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ST STANISLAUS' COLLEGE BATHURST

Child Protection Policy & Procedures

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1. Introduction

St Stanislaus' College Bathurst is a day and boarding school for boys in Years 7 to 12. The College seeks to proclaim the gospel in the spirit of St Vincent de Paul through the formation of our students and all associated with the school in a welcoming, caring environment where all our students are supported and challenged to do their best.

1.1 Policy Statement

St Stanislaus' College Bathurst is committed to providing education and care to children and young people to assist them to develop into high-achieving, supported young adults, positively connected to each other and to the communities in which they live and which they will serve.

The College is committed to ensuring the safety, welfare and wellbeing of all children and young people at the College and is dedicated to protecting them from abuse and harm.

At St Stanislaus' College Bathurst, we have a zero tolerance for child abuse and harm. The College regards its child protection responsibilities with the utmost importance and as such is committed to providing the necessary resources to ensure compliance with all relevant child protection laws and regulations and maintaining safe and supportive College physical and online environments for all children and young people.

1.2 Policy Purpose

The Vincentian Safeguarding Commitment serves as a foundational piece to the development and implementation of this policy including the endeavours of all members of the College community to ensure the safety of young people in their care.

This policy is underpinned by the NSW Child Safe Standards and National Catholic Safeguarding Standards. The NSW *Children's Guardian Amendment (Child Safe Scheme) Bill 2021* ensures that all child-related organisations in NSW have implemented Child Safe Standards and are held accountable for their implementation through independent oversight.

The Child Safe Standards recommended by the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse provide a framework so organisations can create cultures and adopt strategies to keep children safe from harm. They:

- Help drive cultural change in organisations
- Are principle-based and outcome-focused
- Are flexible enough that they can be adapted by organisations of varying size and characteristics
- Avoid placing undue burden on organisations
- Help organisations address multiple risks
- Balance caution and caring
- Are a benchmark against which organisations can assess their child safe capability and set performance targets
- Are of equal importance and are interrelated.

The relevant regulatory framework is outlined in Section 1.4 of this policy.

1.3 Policy Principles and Practices

The Vincentian Safeguarding Commitment underpins the approach of the College to the provision of a safe and supportive environment for students, and in particular for child protection.

'The Oceania Province of the Congregation of the Mission (The Vincentians) is actively committed to fostering communities of safeguarding that recognise and uphold the dignity and rights of all children. We encourage open communication whereby families and communities are informed of relevant issues and participate in decisions about the safety of children. It is particularly important to us to look for avenues to empower children to have a say and be listened to. We actively seek to become and remain informed of the causes and signs of child abuse and neglect.' (The Vincentians 2020)

The following child safe values and principles guide the College commitment to child safety and form the basis for all child protection policies and procedures at the College.

1. All children and young people have the right to be safe.
2. The welfare and best interests of the children and young people are paramount.
3. The views and the privacy of the children and young people must be respected.
4. Clear expectations for appropriate behaviour with children are established in our Child Protection Policies and Procedures and Staff Code of Conduct.
5. Maintain professionalism in our interactions with children by exercising appropriate duty of care and maintaining appropriate professional boundaries.
6. The safety of children and young people is dependent upon the existence of a child safe culture.
7. Child safety awareness is promoted and openly discussed within our College community.
8. Procedures are in place to screen all staff, volunteers, third party contractors and external education providers who have direct contact with children and young people.
9. Child safety and protection is everyone's responsibility.
10. Child protection training is mandatory for all employees.
11. Procedures for responding to alleged or suspected incidents of child abuse and harm are simple and accessible for all members of the College community.
12. Procedures are in place to ensure all College premises are designed to ensure the safety of children and young people.

1.4 Policy Scope

This policy sets out staff responsibilities for child protection and processes that staff must follow in relation to child protection matters. This policy applies to all staff members, which include employees, contractors and volunteers. Staff members who fail to adhere to this policy may be in breach of their terms of employment.

1.5 Key Legislation

The legislative framework for child protection in New South Wales is based on:

- the *Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998* ("Care and Protection Act");
- the *Child Protection (Working with Children) Act 2012* ("WWC Act");
- the *Children's Guardian Act 2019* ("Children's Guardian Act")
- the *Children's Guardian Amendment (Child Safe Scheme) Bill 2021 (NSW)*;
- the *Education Act 1990*
- the *Crimes Act 1900* ("Crimes Act").

1.6 Related Policies

There are a number of other College policies that relate to child protection that employees must be aware of and understand including (but not limited to):

- Attendance Policy and Procedures – sets out the procedures for student attendance at the College;

- Staff Code of Conduct - sets out information about the standards of behaviour expected of all employees;
- Work Health and Safety - identifies the obligations imposed by work health and safety legislation on the College and employees;
- Discrimination, Harassment and Bullying - summarises obligations in relation to unlawful discrimination, harassment and bullying;
- Complaints and Grievances Handling Policy and Procedures – provides the steps taken by the College in addressing complaints including allegations of staff misconduct and reportable conduct.

1.7 Compliance and records

The Head of College monitors compliance with this policy and has delegated responsibility to the Leader – Governance and Risk for the secure maintenance of College records relevant to this policy, which includes the following:

- register of employees who have read and acknowledged that they have read and understood this policy;
- register of annual child protection training for each employee;
- Working with Children Check Clearance (WWCC clearance) verifications;
- mandatory reports to the Department of Communities and Justice (DCJ), previously known as Family and Community Services; and
- reports of reportable conduct allegations, the outcome of reportable conduct investigations, and/or criminal convictions.

2. Child Protection

The safety, protection and welfare of students is the responsibility of every employee and encompasses:

- a duty of care to ensure that reasonable steps are taken to prevent harm to students which could reasonably have been foreseen; and
- obligations under child protection legislation.

2.1 Forms of Child Abuse

Awareness of various forms of child abuse is important in the implementation of child protection procedures. There are different forms of child abuse. These include neglect, sexual, physical and emotional abuse.

Neglect: is the continued failure by a parent or caregiver to provide a child with the basic things needed for his or her proper growth and development, such as food, clothing, shelter, medical and dental care and adequate supervision.

Sexual abuse: is when someone involves a child or young person in a sexual activity by using their power over them or taking advantage of their trust. Often children are bribed or threatened physically and psychologically to make them participate in the activity. Child sexual abuse is a crime.

Physical abuse: is a non-accidental injury or pattern of injuries to a child caused by a parent, caregiver or any other person. It includes but is not limited to injuries which are caused by excessive discipline, severe beatings or shakings, cigarette burns, attempted strangulation and female genital mutilation.

Injuries include bruising, lacerations or welts, burns, fractures or dislocation of joints. Hitting a child around the head or neck and/or using a stick, belt or other object to discipline or punishing a child (in a non-trivial way) is a crime.

Emotional abuse: can result in serious psychological harm, where the behaviour of their parent or caregiver or other person damages the confidence and self-esteem of the child or young person, resulting in serious emotional deprivation or trauma.

This can include a range of behaviours such as excessive criticism, withholding affection, exposure to domestic violence, intimidation or threatening behaviour.

Abuse can occur in physical environments or in online environments. The College ensures that student access to online environments as part of their access to curriculum and learning is monitored.

2.2 Child wellbeing concerns

Child wellbeing concerns may not always meet the mandatory reporting threshold, risk of significant harm as identified in section 5, Mandatory Reporting. However, the care of each individual student and their wellbeing remains a key priority, irrespective of whether the concerns meet the threshold.

2.3 Employee responsibilities

Key legislation requires reporting of particular child protection concerns. However, as part of the overall commitment of the College to child protection, all staff are required to report any child protection or child wellbeing concerns about the safety, welfare or wellbeing of a child or young person to the College Counsellor or Head of College. The College Counsellor or Head of College will then follow the relevant processes to address wellbeing concerns.

If the allegation involves the Head of College, a report should be made to the Chair of the College Board of Directors.

3. Training

The College provides all employees with a copy of this policy and all employees are required to participate in annual child protection training. Additional training for individuals or the staff as a whole may be undertaken at the direction of the Head of College.

The training complements this policy and provides information to staff about their legal responsibilities related to child protection and College expectations, including:

- mandatory reporting;
- reportable conduct;
- working with children checks; and
- professional boundaries.

All new employees must read this policy and sign the acknowledgement that they have read and understood the policy and complete child protection training prior to commencement of employment and as part of their induction at the College.

4. Working with Children Checks (WWCC)

The *Child Protection (Working with Children) Act 2012* protects children by requiring a worker to have a WWCC clearance to engage in child related work. Failure to do so may result in a fine or imprisonment.

The Office of the Children's Guardian (OCG) is responsible for determining applications for a WWCC clearance. It involves a national criminal history check and review of reported workplace misconduct findings. The result is either to:

- grant a WWCC clearance (generally valid for five years); or
- refuse a WWCC clearance (further applications cannot be made for five years).

In addition, the OCG may impose an interim bar on engaging in child related work for both applicants and WWCC clearance holders.

WWCC clearance holders are subject to ongoing monitoring by the OCG.

4.1 Responsibilities for Working with Children Checks

4.1.1 Employees

Employees and volunteers (including College Board Directors and those volunteers working at overnight camps) who engage in child-related work are required to:

- hold and maintain a valid WWCC clearance;
- not engage in child-related work at any time that they are subjected to an interim bar or a bar;
- report to the Head of College if they are no longer eligible for a WWCC clearance, the status of their WWCC clearance changes or are notified by the OCG that they are subjected to a risk assessment; and
- notify the OCG of any change to their personal details within three months of the change occurring. Failure to do so may result in a fine.

It is an offence for an employee to engage in child-related work when they do not hold a WWCC clearance or if they are subject to a bar.

All volunteers are required to:

- be aware and follow the expectations of conduct expressed in the College Staff Code of Conduct.

4.1.2 The College

The College is required to:

- verify online and record the status of each child-related worker's WWCC clearance;
- only employ or engage child-related workers or volunteers who have a valid employee WWCC clearance; and
- advise the OCG of the findings they have made after completing a reportable conduct investigation, including whether they have made a finding of reportable conduct. A finding of reportable conduct in relation to sexual misconduct, a sexual offence or a serious physical assault must be referred to the OCG's Working with Children Check Directorate (WWCC Directorate). It is an offence for an employer to knowingly engage a child-related worker who does not hold a WWCC clearance or who has a bar.
- Notify the NSW Education Standards Authority (NESA) of relevant matters that may lead to the suspension or revocation of a teacher's accreditation, as required under NESA policies.

4.2 Working with Children Check Clearance

A WWCC clearance is authorisation under the *Child Protection (Working with Children) Act 2012* for a person to engage in child-related work.

4.2.1 Child-related work

Child-related work involves direct contact by the worker with a child or children and that contact is a usual part of and more than incidental to the work. Child related work includes, but is not limited to work in the following sectors:

- early education and child-care including education and care service, child-care centres and other child care;
- schools and other educational institutions and private coaching or tuition of children;
- religious services;
- residential services including boarding schools, homestays more than three weeks, residential services and overnight camps;
- transport services for children including school bus services, taxi services for children with disability and supervision of school road crossings; and
- counselling, mentoring or distance education not involving direct contact.

Any queries about whether roles/duties engage in child-related work should be directed to the Head of College.

4.2.2 Application/Renewal

An application or renewal can be made through Service NSW or its replacement agency. The process for applying for and renewing a WWCC clearance with the OCG involves a national police check and a review of findings of misconduct. If the OCG grants or renews a WWCC clearance, the holder will be issued with a number which is to be provided to the College to verify the status of an employee's WWCC clearance.

4.2.3 Refusal/Cancellation

The OCG can refuse to grant a WWCC clearance or cancel a WWCC clearance. The person is then restricted from engaging in child-related work and not able to apply for another clearance for five years. Employers are notified by the OCG and instructed to remove such persons from child-related work.

4.2.4 Interim Bar

The OCG may issue an interim bar, for up to 12 months, to high risk individuals to prevent them from engaging in child-related work while a risk assessment is conducted. If an interim bar remains in place for six months or longer, it may be appealed to the Administrative Decisions Tribunal.

Not everyone who is subject to a risk assessment will receive an interim bar; only those representing a serious and immediate risk to children.

4.2.5 Disqualified Person

A disqualified person is a person who has been convicted, or against whom proceedings have been commenced for a disqualifying offence outlined in Schedule 2 of *Child Protection (Working with Children) Act 2012*. A disqualified person cannot be granted a WWCC clearance and is therefore restricted from engaging in child related work.

4.3 Ongoing monitoring

The OCG will continue to monitor criminal records and professional conduct findings of all WWCC clearance holders through a risk assessment process.

4.3.1 Risk assessments

A risk assessment is an evaluation of an individual's suitability for child-related work.

The OCG will conduct a risk assessment on a person's suitability to work with children when a new record is received which triggers a risk assessment. This may include an offence under Schedule 1, pattern of behaviour or offences involving violence or sexual misconduct representing a risk to children and findings of misconduct involving children.

5. Mandatory reporting

The *Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998* provides for mandatory reporting of children at risk of significant harm. A child is a person under the age of 16 years and a young person is aged 16 years or above but who is under the age of 18, for the purposes of the *Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998*.

Under the *Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998*, mandatory reporting applies to persons who:

- in the course of their employment, deliver services including health care; welfare, education, children's services and residential services, to children; or
- hold a management position in an organisation, the duties of which include direct responsibility for, or direct supervision of, the provision of services including health care, welfare, education, children's services and residential services, to children, are mandatory reporters.

Every staff member of the College is a mandatory reporter.

5.1 Reports to Communities and Justice

A mandatory reporter must, where they have reasonable grounds to suspect that a child (under 16 years of age) is at risk of significant harm, report to the Department of Communities and Justice (DCJ) as soon as practicable. The report must include the name, or a description, of the child and the grounds for suspecting that the child is at risk of significant harm.

In addition, the College may choose to make a report to the DCJ where there are reasonable grounds to suspect a young person (16 or 17 years of age) is at risk of significant harm and there are current concerns about the safety, welfare and wellbeing of the young person.

At the College, a mandatory reporter will meet their obligation if they report to the Head of College or the College Counsellor. In some situations, reports may be made to a member of the Leadership team. A centralised reporting model ensures that the College has all of the information that may be relevant to the circumstances of the child at risk of significant harm and addresses the risk of the College not being aware of individual incidences that amount to cumulative harm.

5.1.1 Reasonable grounds

'Reasonable grounds' refers to the need to have an objective basis for suspecting that a child or young person may be at risk of significant harm, based on:

- first-hand observations of the child, young person or family;
- what the child, young person, parent or another person has disclosed;
- what can reasonably be inferred based on professional training and / or experience.

'Reasonable grounds' does not mean a person is required to confirm their suspicions or have clear proof before making a report.

5.1.2 Significant harm

A child or young person is 'at risk of significant harm' if current concerns exist for the safety, welfare or wellbeing of the child or young person because of the presence, to a significant extent, of any one or more of the following circumstances:

- the child's or young person's basic physical or psychological needs are not being met or are at risk of not being met;
- the parents or other caregivers have not arranged and are unable or unwilling to arrange for the child or young person to receive necessary medical care;
- in the case of a child or young person who is required to attend school in accordance with the *Education Act 1990*, the parents or other caregivers have not arranged and are unable or unwilling to arrange for the child or young person to receive an education in accordance with that Act;
- the child or young person has been, or is at risk of being, physically or sexually abused or ill-treated;
- the child or young person is living in a household where there have been incidents of domestic violence and as a consequence, the child or young person is at risk of serious physical or psychological harm,
- a parent or other caregiver has behaved in such a way towards the child or young person, that the child or young person has suffered or is at risk of suffering serious psychological harm;
- the child was the subject of a pre-natal report under section 25 of the *Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998* and the birth mother of the child did not engage successfully with support services to eliminate, or minimise to the lowest level reasonably practical, the risk factors that gave rise to the report.

What is meant by 'significant' in the phrase 'to a significant extent', is that which is sufficiently serious to warrant a response by a statutory authority irrespective of a family's consent.

What is significant, is not minor or trivial and may reasonably be expected to produce a substantial and demonstrably adverse impact on the child or young person's safety, welfare or wellbeing.

The significance can result from a single act or omission or an accumulation of these.

The impact of COVID on school attendance rates has heightened the importance of monitoring attendance of each individual student. The College is committed to supporting each student's regular attendance at school. This is crucial if a student is to reach their full potential. College staff monitor attendance of each student, each day. Where there are concerns about attendance, in accordance with their duty of care and legislative obligations, the College will liaise with parents/carers to identify the cause of absences, and to implement an Attendance Improvement Plan. Lack of regular attendance may flag a risk to the safety of a student. It also may be deemed to constitute 'educational neglect' and thus require a mandatory report to be made.

5.2 Process for mandatory reporting

5.2.1 Employees

Employees must raise concerns about a child or young person who may be at risk of significant harm with the Head of College or Leadership Team or College Counsellor as soon as possible to discuss whether the matter meets the threshold of 'risk of significant harm' and the steps required to report the matter.

However, if there is an immediate danger to the child or young person and the Head of College or a member of the College Leadership Team or College Counsellor is not contactable, employees

should contact the Police and/or the Child Protection Helpline (13 21 11) directly and then advise the Head of College or a member of the College Leadership Team as soon as possible.

Employees are not required to and must not, undertake any investigation of the matter. Employees are not permitted to inform the parents or caregivers that a report to the DCJ has been made.

Employees are required to deal with the matter confidentially and only disclose it to the persons referred to above or as required to comply with mandatory reporting obligations. Failure to maintain confidentiality will not only be a breach of this policy, but could incite potential civil proceedings for defamation.

5.2.2 The College

In general, the Head of College or College Counsellor will report these matters to the DCJ and where necessary, the Police. This is supported by the DCJ in accordance with best practice principles.

5.2.3 Confidentiality

It is important when dealing with mandatory reports that the matter be dealt with as confidentially as possible.

The College requires that all parties maintain confidentiality during the reporting and any investigation processes, including in relation to the handling and storing of documents and records.

Mandatory reporting records will be kept in a secure area and will be accessible by the Head of College or with the Head of College's express authority.

No employee may comment to the media about a mandatory report matter unless expressly authorised by the Head of College to do so.

Employees who become aware of a breach of confidentiality in relation to a mandatory report matter must advise the Head of College.

5.3 Process for reporting concerns about students

5.3.1 Employees

The *Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998* outlines a mandatory reporter's obligation to report to the DCJ concerns about risk of significant harm. However, to ensure centralised reporting, all employees are required to report any concern regarding the safety, welfare and wellbeing of a student to the Head of College or Leadership Team or College Counsellor. Employees who are unsure as to whether a matter meets the threshold of 'risk of significant harm', should report their concern to the Head of College or Leadership Team or College Counsellor regardless.

Employees are required to deal with all reports regarding the safety, welfare or wellbeing of a student confidentially and only disclose it to the Head of College or Leadership Team or College Counsellor and any other person the Head of College nominates.

6. Reportable Conduct

Section 29 of the *Children's Guardian Act 2019* requires the Heads of Entities, including non-government schools in New South Wales, to notify the OCG of all allegations of reportable

conduct and convictions involving an 'employee' and the outcome of the School's investigation of these allegations. Under the *Children's Guardian Act 2019*, allegations of child abuse only fall within the reportable conduct jurisdiction if the involved individual is an employee of the relevant entity at the time when the allegation becomes known by the Head of Entity.

A finding of reportable conduct in relation to sexual misconduct, a sexual offence or a serious physical assault, must be referred to the OCG's WWCC Directorate. Information must also be referred internally to the OCG's WWCC Directorate if it meets the threshold for consideration of an interim WWCC bar, as per Section 17 of the *Child Protection (Working with Children) Act 2012*, pending a formal risk assessment.

The College may also be obliged to report, amend or provide additional information to the OCG as outlined in the *Child Protection (Working with Children) Act 2012* and the *Children's Guardian Act 2019*.

When informing an employee of a finding of reportable conduct against them, the College will alert the employee to the consequent report to the WWCC Directorate in relation to sustained findings of sexual misconduct, a sexual offence or a serious physical assault.

Reportable Conduct:

- involves a child (a person under the age of 18 years) at the time of the alleged incident; and
- involves certain defined conduct as described in the *Children's Guardian Act 2019* (see below).

The OCG:

- must keep under scrutiny the systems for preventing reportable conduct by employees of non-government schools and the handling of, or response to, reportable allegations (including allegations which are exempt from notification) or convictions;
- must receive and assess notifications from non-government schools concerning reportable conduct or reportable convictions;
- is required to oversee or monitor the conduct of investigations by non-government schools into allegations of reportable conduct or reportable convictions;
- must determine whether an investigation that has been monitored has been conducted properly and whether appropriate action has been taken as a result of the investigation;
- may directly investigate an allegation of reportable conduct or reportable conviction against an employee of a non-government school, or the handling of or response to such a matter (eg: arising out of complaints by the person who is the subject of an allegation); and
- may investigate the way in which a relevant entity has dealt with, or is dealing with, a report, complaint or notification, if the OCG considers it appropriate to do so.

Under the *Children's Guardian Act 2019*, reportable conduct is defined as:

- a sexual offence;
- sexual misconduct;
- an assault against a child;
- ill-treatment of a child;
- neglect of a child;
- an offence under section 43B (failure to protect) or section 316A (failure to report) of the *Crimes Act 1900*; and
- behaviour that causes significant emotional or psychological harm to a child.

Reportable conduct does not extend to:

- conduct that is reasonable for the purposes of the discipline, management or care of children, having regard to the age, maturity, health or other characteristics of the children and to any relevant codes of conduct or professional standards; or
- the use of physical force that, in all the circumstances, is trivial or negligible and the circumstances in which it was used have been investigated and the result of the investigation has been recorded in accordance with appropriate procedures; or
- conduct of a class or kind exempted from being reportable conduct by the *Children's Guardian Act 2019* under section 30.

6.1 Process for reporting of reportable conduct allegations or convictions

6.1.1 Employees

Any concerns about any other employee engaging in conduct that is considered inappropriate, or reportable conduct, or any allegation of inappropriate or reportable conduct made to the employee or about the employee themselves must be reported to the Head of College or Leadership Team or College Counsellor. Where it is uncertain if the conduct is reportable conduct but is considered inappropriate behaviour this must also be reported.

Employees must also report to the Head of College or Leadership Team or College Counsellor when they become aware that an employee has been charged with or convicted of an offence (including a finding of guilt without the court proceeding to a conviction) involving reportable conduct. This includes information relating to the employee themselves.

If the allegation involves the Head of College, the employee must report to the Chair of the College Board of Directors.

6.1.2 Parents, carers and community members

Parents, carers and community members are encouraged to report any conduct that is in their view inappropriate, reportable or criminal conduct to the Head of College, Leadership Team or College Counsellor. All such reports will be dealt with in accordance with the complaint handling procedures of the College to ensure that all reports are taken seriously and investigated appropriately.

6.1.3 The College

The Head of College, as the Head of Entity under the Children's Guardian Act 2019, must:

- Ensure specified systems are in place for preventing, detecting and responding to reportable allegations or convictions,
- Submit a 7-day notification form to the OCG within seven business days of becoming aware of a reportable allegation or conviction against an employee of the entity (unless the Head of the Entity has a reasonable excuse),
- The notification should include the following information:
 - a) that a report has been received in relation to an employee of the College, and
 - b) the type of reportable conduct, and
 - c) the name of the employee, and
 - d) the name and contact details of the College and the Head of Entity, and
 - e) for a reportable allegation, whether it has been reported to Police, and
 - f) if a report has been made to the Child Protection Helpline, that a report has been made, and
 - g) the nature of the relevant entity's initial risk assessment and risk management action.

- The notice must also include the following, if known to the Head of Entity:
 - a) details of the reportable allegation or conviction considered to be a reportable conviction,
 - b) the date of birth and working with children number, if any, of the employee the subject of the report,
 - c) the police report reference number (if Police were notified),
 - d) the report reference number if reported to the Child Protection Helpline,
 - e) the names of other relevant entities that employ or engage the employee, whether or not directly, to provide a service to children, including as a volunteer or contractor.
- Maximum penalty for failure to notify within seven business days —10 penalty units.

6.2 Process for investigating an allegation of reportable conduct

The Head of College is responsible for ensuring that the following steps are taken to investigate an allegation of reportable conduct.

6.2.1 Initial steps

Once an allegation of reportable conduct against an employee is received, the Head of College is required to:

- determine whether it is an allegation of reportable conduct;
- assess whether the DCJ or the Police need to be notified (ie: if reasonable grounds to suspect that a child is at risk of significant harm or a potential criminal offence). If they have been notified, seek clearance from these statutory agencies prior to the College proceeding with the reportable conduct investigation;
- notify the child's parents (unless to do so would be likely to compromise the investigation or any investigation by the DCJ or Police);
- notify the OCG within seven business days of receiving the allegation;
- carry out a risk assessment and take action to reduce/remove risk, where appropriate; and
- provide an initial letter to the Employee Subject of Allegation (ESOA) advising that an allegation of reportable conduct has been made against them and the responsibility of the College to investigate this matter under Section 34 of the *Children's Guardian Act 2019*; and
- investigate the allegation or appoint someone to investigate the allegation.

6.2.2 Investigation principles

During the investigation of a reportable conduct allegation the College will:

- follow the principles of procedural fairness;
- inform ESOA of the substance of any allegations made against them, at the appropriate time in the investigation, and provide them with a reasonable opportunity to respond to the allegations;
- make reasonable enquiries or investigations before making a decision;
- avoid conflicts of interest;
- conduct the investigation without unjustifiable delay;
- handle the matter as confidentially as possible; and
- provide appropriate support for all parties including the child/children, witnesses and the ESOA.

6.2.3 Investigation steps

In an investigation the Head of College or appointed investigator will generally:

- interview relevant witnesses and gather relevant documentation;

- provide a letter of allegation to the ESOA;
- provide the ESOA with the opportunity to provide a response to the allegations either in writing or at interview;
- consider relevant evidence and make a preliminary finding in accordance with the OCG guidelines;
- inform the ESOA of the preliminary finding in writing by the Head of Entity and provide them with a further opportunity to respond or make a further submission prior to the matter moving to final findings;
- consider any response provided by the ESOA;
- make a final finding in accordance with the OCG guidelines;
- decide on the disciplinary action, if any, to be taken against the ESOA;
- if it is completed, send the final report to the OCG within 30 days after having received the allegation, as per section 36 of the *Children's Guardian Act 2019*;
- should the final report be unfinished within 30 days, the Head of Entity must provide, at minimum, an interim report to the OCG within 30 days of having received the allegation, as per section 38 of the *Children's Guardian Act 2019*.

Submission of an interim report must include:

- a reason for not providing the final report within 30 days and an estimated time frame for completion of the report.
- specific information, including (if known); the facts and circumstances of the reportable allegation; any known information about a reportable conviction; action taken since the OCG received a notification about the reportable allegation or reportable conviction; further action the Head of Entity proposes to take in relation to the reportable allegation or reportable conviction; including if the Head of Entity proposes to take no further action; the reasons for the action taken and the action proposed to be taken or the reasons for the decision to take no further action; other information prescribed by the regulations; and
- be accompanied by copies of documents in the possession of the College, including transcripts of interviews and copies of evidence.

The steps outlined above may need to be varied on occasion to meet particular circumstances. For example, it may be necessary to take different steps where the matter is also being investigated by the DCJ or Police.

An ESOA may have an appropriate support person with them during the interview process. Such a person is there for support only and as a witness to the proceedings and not as an advocate or to take an active role.

6.3 Risk management throughout an investigation of a reportable conduct allegation

Risk management means identifying the potential for an incident or accident to occur and taking steps to reduce the likelihood or severity of its occurrence.

The Head of College is responsible for risk management throughout the investigation and will assess risk at the beginning of the investigation, during and at the end of the investigation.

6.3.1 Initial risk assessment

Following an allegation of reportable conduct against an employee, the Head of College conducts an initial risk assessment to identify and minimise the risks to:

- the child(ren) who are the subject of the allegation;
- other children with whom the employee may have contact;

- the ESOA;
- the College, and
- the proper investigation of the allegation.

The factors which will be considered during the risk assessment include:

- the nature and seriousness of the allegations;
- the vulnerability of the child(ren) the ESOA has contact with at work;
- the nature of the position occupied by the ESOA;
- the level of supervision of the ESOA; and
- the disciplinary history or safety of the ESOA and possible risks to the investigation.

The Head of College will take appropriate action to minimise risks. This may include the ESOA being temporarily relieved of some duties, being required not to have contact with certain students, being asked to take paid leave, or being suspended from duty. When taking action to address any risks identified, the College will take into consideration both the needs of the child(ren) and the ESOA.

A decision to take action on the basis of a risk assessment is not indicative of the findings of the matter. Until the investigation is completed and a finding is made, any action, such as an employee being suspended, is not to be considered to be an indication that the alleged conduct by the employee did occur.

6.3.2 Ongoing risk assessment

The Head of College will continually monitor risk during the investigation including in the light of any new relevant information that emerges.

6.3.3 Findings

At the completion of the investigation, a finding will be made in relation to the allegation and a decision made by the Head of College regarding what action, if any, is required in relation to the ESOA, the child(ren) involved and any other parties.

6.3.4 Information for the Employee Subject of Allegation

The ESOA will be advised:

- that an allegation has been made against them (at the appropriate time in the investigation); and
- of the substance of the allegation, or of any preliminary finding and the final finding.

NB: it may not be possible to provide specifics of the allegation until the investigation process has commenced and a letter of allegation has been issued to the ESOA. No finding will be made without due process being followed.

The ESOA does not automatically have the right to:

- know or have confirmed the identity of the person who made the allegation; or
- be shown the content of the OCG notification form or other investigation material that reveals information provided by other employees or witnesses.

The *Child Protection (Working with Children) Act 2012* enables a person who has a sustained finding referred to the OCG to request access to the records held by the College in relation to the finding of misconduct involving children, once final findings are made. The entitlements of a person to request access to information in terms of section 46 of the *Child Protection (Working*

with Children) Act 2012 is enlivened when a finding of misconduct involving children has been made.

6.3.5 Disciplinary action

As a result of the allegations, investigation or final findings, the College may take disciplinary action against the ESOA (including termination of employment).

In relation to any disciplinary action the College will give the ESOA:

- details of the proposed disciplinary action; and
- a reasonable opportunity to respond before a final decision is made.

6.3.6 Confidentiality

It is important when dealing with allegations of reportable conduct that the matter be dealt with as confidentially as possible.

The College requires that all parties maintain confidentiality during the investigation including in relation to the handling and storing of documents and records.

Records about allegations of reportable conduct against employees will be kept in a secure area and will be accessible by the Head of College or with the Head of College's express authority.

No employee may comment to the media about an allegation of reportable conduct unless expressly authorised by the Head of College to do so.

Employees who become aware of a breach of confidentiality in relation to a reportable conduct allegation must advise the Head of College.

7. Criminal Offences

In 2018, the Crimes Act 1900 was amended to adopt recommendations of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse. The amendments were designed to prevent child abuse and to bring abuse that has already occurred to the attention of the Police. Offences committed under the Crimes Act are punishable under the law.

8. Staff Acknowledgement

I _____ have read, understood and agree to comply with the terms of this Child Protection Policy and Procedures.

Signed

Dated

REFERENCES

NSW Department of Communities and Justice
<https://www.dcj.nsw.gov.au>

The Office of the Children's Guardian
<https://www.kidsguardian.nsw.gov.au>

Catholic Professional Standards – National Catholic Safeguarding Standards
<https://www.cpsltd.org.au/safe-church/national-catholic-safeguarding-standards/>

National Office for Child Safety
<https://chidsafety.pmc.gov.au/>

9. NSW Child Safe Standards, NSW Office of the Children's Guardian

On 1 February 2022, the NSW Child Safe Scheme commenced. The College now must demonstrate how we are implementing the Child Safe Standards. These Standards are a key recommendation from the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse.

The College is committed to implementing the Standards and to making our College safer for children and young people. We know that this requires strong leadership and sustained, collective effort and action. The foundation for this work is the Vincentian Safeguarding Statement and Child Protection Policy. The College Leadership will continue to map College Child Protection Procedures to ensure each of the standards is addressed appropriately.

<https://www.ocg.nsw.gov.au/child-safe-organisations/training-and-resources/child-safe-standards>

The Child Safe Standards



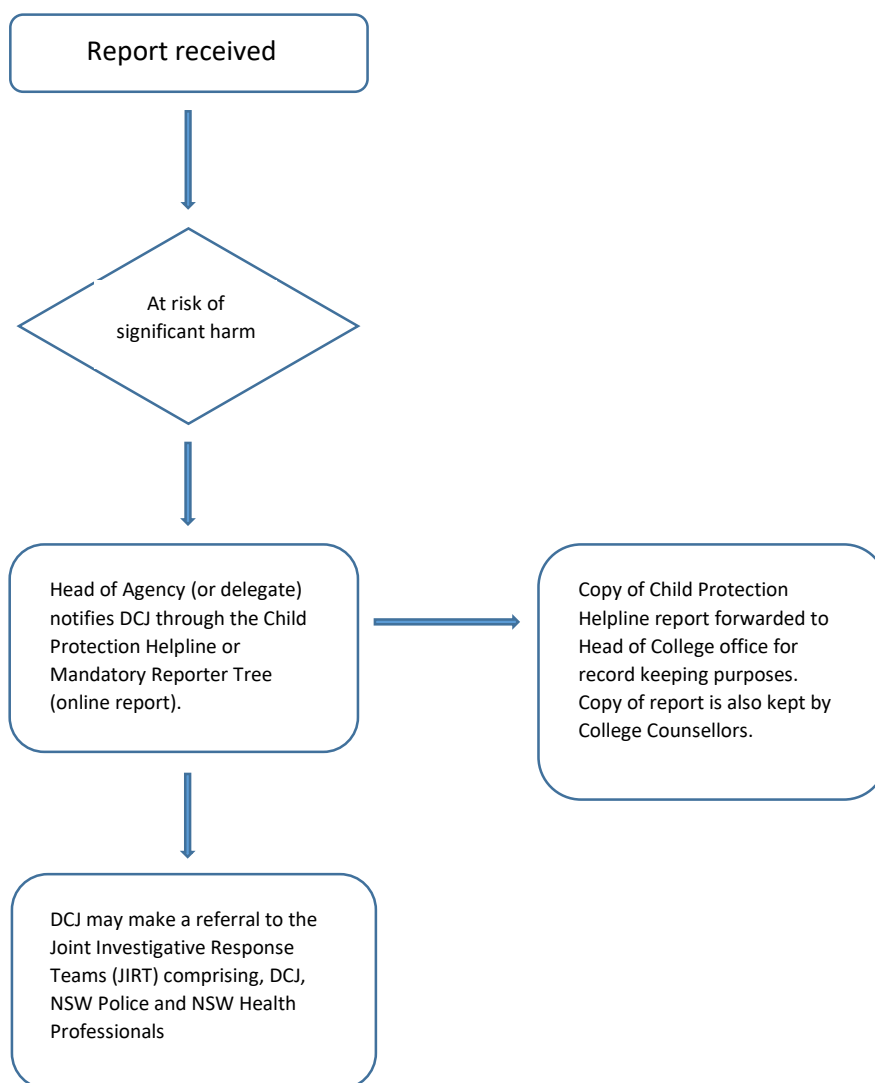
10. National Catholic Safeguarding Standards

The 10 National Catholic Safeguarding Standards incorporate recommendations from the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse and also the National Principles for Child Safe Organisations, contextualising these requirements for the Catholic Church in Australia. The Standards have been adopted by the Catholic Church in Australia. There is strong alignment between the mandatory NSW Child Safe Standards and these standards. Similarly, to the College's approach to implementation of the NSW Child Safe Standards, the College will utilise this framework with the Vincentian Statement on Safeguarding to adopt a holistic approach to ensure all children and young people in the care of the College are safe.

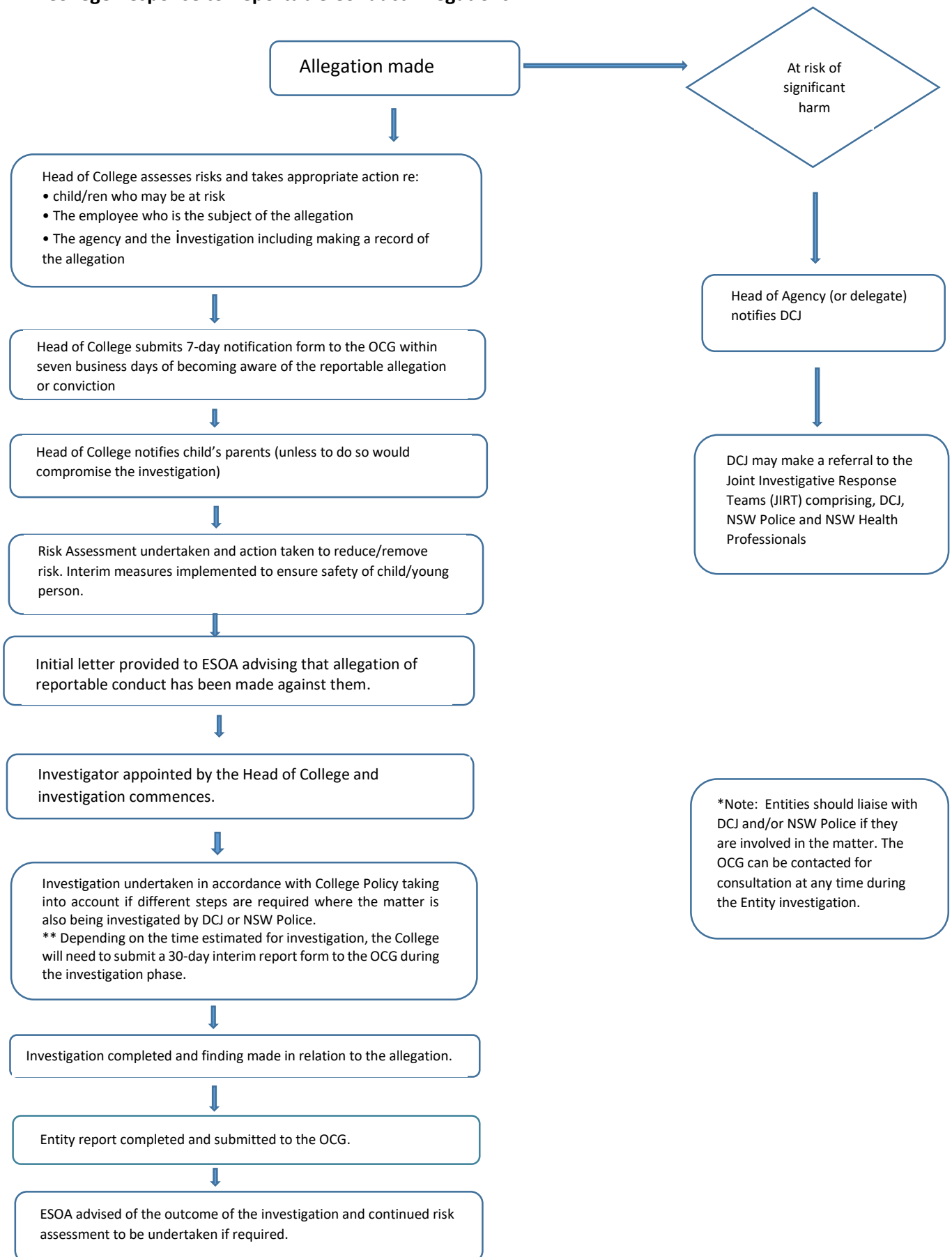
<https://www.cpsltd.org.au/safe-church/national-catholic-safeguarding-standards/>



11. College Response to Mandatory Reports



12. College Response to Reportable Conduct Allegations



13. Glossary

The following terms relate to reportable conduct. Source: AISNSW.

- **Assault:** an assault can occur when a person intentionally or recklessly (ie: knows the assault is possible but ignores the risk):
 - applies physical force against a child without lawful justification or excuse – such as hitting, striking, kicking, punching or dragging a child (actual physical force); or
 - causes a child to apprehend the immediate and unlawful use of physical force against them – such as threatening to physically harm a child through words and/or gestures regardless of whether the person actually intends to apply any force (apprehension of physical force)
- **Employee** of an entity includes:
 - an individual employed by, or in, the entity
 - a volunteer providing services to children
 - a contractor engaged directly by the entity (or by a third party) where the contractor holds, or is required to hold, a WWCC clearance for the purposes of their work with an entity; and
 - a person engaged by a religious body where that person holds, or is required to hold, a WWCC clearance for the purposes of their work with the religious body.
- **ESOA:** Employee Subject of the Allegation.
- **Ill-treatment:** is defined as conduct towards a child that is:
 - unreasonable; and
 - seriously inappropriate, improper, inhumane or cruel.

Ill-treatment can include a range of conduct such as making excessive or degrading demands of a child; a pattern of hostile or degrading comments or behaviour towards a child; and using inappropriate forms of behaviour management towards a child.

- **Neglect:** defined as a significant failure to provide adequate and proper food, supervision, nursing, clothing, medical aid or lodging for a child that causes or is likely to cause harm - by a person who has care and/or has responsibility towards a child.

Neglect can be an ongoing situation of repeated failure by a caregiver to meet a child's physical or psychological needs, or a single significant incident where a caregiver fails to fulfill a duty or obligation, resulting in actual harm to a child where there is the potential for significant harm to a child. Examples of neglect include failing to protect a child from abuse and exposing a child to a harmful environment.

Behaviour that causes significant **emotional or psychological harm** to a child is conduct that is intentional or reckless (without reasonable excuse), obviously or very clearly unreasonable and which results in significant emotional harm or trauma to a child.

For a reportable allegation involving psychological harm, the following elements must be present:

- An obviously or very clearly unreasonable or serious act or series of acts that the employees knew or ought to have known was unacceptable, and

- Evidence of psychological harm to the child that is more than transient, including displaying patterns of 'out of character behaviour', regression in behaviour, distress, anxiety, physical symptoms or self-harm, and
 - An alleged causal link between the employee's conduct and the significant emotional or psychological harm to the child.
- **Reportable allegation:** is an allegation that an employee has engaged in conduct that may be reportable conduct.
- **Reportable conviction:** means a conviction (including a finding of guilt without the court proceeding to a conviction), in NSW or elsewhere, of an offence involving reportable conduct.
- **Sexual misconduct:** conduct with, towards or in the presence of a child that is sexual in nature (but not a sexual offence). The *Children's Guardian Act 2019* provides the following (non-exhaustive) examples:
 - descriptions of sexual acts without a legitimate reason to provide the descriptions;
 - sexual comments, conversations or communications;
 - comments to a child that express a desire to act in a sexual manner towards the child, or another child.

Note – crossing professional boundaries comes within the scope of the scheme to the extent that the alleged conduct meets the definition of sexual misconduct. That is, the conduct with, towards or in the presence of a child that is sexual in nature (but is not a sexual offence).

- **Sexual offence:** an offence of a sexual nature under a law of the State, another State, a Territory, or the Commonwealth, committed against, with or in the presence of a child, such as:
 - sexual touching of a child;
 - a child grooming offence;
 - production, dissemination or possession of child abuse material.

Definitions of 'grooming', within child protection legislation, are complex. Under the *Crimes Act 1900*, grooming or procuring a child under the age of 16 years for unlawful sexual activity is classed as a sexual offence. The *Crimes Act 1900* (s73) also extends the age of consent to 18 years when a child is in a 'special care' relationship. Under Schedule 1(2) of the *Child Protection (Working with Children) Act 2012*, grooming is recognised as a form of sexual misconduct. The *Children's Guardian Act 2019* and this Child Protection Policy reflect these definitions within the context of the Reportable Conduct Scheme (Division 2).

An alleged sexual offence does not have to be the subject of criminal investigation or charges for it to be categorised as a reportable allegation of sexual offence.