



STRATEGIES TO EMBED AN ORGANISATIONAL CULTURE OF CHILD SAFETY POLICY [Standard 1]

Background Information and Rationale

- Victoria's Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities (the Charter) outlines the basic human rights of all people. It was introduced in Victoria through the *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006*.
- The Charter requires that governments, local councils and other public authorities not act inconsistently with the Charter and hence the introduction of the seven Child Safe Standards.
- Ministerial Order (MO) 870 which comes into effect 1 August 2016, provides the framework for how schools will be required to comply with the Standards. Overall responsibility for ensuring compliance rests with the Victorian Registration and Qualifications Authority (VRQA).
- The Ministerial Order specifies the following requirements for schools regarding Standard 1:
"Northcote Primary School governing authority must
 - (a) develop strategies to embed a culture of child safety at Northcote Primary School
 - (b) allocate roles and responsibilities for achieving the strategies
 - (c) inform Northcote Primary School community about the strategies, and allocated roles and responsibilities
 - (d) put the strategies into practice, and inform Northcote Primary School community about these practices; and
 - (e) periodically review the effectiveness of the strategies put into practice and, if considered appropriate, revise those strategies."
- MO 870 identifies five elements of the Standard 1 requirement, including developing strategies, allocating roles and responsibilities, informing Northcote Primary School community, putting the strategies into practice, and periodic review. If a school is satisfied that its culture of child safety meets or exceeds the minimum standard in the Ministerial Order, Northcote Primary School needs to ensure that it can demonstrate the strength of its organisational culture to the VRQA.
- All staff and volunteers in organisations providing services to children need to recognise the importance and legislative implications, of keeping children safe. Under this Standard, organisations need to establish new ways or build on existing systems to embed or improve on a culture of child safety throughout all levels of their organisation.
- Preventing child abuse and responding to allegations is everyone's business. The Child Safe Standards aim to drive cultural change in organisations so that protecting children from abuse is embedded in everyday thinking and practice. To engage this cultural change, schools need to:
 - help leaders create an organisational culture that protects children from abuse
 - ensure Northcote Primary School's policies and practices reflect a commitment to child safety
 - ensure leadership is aware of allegations and substantiated cases of abuse and responds in ways that protect children from abuse
 - ensure staff and volunteers know and understand the organisation's commitment to child safety
 - commit to continuous improvement through regular reviews and updating policies and practices, and being open to scrutiny.
- To comply with the Child Safe Standards, an organisation must include the following principles as part of each standard:
 - promoting the cultural safety of Aboriginal children
 - promoting the cultural safety of children from culturally and/or linguistically diverse backgrounds
 - promoting the safety of children with a disability
- Northcote Primary School may already use good leadership strategies. Leaders can use this resource to help protect children from abuse by embedding child safety in Northcote Primary School's everyday thinking and practice.

- Whilst working with children can be very rewarding, it also brings additional responsibilities.
- Schools must act to protect children from abuse and build an environment where children feel respected, valued and encouraged to reach their full potential. This requires a culture of child safety to be embedded throughout the organisation so that child safety is part of everyone's everyday thinking and practice. Such a culture is achieved through proactive leadership in demonstrating the appropriate values, attitudes and behaviours of an organisation.
- A child safe environment is the product of a range of strategies and initiatives. Northcote Primary School should foster a culture of openness, inclusiveness and awareness. Children and adults should know what to do if they observe or are subject to abuse or inappropriate behaviour.

Purpose

- To ensure Northcote Primary School complies with the legislative requirements of MO 870.
- To identify those aspects of school leadership that will help to embed an organisational culture of child safety.
- To ensure Northcote Primary School demonstrates its commitment to creating a child safe environment.
- To raise awareness within Northcote Primary School community of the importance of child safety.
- To ensure the promotion of:
 - the cultural safety of Aboriginal children if applicable
 - the cultural safety of children from culturally and/or linguistically diverse backgrounds
 - the safety of children with a disability

Definitions

At Northcote Primary School, the Leadership Team comprises three members:

Principal
Assistant Principal
Leading Teacher

Child Safe Officer - a point for contact for children who feel unsafe or who wish to disclose abuse.

Northcote Primary School Council is the governing body and is responsible for ratifying all policies developed by Northcote Primary School.

In all Standards, the term "child" applies to any person under the age of 18 years. (For the glossary of all terms, please refer to Appendix 1).

Implementation

- This policy is intended for School Leadership.
- The safety and wellbeing of our school population is our highest priority and our first consideration.
- We have **zero tolerance of child abuse**, and all allegations and safety concerns will be treated very seriously and consistently with our robust policies and procedures.
- To reinforce the message to be conveyed within the Standards, Northcote Primary School has consciously chosen to use the term 'child' or 'children' rather than 'student/students'. The exception is where the term 'student' is integral to the name of a document.
- The Leadership Team at Northcote Primary School will take a preventative, proactive and participatory approach to child safety issues.
- It is seen as vital that the Leadership Team has a clear understanding of how developed Northcote Primary School's child safety approaches are.
- Northcote Primary School recognises that developing a child safe environment is an ongoing process and will not be achieved in the short term.
- Implementing the Child Safe Standards requires an ongoing commitment. It will not be achieved in one activity or exercise. However, this does not have to be a complex process and will involve:
 - regular staff briefings and discussions
 - taking every opportunity to provide information to the parent community e.g. through Newsletter articles, meetings with Parent Organisations as applicable
 - regular updates to School Council (a regular agenda item)

- Existing policies have been reviewed and updated to stress the importance Northcote Primary School places on child safety with sentences such as the first two dot points above. This includes all child safe policies which have had additions and amendments as Northcote Primary School gained a better understanding of a child safe culture.
- Northcote Primary School's Vision, Mission & Values Statement will include child safety as a key component.
- When the next School Strategic Plan is developed, it is expected that school goals will relate to the development of a child safe culture.
- The components of Northcote Primary School's child safe culture are:

Child Safety Review

Over a period of time, and with broad consultation, Northcote Primary School will complete the Child Safety Review as it will help Northcote Primary School to identify what is currently in place and what needs to be developed.

Children have a unique voice and are able to contribute to discussions about how they interact with Northcote Primary School. Through already established forums and in an age-appropriate manner involving class discussions and focus groups, children will be asked what makes them feel safe and unsafe. Northcote Primary School will provide opportunities for opinions to be provided confidentially. Children will be told about what Northcote Primary School is doing to help keep them safe, ensuring the experience is a positive one. We will consistently let children know that their views are valued and respected.

Northcote Primary School will set aside Staff Meeting time so that all staff, teaching and non-teaching, will be given an opportunity to participate in the review to help to identify areas of risk of harm or injury and encourage everyone involved in Northcote Primary School to take a proactive approach to reducing risk.

The already established Consultative Committee, Professional Learning Teams and staff as a whole will provide input. Other forums such as hosted meetings, newsletter articles, surveys and questionnaires will be provided so that School Council, parents and volunteers can provide input into the review.

The review will be completed systematically with an invitation to participate and a date always set for the next section to be addressed. In that way, there will always be a reassurance the work being undertaken is of paramount importance to Northcote Primary School over the long term.

When Northcote Primary School has completed the Child Safety Review we will have identified the areas in which we need to improve. At this point, an Action Plan will be developed.

Leadership and Staff Responsibilities

The Leadership Team is responsible for embedding a culture of child safety in Northcote Primary School.

The Leadership Team will take the lead in protecting children from abuse.

However, staff have the responsibility to make school leadership aware of child abuse allegations and risks so that appropriate action can be taken.

All allegations of child abuse and child safety concerns are treated very seriously by this school. This includes complying with all legal requirements, including reporting suspicions of child abuse to police or the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) Child Protection as soon as practicable.

If any staff member believes a child is at immediate risk of abuse, they must immediately phone 000 and ask for police. In an emergency, this action is to occur without consultation.

(Failure to disclose the information to police is a criminal offence, except in limited circumstances such as where the information has already been reported to DHHS Child Protection.)

Identification and Analysis of Risk of Abuse

Northcote Primary School will adopt an approach to prevent, detect and respond to child abuse risks. This includes a risk management strategy and policy that sets out how your organisation identifies, assess, and takes steps to reduce or remove child abuse risks. Please refer to Standard 6.

Risk analysis always forms part of our preparation for school camps and some excursions. The analysis will now include possible potential for child abuse. Northcote Primary School's Incursions (*Safety of Children Working with External Providers*) Policy already has strategies to minimise the risk of abuse.

Development of a Child Safe Policy

Northcote Primary School has developed a child safe policy which outlines our commitment to promoting children's wellbeing and protecting children from abuse. Please refer to Northcote Primary School's policy documents and to Standard 2.

Development of a Code of Conduct

Northcote Primary School has developed a code of conduct for staff, teaching and non-teaching, which specifies the standards of conduct and care required when working and interacting with children. The *Staff Code of Conduct Policy (General)* references the *Child Safe Policy* and explicitly prohibits any staff member from communicating with children on social media. It also informs staff of the need for a current Working with Children Check which is recorded on CASES21.

Northcote Primary School's *Student Engagement Policy*, the *Bullying & Harassment Policy*, the *Internet/Social Media Policy* and the *Mobile Phone, Student Use Policy* also describe appropriate interaction between children. Please refer to Standard 3.

Choosing Suitable Employees and Volunteers

Northcote Primary School will take all reasonable steps to ensure that it engages the most suitable and appropriate people to work with children. This includes police record and identity checks, Working with Children Checks where required, face-to-face interviews and detailed reference checks from previous employers, including from the applicant's most recent line manager. Northcote Primary School's *Incursions (Safety of Students Working with External Providers) Policy* and the *Working with Children Checks – Staff & Volunteers Policies* have details of the steps Northcote Primary School will take to promote a child safe environment. Please refer to the Standard 4.

Visitors to Northcote Primary School

Northcote Primary School has made clear decisions about what category of visitor is welcome in Northcote Primary School and the steps Northcote Primary School will take to ensure safety of children. Please refer to Northcote Primary School's *Visitors to Northcote Primary School Policy* and the *Photographing & Filming Students Policy*. Please refer to the Standard 4.

Support, Training, Supervision and Enhancement of Performance

Northcote Primary School will ensure that volunteers and employees who work with children have ongoing supervision, support and training so that their performance is developed and enhanced to help protect children from abuse. In particular, leadership need to understand their responsibilities.

New staff and trainee teachers if applicable, will be trained as part of the induction process.

Northcote Primary School has a Student Welfare Officer (SWO). The SWO already is a point of contact for others who have questions or concerns or want to report an allegation of abuse. Northcote Primary School would enhance the role to include Child Safe responsibilities including the promotion of child safety within Northcote Primary School and the community. Additional training in child safety issues will be provided. Duties will be listed in the job description. Please refer to Standard 4.

Promoting Inclusion

Northcote Primary School values diversity and will be inclusive to all children and families. In particular, Northcote Primary School will establish a culture that supports:

- cultural safety for Aboriginal children, for example by working in partnership with Aboriginal peoples and Aboriginal community controlled organisations if applicable
- cultural safety for children from culturally and/or linguistically diverse backgrounds, for example by using inclusive language and images in policy documents, and communications such as the website and newsletters
- the safety of children with a disability, for example by ensuring your organisation is accessible to everyone and ensuring appropriate training and supervision of staff and volunteers working with children with a disability.

Northcote Primary School understands that for Aboriginal people, culture is about family networks, Elders and ancestors. It is about relationships, languages, dance, ceremony and heritage. Culture is about spiritual

connection to lands and waters. It is the way stories are passed on and knowledge given to babies and children. It is how people are greeted. It is looking for connection. It is about all the parts that bind us together.

Northcote Primary School recognises that creating a physical environment that is respectful of Aboriginal culture is an important first step. Symbols and images that surround a place send an important message about respect. By acknowledging the Country in which Northcote Primary School is located, we are demonstrating our willingness to learn, understand and respond to the diversity of Aboriginal cultures. As part of the policy review process, Northcote Primary School will consider whether or not 'Acknowledgement of Country' should form part of its ceremonies.

Northcote Primary School recognises that cultural safety is living in an environment that is safe for people, where there is no assault, challenge or denial of their identity, of who they are what they need. It is about shared respect, shared meaning, shared knowledge and experience, of learning, living and working together with dignity and truly listening.

Northcote Primary School recognises that promotion of cultural safety of children from culturally and/or linguistically diverse backgrounds involves:

- ensuring Northcote Primary School clearly demonstrates a zero tolerance of discrimination
- being respectful, inclusive and welcoming of families from a range of backgrounds
- recognising times of importance to different cultures
- ensuring the physical environment has a positive image of a range of cultures, in terms of decoration and artwork
- employing staff that are representative of the local community
- actively seeking out and talking to families about how they would like to be involved
- asking about the best way to provide information to children and families

Northcote Primary School recognises that promotion of the safety of children with a disability involves:

- acknowledging that children with a disability are particularly vulnerable and ensure risk assessment processes considers their needs
- ensuring Northcote Primary School clearly demonstrates a zero tolerance to discrimination and actively welcomes
- all children
- making sure the environment does not pose access difficulties
- being responsive to families regarding specific measures that may be required to ensure the safe participation of a child with a disability
- supporting staff, other children and their families to understand and be inclusive of people with a disability
- thinking about how Northcote Primary School can encourage participation and feedback from children with a disability and their families

Northcote Primary School's definition of 'disability' extends to children with a medical condition such as diabetes, epilepsy, anaphylaxis or blood-borne viruses and has developed policies to support these children.

Northcote Primary School recognises that respecting diversity means:

- valuing and respecting people's beliefs
- building responsive relationships
- communicating openly and honestly to find out how best to be inclusive and respect cultural needs
- examining our personal ideas, customs and beliefs and
- respecting that the beliefs of one person may not be the same as another
- acknowledging and respecting that others can hold different beliefs of equal significance

Northcote Primary School's *Anti-Discrimination Policy* describes Northcote Primary School's commitment to providing teaching and learning environments that are free from discrimination in all forms, including those based on race, ethnicity, gender, ability, disability, sexuality and religion. Anti-discrimination extends to Northcote Primary School's dress code so that children are treated equally with the rights of individual children balanced against the best interests of Northcote Primary School community as a whole when developing and implementing their dress codes.

Empowering and Promoting the Participation of Children in Decision-Making

Northcote Primary School promotes the involvement and participation of children in developing and maintaining a child safe environment.

Ideas from children are sought formally by completion of the annual Student Attitude to School Survey which specifically addresses feelings of safety, through the Junior School Council (JSC) which comprises children from each class in Years 3 - 6 and through focus groups and other formal and informal forums for children.

Professional Learning

Northcote Primary School has a strong commitment to ongoing professional learning for all staff.

There is an annual briefing for mandatory reporting protocols which is a component of induction for new staff.

This will be extended to include volunteers and external providers.

Staff are given information about a number of school policies with an emphasis now placed on the child safe related policies.

Evaluation

- This policy will be reviewed every two years as part of VRQA requirements, if an incident occurs *or if* guidelines change (latest PROTECT update 11 April 2018).

NPS School Council ratified this policy on the 5th December 2018

References:

Creating a Child Safe Organisation Guide p.46

Child Safe Standards Toolkit

www.education.vic.gov.au/school/Principals/spag/safety/Pages/childsafestandards.aspx

and

Protect – Identifying All Forms of Child Abuse in Victorian Schools 11 April 2018