

SECTION 6.4: CHILD SAFE STANDARDS POLICY

The Australian Ballet School

ACCOUNTABLE: Board

RESPONSIBLE: Health and Wellbeing Committee (HWC)

VERSION 1 APPROVED BY THE BOARD: 2019

LATEST VERSION APPROVED: June 2023

REVIEW DATE: Annually (taking effectiveness and the publication of relevant research or changes to child protection laws into consideration)

DATA ACCESS LOCATION: Staff Portal, Student Portal, The Australian Ballet School website

1. OVERVIEW

Victorian organisations that provide services or facilities for children are required by law to implement the Victorian Child Safe Standards (Standards) to protect children from harm.

The eleven Standards require schools that provide services for children to have strategies embedded in their school community which promote and support an organisational culture of child safety, including through effective leadership arrangements, the involvement of families and community and risk management strategies. The Standards also align with associated child protection laws.

In Victoria there are specific criminal offences which impose general obligations on individuals:

- Aged 18 years or over to report any belief that a sexual offence has been committed, against a child under the age of 16 years, by a person over the age of 18 years (*Crimes Act (Vic) S327*) and
- In authority and identified people and roles within a school to act to remove or reduce a substantial risk that a sexual offence will be committed against a child (*Crimes Act (Vic) S327*) and the *Children, Youth and Families Act 2005 (Vic)*.

All States and Territories have similar criminal offences.

2. PURPOSE

The purpose of this policy is to detail how The Australian Ballet School (School) will meet these Standards and in doing so provide a strong foundation for a child safe environment. The Standards require policies and procedures to be implemented to ensure the safety of children is supported and to prevent and respond to and report allegations of child abuse. The School has a Child Safe Policy which is communicated thoroughly to all members of the School Community through the Statement of Commitment to Child Safety on the School's website.

Related Policies: This policy should be read in conjunction with the School’s Code of Conduct (1.2), Whistleblower Policy (1.4), Risk Management Policy (1.5), Appropriate Use of Technology Policy (4.3), Photography, Film and Recording Policy (4.3.2), ICT and Cyber Security Policy (4.3.3), Bullying Policy (5.1.1), Equality, Respect and Diversity Policy (5.1.2) (pending), Sexual Harassment Policy, (5.1.3), Gender Identity Policy (5.2.7), Recruitment Policy (5.3.1), Working with Children Check Policy (5.3.5), Volunteer Policy (5.3.9), Student Complaints and Appeals Policy (6.3.3), Reportable Conduct Scheme Policy (6.4.1).

3. DEFINITIONS

Board: The Board of Directors of The Australian Ballet School acting as the Board.

Child: (or young person) who is under 18 years of age.

Child Safety Officer: the designated officer on the School staff who has a thorough knowledge of child safety issues and is the primary point of contact for any member of the **School Community** who has concerns or wishes to report an allegation of abuse.

Child Abuse: any act committed against a child involving:

- Physical violence;
- Sexual abuse;
- Serious emotional or psychological abuse (this includes grooming) ;
- Serious neglect.

Consultant: an independent individual or organization engaged by the School to provide expert business advice, and often in relation to a specific project.

Contractor: an independent individual or organization that works with the School to complete a job or to provide a service or material, and includes a subcontractor.

Executive Team: comprises The Director of the School (Director), the Executive Director and the Director of Development.

Cultural Safety: the acknowledgement, protection, respect and continued improvement of inherent rights, cultures and traditions of a particular culture.

School Community: includes Board members, all **Staff Members** including the staff of Marilyn Rowe House (MRH), **Volunteers**, Contractors and Consultants.

Senior Management Team: comprises the Finance Manager, the Head of Marketing and Communications, the Head of Student Teaching and Learning, the Head of Operations, the Head of Music, the Head of Boarding, the Digital Lead and the Project Manager.

Staff Member: refers to a person employed by the School, whether pursuant to a written contract of employment or otherwise, irrespective of the nature or period of their employment. This includes a person employed on a full-time, part-time or casual basis, or a contract for a specified period of time.

Volunteer: refers to a person engaged by the School under a written volunteer agreement to provide a service to the School for no financial compensation, irrespective of the nature or the

period of the engagement. This includes a work experience/internship or vocational placement student, but excludes the Board.

4. WHO DOES THIS POLICY APPLY TO

This policy applies to all members of the **School Community**.

5. POLICY

This policy sets out the behaviour and conduct standards expected of all members of the School Community. The policy also operates in conjunction with the School's Code of Conduct.

All students enrolled at the School have a right to feel and be safe; to be happy and empowered. The policy confirms the School's commitment to promoting children's wellbeing and protecting children from abuse.

The School supports and respects all children and is committed to championing and fostering these aims. In order to reduce or remove child abuse dangers, a risk management strategy to identify, assess, prevent and respond, by undertaking steps to reduce or remove these risks is embedded in this policy and includes:

- All staff, direct-contact Volunteers and regular contractors/consultants being required to be familiar with the School's Child Safe Policies and Procedures and their legal obligations with respect to reporting child abuse through an induction process and being aware of the School's Code of Conduct;
- Provide training to staff, direct-contact Volunteers and regular contractors/consultants regarding what to do when an allegation of child abuse is made. This includes the importance of information sharing and record keeping obligations;
- Inclusion of child safe obligations in staff position descriptions and the performance monitoring process;
- Child safety is a standard discussion item at School Executive Team meetings and all staff meetings;
- Incident reporting process;
- Annual review and identification of risk factors for the School.

The School has a zero-tolerance approach to child abuse. All allegations and safety concerns will be treated seriously. The legal and moral obligations to contact authorities when there is concern for the safety of a child is paramount.

The Australian Ballet School Board and Staff Members are required by law to report to police if they reasonably believe or know that a sexual offence has been committed by an adult against a child under the age of 16 years or a child against a child. It is a criminal offence to fail to comply (*failure to disclose*).

Although all children are vulnerable, some children face additional vulnerabilities. The Standards provides the following overarching principles for organizations to ensure equity is upheld and diverse needs are respected:

- Be aware of and sensitive to the diverse backgrounds, circumstances and needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, culturally and/or linguistically diverse children and children with disability;
- Attend to any adjustments to provide equal protection for all children;
- Give particular attention to the needs of children who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or intersex;
- Give particular attention to the needs of children unable to live at home.

The policy aims to develop and promote an organizational environment where child safety is embedded into everyday thinking and practice across the School, highlighting that all members of the School Community have a responsibility to keep children safe from abuse, to be observant and to raise any concerns relating to child abuse with the Child Safety Officer. To ensure this is achieved by the School, it is important that the Executive Team drive and champion the policies, procedures and behaviours, along with appropriate annual training for Staff Members and other members of the School Community (where appropriate) to support an environment of child safety.

6. PROCEDURES

The Executive Team at the School is responsible for encouraging the attributes identified in the School's Code of Conduct of mutual respect, openness, support, accountability and behaving ethically as a strong demonstration of the need to actively encourage any member of the School Community, (including students), who observe or are subject to abuse or inappropriate behaviour to have the confidence to report this behaviour to the Child Safety Officer in the first instance. Then if necessary, The Director and/or Executive Director. These responsibilities are identified in the Position Descriptions of staff.

If any person reading this document believes a child is at immediate risk of abuse, they should phone 000.

The Director of the School is to ensure legal regulations and their amendments are kept up to date, with any changes and their relevance communicated to all departments and supervisors along with amendments to relevant reference material, such as the School's Code of Conduct.

All allegations of child abuse will be treated very seriously. This covers complying with all legal requirements, including reporting suspicions of child abuse to police and/or child protection. In all matters relating to the reporting of child abuse, authority within the School resides with the Director.

Child Safe Standard 1: Organizations must establish a culturally safe environment in which the diverse and unique identities and experience of Aboriginal children and young people are valued and respected.

The School is committed to promoting and providing a culturally safe and inclusive environment, where diversity and unique identities and experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and their families are valued and respected. All the School's policies, procedures, systems and processes together support this Standard.

By supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children to feel strong in their identity the School helps them to enjoy their cultural rights. Cultural Safety is a key dimension of overall safety.

The School has strategies embedded within its activities, events and cultural training to equip all Staff Members to acknowledge and appreciate the strengths of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and understand the importance to their wellbeing and safety.

The School has developed the following strategies to support Cultural Safety:

- Commence assemblies, meetings and other events with an Acknowledgment of Country. This is an opportunity to reflect and show respect for Traditional custodians and the continuing connection of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander land and culture;
- Development and registration of the School's Reconciliation Action Plan with Reconciliation Australia;
- Engagement of the Koorie Heritage Trust to assist with cultural education;
- Engagement with NAIDOC (National Aborigines and Islanders Day Observance Committee) to participate and celebrate the cultures and histories of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island culture during the annual NAIDOC Week celebrations;
- Foster engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island dancers who are interested in ballet training.

Standard 1 also links to Standard 5 which is championed by the Executive Team of the School and supported by Staff Members to ensure equity is upheld and diverse circumstances and needs are identified and respected, while also responding to those who are vulnerable.

Child Safe Standard 2: Child safety and wellbeing is embedded in organizational leadership, governance and culture.

The School has made a public commitment to child safety at all levels of the School and has enunciated clear expectations, including written guidance on acceptable and unacceptable behaviours towards children.

Governance guidelines facilitate the implementation of the child safety and wellbeing policy at all levels of the School.

Together the Executive Team and the Senior Management Team actively model and champion a culture of child safety and wellbeing to ensure it is understood and practiced throughout the School.

At the commencement of each calendar year the Director and the Executive Director will ensure all Staff Members and students receive appropriate child safety, Cultural Safety, wellbeing and health and safety updates or induction.

The School's formal induction process for all Staff Members and Volunteers joining the School ensures an appropriate presentation and direction is communicated in respect of the importance of the School's policies and procedures, including reporting obligations in relation to child safety are clearly and comprehensively provided.

Child Safe Standard 3: Children and young people are empowered about their rights, participate in decisions affecting them and are taken seriously.

The School fosters the involvement of the students in developing and maintaining a child safe environment. Empowering children and young people improves child safety.

The School Counsellor promotes and encourages student participation in the decision-making process, by seeking their views and demonstrating the value and respect this participation and feedback deserves.

Children are informed about all their rights, including to child safety information and participation. The School Counsellor also conducts regular classes to create a safe environment for sharing ideas and highlighting the importance of friendships and encouraging support from peers. Friends are often the primary people children will go to for information, advice and support. "Connecting to the School Community" classes are conducted by an external provider and are tailored for each year level. Together these programs provide students with the knowledge that all staff and members of the School Community provide a group of approachable adults who children can feel confident they can speak to in relation to any concerns they may have, particularly in relation to safety. When children believe their contributions are valued, they are more likely to speak up when harmed or feeling unsafe or isolated.

Standard 4: Families and communities are informed and involved in promoting child safety and wellbeing.

The School recognizes the importance family engagement has in monitoring children's safety, wellbeing and helping children to disclose concerns and ideas for improvement. The School has a Family Support Program (FSP) in place which actively engages families in a two-way consultative communications process with the School. In consultation with the FSP, a regular newsletter is provided to students and families

To support family engagement, the School provides families and the School Community with access to their child safe policies and procedures.

Standard 5: Equity is upheld, and diverse needs respected in policy and practice.

The School through its policies, induction process and regular information and staff development programs, ensures Staff Members and Volunteers understand children's diverse circumstances and provide support and responds to those who are vulnerable.

At the commencement of each term a Full School Assembly provides an opportunity for the reinforcement of the School's child safety and wellbeing culture. Full staff meetings are also held regularly and artistic staff meetings and Health team meetings are held weekly, they provide an opportunity for initiatives and items of concern to be discussed openly and thoroughly by all Staff Members.

The School undertakes risk analysis assessments to support the needs of children with disability, children from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, those who are unable to live at home and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex children.

Standard 6: People working with children and young people are suitable and supported to reflect child safety and wellbeing values in practice.

The Recruitment Policy and procedures and required referee and background checks of the School are closely aligned to the Standards and ensure child safety and wellbeing is emphasised.

Ongoing supervision and people management is focused on child safety and wellbeing.

Standard 7: Processes for complaints and concerns are child focused.

The School has a Student Complaints and Appeals Policy and a Reportable Conduct Scheme Policy ensuring the processes for complaints and concerns are child focused. Complaints are taken seriously, responded to promptly and thoroughly.

Provision of effective and Culturally Safe complaint handling processes and support services and/or individuals are understood by children, families, Staff Members and Volunteers.

Record keeping processes ensure child safety concerns and/or incidents, regular in-service staff training and legislative changes are logged.

The PROTECT identification and reporting process is communicated to students and Staff Members.

Reporting, privacy and employment law obligations are met.

Standard 8: Staff and Volunteers are equipped with the knowledge, skills and awareness to keep children safe through ongoing education and training.

Staff Members and Volunteers are trained and supported to effectively implement the School's child safety and wellbeing policy. This training includes information to recognise indicators of child harm including harm caused by other children.

Staff Members and Volunteers receive training and information to respond effectively to issues of child safety and wellbeing, to support colleagues who disclose harm and to understand the requirements to develop culturally safe environments for children.

Standard 9: Physical and online environments promote safety and wellbeing while minimising the opportunity for children to be harmed.

The School identifies that it has a responsibility to ensure physical and online environments promote child safety and wellbeing without compromising a child's right to privacy, access to information, social connections and learning opportunities. The School has cyber safety policies in place and conducts regular/annual information sessions for all students on these subjects. This is also included in staff meetings and training sessions. The Online Learning Guidelines and Staff/Student Agreement documents complement these requirements.

The online environment is used in accordance with the School's Code of Conduct and child safety and wellbeing policy and practices.

Risk management plans consider risks posed by unique training requirements for vocational dance, activities and the boarding and physical environments.

Contract facilities and services from third parties are monitored.

Standard 10: Implementation of the Child Safe Standards is regularly reviewed and improved.

The School regularly reviews, evaluates and improves child safe practices. The interests of children are put first and are at the centre of the School's activities.

Complaints, concerns and safety incidents are analysed to identify causes, risk factors and systematic failure to guide continuous improvement.

The School provides appropriate reporting with regard to the continuity of care and the findings of relevant reviews to Staff Members, Volunteers, community and families and children.

Standard 11: Policies and procedures document how the organization is safe for children and young people.

The policies and procedures of the School address all the Standards. Best practice models, benchmarking and stakeholder consultation informs their development.

The Executive Team and the Senior Management of the School champions and leads by example to ensure compliance with child safe policies and procedures. Staff Members and Volunteers are provided with training and encouragement to ensure they understand and implement the policies and procedures.

