



# CHILD SAFETY POLICY

## Child Safety and Wellbeing

July 2022

Catholic Education Sandhurst Limited (CES Ltd), operates and governs all Catholic Primary and Secondary Schools within the Diocese of Sandhurst (*excluding FCJ College Benalla, Marist College Bendigo, Catherine McAuley College Bendigo and St Joseph's College Echuca*).

### 1. Vision

The vision for Catholic Education Sandhurst Limited (CES Ltd) is to provide, in partnership with our families, stimulating, enriching, liberating and nurturing learning environments in each of the Catholic school communities within the Diocese. At the heart of this vision is our commitment to the ongoing duty of care that we have for the safety, wellbeing and inclusion of all children and young people.

We believe:

- that the values of the Gospel are central to who we are, what we do, and how we act
- that we have a vital role in the mission of the Catholic Church to imagine and seek new horizons while respecting our Tradition
- that a strong sense of community is dependent on the quality of our collegial relationship
- that each person's potential is fostered through the dedicated ministry of Catholic Education
- in leadership encompassing vision, innovation and empowerment.

### 2. Introduction

CES Ltd holds the care, safety and wellbeing of children and young people as a fundamental responsibility of all staff in 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 (CECV Commitment Statement to Child Safety, 2022).

Each human being and their material and spiritual needs "is at the heart of Christ's teaching"; therefore the goal of each Catholic school is the promotion of the human person (The Catholic School on the Threshold of the Third Millennium, n.9).

In CES Ltd's schools "the inalienable dignity of each person is always affirmed and respected, and therefore children and young people are placed at the centre of Catholic education." ([Sandhurst Diocesan Charter for Catholic Education](#), 2021 p. 3).

### 3. Purpose

The purpose of this Policy is to demonstrate the strong commitment of CES Ltd to the care, safety and wellbeing of all students. It provides an outline of the policies, procedures, actions and strategies that will be implemented to ensure that a child safe culture is championed and modelled at all levels of our schools, to keep students safe from harm, including all forms of abuse in the school environment, including on campus, online and in other locations provided by schools.

This Policy takes into account relevant legislative requirements within the state of Victoria, including the specific requirements of the Child Safe Standards as set out in [Ministerial Order No. 1359](#).

This Policy applies to all CES Ltd staff and school staff, including school employees, volunteers, contractors and clergy.

### 4. Principles

Catholic schools have a moral, legal and mission-driven responsibility to create nurturing school environments where children and young people are respected, their voices are heard, and they are safe and feel safe (CECV Commitment Statement to Child Safety, 2022).

The following principles underpin our commitment to child safety and wellbeing:

- All students deserve, as a fundamental right, safety and protection from all forms of abuse and neglect.
- Our schools work in partnership with families and the community to ensure that they are engaged in decision-making processes, particularly those that have an impact on child safety, wellbeing and protection.
- All students have the right to a thorough and systematic education in all aspects of personal safety, in partnership with their parents/guardians/carers.
- All adults in our schools, including teaching and non-teaching staff, clergy, volunteers and contractors, have a responsibility to care for children and young people, to positively promote their wellbeing, to identify and mitigate risks related to child safety and wellbeing in the school environment and to protect them from any kind of harm or abuse.
- The policies, guidelines and codes of conduct for the care, wellbeing and protection of students are based on honest, respectful and trusting relationships between adults and children and young people.

- Policies and practices demonstrate compliance with legislative requirements and cooperation with the Church, governments, the police and human services agencies.
- All persons involved in situations where harm is suspected or disclosed must be treated with sensitivity, dignity and respect.
- All members of the school community (including students and their families) are kept informed of child safety and wellbeing matters (where appropriate) and are involved in promoting child safety and wellbeing.
- School employees, volunteers, contractors, clergy, parents and students are able to raise concerns about child safety and wellbeing, knowing these will be taken seriously by school leadership.
- Appropriate confidentiality will be maintained, with information being provided to those who have a right or a need to be informed, either legally (including under legislated information sharing schemes being Child Information Sharing Scheme (CISS) or Family Violence Information Sharing Scheme (FVISS)) or pastorally.

## 5. Definitions

<b>Aboriginal</b>	'Aboriginal' in this document includes Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.
<b>Child</b>	means a child or young person who is under the age of 18 years.
<b>Child abuse</b>	includes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(a) any act committed against a child involving - <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(i) a sexual offence; or</li> <li>(ii) an offence under section 49M(1) of the <i>Crimes Act 1958</i>; and</li> </ul> </li> <li>(b) the infliction, on a child, of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(i) physical violence</li> <li>(ii) serious emotional or psychological harm; and</li> </ul> </li> <li>(c) the serious neglect of a child.</li> </ul>
<b>Child safety</b>	includes 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 suspicions, incidents, disclosures or allegations of child abuse (Ministerial Order No. 1359).

<p><b>School environment</b></p>	<p>means any of the following physical, online or virtual places used during or outside school hours:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● a campus of the school</li> <li>● online or virtual school environments made available or authorised by our school for use by a child or student (including email, intranet systems, software, applications, collaboration tools and online services)</li> <li>● other locations provided by the school or through a third-party provider for a child or student to use including, but not limited to, locations used for school camps, approved homestay accommodation, delivery of education and training, sporting events, excursions, competitions and other events (Ministerial Order No. 1359).</li> </ul>
<p><b>School staff</b></p>	<p>means an individual working in a school environment who is:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● directly engaged or employed by CES Ltd</li> <li>● a contracted service provider (whether or not a body corporate or any other person as an intermediary) engaged by CES Ltd to perform child-related work; or</li> <li>● a minister of religion, a religious leader or an employee or officer of a religious body associated with the school.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Volunteer</b></p>	<p>means a person who performs work without remuneration or reward in the school environment.</p>

## 6. Policy commitments

All students enrolled at CES Ltd schools have the right to feel safe and be safe. The safety and wellbeing of children in our care will always be our first priority and we do not and will not tolerate child abuse. We aim to create a child-safe and child-friendly environment where children are free to enjoy life to the full without any concern for their safety. There is particular attention paid to the most vulnerable children, including Aboriginal, children from culturally and/or linguistically diverse backgrounds, children with a disability, children who are unable to live at home, international students, and students of diverse sexuality.

## 6.1 Our commitment to our students

We commit to:

- the safety and wellbeing of all children and young people enrolled or attending our school.
- providing children and young people with positive and nurturing experiences.
- listening to children and young people, and empowering them by ensuring that they understand their rights (including to safety, information and participation), and by taking their views seriously and addressing any concerns that they raise with us.
- taking action to ensure that children and young people are protected from abuse or harm.
- ensuring that the needs of all children and young people enrolled or attending our school are met, including those who are most vulnerable.
- recognising the importance of friendships and to encouraging support from peers, to help students feel safe and less isolated.
- developing a culture that facilitates and provides opportunities for student participation, and strengthens the confidence and engagement of students by being responsive to their input.
- teaching children and young people the necessary skills and knowledge to understand and maintain their personal safety and wellbeing.
- seeking input and feedback from students regarding the creation of a safe school environment.

## 6.2 Our commitment to parents, guardians and carers

We commit to:

- communicating honestly and openly with parents, guardians and carers about the wellbeing and safety of their children.
- engaging with, and listening to, the views of parents, guardians and carers about our child safety and wellbeing practice, policies and procedures.
- transparency in our decision-making with parents, guardians and carers where it will not compromise the safety of children or young people.
- open engagement and communication with parents, guardians and carers about our child safe approach and our operations and governance related to child safety and wellbeing.
- ensuring that relevant information relating to child safety and wellbeing is accessible to parents, guardians and carers.

- acknowledging the cultural diversity of students and families and being sensitive to how this may impact on student safety issues.
- continuously reviewing and improving our systems to protect children from abuse.

### 6.3 Our commitment to our staff (school employees, contractors and clergy) and volunteers

We commit to

- providing all staff with the necessary support to enable them to fulfil their roles and to ensure that staff are attuned to signs of harm and are able to facilitate child-friendly ways for children and students to express their views, participate in decision-making and raise their concerns. This will include regular and appropriate learning opportunities.
- providing regular opportunities to clarify and confirm policy and procedures in relation to child safety and wellbeing and young people's protection and wellbeing. This will include annual training in the principles and intent of the Child Safety and Wellbeing Policy and Child Safety Code of Conduct, and staff responsibilities to report concerns.
- listening to all concerns voiced by school staff and volunteers about keeping children and young people safe from harm.

## 7. Responsibilities and organisational arrangements

Everyone employed or volunteering at CES Ltd schools has a responsibility to understand the important and specific role they play individually and collectively to ensure a child safe culture in which the wellbeing and safety of all students is at the forefront of all they do and every decision they make (CECV Commitment Statement to Child Safety).

Schools have allocated roles and responsibilities for child safety and wellbeing and make these readily available in the school community.

### 7.1 School leadership

CES Ltd Principals and school leaders will ensure the development of preventative and proactive strategies that promote a culture of openness, awareness of and shared responsibility for child safety and wellbeing. Responsibilities include:

- creating an environment for children and young people to be safe and to feel safe
- upholding high principles and standards for all staff and volunteers
- promoting models of behaviour between adults and children and young people based on mutual respect and consideration

- ensuring thorough and rigorous practices are applied in the recruitment, screening and ongoing professional learning of staff and volunteers
- ensuring school personnel have regular and appropriate learning to develop their knowledge of, openness to and ability to prevent, identify and address child safety and wellbeing matters
- ensuring the school has in place appropriate risk management strategies and practices that focus on preventing, identifying and mitigating risks related to child safety and wellbeing in the school environment
- providing regular opportunities to clarify and confirm legislative obligations, policies and procedures in relation to children and young people's protection and wellbeing
- ensuring the school meets the specific requirements of the Victorian Child Safe Standards as set out in Ministerial Order No. 1359
- ensuring the school takes specific action to protect children from abuse in line with the three new criminal offences introduced under the *Crimes Act 1958* (Vic.) and in line with [PROTECT: Identifying and responding to all forms of abuse in Victorian schools](#)
- ensuring the school understands and reports all matters that may constitute reportable conduct under the Reportable Conduct Scheme and in accordance with CES Ltd Policy - Reportable Conduct Scheme
- sharing information under legislated information sharing schemes (CISS and FVISS) in accordance with CES Ltd and its schools prescribed role as an Information Sharing Entity (ISE)
- ensuring that schools monitor and review the risks related to child safety and wellbeing, including evaluating the effectiveness of the implementation of its risk controls, on an annual basis.

## 7.2 School staff and volunteers

Responsibilities of school staff (school employees, contractors and clergy) and volunteers include:

- treating children and young people with dignity and respect, acting with propriety, providing a duty of care, and protecting children and young people in their care
- following CES Ltd policies, internal school policies, procedures and processes in the course of their work if they form a reasonable belief that a child or young person has been or is being abused or neglected
- providing a physically and psychologically safe environment where the wellbeing of children and young people is nurtured

- undertaking regular training and education in order to understand their individual responsibilities in relation to child safety and the wellbeing of children and young people, including ways to prevent, identify and mitigate risks relating to child safety and wellbeing
- assisting children and young people to develop positive, responsible and caring attitudes and behaviours which recognise the rights of all people to be safe and free from abuse
- following the CES Ltd Child Safety Code of Conduct
- where risks of child abuse are identified, ensuring that action is taken to mitigate against those risks and that risks and actions are appropriately recorded.

### 7.3 Organisational arrangements

School Principals have the overall leadership role in monitoring and responding to the policies, procedures and practices for child safety and wellbeing in accordance with this Policy.

Each school has an officer responsible for child safety and wellbeing and the role description is available in each school's staff handbook or equivalent.

The responsible officer for child safety and wellbeing:

- works in preventing, identifying and mitigating risks in child safety and wellbeing
- supports the Principal to monitor implementation of school policies, procedures and practices, to monitor and review the risks associated with child safety and wellbeing (including identifying professional learning opportunities).

School websites and newsletters will provide information to keep parents and carers informed of child safety and wellbeing commitments, procedures and arrangements.

## 8. Child Safety Code of Conduct

CES Ltd expects staff (school employees, contractors and clergy) and volunteers to:

- proactively ensure the safety and wellbeing of students at all times
- identify concerns about child safety and wellbeing
- take appropriate action if there are concerns about the safety and wellbeing of any child at the school.

All staff and volunteers must remain familiar with the relevant laws, the code of conduct, and policies and procedures in relation to child protection, and comply with all requirements. CES Ltd has developed a Child Safety Code of Conduct (the Code) which recognises the critical role that staff and volunteers play in protecting the students in our care and establishes clear expectations of staff and volunteers for appropriate behaviour with children in order to safeguard them against abuse and/or neglect.



The Code also protects staff and volunteers through clarification of acceptable and unacceptable behaviour.

## **9. Managing risk to child safety and wellbeing**

CES Ltd is committed to proactively and systematically identifying and assessing risks to student safety across our whole school environment and reducing or eliminating (where possible) all potential sources of harm. We document, implement, monitor and annually review our risks and risk management strategies for child safety and wellbeing, evaluate the effectiveness of the implementation of our risk controls and ensure that the strategies change as needed and as new risks arise.

## **10. Establishing a culturally safe environment**

CES Ltd is committed to establishing an inclusive and culturally safe school environment where the strengths of Aboriginal culture, values and practices are respected.

For Aboriginal students, we recognise the link between Aboriginal culture, identity and safety and actively create opportunities for Aboriginal students and the Aboriginal community to have a voice and presence in our schools' planning, policies and activities.

Each school's FIRE Carrier Covenant documents the actions to be taken to promote cultural safety in our school communities and is available on each school's website.

## **11. Student empowerment**

To support child safety and wellbeing we will:

- work to create an inclusive and supportive environment that encourages students and families to contribute to our child safety approach and understand their rights and responsibilities
- encourage strong friendships and peer support in the school to ensure a sense of belonging through implementing a whole school approach to respectful relationships and student behaviour expectations
- inform students of their rights and give them the skills and confidence to recognise unsafe situations with adults or other students and to speak up and act on concerns relating to themselves or their peers
- ensure our students know who to talk to if they are worried or feeling unsafe and encourage them to share concerns with a trusted adult at any time
- ensure students and families can also access information on how to report concerns on the school website
- ensure, when gathering information in relation to a complaint about alleged misconduct or abuse of a child, we will listen to the complainant's account and take

them seriously, check our understanding of the complaint, support the student and keep them (and their parents and carers, as appropriate) informed about progress.

## 12. Family engagement

CES Ltd ensures that families, carers and other members of our school communities are informed about relevant child safety and wellbeing matters and are involved in the promotion of child safety and wellbeing at their school. We aim to ensure that:

- families participate in decisions relating to child safety and wellbeing which affect their child
- we engage and openly communicate with families, carers and other members of the school community about child safety and wellbeing
- all members of the school community have access to information relating to child safety and wellbeing
- families, carers and other members of the school community have the opportunity to provide input into the development and review of the school's child safety and wellbeing policies and practices
- families, carers and other members of the school community are informed about the operations and governance of the school in relation to child safety and wellbeing.

## 13. Complaints and reporting processes

CES Ltd ensures its schools foster a culture that encourages staff, volunteers, students, parents, and the school community to raise concerns and complaints. This makes it more difficult for breaches of the Code of Conduct, misconduct or abuse to occur and remain hidden.

There are clear pathways for raising and responding to complaints and concerns documented in the Complaints Management Policy, that can be found on each school's website.

If there is an incident, disclosure, allegation or suspicion of child abuse, all staff and volunteers must follow our PROTECT Responding and Reporting Obligations Policy and PROTECT Responding and Reporting Obligations Procedures.

Policies and procedures address complaints and concerns of child abuse made by or in relation to a child or student, school staff, volunteers, service providers, visitors or any other person while connected to the school.

As soon as any immediate health and safety concerns are addressed, and relevant school staff have been informed, we will ensure that schools follow:

- the [Four Critical Actions](#) for schools responding to incidents, disclosures and suspicions of child abuse
- the [Four Critical Actions](#) responding to student sexual offending.

For complaints and concerns relating to student physical violence or other harmful behaviours please refer to CES Ltd Student Behaviour Framework and Student Bullying and Harassment Prevention Policy.

## 14. Suitable staff and volunteers

CES Ltd will apply thorough and rigorous screening processes in the recruitment of employees and volunteers involved in child-connected work. Our commitment to child safety and wellbeing and our screening requirements are included in all advertisements for such employee, contractor and volunteer positions, and all applicants are provided with copies of the CES Ltd Child Safety Code of Conduct and Child Safety and Wellbeing Policy.

Each position description for child-connected work has a clear statement that sets out the requirements, duties and responsibilities regarding child safety and wellbeing. It also includes essential qualifications, experience and attributes in relation to child safety and wellbeing.

When recruiting and selecting staff and volunteers involved in child-connected work, the following information is gathered, verified and recorded:

- Proof of personal identity and any essential or relevant professional or other qualifications.
- The applicant's Working with Children Check and National Police Check status and/or professional registration (as relevant).
- The applicant's history of work involving children.
- References that address the applicant's suitability for the job and working with children.

Ensure that appropriate supervision or support arrangements are in place in relation to the induction of new school staff and volunteers into relevant policies, codes, practices and procedures governing child safety and wellbeing and child-connected work.

Have procedures and processes for monitoring and assessing the continuing suitability of school staff and volunteers to work with children, including regular reviews of the status of Working with Children Checks and staff professional registration requirements such as Victorian Institute of Teaching (VIT) registration.

CES Ltd is informed by the following CECV guidelines:

- *Guidelines on the Employment of Staff in Catholic Schools*
- *Guidelines on the Engagement of Volunteers in Catholic Schools*
- *Guidelines on the Engagement of Contractors in Catholic Schools*
- *NDIS/External Providers: Guidelines for Schools.*

## 15. Child safety knowledge, skills and awareness

CES Ltd provides staff and volunteers with regular and appropriate opportunities to develop their knowledge of, openness to and ability to address child safety and wellbeing matters. This includes induction, ongoing training and professional learning to ensure that everyone understands their professional and legal obligations and responsibilities and the procedures for reporting suspicion of child abuse and neglect.

At least annually, our professional learning and training includes:

- individual and collective obligations and responsibilities for managing the risk of child abuse
- child safety and wellbeing policies, procedures, codes and practices
- preventing, identifying and mitigating child abuse risks in the school environment without compromising a child or student's right to privacy, access to information, social connections and learning opportunities
- guidance on recognising indicators of child harm including harm caused by other children and students
- guidance on responding effectively to issues of child safety and wellbeing and supporting colleagues who disclose harm
- guidance on how to build culturally safe environments for children and students
- information sharing and recordkeeping obligations.

## 16. Diversity and equity

CES Ltd is committed to ensuring that equity is upheld, and that diverse needs are respected in policy and practice. We aim to ensure that:

- all school staff and volunteers understand the diverse circumstances of children and students
- each school provides support and responds to vulnerable children and students
- children, students, staff, volunteers and the school community have access to information, support and complaints processes in ways that are culturally safe, accessible and easy to understand.

We pay particular attention to individuals and groups of children and young people in our community with additional and specific needs. This includes tailoring our child safety strategies and supports to the needs of:

- Aboriginal children and young people
- children from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds
- children and young people with disabilities

- children unable to live at home or impacted by family violence
- international students
- children and young people who identify as LGBTIQ+.

## 17. Communications

CES Ltd is committed to communicating our child safety strategies to our school communities through:

- ensuring that key child safety and wellbeing policies are available on the school website including the Child Safety and Wellbeing Policy (this document), Child Safety Code of Conduct, PROTECT Responding and Reporting Obligations - Policy and Procedure, and Mandatory Reporting Policy
- displaying PROTECT posters around each school
- updates in school newsletters and other communication methods
- ensuring that child safety is a regular agenda item at school leadership meetings, staff meetings and school council meetings.

## 18. Privacy and information sharing

Each school collects, uses, and discloses information about children and their families in accordance with Victorian privacy laws, and other relevant laws. For information on how schools collect, use and disclose information refer to our Privacy Policy available on each school's website.

## 19. Records management

CES Ltd acknowledges that good records management practices are a critical element of child safety and wellbeing. Relevant records for any child safety complaint, disclosures or breach are maintained and disposed of in accordance with security and privacy requirements of the [Public Report Office Victoria Recordkeeping Standards](#) (including minimum retention periods). Schools comply with legal obligations that relate to managing the risk of child abuse under the *Children, Youth and Families Act 2005* (Vic.), the *Crimes Act 1958* (Vic.), the *Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005* (Vic.) and the recommendations of the *Betrayal of Trust* report.

## 20. Review of child safety practices

CES Ltd has established processes for the review and ongoing improvement of child safe policies, procedures, and practices.

Each school will:

- review and improve policies every two years or after any significant child safety incident
- analyse any complaints, concerns and safety incidents to improve policies and practices
- act with transparency and share pertinent learnings and review outcomes with school staff and school community.

## 21. Relevant legislation

- *Children, Youth and Families Act 2005* (Vic.)
- *Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005* (Vic.)
- *Worker Screening Act 2020* (Vic.)
- *Education and Training Reform Act 2006* (Vic.)
- *Education and Training Reform Regulations 2017* (Vic.)
- *Equal Opportunity Act 2010* (Vic.)
- *Privacy Act 1988* (Cth)
- *Public Records Act 1973* (Vic.)
- *Crimes Act 1958* (Vic.)

## 22. Related documents

### CES Ltd

- Child Safety Code of Conduct
- Complaints Management Policy Template
- F.I.R.E. Carrier Covenant Template
- Privacy Policy
- PROTECT: Responding and Reporting Obligations Policy
- PROTECT: Responding and Reporting Obligations Procedures
- Reportable Conduct Scheme Policy
- Student Behaviour Policy Template

### Catholic Education Commission of Victoria Ltd (CECV) guidelines

- [CECV Guidelines on the Employment of Staff in Catholic Schools](#)
- [CECV Guidelines on the Engagement of Volunteers in Catholic Schools](#)
- [CECV Guidelines on the Engagement of Contractors in Catholic Schools](#)

- [CECV NDIS/External Providers: Guidelines for Schools](#)
- [CECV Positive Behaviour Guidelines](#)
- [CECV Commitment Statement to Child Safety](#)

### Other Documents

- PROTECT: Identifying and responding to all forms of abuse in Victorian schools
- Resilience, Rights and Respectful Relationships (DET)

Responsible Officer	Chief Student Pastoral Wellbeing Officer
Approving Body	CES Ltd Board
Approval Date	June 2022
Risk Rating	High
Date of Next Review	June 2023