Child safety and wellbeing policy

**Acknowledgement**

The Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority proudly acknowledges and pays respect to Victoria’s Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and their rich and enduring cultures.

We acknowledge Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as Australia’s first peoples and as the Traditional Owners and custodians of the lands and waters on which we rely. We pay respect to Elders past and present of the lands where we conduct our work and recognise their ongoing contributions as the first educators on the land now known as Victoria.

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1. Overview

The Child Safety and Wellbeing Policy affirms the commitment of the Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority (VCAA) to fostering a safe environment for children and young people. This policy reflects the VCAA’s dedication to child safety in the organisation’s role as an educational provider for Victorians from birth to senior secondary levels. As a category 1 entity under the *Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005* (Vic), the VCAA adheres to the Child Safe Standards, supporting the organisation to create, implement and maintain a child safe environment.

This policy applies to all employees within the VCAA. For the purposes of this policy, the term 'employees' encompasses VCAA employees of the direct workforce, as well as any individuals or groups undertaking an activity for or on behalf of the VCAA, including:

* all employees (fixed term, casual, sessional) employed under Ministerial Order No. 1451 – Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority employees (Employment Conditions, Salaries, Allowances, Selection and Conduct) Order 2023 (referred to as ‘The MO’)
* volunteers
* Board members.

In this policy, ‘child’ means a child or young person who is under the age of 18 years.

1. Objectives

The child safety and wellbeing policy aims to:

* demonstrate the VCAA's commitment to prioritising and fostering a child safe environment, where children are safe and feel safe
* outline clear roles, responsibilities, and procedures for employees in upholding child safety standards
* educate and raise awareness among all employees regarding identifying, reporting, and addressing potential risks or safety concerns
* ensure adherence to legislative and ethical obligations, codes of conduct, and standards related to child safety and protection.

1. Principles
   1. Prevention and protection

Taking a preventative approach and proactive measures to prevent harm and protect children from all forms of abuse, neglect, exploitation, and harm. Actively assessing and managing potential risks within the organisation. This principle emphasises the proactive identification of risks and the implementation of measures to prevent harm to children.

* 1. Openness and reporting

Fostering a culture of openness that encourages the safe disclosure of any concerns or risks related to the safety of children.

* 1. Children's rights

Recognising, respecting, and advocating for the rights of children. Providing children with a safe and nurturing environment that upholds their rights and well-being. Promoting inclusivity and diversity to ensure that all children, regardless of their individual characteristics, are treated with dignity, respect, and equality.

1. Roles and responsibilities
   1. Executive directors, managers and authorised delegates

Executive directors, managers and authorised delegates are responsible for:

* promoting awareness of the child safety and wellbeing policy
* committing to the application of child safe standards to their work
* actively participating in fostering a strong child safe culture at the VCAA
* creating an environment where child safety complaints and concerns are rapidly raised, and no one is discouraged from reporting an allegation of child abuse to relevant authorities
* reporting breaches of the policy and acting on breaches by taking timely and decisive action under the VCAA complaints, misconduct and unsatisfactory performance policy
* notifying, or assisting employees to notify, appropriate authorities of alleged or suspected child abuse in accordance with legislative obligations.
  1. Employees

Employees are responsible for:

* complying with the child safety and wellbeing policy and related processes
* ensuring their conduct and behaviour towards children aligns with the established standards and child safe code of conduct
* demonstrating cultural sensitivity and understanding when interacting with children from diverse backgrounds, respecting their cultural practices, and ensuring an inclusive environment for all children
* reporting any child safety concerns promptly and in accordance with the VCAA's reporting procedures and legislative obligations.

1. Expectations

5.1. Child safe standards

Victoria's Child Safe Standards (**the Standards**) are compulsory minimum standards to ensure children and young people are protected and safe from harm and abuse. The Standards necessitate organisations to establish policies and processes preventing and addressing abuse, prioritising the safety of young individuals in Victoria.

The 11 standards are listed below:

* **culturally safe environments:** establish a culturally safe environment in which the diverse and unique identities and experiences of Aboriginal children and young people are respected and valued
* **leadership, governance and culture:** ensure that child safety and wellbeing are embedded in the VCAA's leadership, governance and culture
* **child and student empowerment:** children and young people are empowered about their rights, participate in decisions affecting them and are taken seriously
* **family engagement:** families and communities are informed, and involved in promoting child safety and wellbeing
* **diversity and equity:** equity is upheld and diverse needs are respected in policy and practice
* **suitable staff and volunteers:** people working with children and young people are suitable and supported to reflect child safety and wellbeing values in practice
* **child-focused complaints processes:** ensure that processes for complaints and concerns are child focused
* **child safety knowledge, skills and awareness:** staff and volunteers are equipped with the knowledge, skills and awareness to keep children and young people safe through ongoing education and training
* **physical and online environments:** physical and online environments promote safety and wellbeing while minimising the opportunity for children and young people to be harmed
* **review of child safety practices:** implementation of the child safe standards is regularly reviewed and improved
* **implementation of child safety practices:** policies and procedures that document how schools are safe for children, young people and students.

5.2. Reporting child safety incidents and managing child safe concerns and complaints

The VCAA intends to ensure all employees understand their obligations and know who to tell if they observe harm and abuse, are a victim, or if they notice inappropriate behaviour.

When faced with a child safety incident or child safe concern or complaint, the VCAA prioritises this immediately, acting in the best interests of the child to ensure their safety before promptly reporting the matter internally through organisational reporting arrangements.A child safety incident or child safe concern or complaint needs to be reported directly to the Division’s Executive Director, or a manager or authorised delegate within the VCAA.

The VCAA handles all reports in a serious manner and addresses them promptly in accordance with VCAA policies, processes, and legislation. In certain incidents, the VCAA will report the matter to external authorities, including Victoria Police, the Commission for Children and Young People and/or Child Protection.

5.3. Privacy

The collection, use and disclosure of personal information by the VCAA in relation to students, families, and all employees complies with Victorian privacy laws, and other relevant laws.

5.4. Further assistance

Kids Helpline is a confidential and free counselling service available in Australia to children and young people 24/7 via phone for ages between 5 to 25. The service offers support, guidance, and counselling on a range of issues, including mental health, relationships, family problems, bullying, and more at Kids Helpline website.

5.5. Definitions

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| --- | --- |
| Term | Definition |
| Child | A child or young person who is under the age of 18 years. |
| Child safe standards | The Standards made under section 17(1) of the *Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005*. |
| Child abuse | Includes:   1. any act committed against a child involving: 2. a sexual offence 3. grooming offences under section 49M(1) of the *Crimes Act 1958* 4. the infliction, on a child of: 5. physical violence 6. serious emotional or psychological harm 7. the serious neglect of a child. |
| Complaint | An expression of dissatisfaction with services provided, contracted, funded or regulated by the VCAA. A complaint relates to a specific episode, occurrence or provision of service that has resulted in an impact on any individual or group. This can include the complaints handling process itself. |
| Cultural safety | in our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural safety [framework](https://www.health.vic.gov.au/publications/aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-cultural-safety-framework-part-1) as an environment that is safe for Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islanders, where there is no assault, challenge or denial of their identity and experience. |
| Child safety concerns | May be identified through:   * a suspicion or belief that abuse or harm has occurred or is likely to occur * a disclosure made by a child, their parent, guardian or carer, a teacher or any other person, including another child * observations of concerning behaviour about a person’s conduct towards, or in the presence of a child. |
| Family violence | 1. behaviour by a person towards a family member of that person if that behaviour: 2. is physically or sexually abusive 3. is emotionally or psychologically abusive 4. is economically abusive 5. is threatening 6. is coercive 7. in any other way controls or dominates the family member and causes that family member to feel fear for the safety or wellbeing of that family member or another person 8. behaviour by a person that causes a child to hear or witness, or otherwise be exposed to the effects of, behaviour referred to above. |

1. Managing this policy
   1. Authorisation

This policy is issued under the authority of the Chief Executive Officer.

* 1. Accountability for the policy

The owner for this policy is VCAA Human Resources. The owner reports to the Chief Executive Officer on the management of this policy.

The owner is responsible for:

* development and regular review of this policy
* development of protocols, processes and guidelines to support implementation
* monitoring compliance of applicable employees, organisational units, and/or locations.
  1. Important dates

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| Date of adoption: | July 2024 |
| Date of last amendment: | July 2024 |
| Date of next review: | July 2026 |

1. Related documents

* *Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005* (Vic)
* [*Education and Training Reform Act 2006* (Vic)](https://www.legislation.vic.gov.au/in-force/acts/education-and-training-reform-act-2006/099)
* Child Safe Standards
* Commission for Children and Young People
* [*Family Violence Protection Act 2008*](https://www.legislation.vic.gov.au/in-force/acts/family-violence-protection-act-2008/061)(Vic)
* [*Privacy and Data Protection Act 2014*](https://www.legislation.vic.gov.au/in-force/acts/privacy-and-data-protection-act-2014/030)(Vic)
* Child Safe Code of Conduct