

## PARTICIPATION AND EMPOWERMENT OF STUDENTS POLICY

*Child Safe Standard 7: Strategies to promote the participation and empowerment of children*

### Context

Christian Brothers' College St Kilda (CBC St Kilda) is a Catholic school for girls and boys in the Edmund Rice tradition, established in 1878. CBC St Kilda is committed to providing a caring, supportive and safe environment where every student has a place, a voice and their story is known. As a Catholic school in the Edmund Rice tradition, our Christian values are those expressed in the Touchstones of our governing body, Edmund Rice Education Australia (EREA): Liberating Education, Gospel Spirituality, Inclusive Community, Justice and Solidarity. The charism of Blessed Edmund Rice expressed through these touchstones, underpins our continued commitment to a safe and inclusive environment for all, providing a preferential option to those at the margins, to grow in empathy and to respond in faith and action.

### Rationale

CBC St Kilda has a zero tolerance for child abuse and is committed to acting in children's best interests and keeping them safe from harm. The College is fully committed to the participation and empowerment of all children.

The College recognises that empowering children and facilitating their participation, enhances their safety and protection. The College supports participation that is ethical, age appropriate, child friendly, culturally respectful, inclusive of the diversity of students, demonstrating respect for children of all ages, abilities, social and cultural backgrounds, and is positive.

### Principles

This policy provides the framework for:

- the participation and empowerment of students within the College;
- the creation of a positive and robust child safety culture;
- the promotion and open discussion of child safety issues within the College; and
- compliance with laws, regulations and standards relevant to child safety and protection in Victoria, in particular Ministerial Order No. 870.

Child abuse includes sexual offences, grooming, physical violence, serious emotional or psychological harm, serious neglect and a child's exposure to family violence.

### Policy Statement

CBC St Kilda regards its child safety responsibilities with the utmost importance. The College is committed to providing the necessary resources to ensure compliance with all relevant child safety and protection laws and regulations and to uphold a child safe culture at all times.

The College is committed to the protection of all children from all forms of child abuse and demonstrates this commitment through the implementation of a comprehensive Child Safety

Program designed to keep children safe. Further, students at the College, through our actions, processes and support, are empowered to participate in their own and others' learning, giving voice to students' needs, concerns, ideas, knowledge, skills, hopes and initiatives.

### Participation and Empowerment of Children

Children often do not report abuse because they:

- feel uncomfortable doing so
- do not recognise behaviours as abuse or grooming
- do not know who to raise their concerns or make a report.

CBC St Kilda recognises that in order to achieve a child safe environment at the College which meets students' intellectual, physical, social, emotional and moral needs, students need to be involved in the creation and maintenance of such an environment.

It is our policy that we have simple and accessible processes in place to assist children (including those from diverse cultural backgrounds and those with a disability) to develop appropriate knowledge and skills to identify and communicate when they do not feel safe.

It is our policy that relevant staff members are trained on methods of empowering children and encouraging their participation.

This is done through various work systems, practices, policies and procedures. This includes:

- Pastoral Care – Child Protection
- Students with a Disability
- Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Students

Also refer to the EREA Student Inclusion Policy and accompanying Guidelines.

### Pastoral Care – Child Protection

Pastoral care is the support given to students for their development as a person. It relates to the total care of students and involves tending to both the academic and non-academic needs of students including spiritual, emotional and social wellbeing.

The College is committed to providing a safe, supportive and social environment where students feel nurtured as they learn.

To this end, the College has developed, and continue to develop, a comprehensive range of pastoral care programs that are designed to promote the social and emotional wellbeing of students, and to deliver age-appropriate education to all students about:

- Healthy and respectful relationships.
- Child abuse awareness and a child's right to be safe.
- A child's right to make decisions about their body and their privacy.

- How students can raise concerns about abuse.
- The fact that any concerns students do raise will be taken seriously and responded to appropriately.
- The College's Child Protection and Safety Policy and Child Safety Code of Conduct.
- Resilience and coping with adversity. Standards of behaviour for students.

The College is committed to ensuring that child abuse reporting procedures are age appropriate, simple, and accessible for all students including students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, and students with a disability.

Students are encouraged to provide feedback about child safety and protection issues at the College and the College conducts Student Voice Committee meetings to provide the opportunity for students to discuss with key staff various safety issues at the College, including child protection and safety. The Student Voice Committee is made up of year level student representatives reflecting the College's gender diversity, an international student representative, and key College staff. The College takes all student contributions seriously and actively looks for ways to implement improvements to its Child Protection Program to reflect these contributions.

Information about these topics, as well as other child safety and wellbeing topics, is made available to students through various age appropriate pastoral care initiatives as well as communications such as newsletters and information sessions. Child safety and wellbeing topics are also incorporated into the College's curriculum.

As part of the additional training provided to the College's Child Safety Officers, these members of staff are trained on methods of empowering children and encouraging children's participation as part of their role.

#### Students with a Disability

The College has an obligation to students with a disability to ensure that they are afforded the same level of educational and pastoral care as any other student at the College and considers how each policy and procedure the College establishes and implements may affect students with a disability.

The College is committed to ensuring that it fulfils its legal obligations including those related to discrimination and disability standards (refer to the College's Disability Discrimination Policy).

The College recognises that students with a disability will not only require additional assistance to participate and engage in College activities in a safe and supportive manner, but also that there are specific child protection risks that arise in relation to students with a disability. This may include for example, stricter screening procedures and training for staff who assist students who require help with personal activities such as toileting or dressing.

As a result, the College has implemented specific risk controls in relation to the safety of students with disabilities. This includes:

- Specific screening and training for staff and/or volunteers that will have direct contact with students with a disability
- Written guidelines for staff and volunteers working with students with a disability
- Express, written permission from the parent/carer of a student with a disability where physical contact is required as part of their care; and
- Alternative reporting avenues to suit the needs of students with a disability at the College.

Students with a disability at the College may also require varied reporting avenues or systems to students without a disability and the College has considered this when creating and implementing its *Procedures for Responding to and Reporting Allegations of Child Abuse*.

When supporting a student with a disability who has been impacted by child abuse, it is critical that the College considers:

- the chronological age, developmental age and cognitive function of the student in order to tailor developmentally appropriate support strategies; and
- the student's vulnerability to on-going abuse when considering the need to make a further report and/or implement further risk mitigation strategies.

### Cultural Diversity

Children from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds are children who identify as having cultural or linguistic affiliations by virtue of their place of birth, ancestry or ethnic origin, religion, preferred language or language spoken at home or because of their parents' identification on a similar basis. They include children of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent that identify as being Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander.

The College values and respects the racial and cultural diversity of its students and is committed to ensuring that the backgrounds of all students are sensitively recognised, catered for, celebrated and valued so that racial and cultural differences do not compromise a student's safety and wellbeing.

It is the College's approach to:

- identify children from culturally diverse backgrounds when they are enrolled in the College.
- employ appropriate strategies to ensure the safety of these children as required.
- encourage participation and empowerment of these children in the development of these strategies.
- consider these children when developing and implementing policies and procedures related to child protection at the College; and
- educate staff about these cultural differences and the strategies and procedures the College has employed.

When supporting students from culturally and/or linguistically diverse backgrounds, including Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander students, or those who identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander, it is critical that the College provides culturally appropriate support. Where possible, the College will work with relevant cultural support groups,

ensure that confidentiality of the family is maintained and engage an interpreter when communicating with the student's family.

Similarly, when supporting international students who have been impacted by abuse, the College will consider appropriate measures to be taken for the welfare of the students, including additional support where appropriate given that the student's family may not be present to provide support within the home environment.

Students from refugee backgrounds who have been impacted by abuse may also be experiencing trauma, dislocation and loss. Sensitive consideration should be given when determining how to support the student and their family.

### **Breaches of this Policy**

Breaches of this policy should be reported to the Principal by telephone or in writing, and/or reported to the College's governing body, Edmund Rice Education Australia.

### **References**

- Child Safety Code of Conduct
- EREA Child Safe Code of Conduct
- Staff and Student Professional Boundaries Policy
- Procedures for Responding to and Reporting Allegations of Child Abuse
- Child Protection Program

### **Review**

This policy will be reviewed December 2021.