Child Safety and Wellbeing Policy Statement

This Child Safe Policy Statement (**Policy Statement**) sets out the values, principles and strategies that will guide the College in developing policies and procedures to create and maintain a student safe environment.

The Policy Statement sets out the strategies the College has adopted, and the actions the College will take, to:

- Demonstrate its commitment to student safety and monitor compliance with the Policy Statement.
- Support, encourage and enable College staff, parents and students to understand, identify, discuss and report student safety matters.
- Support or assist students who disclose child abuse or other harm or are linked to suspected child abuse or other harm.

The Policy Statement forms part of the College's Child Safe Program.

The Policy Statement is a child safety policy made in accordance with *Ministerial Order No. 1359 - Child Safe Standards – Managing the Risk of Child Abuse in Schools and the National Principles for Child Safe Organisations published by the Australian Human Rights Commission (National Principles)*.

The Child Safe Policy provides the framework for:

- The implementation of the Victorian Child Safe Standards, Ministerial Order No 1359 and the National Principles
- The development of work systems, practices, policies and procedures, consistent with PROTECT Four Critical Actions for Schools: Responding to Incidents, Disclosure and Suspicions of Child Abuse
- The creation of a safe and supportive College environment and a positive and robust child safe culture
- The promotion and open discussion of child safety issues within the College
- Compliance with all laws, regulations and standards relevant to child protection and child safety in Victoria.
- Scope
- The College's Child Safe Policy applies to all adults in the College community, including Staff, Volunteers, Contractors, and External Education Providers i.e. "school staff" within the meaning of Ministerial Order 1359) as well as to Visitors.
  This policy applies in all College environments, both physical and online, and on-site and off-site College grounds (e.g. camps and excursions).

Definitions

Please refer to the *Child Safe Program Definitions* document for definitions of terms used in this document

Roles and Responsibilities: Child protection and safety is everyone's responsibility. All adults in the College community have a shared responsibility for contributing to the safety and protection of students.

Specific responsibilities are summarised in our Child Safety Responsibilities policy statement.

The College's commitment to student safety

The College is committed to providing a respectful, safe and supportive environment for students and adopts a student-centred approach to education where creativity, academic, emotional, spiritual, physical and life skills are nurtured.

The College recognises that any person in authority within, or in relation to the College has a statutory duty under section 49O of the *Crimes Act 1958* (Vic) to protect children studying at the College from any substantial risk that they will become the victim of a sexual offence committed by another person who is 18 years of age or more and associated with the College.

The College treats seriously its reporting obligations in relation to student safety matters, including to the Social Services Regulator and Victoria Police. The College recognises that whilst reporting obligations may differ depending on a person's position within the school, all staff are required to uphold the ethos of this policy by ensuring that student safety matters are reported internally, and externally where required.

The College accordingly takes a zero-tolerance approach to student safety risks and recognises that it has a pastoral, moral and legal responsibility to create a school environment where students are respected, their voices are heard and taken seriously, and where they are safe and feel safe. To achieve a student safety culture, we value and celebrate diversity, promote safe and respectful working environments, and are proactive in our approach to curriculum, practices policies and procedures.

At all times, the ongoing safety and wellbeing of students will be paramount in the College's decision-making.

The College's guiding values and principles

The College's commitment to student safety is based on the following overarching values and principles that guide the development and regular review of our strategies, practices, policies and procedures to create and maintain a student safe school environment.

<u>All students have the right to be safe</u>

Our primary focus in delivering care, education and through decision-making, is that all students are safe, feel safe, and are able to actively participate in decisions that affect their lives. We encourage students to talk openly and share their views, particularly about matters that directly impact them. This includes decisions about organisational planning, delivery of services, management of facilities, and classroom learning and assessment environments. All students are encouraged to provide feedback at any time, however, the College also facilitates an additional opportunity for this to take place as part of the student cyclic surveys and via the College student council. The welfare and best interests of the student are paramount.

The College appreciates that a student safe environment looks different for every student, and in delivering this, respects the cultural safety of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, students from culturally and/or linguistically diverse backgrounds, as well as the safety of students with a disability or who are otherwise vulnerable.

To achieve this, we:

- Support the cultural safety, participation and empowerment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and their families
- Support the cultural safety, participation and empowerment of students from culturally and/or linguistically diverse backgrounds and their families
- Support students with a disability and their families and act to promote their participation
- Support students and families of diverse sexuality and act to promote their participation
- Seek to recruit a workforce that reflects a diversity of cultures, abilities and identities
- Have a physical environment that actively celebrates diverse cultures and recognises cultural difference
- Commit to ensuring that our facilities promote the inclusion of students of all abilities
- Have a College Code of Conduct, a Disability Discrimination policy and Anti-bullying policy which explains how the College can identify, confront and address breaches of the code of conduct and policies
- Cover topics such as respectful relationships in the Life Skills curriculum to promote respectful relationships and to assist students with identifying, confronting and reporting prohibited behaviours, such as racism.
- Cover topics such as coercive or manipulative online behaviours
- Celebrating different cultures during Harmony Week
- Have a First Nations Committee who arrange activities designed to celebrate our ATSI community
- Have a Reconciliation Action Plan which helps our ATSI College community understand their rights and how they are being supported
- Educating and bringing awareness to our College Community of the ATSI cultures and peoples, both past and present, via College newsletter and bulletin entries
- Acknowledging the ATSI community at the beginning of each staff meeting and school assembly
- Where possible, engage a member of the College community with an ATSI background to be part of the College's First Nations Committee

We build cultural safety at the College through partnerships with relevant communities. Including and not limited to :

- Uniting Church in Australia
- Reconciliation Action Plan
- Hume City Council
- Dianella
- HeadSpace
- Beyond Blue

Be You…The College will promote its student safety practices to students in ways that are readily accessible, easy to understand and user-friendly.

The College will ensure that student safety awareness is promoted and openly discussed within the College community.

The College will ensure students (and their parents) are provided with the necessary skills and knowledge to understand and maintain their own personal safety and wellbeing, including:

- Understanding, identifying, discussing and reporting student safety matters, including in the online environment.
- Standards of behaviour for students attending the College.
- Healthy and respectful relationships (including those relating to race, gender and sexuality).
- Resilience.

The College community should be empowered to raise student safety concerns

The College will ensure that procedures for raising and responding to student safety concerns are simple and accessible for all members of the College community.

The College has a *Reporting and Responding to Child Safety Concerns Policy Statement*, publicly available on the College's website, which sets out:

- How concerns about child abuse and reportable conduct may be raised with the College
- How such concerns will be dealt with by the College (including by complying with any legislative reporting obligations).
- The College's record keeping and privacy practices
- How the College will support or assist students who disclose such concerns, or who are otherwise linked to such concerns.

The College policies, which are published on the website, include a statement which gives members of the community an opportunity to provide feedback. The College also has a Parents and Friends Association and families are encouraged to participate in cyclic surveys. Families are also given an explicit opportunity to discuss and provide feedback on our Child Safety and Wellbeing policy and strategies during Parent Information Evenings which are held annually. These, partnered with internal reviews, assists in striving for continuous improvement.

Effective employment practices are critical for fostering and sustaining a student safe culture

The College acknowledges that establishing and entrenching a strong student safe culture requires effective staff selection, supervision and management practices.

All positions at the College that involve child-connected work will have a position description, which clearly sets out:

- The position's requirements, duties and responsibilities regarding student safety.
- The occupant's essential or relevant qualifications, experience and attributes in relation to student safety.

All prospective employees will be informed about the College's student safety practices and be subject to child protection screening in accordance with the College's obligations under legislation (including *Ministerial Order No. 1359 – Child Safe Standards – Managing the Risk of Child Abuse in Schools).*

The College will ensure appropriate procedures are in place to screen all staff (including volunteers, contractors, and External Education Providers) involved in child-related work. An overview of these procedures is outlined in the College's *Recruitment and Engagement Policy Statement*.

Appropriate induction regarding the College's student safety practices will follow any successful appointment or engagement, including training on the content of the College's Child Safe Program.

The College requires that staff act professionally, and in a way that upholds the College's commitment to student safety. The College has a *Child Safety Staff Code of Conduct* (**Code**), publicly available on the College's website, which sets out appropriate and inappropriate behaviours by staff.

The College also has a *Staff and Student Professional Boundaries Policy Statement* specifically dealing with appropriate conduct in the context of crossing professional boundaries.

The College will take disciplinary action where a staff member is found to have acted contrary to the Code or the *Staff and Student Professional Boundaries Policy Statement*.

Staff will otherwise be subject to regular supervision, and periodic student safety checks, to ensure their ongoing suitability for child-connected work.

At least annually, the College will ensure that appropriate guidance and training is provided to Board members and staff about:

- Individual and collective obligations and responsibilities for managing the risk of child abuse.
- Child abuse risks in the school environment.
- The College's current student safety standards.

Embedding a Culture of Child Safety

Our Child Safe Program itself is one of the strategies employed by Aitken College to embed a culture of child safety at the College.

Our Child Safe Program relates to all aspects of child safety and protecting students from abuse or other harm and establishes work systems, practices, policies and procedures to create and maintain a child safe environment and culture at the College. It includes:

- Child Safe Codes of Conduct
- Policies which address online behaviours
- Clear information as to what constitutes child abuse and other harm and associated key indicators of child abuse and other harm
- Clear procedures, that are consistent with PROTECT Four Critical Actions, for responding to and reporting child safety incidents or concerns internally to a Child Safety Officer/Champion, and for responding to incidents or allegations of child abuse or other harm
- Strategies to support, encourage and enable Staff, Volunteers, Contractors, parents/carers and students to understand, identify, discuss and report child safety matters
- Procedures for recruiting and screening members of the Leadership Team, Staff, Volunteers and Contractors
- Procedures for sports and performing arts instruction and conduct (refer to Staff and Student Professional Boundaries policy)
- Supervision requirements (Refer to the Aitken College Supervision policy)
- Procedures for reporting to external agencies, that are consistent with PROTECT Four Critical Actions, including Mandatory Reporting to the Department of Families, Fairness and

Housing (Child Protection), Reportable Conduct to the Social Services Regulator and Reporting Child Sexual Abuse to Police
- Pastoral care strategies designed to empower students and keep them safe, including in the online environment
- Strategies to support and encourage the participation and inclusion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds and students with disability
- Child safe training
- Information regarding the steps to take after a disclosure of abuse or other harm to protect, support and assist students
- Guidelines with respect to record keeping and confidentiality
- Policies to ensure compliance with all relevant laws, regulations and standards (including the Victorian Child Safe Standards, Ministerial Order 1359 and the National Principles)
- A system for continuous review and improvement.

Effective risk management is critical for maintaining a student safe environment

The College recognises that it must have appropriate systems in place to identify and minimise risks in order to create and maintain a student safe environment.

The College will ensure that it has effective risk management strategies in place to identify and mitigate the risk(s) of child abuse and reportable conduct in school environments. These strategies will take into account the nature of the College's school environment, the activities expected to be conducted in that environment (including the provision of services by contractors or outside organisations), and the characteristics and needs of all students expected to be present in that environment.

Where the College identifies risks of child abuse or reportable conduct occurring in the school environment, it will make a record of those risks and determine the action(s) it will take to reduce or remove the risks (**risk controls**).

The College will monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of the implementation of its risk controls.

Continual improvement

The College is committed to continual improvement that is responsive to emerging thinking, evidence and practice, so as to eliminate (where practicable) the possibility of student safety risks occurring in the first place. Where the College can improve, it will strive to do so.

The College's Child Safe Program

The commitments contained in this document are reflected in the College's Child Safe Program, which contains the framework to be followed by staff regarding student safety. This Policy Statement underpins every other aspect of the Child Safe Program.

The College will ensure that the Child Safe Program (including the College's compliance with the principles in this Policy Statement) will be reviewed annually and after any significant child safety incident. When undertaking these reviews, the College actively seeks, actions, and incorporates feedback from students, families, the wider College community, Staff, Volunteers and Contractors, and will communicate any adjustments or amendments widely throughout the College community.

The Child Safe Program is accessible to all staff electronically, and key aspects of the program are published on the College website.

Communication

This document is available to the College community and public on the College website.

This document is available to staff as part of the Child Safe Program. The Child Safe Program forms part of the College's induction program for incoming staff, and aspects of (and updates to) the Child Safe Program will be addressed in the College's professional development updates, bulletins and newsletters.

Breach of the Child Safe Policy

Aitken College enforces this Child Safe Policy and our Child Safe Codes of Conduct. In the event of any non-compliance, we will instigate a review 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
- Suspension
- In the case of serious breaches, termination of employment, contract or engagement.

Approval and review

The College's Board has endorsed this Policy Statement.

The Child Safe Program will be reviewed annually or earlier if required, such as due to changes in legislation

Related documents

This document forms part of the College's Child Safe Program and should be read in conjunction with its various policies and procedures, including the following:

- Child Safety Staff Code of Conduct
- Child Safe Program Definitions
- Child Safety Responsibilities Policy Statement
- Reporting and Responding to Child Safety Concerns Policy Statement
- Recruitment and Engagement Policy Statement
- Staff and Student Professional Boundaries Policy Statement
- Supervision (General) Policy Statement
- Social Media Policy

If you wish to discuss this policy or provide feedback please email admin@aitkencollege.edu.au.

Revision History

Version	Date	Reviewed by	Position/Title	Approved by
1	12/04/2018	Kim Forward	Deputy Principal	Deputy Principal
1.1	08/05/2019	Kim Forward	Deputy Principal	Deputy Principal
	24/02/2020	College Board	No changes	College Board
1.2	08/05/2020	Kim Forward	Deputy Principal	Deputy Principal
2	02/09/2020	Amy Schembri	Compliance Manager	Compliance Manager
3	12/11/2020	Josie Crisara Amy Schembri College Board (together with RK Lawyers)	Principal Compliance Manager	College Board
	26/06/2021	Endorsed by College Board		College Board
4	02/03/2022	Amy Schembri	Compliance Manager	Compliance Manager
	30/05/2022	Endorsed by Aitken College Board		College Board
5	03/10/2022	Josie Crisara Amy Schembri Aitken College Board	Principal Compliance Manager	Principal
5.1	11/10/2023	Josie Crisara Amy Schembri Aitken College Board	Principal Compliance Manager	Principal
6	25/10/2024	Josie Crisara	Principal	College Board
7	06/11/2025	Josie Crisara	Principal	College Board
8	20/02/2026	Amy Schembri	Compliance Manager	Principal