



Child Safety and Safeguarding Program

Child Safeguarding Student Participation and Empowerment Policy and Procedures

Background

St Patrick's College is a Catholic school in the Edmund Rice tradition. The charism of Blessed Edmund Rice expressed through the touchstones of Liberating Education, Gospel Spirituality, Inclusive Community, Justice and Solidarity, underpins our continued commitment to a safe and inclusive environment for all.

St Patrick's College is a Catholic day and boarding college for boys in the Edmund Rice tradition, established in 1893. St Patrick's College is committed to providing a caring, supportive, and safe environment where every student has a place, a voice and their story is known.

The EREA VSL Board, the College's and the Boarding School's governing authority, has approved St Patrick's College's Child Safeguarding Student Participation and Empowerment Policy and Procedures, as set out in the Policy Administration section, below.

St Patrick's College's Statement of Commitment to Child Safety

All children and young people have a right to feel safe and be safe.

St Patrick's College is committed to embedding a culture where the safety, wellbeing, and participation of all children and young people under our care is paramount. Particular attention is given to the needs of vulnerable children and young people, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait

Islander children and young people, children and young people with disability and mental health issues, children and young people from culturally and/or linguistically diverse backgrounds, children and young people who are unable to live at home, and those who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or intersex. We are committed to at all times acting in the best interests of children and young people.

We have no tolerance for child abuse and all allegations and safety concerns are treated very seriously and consistent with our robust safeguarding policies and procedures. St Patrick's College is committed to nurturing the wellbeing of all children and young people, respecting their dignity, ensuring their safety and protecting them from abuse and other harm. St Patrick's College and its School-Based Staff, Contractors and Volunteers have legal and moral obligations to respond swiftly, including contacting authorities where relevant when we are concerned about a child's safety, which we follow rigorously.

St Patrick's College is committed to providing a safe and child-friendly environment, where children and young people are safe and feel safe and can actively participate in decisions that affect their lives.

At St Patrick's College we have zero tolerance for child abuse and are committed to acting in our students' best interests and keeping them safe from harm.

St Patrick's College regards its child safeguarding, wellbeing, and protection responsibilities with the utmost importance and as such, is committed to providing the necessary resources to ensure compliance with all relevant child safety, wellbeing and protection laws and regulations and maintain a child-safe culture.

Purpose

St Patrick's College (the College) is committed to providing a safe and supportive learning environment.

To be a child safe environment, St Patrick's College must enable and empower students to understand their rights and to participate in all the different decisions that affect them, not just those relating to child safety and wellbeing.

Standard 3 of the Victorian Child Safe Standards is that children and young people are empowered about their rights, participate in decisions affecting them and are taken seriously.

To implement this Standard, Ministerial Order 1359 places specific obligations on The EREA VSL Board to ensure that:

- St Patrick's College and the Boarding School informs students about all of their rights, including to safety, information and participation
- the College and the Boarding School recognises the importance of friendships and encourages support from peers
- the College's and the Boarding School's School-Based Staff and Volunteers are aware of the signs of harm, and facilitate child-friendly ways for students to express their views, participate in decision-making and raise their concerns
- the College and the Boarding School have strategies to develop a culture that facilitates participation and responds to students' input
- the College and the Boarding School provide opportunities for students to participate and are responsive to their contributions.

St Patrick's College places a high priority on promoting the empowerment of our students and their participation in all decisions that affect them, not just those relating to child safety and wellbeing. Establishing an environment of trust and inclusion at our College enables students to speak up if they have concerns.

St Patrick's College recognises that students may not disclose child safety incidents or concerns to the College because they:

- do not recognise behaviours as inappropriate, abusive or grooming behaviour; or
- do not know how to raise their concerns or make a complaint.

Having simple and accessible information for students about inappropriate behaviours and about the College's reporting and responding processes assists all students to develop the appropriate knowledge and skills to identify and communicate when they do not feel safe.

This Policy and its Procedures set out the policies, procedures, strategies and practices that the College uses to encourage the participation and empowerment of all students, to establish a child-friendly culture in which students are respected and taken seriously, to promote friendship and encourage peer support, and to provide opportunities for students to participate in decisions that affect them and to respond to their contributions.

Principles

EREA Victorian Schools Ltd. (EREA VSL) and St Patrick's College are committed to ensuring the safety, wellbeing, and participation of all students. We have no tolerance for child abuse.

St Patrick's College and The EREA VSL Board have a moral, legal and mission-driven responsibility to create nurturing College environments where children and young people are respected and their voices heard, and where they are safe and feel safe.

Ministerial Order 1359 and the EREA VSL Safeguarding Framework set out the principles that guide The EREA VSL Board and St Patrick's College in the development and regular review of the Child Safeguarding Student Participation and Empowerment Policy and Procedures.

Principles of Participation

The following three key principles underpin the College's approach to participation of students in decisions at or by the College that affect them:

- Empowerment: which involves students having greater control or say over their lives through participation.
- Purposeful Engagement: which involves students taking on valued roles, addressing issues that are relevant to them, and influencing real outcomes.
- Inclusiveness: which involves ensuring that all students are able to participate.

Scope

For the purposes this Policy and its Procedures, references to the College include the Boarding School.

This Policy and its Procedures apply to all School-Based Staff, including School Boarding Premises Staff, Volunteers and Contractors.

They apply in all College and Boarding School environments (together referred to as College environments) within the meaning of Ministerial Order 1359, including physical, virtual and online environments used during or outside of school hours, on-site and off-site College grounds (e.g. extra-curricular activities such as sport and other programs, camps and excursions, interstate and overseas travel) , and environments provided by External Education Providers and other Contractors.

Definitions

Definitions of particular terms used in this Policy and its Procedures can be found in the [Child Safety and Safeguarding Policy: Master Definitions List](#).

Of particular importance to this Policy and its Procedures are the following additional key definitions:

“Decisions that Affect Students”

Of particular relevance to this Policy and its Procedures is the requirement that students are able to participate in decisions that affect them.

“Decisions that affect students” are not limited to those relating to child safety and wellbeing. They include decisions about:

- organisational planning
- delivery of services
- management of facilities
- learning and assessment environments.

“Pastoral Care”

“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 their spiritual, emotional and social wellbeing.

“Resilience”

“Resilience” is the ability to cope and thrive in the face of negative events, challenges or adversity.

Roles and Responsibilities

In addition to relevant roles and responsibilities as set out in [Child Safety and Safeguarding Roles and Responsibilities](#), the following people have particular responsibilities under this Policy and its Procedures.

- Director of Human Resources, Risk & Compliance Manager - Mr Jamie Bobrowski
- the College's Assistant Principal-Pastoral Care and Wellbeing - Mr Kevin Robillard
- the School Principal Steven O'Connor

St Patrick's College's Policy

Participation

1. As part of creating and maintaining a child safe environment at St Patrick's College for all students, the College:
 - engages and involves students in decisions that affect them
 - provides child-friendly pathways for students to express their views and raise concerns
 - takes students' views and opinions seriously
 - educates students about their rights via the child safety curriculum and student handbook (including delivering sexual abuse prevention programs and relevant related information in an age-appropriate way)
 - includes students in policy consultation and development.
2. We provide multiple age-appropriate and child-friendly platforms, set out in the **Procedures** below, to regularly seek students' views about, and to enable students to participate in, decisions that affect them.
3. We actively seek to understand what makes students feel safe in our organisation. To do this, we:
 - encourage students to provide feedback about child safety concerns and issues at the College
 - have and implement strategies, set out in the **Procedures** below, to obtain feedback from its students.
4. We take all student contributions seriously, and document and actively look for ways to implement improvements to its child safety and wellbeing policies, procedures and practices that reflect these contributions.
5. We are honest with students about the extent of their involvement in decision-making and give feedback on how their views have been taken into account and actioned.

Developing and Maintaining a Child-Friendly Culture

1. St Patrick's College is a child safe and child-centred organisation. We are committed to providing a safe, supportive and social environment, where students feel nurtured as they learn.

2. Our College physical environments promote students' feelings of inclusion, participation and empowerment.
3. We recognise the importance of friendships and peer support in helping students people feel safe and be less isolated. We actively support students to develop and sustain friendships and to receive support from peers through both formal programs and informal mechanisms, set out in the **Procedures** below.
4. Our College is committed to ensuring that the information and procedures that we have to enable students to raise, and to respond to, child safety concerns are age-appropriate, simple, and accessible for all students, including:
 - students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds
 - Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students
 - students with disability
 - LGBTQIA+ students
 - international students
 - students who are unable to live at home; and
 - other vulnerable students.

For more information, refer to [Child Safeguarding Complaints Management Policy and Procedures](#).

5. Our College openly displays contact details for independent child advocacy and child helpline services throughout the College and the Boarding School.
6. Our College provides training and information to Staff, and relevant Volunteers and Contractors, about identifying signs of child abuse and other harm, and about how to help and encourage students to participate in decisions and to raise concerns. For more information, refer to [Child Safeguarding Training and Supervision Policy and Procedures](#).
7. Our College takes a leadership role in raising community awareness of children's rights, child abuse and other harm and its prevention including by:
 - actively promoting and participating in civic engagement activities and campaigns which promote whole of community awareness of children's rights, child abuse and other harm, and prevention
 - encouraging student involvement in these activities and campaigns.

Pastoral Care

1. Standards of Behaviour for Students Attending the College

St Patrick's College:

- has a Student Code of Conduct, developed in consultation with students, that sets out standards of behaviour for all students attending the College, including behaviours relating to child safeguarding. The College promotes the Student Code of Conduct within the College.
- has policies on Bullying Prevention and Intervention, Student Use of Social Media and Harassment (Student Against Student). For more information, refer to our Student Duty of Care Program.
- disciplines students who do not uphold these standards of behaviour using our student disciplinary procedures, but also supports these students to address and mitigate behaviours that are not in line with the Code and any underlying factors
- encourages students to tell a trusted adult, whether it's a parent/carer or other family member, a trusted teacher or a Child Safeguarding Officer, when they feel unsafe as a result of or are otherwise impacted by the behaviour of other students.

2. Child Safety and Wellbeing Curriculum

St Patrick's College delivers age-appropriate information and education to all students about:

- healthy and respectful relationships (including sexuality, sexual relationships and consent)
- child abuse awareness and the right to be safe
- children and young people's rights to make decisions about their body and their privacy
- how they can raise child safety incidents and concerns
- resilience and coping with adversity
- the College's response to child safety incidents and concerns, making clear that it will take any concerns students raise seriously and will respond appropriately
- our Child Safeguarding Safety and Wellbeing Policy and Procedures, Child Safeguarding Reporting and Responding Obligations Policy and Procedures, Child Safeguarding Code of Conduct (Vic) and Student Code of Conduct.

Procedures

Participation

St Patrick's College is informed by EREA's Empowering Student Voice and Participation resource and the EREA VSL Safeguarding Policy: Advancing Voice and Agency to assist us to meet the above

goals.

To encourage and enable students to participate in decisions that affect them, the College uses the following platforms and methods:

- Refer to College Principal
- providing students with access to sexual abuse prevention programmes and to relevant related information in a developmentally and age-appropriate way
- supporting children and young people to understand their rights, contributing to child safety planning and raising concerns
- promoting and encouraging children and young people's participation in decision-making
- seeking children and young people's views about what makes them feel safe and unsafe
- valuing and respecting children and young people's opinions
- establishing an environment of trust and inclusion that enables children to ask questions and speak up if they are worried or feel unsafe
- promoting children's participation provides valuable information about their experience
- facilitating means that children and young people are empowered to develop child-safe policies that are understandable and owned by them

To encourage and enable students to provide feedback specifically about safety and wellbeing concerns and issues, including when reviewing our child safeguarding policies, procedures and practices, the College employs a number of strategies, including:

- at least one student representative on the College's Child Safeguarding Committee

Homeroom, Classroom, Teacher, YLC, Heads of School, anonymously or with counsellors

Developing and Maintaining a Child-Friendly Culture

The formal programs used at the College to support students to develop and sustain friendships and receive support from peers include:

The resources are available by contacting homeroom teachers, Year Level Coordinators, Counsellors and Heads of Schools.

Pastoral Care

1. Child Safety and Wellbeing Curriculum

St Patrick's College includes the following topics in the curriculum for each year level:

Healthy and Respectful Relationships, Sexuality and Resilience

The teaching of healthy and respectful relationships (including sexuality, sexual relationships and consent), and skills relating to resilience assists students to grow and develop into healthy, mature adults, capable of realising their full potential.

Healthy and respectful relationships and resilience education at the College is:

- imparted in the context of Catholic moral teachings leading to the formation of a Christian conscience
- enshrined in core pedagogical practices that are age-appropriate, respectful, sensitive of culture and family background and differentiated to support the learning and developmental needs of the child or young person
- endorsed by The EREA VSL Board.

Child Abuse Awareness and Prevention

The College's curriculum includes age-appropriate education for students on child safety awareness and child abuse and harm prevention, to build their capacity to:

- identify when they feel safe and unsafe and when they are at risk, including when online
- identify safe and unsafe touching (using the anatomical names for their body parts)
- promote their personal safety (avoiding harm where possible)
- seek help, using their identified safety networks
- overcome barriers to disclosure, for example guilt or disbelief.

The College considers best practice when providing access to or selecting providers of child abuse and harm prevention education.

2. Child Safeguarding Information and Communication

To ensure that students can identify inappropriate behaviour and know how to raise concerns, the College provides child-friendly versions of the following Policies and Procedures to all students via the College's intranet:

- Child Safeguarding Code of Conduct (Vic)
- Child Safeguarding Complaints Management Policy and Procedures
- Child Safeguarding Safety and Wellbeing Policy and Procedures

Contact Director of Human Resources, Risk and Compliance for further policy information.

The College also provides all students with information about the above topics, as well as other child safety and wellbeing topics, through various age-appropriate pastoral care initiatives and other communication methods, including:

Memo, daily messages, Crest articles, websites, email and PAM notifications.

Implementation

This Policy and its Procedures are made available to all School-Based Staff, Volunteers, and Contractors, via the College's PolicyConnect site. They are included in induction training and in ongoing refresher training for School-Based Staff and relevant Volunteers and Contractors. For more information, refer to [Child Safeguarding Training and Supervision Policy and Procedures](#).

They are made accessible to parents/carers, students and the wider School community in summary in our [Child Safeguarding Safety and Wellbeing Policy and Procedures](#) as well as Complispace-PolicyConnect and Staff Learning Systems, SafeTripBuilder, Passtab, College Website, Contracts, Newsletters, Annual Reports, Annual briefings and the Crest..

They are also available in hard copy by request.

Breach of Child Safeguarding Student Participation and Empowerment Policy and Procedures

St Patrick's College enforces this Policy and its Procedures. In the event of any non-compliance, we will instigate a review, in a timely and fair manner, that may result in a range of measures including (depending on the severity of the breach):

- remedial education
- counselling
- increased supervision
- the restriction of duties
- appointment to an alternate role
- suspension
- in the case of serious breaches, termination of employment, contract or engagement.

For more information, refer to [Child Safeguarding Compliance and Breach Policy and Procedures](#).

Policy Review

A review of the Child Safeguarding Student Participation and Empowerment Policy and Procedures is conducted every two years or earlier if required, such as due to changes in legislation.

The EREA VSL Board is responsible for ensuring that this Policy and its Procedures is reviewed and updated as needed and for approving this Policy and its Procedures.

Source of Obligation

- [Ministerial Order 1359](#), Clause 7

EREA VSL and St Patrick's College Policy and Procedures Linkages

The Child Safeguarding Student Participation and Empowerment Policy and Procedures is to be read and understood in conjunction with:

- [Child Safeguarding Safety and Wellbeing Policy and Procedures](#)
- [Family and Community Involvement in Child Safeguarding Policy and Procedures](#)
- [Child Safeguarding Complaints Management Policy and Procedures](#)
- [Child Safeguarding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Students Policy and Procedures](#)
- [Child Safeguarding Students from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Backgrounds Policy and Procedures](#)

- [Child Safeguarding Students with Disability Policy and Procedures](#)
- [Child Safeguarding LGBTQIA+ Inclusion Policy and Procedures](#)
- [Child Safeguarding Regular Reviews and Continuous Improvement Policy and Procedures](#)
- [Child Safeguarding Training and Supervision Policy and Procedures](#)
- [Child Safeguarding Compliance and Breach Policy and Procedures](#)
- [Child Safeguarding \(Responding and Reporting Obligations\) Policy and Procedures](#)
- [Child Safety Code of Conduct Policy and Procedures](#)

Related Forms and Documents

- Department of Education and Training, Catholic Education Commission of Victoria and Independent Schools Victoria, [PROTECT Recording your actions: Responding to suspected child abuse - A Template for Victorian Schools](#)
- Department of Education and Training, Catholic Education Commission of Victoria and Independent Schools Victoria, [PROTECT Responding to Suspected Student Sexual Offending: Template for all Victorian Schools](#)

References and Resources

- Victorian Commission for Children and Young People, [Participation and Empowerment: A guide for organisations working with children and young people](#), 2021
- EREA, [Empowering Student Voice and Participation](#), 2020.

Policy Administration

Responsible Officer	EREA VSL Chief Executive Officer
Policy Owner	EREA VSL Director of Safeguarding
Approving Body	EREA VSL Board
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Related Documents	
Superseded Documents	