CHILD SAFETY and WELLBEING POLICY

INTRODUCTION

This policy was written to demonstrate the strong commitment of leadership, staff and volunteers to creating and maintaining a child safe and child friendly organisation, where children and young people are safe and feel safe. This policy provides an overview of our school's approach to implementing Ministerial Order 1359 which sets out how the Victorian Child Safe Standards apply in school environments. It informs our school community of everyone's obligations to act safely and appropriately towards children and guides our processes and practices for the safety and wellbeing of students across all areas of our work.

We are committed to regularly reviewing our child safe practices and seeking input from our students, families, staff and volunteers to inform our ongoing strategies.

SCOPE

This policy:

- applies to all school staff, volunteers and contractors whether or not they work in direct contact with students. It also applies to school council members where indicated.
- applies in all physical and online school environments used by students during or outside of school hours, including other locations provided by for a student's use (for example, a school camp) and those provided through third-party providers
- should be read together with our other child safety and wellbeing policies, procedures, and codes

STATEMENT OF COMMITMENT TO CHILD SAFETY

All children attending Preshil have a right to feel and be safe. The welfare of the children in our care will always be our priority and we have zero tolerance policy for child abuse. We aim to create a child safe and child friendly environment where children always feel safe.

Preshil is committed to the principles of cultural safety and inclusion of children from diverse backgrounds and to the safety and inclusion of children with disability, and we recognise that these principles support the safety of all children.

We promote positive relationships between students and adults and between students and their peers. These relationships are based on trust and respect. We take proactive steps to identify and manage any risk of harm to students in our school environment. When child safety concerns are raised or identified we treat these seriously and respond promptly and thoroughly.

DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION AT PRESHIL

Particular attention is given to the child safety needs of First Nation students and their families, those from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, international students, students with disabilities, those unable to live at home, children and young people who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and gender diverse, intersex and queer (LGBTIQ+) and other students experiencing risk or vulnerability. Inappropriate or harmful behaviour targeting students based on these or other characteristics, such as racism or homophobia, are not tolerated at our school, and any instances identified will be addressed with appropriate consequences.

As a child safe organisation and an IB continuum school, we celebrate the rich diversity of our students, families and community and promote respectful environments that are free from discrimination. Our focus is on wellbeing and growth for all.

We recognise that every child has unique skills, strengths and experiences to draw on. We pay particular attention to individuals and groups of children and young people in our community with additional and specific needs. This includes tailoring our child safety strategies and supports to the needs of:

- First Nation's children and young people
- Children from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds (CALD)
- Children and young people with disabilities
- Children unable to live at home or impacted by family violence
- International students
- Children and young people who identify as LGBTIQ+.

To achieve this, we:

- support the cultural safety, participation and empowerment of First Nation children and their families.
- support the cultural safety, participation and empowerment of culturally and or linguistically diverse backgrounds.
- welcome children with disabilities and their families and act to promote their participation.
- seek to recruit appropriate staff from culturally and or linguistically diverse backgrounds.
- welcome same sex attracted, intersex and gender diverse children and families.
- have a physical environment that actively celebrates diverse cultures and recognises cultural differences.
- commit to ensuring our facilities promote inclusion of children of all abilities.

Our Student Wellbeing and Engagement Policy[1] provides more information about the measures we have in place to support diversity and equity.

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

School Leadership Team

Our School Leadership Team is responsible for ensuring that a strong child safe culture is created and maintained, and that policies and practices are effectively developed and implemented in accordance with Ministerial Order 1359.

School Board

In performing the functions and powers given to them under the *Education and Training Reform Act 2006*, School Board members will:

- champion and promote a child safe culture with the broader school community
- ensure that child safety is a regular agenda item at school council meetings
- undertake annual training on child safety·
- approve updates to, and act in accordance with the Child Safety Code of Conduct to the extent that it applies to school council employees and members
- When selecting School Board members, ensure that selection, supervision, and management practices are child safe. At our school, School Board members duties are delegated to the Principal who is bound by this policy.

[1] This policy is currently under development

The Principal and Human Resources Compliance Manager:

Our Principal and the Human Resources Compliance Manager (HR Compliance Manager) are the first point of contact for child safety concerns and queries and for coordinating responses to child safety incidents.

The HR Compliance Manager will act as the Chief Student Safety Officer to support the Principal to implement our child safety policies and practices including staff and volunteer training.

The Human Resources Compliance Manager is responsible for monitoring the School's compliance with this Child Safety and Wellbeing policy.

- Anyone in our school community should approach the HR Compliance Manager if they have any concerns about compliance with this policy.
- The HR Compliance Manager is responsible for informing the school community about this policy and making it publicly available.

The Principal and the Heads of Campus will:

- ensure effective child safety and wellbeing governance, policies, procedures, codes and practices are in place and followed
- model a child safe culture that facilitates the active participation of students, families and staff in promoting and improving child safety, cultural safety and wellbeing
- enable inclusive practices where the diverse needs of all students are considered
- reinforce high standards of respectful behaviour between students and adults, and between students
- promote regular open discussion on child safety issues within the school community including at leadership team meetings, staff meetings and school council meetings
- facilitate regular professional learning for staff and volunteers (where appropriate) to build deeper understandings of child safety, cultural safety, student wellbeing and prevention of responding to abuse
- create an environment where child safety complaints and concerns are readily raised, and no one is discouraged from reporting an allegation of child abuse to relevant authorities.
- ensuring thorough and vigorous practices are applied in the recruitment, screening and ongoing professional development of staff and volunteers
- ensuring that the School has in place appropriate risk management strategies and practices that focus on preventing, identifying and mitigating risks related to child safety and wellbeing in the school environment
- ensuring that the School takes specific action to protect children from abuse in line with the three new criminal offences introduced under the Crimes Act 1958 (VIc) and in line with **PROTECT: Identifying and responding to all forms of abuse in Victorian Schools.**
- ensuring that the School understands and reports all matters that may constitute reportable conduct under the Reportable Conduct Scheme in accordance with the School's Reportable Conduct Policy.
- sharing information under legislated information sharing schemes (CISS and FVISS) in accordance with the School's prescribed role as an Information Sharing Entity.
- ensuring that the School monitors and reviews the risk related to child safety and wellbeing, including evaluating the effectiveness of the implementation of its risk controls on an annual basis.

School staff and volunteers

Responsibilities of School Staff (School employees, contractors and volunteers) include:

- treating children and young people with dignity and respect, acting with propriety, providing a duty of care and protecting children and young people in their care.
- providing a physically and psychologically safe environment where the wellbeing of children and young people is nurtured.
- undertake regular training and education in order to understand their individual responsibilities in relation to child safety, and the wellbeing of children and young people, including ways to prevent, identify and mitigate risks relating to child safety and wellbeing.
- assisting children and young people to develop positive, responsible and caring relationships and behaviours which recognise the rights of all people to be safe and free from abuse.
- participate in child safety and wellbeing induction and training provided by the school and always follow the school's child safety and wellbeing policies and procedures
- act in accordance with our Child Safety Code of Conduct
- identify and raise concerns about child safety issues in accordance with our Child Safety Responding and Reporting Obligations Policy and Procedures, including following the **Four Critical Actions for Schools**
- ensure students' views are taken seriously and their voices are heard about decisions that affect their lives
- implement inclusive practices that respond to the diverse needs of students.

Student Safety Officers

- Preshil has nominated the following members of the Leadership Team as Student Safety Officers [2]:
    - the Human Resources Compliance Manager.
    - the Heads of Campus
    - the Director of Kindergarten
    - the Inclusive Education Leader
    - the Student Youth Worker
    - the School Counsellor

The Student Services Team (Child Safety and Wellbeing Team)

- Preshil has a Child Safety and Wellbeing Team (Student Services Team) and a Student Leadership Team. The Primary School (Arlington) has a Student Safety Group.
- The Student Services Team consists of the Inclusive Education Team, the School Counsellor the Student Wellbeing Leader and the Student Youth Worker.
- The Student Services Team and the Heads of Campus meet regularly to identify and respond to any ongoing matters relating to child safety and wellbeing.
- The Student Leadership Group and the Student Safety Group provide an opportunity for students to provide input into school strategies for child safety and wellbeing.

Student Safety and Participation

At Preshil we actively encourage all students to express their views openly and feel comfortable about giving voice to the issues that are important to them. We teach students about what they can do if they feel unsafe and enable them to understand, identify and discuss and report their concerns. We listen to, and act on, any concerns students or their parents or carers raise with us.

The curriculum design integrates appropriate knowledge and skills to enhance students' understanding of being safe, as well as their understanding of their rights to safety, information and participation. Teaching and learning strategies that acknowledge and support student agency and

[2] **Guidance for Student Safety Officers (SSOs) .**

voice are implemented. We ensure that students are offered access to sexual abuse prevention programs and to relevant related information in an age appropriate way.

We have a culture that facilitates participation and is responsive to the input of children and students. We provide opportunities for children and students to participate and we are responsive to their contributions to strengthen confidence and engagement. The importance of friendship is recognised and support from peers is encouraged, to help children and students feel safe and less isolated.

We have developed programs about

- standards of behaviour for students attending our school
- healthy and respectful relationships
- resilience
- child abuse awareness and prevention

Managing Risks to Child Safety and Wellbeing

- At our school we identify, assess and manage risks to child safety and wellbeing in our physical and online school environments. These risks are managed through our child safety and wellbeing policies, procedures and practices, and in our activity specific risk registers, such as those we develop for off-site overnight camps, adventure activities and facilities and services we contract through third party providers for student use.
- Our Child Safety Risk Register is used to record any identified risks related to child abuse alongside actions in place to manage those risks. Our School Leadership Team will monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of the actions in the Child Safety Risk Register at least annually.

PHYSICAL AND ONLINE SAFETY

Our school will promote physical and online safety without compromising a student's right to privacy, access to information, social connections and learning opportunities by

- ensuring child safety and wellbeing policies, procedures and practices enable school staff and volunteers to identify and mitigate risks in the physical and online environments
- developing, endorsing and communicating policies and procedures on online conduct and online safety
- developing procurement policies for facilities and services from third parties that ensure the safety of students.

ESTABLISHING AN INCLUSIVE AND CULTURALLY SAFE ENVIRONMENT

At Preshil we are committed to establishing an inclusive and culturally safe school where the strengths of First Nation's culture, values and practices are respected. We think about how every student can have a positive experience in a safe environment. For First Nation's students, we recognise the link between Indigenous culture, identity and safety and actively create opportunities for First Nation's students, their families and the their community to have a voice and presence in our school planning, policies, and activities.

We have developed the following strategies to promote cultural safety in our school community:

- A Reconciliation Plan which is reviewed annually
- The appointment of staff members to the Reconciliation Action Group.
- The promotion of activities that celebrate indigenous culture and identity
- Encouraging the development of a culturally sensitive and diverse community that celebrates diversity and promotes inclusivity in our school environment[3].

[3] See IB Programmes and their mission to support the development of students' cultural and personal identity

THE STUDENT VOICE

Preshil is a child centred organisation. We actively seek to include the voices of children in our organisational planning, delivery of services, management of facilities and assessment procedures.

- Respectful relationships between students are reinforced and we encourage strong friendships and peer support in the school to ensure a sense of belonging by implementing a whole school approach to respectful relationships, our Student Code of Conduct and our school values.

- We inform students of their rights and give them the skills and confidence to recognise unsafe situations with adults or other students and to speak up and act on concerns relating to themselves or their peers. We ensure our students know who to talk to if they are worried or feeling unsafe and we encourage them to share concerns with a trusted adult at any time. Students and families can also access information on how to report concerns **(see Complaints and Grievances Policy - Students**).

- When the school is gathering information in relation to a complaint about alleged misconduct or abuse of a child, we will listen to the complainant's account and take them seriously, check our understanding of the complaint, and provide support to the student and their parents or carers.

- Preshil actively seeks to understand what makes children feel safe in our organisation. We regularly communicate with children about what they can do if they feel unsafe. We value the voices of children and will act on concerns raised by children or their families regarding their safety. Preshil includes the voices of children in the following ways.

- regular discussions with children that facilitate child led conversation on what makes them feel safe.

- any proposed significant changes to the physical environment, policies, procedures, programs are discussed with children who are encouraged to provide their views. The views are collated by staff and provided to management for assessment and inclusion in the decision making process.

- communication materials on policies, procedures, staffing and programs are child-friendly and suitable to the relevant age groups and diversity of the children at Preshil, including materials translated into languages the children speak, where needed.

FAMILY ENGAGEMENT

Our families and the school community have an important role in monitoring and promoting children's safety and wellbeing and helping children to raise any concerns. To support family engagement, at Preshil we are committed to providing families and community with accessible information about our school's child safe policies and practices and involving them in our approach to child safety and wellbeing.

We will create opportunities for families to have input into the development and review of our child safety policies and practices and encourage them to raise any concerns and ideas for improvement.

- All of our child safety policies and procedures are available for students and parents on our school website.

- Newsletters inform families and the school community about any significant updates to our child safety policies or processes, and strategies or initiatives that we are taking to ensure student safety.

- PROTECT Child Safety posters are displayed across the school at Reception, in staff rooms and in the school libraries.

SUITABLE STAFF AND VOLUNTEERS

At Preshil, we apply robust child safe recruitment, induction, training, and supervision practices to ensure that all staff, contractors, and volunteers are suitable to work with children.

Staff Recruitment

Preshil applies the best practice standards in the recruitment and screening of staff and volunteers. Recruitment practices shall comply with the Preshil Staff Recruitment and Selection Policy. The Preshil Recruitment and Selection Policy ensures that child safety requirements are addressed in the recruitment process through strategies including:

- assessing the level of contact and responsibility the role will have in regard to children
- National Police Checks and Working with Children Checks are required where roles have contact or responsibility for children and for roles that have influence or authority over children such as leadership positions.
- assessing the qualifications and prerequisites required to ensure the staff are appropriately skilled for the role.
- assess the training, guidance and supervision required for the position and the current resources available to meet these requirements.

When engaging staff to perform child-related work, we:

- sight, verify and record the person's Working with Children clearance or equivalent background check such as a Victorian teaching registration
- collect and record:
    - proof of the person's identity and any professional or other qualifications
    - the person's history of working with children
    - references that address suitability for the job and working with children.
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Staff Induction

All newly appointed staff will be expected to participate in our child safety and wellbeing induction program. The program will include a focus on:

- the Child Safety and Wellbeing Policy (this document)
- the Child Safety Code of Conduct
- Staff Student Boundaries Guidelines
- Student Safety Definitions Document
- the Responding to Student Safety Concerns - Reporting Obligations
- any other child safety and wellbeing information that school leadership considers appropriate to the nature of the role.

Ongoing Supervision and Management of Staff

All staff engaged in child-connected work will be supervised appropriately to ensure that their behaviour towards children is safe and appropriate.

Staff will be monitored and assessed to ensure their continuing suitability for child-connected work. Staff reviews will include questions relating to the staff members knowledge of and understanding of the policies and procedures relating to child safety.

Inappropriate behaviour towards children and young people will be managed swiftly and in accordance with our school and department policies and our legal obligations. Child safety and wellbeing will be paramount.

Suitability of volunteers

All volunteers are required to comply with our Volunteers Policy[4] which describes how we assess the suitability of prospective volunteers and outlines expectations in relation to child safety and wellbeing induction and training, and supervision and management.

Preshil is committed to ensuring that all leaders, staff and volunteers receive training to ensure that they understand their responsibilities in relation to child safety. Preshil assists its leaders, staff and volunteers to incorporate child safety considerations into decision making and to promote a culturally safe environment where children are empowered to speak about issues that affect them.

Mandatory training requirements for Prehil leaders, staff and volunteers are as follows:

- induction - Child Safe Code of Conduct and Child Safe policy
- identifying indicators of child abuse
- how to respond to disclosures of child abuse
- complaint, code of conduct breach and child safety incident reporting procedures.

As these training courses are essential to support Preshil's zero tolerance of child abuse approach, leaders, staff and volunteers are required to undertake all of these components before being allowed to work in a child related role.

Other training provided to Preshil leaders, staff and volunteers includes but is not limited to

- risk management practices in relation to child safety
- creating cultural safety for aboriginal and culturally and or linguistically diverse children
- investigating child abuse concerns and allegations

Student Safety Officers

Preshil has appointed Student Safety Officers who have specific responsibility for responding to any complaints made by staff, volunteers, parents or children.

If a person does not feel comfortable making a report to a Student Safety Officer they may report their concern to the Chair of the School Board.

Student Safety Officers are well known to the children to ensure they understand who the appointed officers are and how and when they may contact them. Photos of the Student Safety Officers are published in staff and family newsletters.

REPORTING PROCEDURES

The Preshil Incident Reporting Policy and Framework includes how to respond to an allegation or incident of child abuse.

The Incident Reporting Policy and Framework includes the following elements:

- If a staff member, volunteer or contractor becomes aware of an incident or allegation of abuse, the first responsibility is to ensure that the child or children are safe and the risks of further abuse or harm are mitigated.

[4] Under development

- If a staff member, volunteer or contractor becomes aware of an incident or allegation of abuse they are required to report the incident even if a Student Safety Officer or the Principal does not share their belief.
- **If the incident or allegation of abuse could involve criminal conduct then the matter should be reported to Victoria Police.**
- **If there is any ongoing risk to a child or children, then the staff member or volunteer should immediately call 000.**
- **It may also be appropriate to notify the Department of Health and Human Services if there is a belief that a child is in need of protection. This may involve notifications to the police or Child Protection.**
- All reports of child abuse will be treated as serious, whether they are made by an adult or a child.
- When an allegation of child abuse is received all mandatory reporting requirements must be met, including reporting to
    - Police
    - Department of Families, Fairness and Housing
    - the Commission for Children and Young People under the Reportable Conduct Scheme
    - other government departments or regulators as appropriate.

RECORD KEEPING AND INCIDENT MONITORING

Preshil has a Records Management Policy and is committed to best practice record keeping. In accordance with the Records Management Policy and as required in the Incident Reporting Procedure all reports of child abuse shall be recorded in the incident reporting system.

Preshil, in maintaining records on reports of child abuse, will maintain confidentiality and privacy for children and families in accordance with legislation. Records will be maintained in line with recommendations from the Office of Public Records. Reports of child abuse and complaints about child safety will be monitored by the School Board to ensure that they are appropriately managed. Risks to child safety that are identified in complaints and reports of abuse will be reviewed and incorporated into the relevant risk management plan.

RISK MANAGEMENT

We recognise the importance of a risk management approach to minimising the potential for child abuse or harm to occur and use this to inform our policies, procedures and activity planning.

Preshil has a Risk Management Policy and Framework. The Risk Management Policy and Framework must include the assessment and mitigation of risks of child abuse at Preshil.

The following elements must be included in the risk management policy and framework:

- all existing and new activities and facilities must be assessed for risks of child abuse including:
    - environmental risks (e.g. areas that might obscure a line of sight)
    - vulnerability risks (such as activities that may foster personal relationships between staff / volunteers and children who have an increased risk of being exploited, such as children who are highly vulnerable and dependent on the staff / volunteer for their needs.
- all identified risks of child abuse are actively reduced by designing and implementing appropriate preventative measures
- risk management plans are documented for all existing and new activities and facilities

- staff volunteers and contractors are made aware of their responsibility for identifying risks of child abuse and their obligation to work with management on reducing those risks
- Families and children are made aware of how to report on identified risks of child abuse
- Risk management plans are living documents that are updated as required, referred to regularly and reviewed periodically.

Staff Training

Ongoing training and education are essential to ensuring that staff understand their roles and responsibilities and develop their capacity to effectively address child safety and wellbeing matters.In addition to the child safety and wellbeing induction, our staff will participate in a range of training and professional learning to equip them with the skills and knowledge necessary to maintain a child safe environment. Staff child safety and wellbeing training will be delivered at least annually and will include guidance on:

- our school's child safety and wellbeing policies, procedures, codes, and practices
- completing the Protecting Children – Mandatory Reporting and Other Legal Obligations online module annually
- recognising indicators of child harm including harm caused by other children and students
- responding effectively to issues of child safety and wellbeing and supporting colleagues who disclose harm
- how to build culturally safe environments for children and students
- information sharing and recordkeeping obligations
- how to identify and mitigate child safety and wellbeing risks in the school environment.

School Board Training

To ensure our School Board is equipped with the knowledge required to make decisions in the best interests of student safety and wellbeing, and to identify and mitigate child safety and wellbeing risks in our school environment, the council is trained at least annually. Training includes guidance on:

- individual and collective obligations and responsibilities for implementing the Child Safe Standards and managing the risk of child abuse
- child safety and wellbeing risks in our school environment
- Preshil child safety and wellbeing policies, procedures, codes and practices

RELATED POLICIES

Child Safe Standards (Victoria)

Child Safe Code of Conduct

LGBTIQ Student Support Policy

Record Keeping Policy

Responding to Student Safety Concerns - Reporting Obligations

Staff and Student Professional Boundaries

Staff Recruitment Policy

Non Compliance with this Policy and the Code of Conduct

Preshil will enforce this policy and the Code of Conduct. Following any non compliance we will instigate a review that may result in restriction of duties, suspension or termination of employment or other corrective action.

REVIEW OF THIS POLICY

This policy was developed in consultation with staff, volunteers, the children who use our services and their parents. It applies to all staff, volunteers, children and individuals involved in our organisation. All members of the Preshil community including students, staff, Board members, contractors, parents, guardians and volunteers share responsibility for providing an environment that supports the safety and wellbeing of Preshil students and are required to uphold the School's commitment to child safety.

This policy was reviewed in January 2023 to align with the Preshil **Responding to Student Safety Concerns** policy and to recognise that Preshil has a responsibility to continue to maintain a culturally safe environment in which the diverse and unique identities and experiences of aboriginal children and young people and their families are respected and valued.

This document will be reviewed annually from the date of approval or as required by any critical incidents, legislative or regulatory changes. We undertake as far as practicable to seek the views, comments and suggestions from children, parents, carers, staff and volunteers as part of this process.