6.09

MERCY EDUCATION POLICY
6.09 CHILD SAFETY

Introduction:

Mercy Education Limited (Mercy Education) has no tolerance for any form of child abuse. Mercy Education has an over-arching commitment and non-delegable duty to ensure that its children and students are safe and secure while fostering their growth in a faith-centred community.

Child safety and wellbeing are at the core of Mercy Education's mission and operations and its schools promote safe, inclusive, and welcoming learning environments. The Mercy Education Board of Directors facilitates and oversees the implementation of child safety and wellbeing policies, codes of conduct, reporting and recordkeeping procedures across all Mercy schools and throughout the organisation. This is in accordance with relevant state and federal legislation, diocesan regulations, and through its executive personnel at the National Office of Mercy Education Ltd.

Purpose:

The purpose of this policy is to demonstrate the commitment of Mercy Education to the safety and wellbeing of children and students through its leadership, governance, and culture.

Mercy Education will facilitate and oversee the implementation of the Child Safety Policy across Mercy schools and throughout the organisation as a part of its governance responsibility. Mercy Education will demonstrate and promote a child safe culture at all levels of the organisation.

Definitions:

<u>Child:</u> A child is a person under the age of 18 years or as defined according to applicable legislation. Enrolled students over the age of 18 years are not included in the definition of a child.

Mercy Education Policy 6.09 Child Protection
Revised by the Board – 15 SEP 2023
Version 2.1

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https://mercyeducation.sharepoint.com/sites/MELExecutive/Shared Documents/Policy Review/Policy Approved/6.09 Child Safety/6.09 Child Safety Policy - rev 15 SEP 2023.docx

Child abuse: includes
a)   any act committed against a child involving
    (i)   a sexual offence; or
    (ii)   an offence according to relevant State legislation
b)   the infliction, on a child, of—
    (i)   physical violence; or
    (ii)   serious emotional or psychological harm; and
c)   the serious neglect of a child

Child-connected work: work authorised by Mercy Education and performed by an adult in a school environment or school boarding environment while children are present or reasonably expected to be present.

Child safety: matters related to protecting all children from child abuse, managing the risk of child abuse, providing support to a child at risk of child abuse and responding to suspicions, incidents, disclosures, or allegations of child abuse.

Clergy: any cleric, member of religious institute or other persons who are employed or engaged by a Church body, or appointed by a Church body to voluntary positions, in which they work with or are near children or young people or are engaged in other forms of pastoral care or chaplaincy.

> NB: Whilst specifically the definition of the word 'clergy' is for ordained persons who are religious leaders serving the needs of their religion and its members, for the purpose of this document, it includes other professed religious personnel providing pastoral care or chaplaincy services.

Conduct: the way an employee, volunteer, parent, or member of the wider school community behaves in a school environment or school boarding environment.

Employee: an individual working in a school environment or school boarding environment who is:

- Directly engaged or employed by a school governing authority
- Contracted service provider (whether a body corporate or any other person is an intermediary) engaged by the school governing authority to perform child-related work; or
- A minister or religion, a religious leader or an employee or officer of a religious body associated with the school (ref Clergy)

Parent: applies to an individual in a parenting capacity of a child, student, prospective student, or past student, including carers, guardians, and natural, step, family care giver, or adoptive parents.

School boarding environment: any physical, online, or virtual space made available or authorised by Mercy Education for a child or student boarding at a school boarding premises to use at any time, including:

a)   online or virtual school boarding environments (including email, intranet systems, software applications, collaboration tools, and online services);

b)   other locations provided by the provider of school boarding services or through a third-party provider for a child or student to use including, but not limited to, locations used for:

    (i)   camps

    (ii)   approved homestay accommodation

    (iii)   delivery of education and training such as registered training organisations, TAFEs, non-school senior secondary providers, or another school; or

    (iv)   sporting events, excursions, competitions, or other events

School environment: any of the following physical, online, or virtual places, used during or outside school hours:

a)   A campus of the school

b)   Online or virtual school environments made available or authorised by the school governing authority for use by a child or student (including email, intranet systems, software applications, collaboration tools, and online services); and

c)   Other locations provided by the school or through a third-party provider for a child or student to use including, but not limited to, locations used for:

    (i)   camps

    (ii)   approved homestay accommodation

    (iii)   delivery of education and training such as registered training organisations, TAFEs, non-school senior secondary providers, or another school; or

    (iv)   sporting events, excursions, competitions, or other events.

Student: means a person who is enrolled at or attends the school or a student at the school boarding premises

Volunteer: an individual (including College Advisory Council Members) who is engaged by Mercy Education or its schools and performs work without renumeration or reward for the school environment or school boarding environment.

Policy Coverage:

This policy applies to Board Directors, Board Committee members, employees engaged by Mercy Education and its schools, members of groups formally constituted and associated with the school (e.g., College Advisory Council, Parents Association, Alumni Association), parents, volunteers, clergy, and the wider school community. The policy also applies to students at Mercy schools who are aged 18 years and older.

Policy Statement:

01   Mercy Education has no tolerance for any form of child abuse and is committed to the safety and wellbeing of all children and students enrolled in its schools

02   Mercy Education is committed to meeting nationally consistent child safe standards and all legislative requirements and regulatory obligations whilst operating in different States and diocesan jurisdictions

03   All children and students regardless of their age, gender, race, religious beliefs, disability, sexual orientation, cultural, social, or economic background, have the right to personal safety, including safety in relationships and protection from all forms of abuse and neglect.

04   Mercy Education pays particular attention to the most vulnerable children, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, children from culturally and/or linguistically diverse backgrounds, children with a disability, children who are unable to live at home, international students and LGBTIQ+ students

05   Mercy Education has clear reporting and recordkeeping protocols, policies, procedures, guidelines, and strategies in place to assist its Board Directors, Board Committee members, employees, volunteers, and the wider school community to provide culturally safe, secure, and nurturing learning environments

06   Mercy Education codes of conduct are publicly available and describe the expected attitudes and minimum appropriate behaviours for its Board Directors, Board Committee members, employees, parents, volunteers, and the wider school community. The codes of conduct are consistent with Mercy Education's child safety strategies, policies and procedures as revised from time to time

07   Mercy Education has a Risk Management Framework which identifies child safety risks at a governance level. In addition, Mercy Education schools have local risk management strategies which focus on preventing, identifying and mitigating risks to children and students in a school environment or school boarding environment

08   Mercy Education applies thorough and rigorous practices in the recruitment, screening, induction and ongoing suitability practices for Board Directors and Board Committee members, employees, and volunteers in its schools

09   The Board of Mercy Education applies thorough and rigorous governance practices for the appointment, induction and ongoing suitability of new Directors and Board Committee members, including an acknowledgement of their individual and collective responsibilities for child safety and wellbeing across all levels of governance and operations in Mercy Education schools

10   Mercy Education requires Board Directors, Board Committee members, employees, and volunteers to understand and acknowledge their roles, responsibilities, and obligations regarding the sharing, reporting and recordkeeping of child abuse suspicions and allegations. As a part of its governance responsibility, Mercy Education requires child safety and wellbeing matters related to Mercy Education schools to be brought to the attention of the Board and appropriate authorities, via clear and established reporting processes and recordkeeping protocols

11   Mercy Education has procedures in place for Board Directors, Board Committee members, employees, and volunteers to undertake regular, relevant training and education to better understand their individual roles, responsibilities, school strategies and practices in relation to child safety and wellbeing. Leadership and employee support, supervision and performance appraisal procedures include elements of child safety and wellbeing

12   Children and students are informed of the commitment of Mercy Education to child safety and wellbeing and are empowered in their rights to provide input and feedback and participate in decisions affecting them as individuals. They access age-appropriate, culturally safe information and sexual abuse prevention programs, are taught to recognise safe school environments and school boarding environments and to apply personal safety and wellbeing strategies

13   Mercy Education empowers children and students by including them in the development of literature, policies and presentations that explain its commitment to the cultural safety, inclusion and wellbeing of children and students

14   Mercy Education ensures that families and communities are informed and involved in promoting child safety and wellbeing in school environments and school boarding environments

15   Mercy Education has an effective complaint handling process in place that is culturally sensitive, publicly available, and accessible to Directors and Board Committee members, school leadership, employees, children and students, volunteers, parents, families, and the wider community. Complaints handling processes include all forms of child abuse. Complaints are treated seriously and responded to promptly and thoroughly by Mercy Education

16   Mercy Education has established structures and processes to review and continuously improve child safety and wellbeing practices whilst evaluating their effectiveness in responding to the needs of its schools and the wider community

17   Mercy Education and its schools have systems for creating, maintaining, and disposing of records in accordance with the applicable State legislation and diocesan child safe recommendations.

Related Documents:

Australian Catholic Safeguarding Ltd (ACSL)

- *https://www.acsltd.org.au/*

Australian Human Rights Commission: (AHRC)

- *National Principles for Child Safe Organisations*
  https://www.humanrights.gov.au/our-work/childrens-rights/national-principles-child-safe-organisations

Catholic Education Commission Victoria (CECV)

- *CECV Anti-Bullying Guide for Principals and Leaders 2019*

Catholic Education Office Ballarat (CEOB)

- *CEOB: https://ceob.edu.au/publications/child-protection/*

Catholic Education Sandhurst (CES)

- *CES: https://www.ceosand.catholic.edu.au/child-safety*

Catholic Education South Australia (CESA)

- *CESA: https://www.cesa.catholic.edu.au/our-schools/safe-environments-for-all*

Catholic Education Western Australia (CEWA)

- *CEWA: https://www.cewa.edu.au/learning-and-wellbeing/wellbeing-and-safety/student-safety/*

Legislation
- *Ministerial Order 1359 Implementing the Child Safe Standards – Managing the Risk of Child Abuse in Schools and School Boarding Premises*
- *Child Safety (Prohibited Persons Act 2016) (SA)*
- *Children and Young People (Safety) Act 2017 (SA)*

Melbourne Archdiocese Catholic Schools (MACS)
CEM: https://www.cem.edu.au/Our-Schools/Child-Safety.aspx

Mercy Education Limited (MEL)
- *MEL Governance Charter*
- *MEL Policy 1.10 Codes of Conduct*
- *MEL Code of Conduct*
- *MEL Parent Code of Conduct: Respectful Relationships*

Review History:

Version	Date Released	Next Review	Author	Approved
1.0	March 2020	February 2023	Head of People and Culture	MEL Board
1.1	June 2020	February 2023	Head of People and Culture	MEL Board
2.0	June 2022	June 2023	Head of People and Culture	MEL Board
2.1	September 2023	July 2024	Head of People and Culture	MEL Board