organisation. It informs the College community about everyone's obligations to act safely and appropriately towards students and guides the policies, processes and practices for the safety and wellbeing of students across all areas of our work, which are set out in the College's Child Safe Program.

This Policy provides the framework for:

- the implementation of the Victorian Child Safe Standards, Ministerial Order 1359 within the College (including in the registered boarding premises of Tiddeman House and MLC Marshmead);
- the development of work systems, practices, policies and procedures, consistent with the Department of Education and Training's PROTECT document, "Four Critical Actions for Schools: Responding to Incidents, Disclosure and Suspicions of Child Abuse" (PROTECT Four Critical Actions) that promote child protection, safety and wellbeing within the College;
- the creation of a positive and robust child safe culture;
- the promotion and open discussion of child safety issues within the College; and,
- compliance with all laws, regulations, and standards relevant to child protection and child safety in Victoria.

The Victorian Registration and Qualifications Authority (VRQA) monitors and enforces compliance with the Victorian Child Safe Standards for all registered schools in Victoria.

3. Scope

MLC's Child Safety & Wellbeing Policy applies to all adults in the MLC Community. This includes the MLC Board, staff, volunteers, third party contractors and external education providers as well as to parents, guardians, and visitors to the College.

This Policy applies in all physical, virtual and online College environments used by students during or outside of school hours, including all locations provided for a student's use (for example on-site and off-site College grounds, sporting events, camps, tours and excursions and environments provided by External Education Providers and other Contractors).

The Policy also applies to the Tiddeman Boarding House and families of boarding students and operations at MLC Marshmead, which are both boarding premises registered with the Victorian Registrations and Qualifications Authority (VRQA).

4. Policy Statement

4.1. Commitment to Child Safety

MLC is committed to providing a child safe and child friendly environment, where children and young people are safe and feel safe to actively participate in decisions that affect their lives.

At MLC we have a zero tolerance for child abuse and are committed to acting in children's best interests and keeping them safe from harm. The College regards its child safety responsibilities with the utmost importance and as such, is committed to providing the necessary resources to ensure compliance with all relevant child safety laws and regulations and maintaining a child safe culture.

Each member of the College community has a responsibility to understand the important specific role that they play individually and collectively to ensure that the wellbeing and safety of all students is at the forefront of all that they do and every decision that they make.

4.2. Child Safety Codes of Conduct

Our Child Safety Codes of Conduct include a *Child Safe Code of Conduct* and a *Staff and Student Professional Boundaries Policy* which apply College-wide (including MLC's boarding premises). Together, these Codes of Conduct set boundaries and expectations for appropriate behaviours between adults in our College community and students, including in physical, online and virtual environments.

We also have a *Behaviour Management Policy – Relationships for Learning* and *Student Code of Conduct Policy and Procedure* which includes standards of behaviour for students relevant to child safety and wellbeing.

Our Child Safety Codes of Conduct include clear processes to report inappropriate behaviour. We publish our Child Safety Codes of Conduct on our public website so that everyone can easily find out what behaviours are acceptable and unacceptable at MLC and how to report inappropriate behaviour.

We also provide additional information to students and families about the Child Safety Codes of Conduct, to ensure that they know what behaviours are acceptable and unacceptable and how to report inappropriate behaviour.

4.3. Cultural Safety

At MLC, we are committed to establishing an inclusive and culturally safe College where the strengths of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture, values and practices are respected.

We think about how every student can have a positive experience in a safe environment. For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, we recognise the link between culture, identity and safety and actively create opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, their families and their communities (including local Aboriginal communities relevant to the College) to have a voice and presence in our College's planning, policies, and activities.

4.4. Student Empowerment and Participation

MLC is a child safe and child-centred organisation, and we work to create an inclusive and supportive environment that encourages students and families to contribute to our approach to child safety and wellbeing. We ensure that our physical, virtual and online environments are friendly and welcoming to all children and young people.

We actively seek student voice in decisions that affect them. We recognise that students have unique perspectives on learning, teaching and schooling, and should have the opportunity to actively shape their own education and contribute to decision making processes and collectively influence outcomes by putting forward their view, concerns and ideas.

We ensure that students know about their rights to safety, information and participation. We recognise the importance of friendships and support from peers. We actively seek to understand what makes students feel safe in our College and regularly communicate with students about what they can do if they feel unsafe.

4.5. Parents/Carers, Families and Community Involvement at the College

The College recognises that parents and carers have the primary responsibility for the upbringing and development of their children.

We ensure that families and relevant communities (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, culturally and linguistically diverse communities, boarding families and other communities that make up our Staff and student cohort, and the local community in which the College operates) know about the MLC's operations and policies, including this MLC Child Safety and Wellbeing Policy and the Child Safety Codes of Conduct and complaints and investigation processes.

We actively seek to engage with families and relevant communities when making significant decisions about organisational planning, delivery of services, management of facilities, and classroom learning and assessment environments.

We build cultural safety at the College through partnerships with relevant communities.

4.6. Diversity and Equity

MLC values diversity and does not tolerate any discriminatory practices. To achieve this, we:

- support the cultural safety, participation and empowerment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and their families
- we identify, confront and do not tolerate racism, and we address any instances of racism within the school environment with appropriate consequences
- support the cultural safety, participation and empowerment of students from culturally and/or linguistically diverse backgrounds and their families
- support students with disability and/or additional learning needs and their families and act to promote their participation
- support students and families of diverse sexuality and/or gender identity and act to promote their participation
- seek to recruit a workforce that reflects a diversity of cultures, abilities and identities
- ensure that all Staff, relevant Volunteers and Contractors have training about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, disability, culturally and/or linguistically diverse backgrounds, and those with particular experiences or needs
- have a physical environment that actively celebrates diverse cultures and recognises cultural difference
- commit to ensuring that our facilities promote the inclusion of students of all abilities.

These commitments apply to MLC's school boarding premises and the families of boarding students.

4.7. Child Safety Human Resources Management

4.7.1. Recruitment and Screening

MLC applies best practice standards in the recruitment and screening of Staff, Volunteers and Contractors to engage the most suitable and appropriate people to work with children and young people.

Our practices include:

- making our commitment to child safety and wellbeing clear in recruitment advertising and documentation
- a range of screening procedures to assess the suitability of all applications
- requiring all Staff and relevant Volunteers and Contractors to maintain a valid VIT Registration or WWC (working with children) clearance, and sighting, verifying and recording this information
- ensuring that all Staff and relevant Volunteers and Contractors undergo induction, and ongoing education and training
- ensuring that we provide Staff, and relevant Volunteers and Contractors who engage with students, with regular supervision and performance monitoring by their manager or a senior member of Staff
- ensuring that professional development programs for Staff include child safety education and training programs.

These practices apply to all staff including staff employed at MLC's boarding premises.

4.7.2. Training and Information about Child Safety

As a part of MLC's induction process, all Staff, as well as relevant Volunteers and Contractors, are required to complete induction training on our child safety policies, practices and procedures.

All Staff, as well as relevant Volunteers and Contractors also receive refresher and ongoing child safety training at least annually.

Our child safety induction and ongoing training program includes information about:

- this MLC Child Safety and Wellbeing Policy
- the Child Safety Codes of Conduct
- recognising child abuse and other harm and identifying key indicators
- our policies and procedures for responding to and reporting child safety incidents or concerns (including mandatory reporting, reporting to police and reportable conduct obligations)
- our policies and procedures for information sharing and record keeping about child safety incidents and concerns
- WWC clearances and other child safety and wellbeing human resources practices.

Additional training is provided to staff who work with children in a 24/7 boarding student duty of care situation eg. Tiddeman Boarding House, MLC Marshmead, MLC Banskia and staff supervising students on camps and tours. The College provides all Visitors to the College, including Casual Volunteers and Contractors, with information about the Child Safe Codes of Conduct and how to report child safety incidents or concerns to the College and to relevant external authorities.

The MLC Board also receives child safety training at least annually, to ensure that its members are equipped with the knowledge required to make decisions in the best interests of student safety and wellbeing, and to identify and mitigate child safety and wellbeing risks in the College's environment. Training includes guidance on:

- individual and collective obligations and responsibilities for implementing the Child Safe Standards and managing the risk of child abuse
- child safety and wellbeing risks in our College's environment
- the College's child safety policies, procedures, codes and practices.

4.7.3. Supervision and Support

The College provides Staff, Direct Contact and Regular Volunteers, and Direct Contact and Regular Contractors with support and regular supervision by their Manager, the College's Child Protection Officers and/or the College Leadership Team to ensure that they are compliant with the College's approach to child safety and wellbeing.

The College promptly manages any inappropriate behaviour towards students in accordance with our policies and legal obligations. Child safety and wellbeing is the paramount consideration when managing inappropriate behaviour.

4.8. **Complaints and Reporting Processes**

MLC fosters a culture that encourages everyone in the College community to raise concerns and complaints about child safety and wellbeing. Our processes for raising complaints and concerns, and the procedures that all Staff, Volunteers and Contractors must follow whenever they witness, suspect or receive a complaint about a child safety incident or concern involving a student, a staff member, a Volunteer, a Contractor or the College, are set out in the procedures, below.

The College will take appropriate, prompt action in response to all child safety incidents or concerns, including all complaints, allegations or disclosures of abuse or other harm, when Staff, Volunteers, Contractors, students, parents/carers or anyone else reports these to the College.

The College's response will include:

- externally reporting all matters that meet the required relevant thresholds to Child Protection (Mandatory Reports), the Police (Mandatory Reporting of Child Sexual Abuse), the CCYP (Reportable Conduct), and/or the Victorian Institute of Teaching (Teacher Misconduct), depending on the issues raised and consistent with PROTECT Four Critical Actions;
- fully cooperating with any resulting investigation by an external agency;
- protecting any student connected to the child safety incident or concern until it is resolved and providing ongoing support to those affected;
- taking particular measures in response to child safety incidents or concerns about an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander student, a student from a culturally and linguistically diverse background, a student with disability, and other vulnerable students (such as students who are unable to live at home or students who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or intersex);
- sharing information with, or requesting information from, external people or agencies as permitted or required under the Child Information Sharing Scheme and/or the Family Violence Information Sharing Scheme;
- securing and retaining records of the child safety incident or concern and the College's response to it;
- taking broader actions to improve child safety at the College (including systemic reviews and resulting improvements).

4.9. **Child Safety Risk Management**

MLC recognises the importance of a risk management approach to minimising the potential for child abuse or harm to occur and we use this information to inform our policies, procedures and activity planning.

We identify, assess and manage child safety risks in all College environments (including boarding premises risks), based on a range of factors including the nature of our College's activities, physical, virtual and online environments and the characteristics of the student body, through our Risk Management Framework. We use this information to inform our policies, procedures and activity planning.

We record identified risks to child safety and wellbeing in our Child Safety Risk Register, along with the actions in place at the College to manage these risks. The MLC Board, the Principal and the College Leadership Team monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of these actions at least annually.

4.10. Privacy and Information Sharing

The College collects, uses and discloses information about students and their families in accordance with Victorian privacy laws and other relevant laws, including laws that permit the College to disclose information about child safety and wellbeing to external people and agencies. For information about how the College collects, uses and discloses this information, refer to our Privacy Policy.

4.11. Child Safety Record Keeping

The College is committed to best practice record keeping about child safety incidents and concerns in accordance with Public Record Office Victoria Recordkeeping Standards and relevant federal and state legislation (including minimum retention periods).

The College records all internal and external reports of child safety incidents and concerns, as well as any other responses by using the MLC Child Protection Incident Report Form.

When keeping records of child safety incidents or concerns, the College maintains confidentiality and privacy for students and families in accordance with federal and state privacy legislation.

4.12. Child Safety Program and Practice Review

Methodist Ladies' College is committed to the continuous improvement of our Child Safe Program. The Program is regularly reviewed for overall effectiveness and to ensure compliance with all child safety related laws, regulations and standards.

When undertaking these reviews, the College:

- actively seeks, actions, and incorporates feedback from students, families, the wider College community, Staff, Volunteers and Contractors
- analyses any complaints and child safety incidents that may have occurred
- communicates any learnings, adjustments or amendments to policy and practice widely throughout the College community.

5. Child Safety Procedures

5.1. Reporting of Concerns

Whenever there are concerns that a child is in immediate danger, call Triple zero (000) and request urgent Police assistance.

Any person, including staff, volunteers, contractors, parents/carers and students, can at any time report concerns about the wellbeing of a child under 17 to Child Protection – Eastern Division (DHHS Box Hill) by phoning 1300 360 391. Note: The Division that takes the case is based on the address of the student, not the address of the College.

Our Child Safe Program provides detailed guidance for all staff and Direct Contact Volunteers as to how to identify key risk indicators of child abuse and how to report child abuse concerns to one of the College's nominated Child Protection Officers. It also contains detailed procedures with respect to the reporting of child abuse incidents to relevant authorities.

Staff, Third Party Contractors, External Education Providers, Volunteers, students, parents/carers and other community members who have concerns that a child may be subject to abuse or grooming are asked to contact the Vice Principal who is the College's Senior Child Protection Officer, by phoning 9274 6333 or the MLC Emergency line on 9274 8100.

The College provides students with information about and encourages them to use multiple pathways to raise child safety incidents or concerns about or at the College. They include formal and informal ways, an 'anonymous' way, and through external child advocacy or child safety organisations.

We recognise that some individuals, particularly children, face additional vulnerabilities to child abuse and other harm, as well as additional barriers to disclosing child safety incidents or concerns.

Our Child Safe Program provides guidance on identifying additional vulnerabilities and barriers and contains strategies for supporting these individuals to participate in the College community and enabling them to disclose child safety incidents or concerns to the College.

Communications will be treated confidentially on a “need to know basis”.

5.2. The College’s Response to and External Reporting of Child Safety Incidents or Concerns

Our Child Safe Program sets out the procedures, consistent with PROTECT Four Critical Actions, that the College will follow for any child safety incident or concern involving a student, College Staff, Volunteer, Contractor or Visitor, or other person connected to the College or the College environment.

It also provides guidance for all Staff, Volunteers and Contractors on their obligations to respond to and report to relevant external authorities, child safety incidents and concerns.

These procedures and guidance are summarised in the following documents which are available on the MLC website:

- Procedures for Managing Child Safety Incidents or Concerns at or Involving the College or its Staff
- Child Abuse Reporting Obligations

5.3. Support for Students, Families and Staff Following Child Safety Incident or Disclosure

Child safety incidents or concerns can cause trauma and significantly impact on the mental health and wellbeing of children, as well as on their families. In addition to reporting and referral to the relevant authorities, the College plays a central role in addressing this trauma and has a duty of care to ensure that students feel safe and supported at the College.

The College employs a range of measures to support students affected by a child safety incident or concern, depending on the particular circumstances of the matter and of the student and their family:

- Child Protection Officers will work with the student and their family to develop a Student Support Plan
- support strategies that could be considered for students and/or their families might include offering or organising referrals to internal or external support, such as the College counsellors, mental health professionals, bi-cultural workers and/or translators, or an external support agency and/or child advocacy organisation which specialises in supporting children and young people impacted by abuse or other harm.

The College offers former students who may disclose historical child safety incidents or concerns from their time at the College similar support.

Witnessing a child safety incident or receiving a disclosure of abuse or other harm can be a distressing experience for Staff, Volunteers and Contractors involved. The College assists impacted Staff, Volunteers and Contractors to access necessary support. The College offers an Employee Assistance Program with access to confidential counselling and a 24/7 hotline.

5.4. Embedding a Culture of Child Safety: Our Child Safe Program

Our Child Safe Program itself is one of the strategies employed by MLC to embed a culture of child safety at the College.

Our Child Safe Program relates to all aspects of child safety and wellbeing and establishes work systems, practices, policies and procedures to create and maintain a child safe environment and culture at the College. It includes:

- The Child Safety Codes of Conduct
- clear information about what is child abuse and other harm and key indicators of child abuse and other harm
- clear procedures for responding to and reporting child safety incidents or concerns internally to a Child Protection Officer, and for responding to incidents or allegations of child abuse or other harm
- strategies to support, encourage and enable Staff, Volunteers, Contractors, parents/carers and students to understand, identify, discuss and report child safety matters
- procedures for recruiting and screening members of the College Leadership Team, Staff, Volunteers and Contractors
- procedures for reporting to external agencies, including Mandatory Reporting to the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing (Child Protection), Reportable Conduct to the Commission for Children and Young People (CCYP) and Reporting Child Sexual Abuse to Police
- student wellbeing policies, procedures and guidelines designed to empower students and keep them safe
- strategies to support and encourage the participation and inclusion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds and students with disability
- child safety training
- information regarding the steps to take after a disclosure of abuse or other harm to protect, support and assist students
- guidelines with respect to record keeping and confidentiality
- policies to ensure compliance with all relevant laws, regulations and standards (including the Victorian Child Safe Standards and Ministerial Order 1359)
- a system for continuous review and improvement.

6. Responsibilities

Child safety is everyone's responsibility. At MLC, all staff (including boarding premises staff), as well as Volunteers, have a shared responsibility for contributing to the safety and protection of children. The specific responsibilities of staff are outlined in this section.

6.1. Child Protection Officers

A number of staff members have been nominated as the College's Child Protection Officers. Our Child Protection Officers receive additional specialised training with respect to child safety issues. They are the first point of contact for raising child safety concerns within the College. They are also responsible for championing child safety within the College and assisting in coordinating responses to child safety incidents.

Our Child Protection Officers are:

- Vice Principal (Senior Child Protection Officer)
- Heads of School
- Head of Boarding
- Director of MLC Marshmead

- Director of MLC Banksia
- Director of MLC Kindle
- Student Counsellors

6.2. MLC Board

The MLC Board is the College's "governing authority" for the purposes of Ministerial Order 1359 and is responsible for approving our Child Safe Program, including this Policy and the Child Safety Codes of Conduct.

The MLC Board is required to ensure that appropriate resources are made available to allow MLC's Child Safety & Wellbeing Policy and the Child Safe Program to be effectively implemented within the College (including in the boarding premises) and are responsible for holding the Principal and the College Leadership Team accountable for its effective implementation.

6.3. The Principal

The Principal is responsible for:

- taking all practical measures to ensure that this MLC Child Safety and Wellbeing Policy and the College's Child Safe Program is implemented effectively and followed
- ensuring that a strong and sustainable child safe culture is maintained within the College, including by:
 - modelling the Child Safe Code of Conduct, and reinforcing high standards of child safe behaviours between adults and students and between students
 - facilitating the participation of students, families, Staff and other members of the College community in promoting and improving child safety and wellbeing at the College
 - promoting regular and open discussion of child safety and wellbeing issues within the College community
 - facilitating regular professional learning for Staff and relevant Volunteers and Contractors about child safety, cultural safety, student wellbeing and preventing and responding to child safety incidents and concerns
 - creating an environment where child safety incidents, concerns and complaints are readily raised with the College and where no one is discouraged from reporting child safety incidents or concerns to relevant external authorities.

The Principal is the "head" of the College for the purposes of the Reportable Conduct Scheme.

6.4. Staff Members

All Staff are required to be familiar with the content of our Child Safety & Wellbeing Policy, Child Safety Codes of Conduct and our Child Safe Program and their legal obligations with respect to the reporting of child abuse. It is each individual's responsibility to be aware of key risk indicators of child abuse, to be observant, and to raise any concerns they may have relating to child abuse with one of the College's Child Protection Officers.

To meet these obligations, all Staff must:

- participate in child safety and wellbeing induction and ongoing training provided by the College
- always follow the College's child safety and wellbeing policies and procedures in the Child Safe Program
- act in accordance with the Child Safety Codes of Conduct
- identify and raise child safety incidents and concerns in accordance with our Procedures for Responding to and Reporting Child Safety Incidents or Concerns, and follow the College's Four Critical Actions Guides

- ensure students views are taken seriously and their voices are heard when making decisions that affect them
- implement inclusive practices that respond to the diverse needs of students.

All Staff are “school staff” for the purposes of Ministerial Order 1359.

6.5. Volunteers

A Volunteer is a someone who works without payment or financial reward for the College. Volunteers may be family members of students, or from the wider College or local community.

Volunteers are not “school staff” for the purposes of Ministerial Order 1359.

All Volunteers at the College are responsible for contributing to the safety and protection of students in the College environment.

To meet these obligations:

- all Volunteers must comply with our MLC Child Safe Policy and Child Safety Codes of Conduct
- Direct Contact Volunteers (and, if required by the College, other Volunteers such as Regular Volunteers who are engaged in “child-connected work”) must:
 - participate in child safety and wellbeing induction and ongoing training provided by the College
 - be aware of key indicators of child abuse and other harm
 - understand their legal obligations with respect to the reporting of child abuse and other harm
 - raise all child safety concerns with one of the College’s Child Protection Officers.

6.6. Contractors

A Contractor is someone who is engaged by the College to perform specific tasks. Contractors are not employees of the College. However, Contractors who have direct contact with children are “school staff” for the purposes of Ministerial Order 1359.

Contractors include, for example, maintenance and building personnel, gardeners, consultants, casual teachers, tutors, sports coaches, caterers and College cleaners. It also includes any external individuals engaged by international students whose welfare arrangements are subject to a Confirmation of Appropriate Accommodation and Welfare (CAAW) letter (boarding and homestay).

All Contractors engaged by the College are responsible for contributing to the safety and protection of children in the College environment.

To meet these obligations:

- all Contractors must comply with our MLC Child Safety and Wellbeing Policy and Child Safety Codes of Conduct.
- Direct Contact Contractors (and, if required by the College, other Contractors such as Regular Contractors who are engaged in “child-connected work”) must:
 - participate in child safety and wellbeing induction and ongoing training provided by the College
 - be aware of key indicators of child abuse and other harm
 - understand their legal obligations with respect to the reporting of child abuse and other harm
 - raise all child safety concerns with one of the College’s Child Protection Officers.

The College may include this requirement in the written agreement between it and the Third-Party Contractor.

7. Implementation and Communication

The MLC Child Safety and Wellbeing Policy is published on our College public website.

It is provided to new Staff, and to Direct Contact and Regular Volunteers, and Direct Contact and Regular Contractors at their induction or prior to them commencing their work at the College.

All Visitors to the College, including Casual Volunteers and Casual Contractors, are provided with information about the MLC Child Safety and Wellbeing Policy (including in particular the Child Safe Codes of Conduct and how to report child safety incidents or concerns to the College and to relevant external authorities).

8. Breach of MLC Child Safety and Wellbeing Policy

Methodist Ladies' College enforces this MLC Child Safety and Wellbeing Policy and our Child Safe Codes of Conduct. In the event of any non-compliance, we will instigate a review that may result in a range of measures including (depending on the severity of the breach):

- remedial education
- counselling
- increased supervision
- the restriction of duties
- suspension
- in the case of serious breaches, termination of employment, contract or engagement.

9. Related Documents

- Child Safe Code of Conduct
- Staff and Student Professional Boundaries Policy
- Child Safe Program
- Child Safety Incident Report Form

10. Governance

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