



School Procedure (Our Lady of Mercy College)

Child Safety and Wellbeing

Introduction

Our Lady of Mercy College (OLMC) is operated and governed by Mercy Education Limited (Mercy Education/MEL). Mercy Education has no tolerance for all forms of child abuse. Mercy Education has legal and moral obligation, an over-arching commitment and non-delegable duty to ensure that its children and young people are safe and secure while fostering their growth in a faith-centred community. OLMC holds the care, safety and wellbeing of children and young people as a central and fundamental responsibility.

Purpose

To demonstrate the strong commitment of Mercy Education and OLMC to the care, safety and wellbeing of all students at our school.

This procedure provides an outline of the strategies and actions that will be implemented to ensure that a child safe culture is championed and modelled at all levels of the school, to keep students safe from harm, including all forms of abuse in our school environment, on campus, online and in other locations provided by the school.

These procedures acknowledge the 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 : Implementing the Child Safe Standards – Managing the Risk of Child Abuse in Schools and School Boarding Premises*.

The school has allocated roles and responsibilities for child safety and wellbeing as follows:

College Leadership

The Principal, the College Council and school leaders recognise their particular responsibility to ensure the development of preventative and proactive strategies that promote a culture of openness, awareness of and shared responsibility for child safety. Their responsibilities include:

- creating an environment for children/young people to be safe and to feel safe
- upholding high principles and standards for all staff, clergy, volunteers and contractors
- promoting models of behaviour between adults and children/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
- ensuring that school personnel have regular and appropriate learning to develop their knowledge of, openness to and ability to address child safety matters

- providing regular opportunities to clarify and confirm legislative obligations, policy and procedures in relation to children/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 1359
- ensuring the school takes specific action to protect children/young people 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 the College's *Child Protection Reporting Obligations Policy*
- sharing information under legislated information sharing schemes (in accordance with the school's prescribed role as an Information Sharing Entity (ISE)).

School staff

(inclusive of school employees, volunteers, contractors and clergy)

Their responsibilities include:

- treating children/young people with dignity and respect, acting with propriety, providing a duty of care, and protecting children and young people in their care
- following the legislative and internal school policies, procedures and processes in the course of their work, if they form a reasonable belief that a child/young person has been or is being abused or neglected
- providing a physically and psychologically safe environment where the wellbeing of children/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/young people
- assisting children/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
- adhering to *OLMC'S Child Safety Code of Conduct* and the *Mercy Education Ltd & OLMC Code of Conduct for Staff and Volunteers*.

Scope

Everyone employed or volunteering at OLMC 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 ([VCEA Statement of Commitment to Child Safety](#)).

These procedures apply to all school employees, volunteers and contractors whether they work in direct contact with students. It also applies to College Advisory Council members (as volunteers) where indicated.

This procedure also applies to all physical and online school environments used by students during or outside of school hours, including other locations provided by for a student's use (for example, a school camp) and those provided through third-party providers.

This procedure should be read together with our other child safety and wellbeing policies, procedures, and codes including:

1. PROTECT: Identifying and Responding to Abuse – Reporting Obligations Policy and associated procedures [PROTECT: Identifying and Responding to Abuse - Reporting Obligations Policy](#)
2. Mercy Education Policy 6.09a Child Safety and Wellbeing
3. Mercy Education Code of Conduct

4. OLMC Reportable Conduct Policy
5. OLMC Child Safety: Student Rights and Responsibilities
6. OLMC Child Protection and Reporting Policy

PROCEDURES

1. Responsibilities of school leadership

The principal and school leaders at our school recognise their particular responsibility to 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 employees, contractors, clergy and volunteers
- promoting models of behaviour between adults, children and young people based on mutual respect and consideration
- creating an environment where child safety complaints and concerns are readily raised, and no one is discouraged from reporting an allegation of abuse to relevant authorities.
- ensuring thorough and rigorous practices are applied in the recruitment, screening and ongoing professional learning of staff and volunteers
- ensuring that employees 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 that 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, policy and procedures in relation to children and young people's safety 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 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 the school's Reportable Conduct Policy
- sharing information under legislated information sharing schemes (CISS and FVISS) in accordance with the school's prescribed role as an Information Sharing Entity (ISE)
- ensuring that the school monitors and reviews the risks related to child safety and wellbeing, including evaluating the effectiveness of the implementation of its risk controls, on an annual basis.
- promoting open discussion of child safety issues within the school community at leadership meetings/staff meeting/SAC meetings
- the processes whereby school leadership reports back on child safety concerns to families etc.

2. Responsibilities of school employees

Responsibilities of school employees (including 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 the legislative and 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

- implementing inclusive practices that respond to the diverse needs of students
- 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 Mercy Education Code of Conduct
- where risks of child abuse are identified, ensuring that action is taken to mitigate those risks and
- all staff are encouraged and supported to report all incidents of concern regarding the safety of all students. Details for how to make a report are contained in the OLMC Child Protection Reporting Obligations. Any staff member who thinks they should report will be supported to do so by any member of the Leadership Team. This will be handled in confidence and all staff will be able to use the College EAP for additional support.
- Once a risk has been identified the Principal will act to ensure that no further risk or incident occurs.

3. Organisational arrangements

The principal has the overall leadership role in monitoring and responding to the policy, procedures and practices for child safety and wellbeing in OLMC in accordance with the School's Child Safety and Wellbeing Policy.

We have appointed a Child Safety and Wellbeing Lead/Officer, and the role description is available on request

- The Child Safety and Wellbeing Team assists the principal.
- The Child Safety and Wellbeing Team works in preventing, identifying and mitigating risks in child safety and wellbeing.
- The Child Safety and Wellbeing Team also 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 by and to identify professional learning).

Our school website and newsletter will from time to time provide information to keep parents and carers informed of child safety and wellbeing commitments, procedures and arrangements.

4. Expectations of our employees and volunteers – Mercy Education Code of Conduct

At our school, we expect school employees and volunteers to proactively ensure the safety and wellbeing of children and young people, to identify concerns about child safety and wellbeing and to take appropriate action if there are concerns about the safety and wellbeing of any child or young person at the school. All school staff must remain familiar with the relevant legislation, the Mercy Education Code of Conduct, and policies and procedures in relation to child safety, and comply with all requirements.

The Mercy Education Code of Conduct recognises the critical role that employees and volunteers play in protecting the students in our care and establishes clear expectations of school employees and volunteers for appropriate behaviour with children to safeguard them against abuse and/or neglect.

The Mercy Education Code of Conduct also protects employees and volunteers through clarification of acceptable and unacceptable behaviours.

5. Student safety, participation, empowerment and support

At OLMC, we actively encourage all students to openly express their views and feel comfortable about giving voice to the things that are important to them including expressing their identity. This may include expressions of culture, sexuality and gender.

We teach students about what to do if they feel unsafe and enable them to understand, identify, discuss and report their concerns. We listen to and act on any concerns students, or their parents/ carers, raise with us.

The curriculum design integrates appropriate knowledge and skills to enhance students' understanding of being safe, as well as their understanding of their rights to safety, information and participation. Teaching and learning strategies that acknowledge and support student agency and voice are implemented. We ensure that students are offered access to sexual abuse prevention programs and to relevant related information in an age-appropriate way.

We have developed appropriate education about:

- standards of behaviour for students attending our school
- healthy and respectful relationships (including sexuality)
- resilience
- child abuse awareness and prevention.

We have also developed curriculum planning documents that detail the strategies and actions the school takes to implement its obligations to ensure that:

- students are informed about all of their rights, including to safety, information and participation
- the importance of friendship is recognised and support from peers is encouraged, to help children and students feel safe and be less isolated
- employees and volunteers are attuned to signs of harm and facilitate child-friendly ways for students to express their views, participate in decision-making and raise their concerns
- we have strategies in place to develop a culture that facilitates participation and is responsive to the input of students
- we provide opportunities for students to participate and is responsive to their contributions to strengthen confidence and engagement
- The College curriculum and the learning program is designed for all students. The Learning Diversity Leaders work closely with families and teachers to ensure that the learning program and environment meet the individual needs of students?
- There are a number of ways that students are provided with information and guidance regarding who to seek help from and how to raise a concern e.g. The PROTECT four critical responses are displayed in all classrooms and breakout spaces along with photos of the staff who can assist them. The Student Handbook contains similar information along with contacts for other organisations that might support them to raise concerns or to report t?
- The Child Safe Student Rights and Responsibilities Policy is published on SIMON and is accessible to all students. The student handbook has a copy of a number of policies and outlines the steps for seeking help. The Student Handbook also contains a resource of community organisations who can also provide support for young people and/or families.
- The Pastoral Program of the College addresses with students, ways OLMC reduces barriers to students disclosing, reporting, raising concerns and complaints.
- At OLMC the development of student relationships is important. In Year 7 students work with a small team of Year 9 Peer Support Leaders about all the aspects of being new to OLMC. In Years 10-12 students are in Vertical Pastoral Groupings to support building connections amongst students who may be in class together and support as student navigate the many decision making processes for Senior School Students.
- The strategies and processes for how you set up practices to encourage student empowerment e.g. student 'town halls'; student leadership that enacts change. Avenues for student feedback (e.g. suggestion boxes, surveys, etc.) etc.
- The school has two separate processes for the transition of young people to OLMC. The Year 7 Transition Program is provided to families as part of the enrolment process and includes a website, orientation days and a specific Pastoral Program. For students in Year 8-12 a buddy will

be assigned from their Pastoral Group and the Transition Coordinator will meet with all students at an Orientation program prior to the start of the year and later in the year at check in morning teas.

- The structure of Student Leadership at OLMC encourages student empowerment. Students are encouraged to speak with class captains, members of the Student Representative Council, House Captains and Vice Captains, members of the Student Leadership Team as an avenue for student voice to raise their views and/or concerns or suggestions for change.
- *Students are involved and can enact change when school events are planned and reviewed.*

We support students to identify, discuss and report their concerns.

We listen to children and young people, take their views seriously, and are committed to addressing any concerns that they raise with us.

Students impacted by a child abuse or child safety matter will be provided with support to assist them to feel safe at school and develop protective factors. Supports will be tailored to each individual student and circumstance. Supports provided to students at our school may include:

- Regularly communicating with the student or students and their parents/ guardians/ carers where appropriate
- Convening a Student Support Group of school wellbeing staff and teachers to plan, support and monitor affected students
- Developing Student Support Plans for students impacted by the incident to ensure appropriate levels of care and support are provided
- Access to counselling
- Referrals to external services such as family violence services, Centre Against Sexual Assault (CASA), or Headspace
- Include further relevant details of school practices or supports that may be offered

Where external authorities are investigating a report of abuse or risk of abuse, it is the role of the Principal of our school to ensure students are supported throughout interviews at the school.

6. Reporting and responding

OLMC creates records relevant to any child safety complaints, disclosures or breaches of the Mercy Education Code of Conduct, and maintains and disposes of those records in accordance with security and privacy requirements and [Public Record Office Victoria Recordkeeping Standards](#) (including minimum retention periods). Our school complies 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.

Child protection reporting obligations fall under separate legislation with differing reporting requirements.

Our school's PROTECT: Identifying and Responding to Abuse – Reporting obligations Policy sets out the actions required under the relevant legislation when there is a reasonable belief that a child at our school is in need of protection or a criminal offence has been committed and provides guidance and procedures on how to make a report.

Our school is a prescribed Information Sharing Entity (ISE) meaning that, where legislated requirements are met, it can share confidential information with other ISEs to promote child wellbeing or safety under the CISS or FVISS.

At our school, if any member of our school community has concerns for a child's safety they need to discuss, they can notify the school Principal, the Deputy Principal or the designated Child Safety and Wellbeing Lead/Officer, [Mrs Megan Edwards].

If the Principal or Child Safety and Wellbeing Officer is not available, then it should be discussed with a member of the school leadership team or a Year Level or House Coordinator. Alternatively, any member of the school community may report directly to the responsible authority.

The employee, supported by the Principal or designated Child Safety and Wellbeing Officer will follow the step-by-step guide to making a report as outlined in the [Four Critical Actions for Schools: Responding to Incidents, Disclosures and Suspicions of Child Abuse](#).

7. Screening and recruitment of school staff

Our school leadership team applies 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 Mercy Education Code of Conduct and the School's Child Safety and Wellbeing Policy.

Each position description for staff involved in child-connected work sets out the requirements, duties and responsibilities regarding child safety and wellbeing for those in that role and the occupant's essential qualifications, experience and attributes in relation to child safety and wellbeing.

When recruiting and selecting employees, contractors and volunteers involved in child-connected work, we ensure that we gather, verify and record the following information about any person we propose to engage:

- proof of personal identity
- confirmation that the person has a current Working with Children clearance
- review of the results of a recent National Police Check
- evidence of current trade or professional registration (as relevant)
- evidence of any essential or relevant professional or other qualifications
- the applicant's history of work involving children and young people
- references that address the applicant's suitability for the job and working with children and young people. We will also ensure that appropriate supervision or support arrangements are provided for the induction of new school staff into the school's policies, codes, practices and procedures governing child safety and wellbeing and child-connected work.

We monitor and assess the continuing suitability of school staff and volunteers to work with children, including annual reviews of the status of Working with Children Checks and staff professional registration requirements such as Victorian Institute of Teaching (VIT) registration.

8. Child safety and wellbeing – education and training for school staff

OLMC provides employees, volunteers and clergy 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 addresses:

- individual and collective employee obligations and responsibilities for managing the risk of child abuse
- preventing, identifying and mitigating child abuse risks in the school environment without compromising a child or young person's right to privacy, access to information, social connections and learning opportunities
- the Reportable Conduct Scheme
- our school's current child safety standards (including this Policy, the Mercy Education Code of Conduct and any other policies and procedures relating to child safety and wellbeing, including in relation to managing complaints and concerns related to child abuse)

- guidance on recognising indicators of child harm including harm caused by other children and young people
- guidance on responding effectively to issues of child safety and wellbeing and supporting colleagues who disclose harm, including their mandatory reporting obligations
- guidance on how to build culturally safe environments for children and young people
- guidance on their information sharing and recordkeeping obligations, including under the [Public Record Office Victoria Recordkeeping Standards](#)

9. Diversity and equity – strategies and actions

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

- all employees and volunteers understand the diverse nature and circumstances of children and young people
- our school provides support and responds to vulnerable children and young people
- children, students, employees, volunteers and the school community have access to information, support and complaints processes in ways that are culturally safe, accessible and easy to understand
- the school pays particular attention to the needs of students with disability, students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, students who are unable to live at home, international students, and LGBTIQ+ students
- the school pays particular attention to the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and provides and promotes a culturally safe environment for them.

We do not tolerate discrimination, racism or bullying.

10. Family engagement – strategies and actions

Our employees ensure that families, carers and other members of the school community are informed about relevant child safety and wellbeing matters and are involved in the promotion of child safety and wellbeing at the school. We aim to ensure that:

- families participate in decisions relating to child safety and wellbeing which affect their child or young person
- we engage and openly communicate with families, carers and other members of the school community about our child safe approach
- 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.

11. Risk management

At our school, we are 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.

The College Student Wellbeing Team regularly monitors risks for young people and works closely with the Counselling Team to identify new or emerging risks. The School Organisation Committee also monitors risks for school based activities or excursions which include any related to Child Safety.

Upon entry to Visitor Reception all visitors will be required to sign in using the Passtab system.

All visitors can view the Child Safety Policy and are required to submit their VIT or WWC registration number when signing in.

Visitors will be provided with a name badge with their photo and will identify the person they are meeting with. This must be worn at all times.

Contractors use the Passtab sign in station in the Basement Level of the Frayne Design Art and Technology Building.

Sports Coaches and umpires/referees sign in using the Passtab station located in the foyer of the Nallejeering Centre.

Related policies and documents

Victorian Department of Education PROTECT: Identifying and Responding to Abuse – Reporting obligations
https://www.education.vic.gov.au/Documents/about/programs/health/protect/ChildSafeStandard5_SchoolsGuide.pdf?bcs-agent-scanner=c45499d7-ba40-7b41-9129-5187e8ef156b

OLMC Reportable Conduct Policy

OLMC Child Protection and Reporting Policy

Legislation and standards

Ministerial Order 1359: Implementing the Child Safe Standards – Managing the Risk of Child Abuse in Schools and School Boarding Premises

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.) – including three criminal offences under this Act:

- **Failure to disclose offence:** Any adult who forms a reasonable belief that a sexual offence has been committed by an adult against a child under 16 has an obligation to report that information to police. Failure to disclose the information to police is a criminal offence.
- **Failure to protect offence:** This offence will apply where there is a substantial risk that a child under the age of 16 under the care, supervision or authority of a relevant organisation will become a victim of a sexual offence committed by an adult associated with that organisation. A person in a position of authority in the organisation will commit the offence if they know of the risk of abuse and have the power or responsibility to reduce or remove the risk, but negligently fail to do so
- **Grooming offence:** This offence targets predatory conduct designed to facilitate later sexual activity with a child. Grooming can be conducted in person or online, for example via interaction through social media, web forums and emails.

Related Documents

Australian Catholic Safeguarding Ltd (ACSL)

- <https://www.acsltd.org.au/>
- [National Catholic Safeguarding Standards](#)

Australian Human Rights Commission: (AHRC)

- *National Principles for Child Safe Organisations*
<https://www.humanrights.gov.au/our-work/childrens-rights/national-principles-child-safe-organisations>

OLMC Policies and Procedures

Mercy Education Limited

- *Mercy Education Limited Governance Statement*
- *MEL Governance Charter*
- *MEL Policy 6.09 a/b/c Child Safety and Wellbeing (State templates)*
- *MEL Policy 1.10 Codes of Conduct*
- *MEL Code of Conduct*
- *MEL Parent Code of Conduct: Respectful Relationships*
- *MEL Policy 6.10 Child Safety Reporting to Mercy Education*

Review History

Version	Date Released	Next Review	Author	Approved
1.0	March 2024		Chief Executive	MEL Board