

6.09

MERCY EDUCATION POLICY 6.09 CHILD PROTECTION

Introduction:

Mercy Education Limited (Mercy Education) has a zero tolerance for all forms of child abuse. Mercy Education has an over-arching commitment and non-delegable duty to ensure that its students are safe and secure while fostering their growth in a faith-centred community. Child safety and wellbeing are at the core of its mission and operations and its schools promote safe, inclusive and welcoming learning environments. Mercy Education facilitates and oversees the implementation of child protection policies and codes of conduct across all its schools and throughout the organisation, in accordance with relevant state legislation, federal legislation and diocesan regulations.

Purpose:

The purpose of this policy is to demonstrate the commitment of Mercy Education to safeguarding children through its leadership, governance and culture.

Mercy Education will facilitate and oversee the implementation of the Child Protection Policy across the Mercy schools and throughout the organisation as a part of its governance responsibility.

Definitions:

Child: a child or a young person enrolled as a student at a Mercy Education school. A child is a person under the age of 18 years or as defined according to applicable legislation. Enrolled students over the age of 18 years are not included in the definition of a child.

Child-connected work: work authorised by Mercy Education and performed by an adult in a school environment while children are present or reasonably expected to be present.

Child safety: 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.

Child abuse: includes

- (a) any act committed against a child involving
 - (i) a sexual offence; or
 - (ii) a grooming offence

- (b) the infliction, on a child, of
 - (i) physical violence; or
 - (ii) serious emotional or psychological harm; and

- (c) serious neglect of a child.

Employees: teaching staff, operational staff and contractors either employed or directly engaged by Mercy Education schools, all staff working at the Mercy Education Executive office and members of a religious order or diocese who receive a stipend for their services to Mercy Education (specifically they are not employees if engaged under a stipend agreement).

Learning environment: any physical or virtual space made available or authorised by Mercy Education for use by a child during or outside school hours, including a school campus, on-line school environments (including email and intranet systems) and other locations provided by the schools for use by children (including but not limited to school camps, sporting events, excursions, competitions, interstate and overseas tours).

Parent: all those in a parenting capacity of a student, prospective student or past student, including carers, guardians, and natural, step, family care giver, or adoptive parents.

Volunteer: an individual who is engaged by Mercy Education or its schools but who gives their time 'freely' to benefit the organisation.

Policy Coverage:

This policy is relevant to the directors of the Board, non-Director Board Committee members, all employees of Mercy Education and its schools, members of formally constituted groups associated with the school (i.e. College Advisory Council, Parents Association, Alumni Association), parents, volunteers and the wider school communities. The policy is also relevant to young people at Mercy schools aged 18 years and older.

Policy Statement:

- 01 Mercy Education has a zero tolerance to all forms of child abuse and is committed to safeguarding children.
- 02 Mercy Education is committed to meeting nationally consistent child safe standards and state requirements whilst operating in different states and diocesan jurisdictions.
- 03 All children regardless of their age, gender, race, religious beliefs, disability, sexual orientation, cultural, social or economic background, have the right to personal safety, including safety in relationships and protection from all forms of abuse and neglect.
- 04 Mercy Education pays particular attention to the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, children with a disability, children from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, children who are vulnerable including those who are unable to live at home and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex children and young people.
- 05 Mercy Education has clear reporting protocols, policies, procedures and guidelines in place to assist its Directors, non-Director Board committee members, employees and wider school communities to provide safe, secure and nurturing learning environments.
- 06 Mercy Education has codes of conduct which are publicly available and that describe the expected attitudes and appropriate behaviours for its Directors, non-Director Board Committee members, employees, parents and wider school communities. These codes of conduct are consistent with Mercy Education's child safety strategies, policies and procedures as revised from time to time.

- 07 Mercy Education has a Risk Management Framework which identifies child protection risks from a governance level. Mercy schools have additional, local risk management strategies which focus on preventing, identifying and mitigating risks to children and young people in physical and virtual environments, and on regular monitoring of bullying (including cyberbullying) and other harmful or inappropriate behaviours.
- 08 Mercy Education through its schools has in place, thorough and rigorous practices which are applied in the recruitment, screening and induction practices for employees.
- 09 The Board of Mercy Education has in place thorough and rigorous governance practices for the appointment and induction of new Directors and non-director Board Committee members, including an acknowledgement of their individual and collective responsibilities for child protection across all operations in Mercy schools.
- 10 Mercy Education requires that Directors, non-Director Board Committee members and employees understand their roles, responsibilities and obligations on information sharing, record keeping and reporting of child abuse allegations. As a part of its governance responsibility, Mercy Education expects that all child safety issues related to Mercy schools should be brought directly to the attention of the Board and to appropriate authorities as required via clear and established reporting protocols.
- 11 Mercy Education has in place procedures such that Directors, non-Director Board Committee members and employees undertake regular training and education in order to understand their individual roles, responsibilities, school strategies and practices in relation to child safety and the wellbeing of students. Ongoing employee support, supervision and performance appraisal processes include child safety elements.
- 12 Children and young people are informed of the commitment of Mercy Education to child safety and wellbeing and of their own rights as individuals. They access age appropriate information and programs, are taught to recognise safe physical and virtual environments and understand protective strategies.
- 13 Mercy Education empowers children and young people by including them in the development of literature, policies and presentations that explain its commitment to the safety, inclusion and wellbeing of children and young people.
- 14 Mercy Education has in place effective complaint handling processes that are culturally sensitive and are publicly available and accessible to Directors and non-Director Board Committee members, children and young people, employees, parents, families and the wider community.
- 15 Mercy Education has established structures and processes to review and continuously improve child safe practices and to evaluate their effectiveness in order to best respond to the needs of its schools and communities.
- 16 Mercy Education and its schools have systems for making, securing and retaining records of compliance with relevant child safe practices.

Related Documents:

Australian Human Rights Commission: (AHRC)

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

Catholic Education Office Ballarat (CEOB)

- *CEOB: https://ceob.edu.au/publications/child-protection/*

Catholic Education Commission Victoria (CECV)

- *CECV Anti-Bullying Guide for Principals and Leaders 2019*

Catholic Education Melbourne (CEM)

- *CEM: https://www.cem.edu.au/Our-Schools/Child-Safety.aspx*

Catholic Education Sandhurst (CES)

- *CES: https://www.ceosand.catholic.edu.au/child-safety*

Catholic Education South Australia (CESA)

- *CESA: https://www.cesa.catholic.edu.au/our-schools/safe-environments-for-all*

Catholic Education Western Australia (CEWA)

- *CEWA: https://www.cewa.edu.au/learning-and-wellbeing/wellbeing-and-safety/student-safety/*

Catholic Professional Standards Limited (CPSL)

- *CPSL: https://www.cpsltd.org.au/*

Mercy Education Limited (MEL)

- *MEL Governance Charter*
- *MEL Code of Conduct*
- *MEL Parent Code of Conduct: Respectful Relationships*

Ministerial Order 870 (Vic) <https://www.vrqa.vic.gov.au/childsafes/Pages/schools.aspx>

Review History:

Version	Date Released	Next Review	Author	Approved
1.0	27/03/20	February 2023	Head of People and Culture	MEL Board
1.1	12/06/2020	February 2023	Head of People and Culture	MEL Board