



South Gippsland Specialist School

Child Safe POLICY

Purpose

The child safe environments policy sets out the school's approach to creating a child safe organisation where children and young people are safe and feel safe; and provides the policy framework for the school's approach to the Child Safe Standards.

Scope

All staff, volunteers, contractors and whether or not they work in direct contact with children or young people. This policy will apply across all school environments including camps, excursions, online environments and outside of school hours activities.

Statement of Commitment to Child Safety.

South Gippsland Specialist School is committed to the safety and wellbeing of all children and young people. This is the primary focus of our care and decision-making.

South Gippsland Specialist School has zero tolerance for child abuse.

South Gippsland Specialist School is committed to providing a child safe environment where children and young people are safe and feel safe, and their voices are heard about decisions that affect their lives. Particular attention will be paid to the cultural safety of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and children from culturally and/or linguistically diverse and gender diverse backgrounds, as well as the safety of vulnerable children and children with a disability.

Every person involved with South Gippsland Specialist School has a responsibility to understand the important and specific role he/she plays individually and collectively to ensure that the wellbeing and safety of all children and young people is at the forefront of all they do and every decision they make.

Safeguarding children underpins our policies and procedures in relation to the protection of children and young people and guides the following:

- The screening and recruitment of our personnel
- The behaviour of our staff towards children and young people
- The induction and training of our staff about safe guarding children and young people
- Our open and effective communication with children and young people and their parents
- Our response to the abuse of children if it occurs
- Our maintenance of a safeguarding culture in our school

Implementation:

In its planning, decision-making and operations South Gippsland Specialist School will:

1. Take a preventative, proactive and participatory approach to child safety;
2. Value and empower children to participate in decisions which affect their lives;
3. Foster a culture of openness that supports all persons to safely disclose risks of harm to children;
4. Respect diversity in cultures and child rearing practices while keeping child safety paramount;
5. Provide written guidance on appropriate conduct and behaviour towards children;
6. Engage only the most suitable people to work with children and have high quality staff and volunteer supervision and professional development.
7. Ensure children know who to talk with if they are worried or are feeling unsafe, and that they are comfortable and encouraged to raise such issues;
8. Report suspected abuse, neglect or mistreatment promptly to the appropriate authorities;
9. Share information appropriately and lawfully with other organisations where the safety and wellbeing of children is at risk; and
10. Value the input of and communicate regularly with families and carers.

Policy and procedures

Policies and procedures outlining school's approach to the Child Safe Standards are outlined below.

- Child Safe Code of Conduct
- Role of a School Child Safety Officer/Leader
- Mandatory Reporting Policy
- Risk Assessment Policy

The Child Safety Officer is responsible for ensuring staff, students, volunteers and community members adhere to the Child Safety Policy and associated policies. At Leongatha Secondary College, the Child Safety Officer is the Principal.

Further information regarding the roles and responsibilities of the Child Safety Officer can be found in the Child Safety Officer role description.

Further resources and advice on child safety and the Child Safe Standards can be accessed from the Department of Education and Training's [PROTECT site](#).

Legislative responsibilities

This policy applies to allegations of disclosures of child abuse made by or in relation to a child, school staff, visitors or other persons connected to the school environment.

Our school takes our legal responsibilities seriously, including:

- All Victorian Teachers have a legal responsibility to report incidents where children's safety is at risk. Victorian Government School employees are expected to follow the DET Mandatory Reporting policy which can be found at

<https://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/principals/spag/safety/Pages/childprotectobligation.aspx>

- **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 school 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.

A child-safe culture

South Gippsland Specialist School's culture encourages staff to raise, discuss and scrutinise concerns making it more difficult for abuse to occur and remain hidden.

All members of the South Gippsland Specialist School Community are encouraged to take responsibility for their actions and to adhere to the core values of be Friendly, be Safe. Be a Learner and be Respectful. The school creates an environment

The following are the strategies that South Gippsland Specialist School will implement to ensure a culture of child safety at our school:

- Staff will complete online Mandatory Training modules annually.
- The 4 Critical Actions posters are displayed in staff work areas and on our OHS noticeboard.
- The Protect Child Safety posters are displayed.
- Child Safety is included in agendas for our staff meetings and professional development days.
- School Council Meeting agendas include updates and discussions about our commitment to child safety.
- Through our curriculum we promote child safety, tolerance and respectful relationships.
- Our commitment to child safety and the relevant policies are available for the community on our school website.
- Our school recognises cultural events that are relevant to our community, and displays the Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander and Australian flags in the front office.

Personnel understand their roles and responsibilities/ Code of Conduct

School leaders and managers will ensure that each person understands their role, responsibilities and behaviour expected in protecting children and young people from abuse and neglect. Staff will comply with the school's Code of Conduct. The school's Code of Conduct sets out clear awareness of the difference between appropriate and inappropriate behaviour.

- The Child Safety Code of Conduct is included in staff induction and CRT information packs, and these staff members are instructed to familiarise themselves with the expectations set out in this document.
- The Code of Conduct is presented to all staff at the beginning of each school year, and staff are reminded of their responsibility to read this document and adhere to the expectations.
- The Code of Conduct is available on our website, in the front office for visitors, and is included in the staff handbook.
- Where breaches of the Code of Conduct are identified, these will be addressed in accordance with the South Gippsland Specialist School's Mandatory Reporting Policy and the DET reporting procedures.
- All visitors to the school are required to sign in and out at reception.
- Volunteers, and those coming to the school to work with children, are required to produce a current WWCC and asked to adhere to the Child Safety Code of Conduct.

Human resources practices and training

South Gippsland Specialist School applies best practice standards in the recruitment and screening of staff, and will take all reasonable steps to ensure that it engages the most suitable and appropriate people to work with children. We will ensure that staff induction, education and training programs are a vital part of our commitment to safeguarding children and young people from abuse and neglect. All prospective staff and volunteers are required to undergo National Criminal History Records check and maintain a valid Working with Children Check.

- Staff are required to provide a copy of their current VIT registration or WWCC annually, and this information is filed by administration staff.
- When hiring new staff members, use of a pre-employment checklist is used to ensure referees are asked if they have any concerns relating to child safety.
- The Child Safety Environments clause is used when hiring staff through Recruitment Online.
- The Child Safety Code of Conduct is included in staff induction and CRT information packs, and these staff members are instructed to familiarise themselves with the expectations set out in this document.

Reporting a child safety concern or complaint

South Gippsland Specialist School has clear expectations for staff and volunteers in making a report about a child or young person who may be in need of protection. Immediate action should include reporting their concerns to the DHHS Child Protection or another appropriate agency and notifying the principal or a member of the school leadership team of their concerns and the reasons for those concerns. The school will take action to respond to a complaint.

- All members of the teaching service are mandated by law to report signs of physical and sexual abuse and neglect (see Mandatory Reporting policy);
- The Mandatory reporting Policy is available on our website and staff are expected to familiarise themselves with this policy.
- The 4 Critical Actions posters are displayed in staff work areas and on our OHS noticeboard to assist staff in making a report.
- After any serious incidents the school will review all policies and procedures related to child safety.
- We have specific policies, processes and training in place that support our staff and volunteers to confidently make a report based on holding a 'reasonable belief' that a child is at risk of child abuse.
- All staff and School Council members are expected to complete the Mandatory Reporting e-Learning module. This is monitored by the Child Safety Officer.

The school's policy and procedures for reporting a child safety concern or complaint can be found in the Mandatory Reporting Policy.

Risk reduction and management

The School believes the wellbeing of children and young people is paramount, and is vigilant in ensuring proper risk management processes. The school recognises there are potential risks to children and young people and will take a risk management approach by undertaking preventative measures. Risk management processes are reviewed annually or pre/post events/excursions/incidents.

- The risk assessment matrix is reviewed annually and ratified by the South Gippsland Specialist School's School Council
- The school's approach to Child Safety risk reduction and management can be found in the Risk Assessment Policy.

- School Council members are educated on their obligations when reviewing and endorsing Child Safe Policies at the first meeting each year. School Council members are required to complete the Mandatory reporting online modules each year.

Listening to children

The school has developed a safe, inclusive and supportive environment that involves and communicates with children, young people and their parents/carers. We encourage child and parent/carer involvement and engagement that informs safe school operations and builds the capability of children and parents/carers to understand their rights and their responsibilities. South Gippsland Specialist School promotes student voice through school council and through thorough classroom discussions around risks and events.

- We will work to ensure children know who to talk with if they are worried or are feeling unsafe, and that they are comfortable and encouraged to raise such issues.
- We are committed to listening and responding to the views and concerns of students, particularly if they are telling you that they or another child has been abused or that they are worried about their safety/the safety of another child.

To support or assist children who disclose child abuse, or are otherwise linked to suspected child abuse the school will:

- Establish regular communication between staff and the child's parent/ guardian/carer (if this is appropriate) to discuss a child's wellbeing and the effectiveness of planned strategies.
- Convene a Student Support Group to plan ongoing monitoring, support, and follow-up of the child's health and wellbeing.
- Develop and implement a Student Support Plan, which documents the planned support strategies and includes timeframes for review (where possible, these support strategies should be informed by allied health and wellbeing professional with expertise in addressing child abuse and trauma).
- Students are educated on protective behaviours through the implementation of the RRRR curriculum, tailored to their year level.
- The PROTECT Child Safety posters are displayed on school notice boards and communicated to the school community via the school website.

When the school is gathering information in relation to a complaint about alleged misconduct with, or abuse of, a child the school will listen to the complainant's account of things and take them seriously, check understanding and keep the child (or their parents/carers) informed about progress.

Confidentiality and privacy

South Gippsland Specialist School collects, uses and discloses information about particular children and their families in accordance with Victorian privacy law. The collection, use and storage of information is included in school policies.

- All allegations of abuse and safety concerns will be reported to a member of the leadership team. The information will be documented using our 'Confidential Welfare Concerns' folder and stored securely. Updates will be added to this document and relevant stakeholders informed.

Policy evaluation and review

To ensure ongoing relevance and continuous improvement, this policy will be reviewed in the context of school self-evaluation undertaken as part of the school accountability framework. The review will include input from students, parents/carers and the school community.

Definitions

A full list of definitions for Ministerial Order No. 870 is available at

www.vrqa.vic.gov.au/childsafe

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 or
- Serious emotional or psychological harm
- Serious neglect of a child

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.

School environment means any physical or virtual place made available or authorised by the school governing authority for use by a child during or outside school hours, including:

- a campus of the school
- online school environments (including email and intranet systems)
- other locations provided by the school for a child's use (including, without limitation, locations used for school camps, sporting events, excursions, competitions and other events)

School staff means:

In a government school, an individual working in a school environment who is:

- employed under Part 2.4 of the *Education and Training Reform Act 2006 (ETR Act)* in the government teaching service or
- employed under a contract of service by the council of the school under Part 2.3 of the ETR Act or
- a volunteer or a contracted service provider (whether or not a body corporate or any other person is an intermediary)

Related policies and Documents

[School Policy Advisory Guide – Duty of Care](#)

[School Policy Advisory Guide – Child Protection Reporting Obligations](#)

Evaluation:

This policy will be reviewed annually or in the event of an incident.

This policy was last ratified by School Council on October 2019 and will be reviewed in 2021