

Child Safe Communities

(Child Protection)

INFORMATION FOR PARENTS



Sydney Catholic Schools

Child Safe Communities: Information for Parents

SYDNEY CATHOLIC SCHOOLS (SCS) AND CHILD PROTECTION

At Sydney Catholic Schools, we believe child protection is a community responsibility – and it’s one we take very seriously. Our schools undertake a number of preventative and responsive steps to ensure all children are protected.

Such steps include complying with NSW laws in our recruitment practices, screening people who work with children, risk assessments, responding to complaints and reporting allegations of abuse or neglect to relevant authorities. Steps include ensuring relevant policies and procedures are accessible for parents and carers.

Also crucial is creating a safe school environment for children to learn within. This means we expect others in the community, who are involved in our schools, to support our school processes for ensuring student safety and wellbeing. This includes staff, volunteers, parents, family members, students themselves, visitors, contractors, religious and clergy.

Other key ways in which we protect children are outlined in the document below.

1) PREVENTATIVE RESPONSIBILITIES

Induction and Training

All employees, contractors and volunteers working with children in Sydney Catholic systemic schools undertake an induction in child protection.

Volunteers

Anyone seeking to volunteer in a Sydney Catholic systemic school must complete an application form to volunteer, be registered and attend an induction for volunteers at the school. It is expected that all volunteers (including parents, family members, carers, clergy and religious) will support this process if they wish to be approved to volunteer in a Sydney Catholic systemic school. Relevant forms for volunteers will be provided by the school.

Contractors or Visitors

Sydney Catholic systemic schools have procedures for the engagement of contractors and visitors engaging with our schools’ activities. All contractors and visitors must adhere to the SCS Child Safe Communities framework.

Principal’s Authority

Schools have a duty of care to ensure that children are safe when under the supervision of the school. Therefore, if a principal has a concern that a person, (whether an adult or young person), may pose a risk to a student, including any serious disruption of education, the principal has the discretion and authority to request that person to disengage from the school activity and leave the school premises until further assessment can be undertaken.

Similarly, if a principal assesses that an activity poses a risk to a student, they have the authority to stop that activity until further assessment can be undertaken to reduce the concerns. There are procedures in place for such situations, if they arise.

Language or behaviour that presents a risk to safety or disruption of education for any student in our schools, which occurs on school premises or at any school activity, is not acceptable.

Obtaining Information from Other Agencies

A principal may request information from certain authorities and other agencies if that information is required to assess, investigate or respond to the safety, wellbeing or educational needs of a student.

NSW Working with Children Check - Screening

Our schools comply with NSW laws on screening people to ensure they are suitable to work (paid or unpaid) with children. This process is administered by the NSW Office of the Children's Guardian (OoCG). This process is called a Working with Children Check (known as the WWCC) and includes a national criminal history check and review of findings of workplace misconduct involving children. The result is either a clearance or a bar. The process identifies persons who are prohibited by law to work or volunteer in our schools.

This means that any person who seeks to work (paid or unpaid) with children at a Sydney Catholic systemic school must comply with the requirements of the NSW OoCG which includes undertaking a WWCC. Information for parents about the process can be located on the OoCG website at www.kids.nsw.gov.au.

SCS verifies the clearance number for those required to undertake the WWCC to ensure they are cleared to work with children. This is managed centrally through SCS.

2) RESPONSIVE RESPONSIBILITIES – A SCHOOLS' RESPONSE TO CONCERNS ABOUT THE SAFETY, WELFARE OR WELLBEING OF A CHILD/YOUNG PERSON IN GENERAL

A. REPORTING REQUIREMENTS

Department of Family and Community Services

The abuse of a child is an offence under NSW law. The Department of Family and Community Services (FACS) is the government authority responsible for responding to reports that a child (under the age of 16 years), or a young person (aged 16 or 17 years), is at "risk of significant harm".

Staff in our schools are mandatory reporters. This means they are lawfully required to report to FACS if they have "reasonable grounds" to suspect a child (age 0-15 years) is at risk of significant harm from abuse or neglect and those grounds are identified in the course of, or from, the person's work.

Principals, teachers, counsellors, school consultants, as well as many external professionals working with children in our schools, are all mandatory reporters. It is an offence for these people not to comply with their legal duties under the legislation.

Additionally, it is a SCS policy that staff make a report to FACS for a young person, (age 16 or 17 years), given their duty of care to children in our schools, when in their professional judgment they believe a statutory intervention is required for the young person's safety and wellbeing.

Staff are required to make a report to FACS when they have reasonable grounds to suspect a child/young person is at significant risk of harm, including:

- Physical abuse.
- Neglect of supervision, physical shelter/environment, food, medical care, mental health care, or education.
- Sexual abuse.
- Problematic sexual behaviour.
- Psychological harm.
- Relinquishing care.
- Carer concerns – parent/carer substance abuse, parent/carer mental health, parent/carer domestic violence.
- Unborn children.

It is FACS' responsibility to assess if intervention is required. The school's responsibility is to report certain information and not to assess the validity of that information.

NSW Police

The NSW Police will be informed of any information received by our schools which may be of a criminal nature.

NSW Ombudsman

All schools in NSW are required by law (Part 3A *NSW Ombudsman Act 1974*) to report to the NSW Ombudsman allegations of "reportable conduct" involving an employee, certain contractors or volunteers. Allegations requiring reporting include:

- a) Any sexual offence, or sexual misconduct, committed against, with or in the presence of a child (including a child pornography offence or an offence involving child abuse material).
- b) Any assault, ill-treatment or neglect of a child.
- c) Any behaviour that causes psychological harm to a child, whether or not the child gave consent.

The role of the NSW Ombudsman is to oversee how the agency manages such reports. The process requires making a report within 30 days to the NSW Ombudsman, making reasonable inquiries into the allegation, assessing the information obtained, and making a finding. SCS has a process in place for such matters.

This is an allegation-based scheme. Therefore, the requirement to report and investigate is at the point an allegation is received. The type of allegations required to be reported can be viewed in the NSW Ombudsman Fact Sheets on their website: www.ombo.nsw.gov.au.

NSW Office of the Children's Guardian (OoCG)

All schools in NSW are required to report to the OoCG sustained findings of the following misconduct that were found to have occurred with a person employed or engaged in schools:

- a) Sexual misconduct (including sexual offences) committed against, with or in the presence of a child, including grooming a child
- b) Any serious physical assault of a child.

A report of such a finding may trigger the OoCG to undertake a risk assessment to consider if that person is suitable to be working with children, or not.

SCS has in place procedures to comply with reporting requirements to the OoCG.

B. OTHER SCS INTERNAL PROCEDURES

SCS has internal procedures for managing and responding to reports of information that relates to the safety of a student in our schools. Any concern in relation to safety and protection is assessed and the appropriate policy and process implemented. As outlined above, this may involve reporting to external authorities such as the NSW Police or FACS. It may require the school or SCS to undertake its own inquiries and investigations. It always involves risk assessment.

Our schools consult and work closely with the NSW Police and FACS to respond to concerns of safety for children and young people. Our schools will assist police and FACS with inquiries, when required.

SCS has three regional offices; each office has a student wellbeing co-ordinator and regional consultants who support and advise schools with any issue relating to child protection and safety.

3. UNDERLYING CHILD SAFE COMMUNITIES PRINCIPLES AND PRACTICE

SCS and its schools have a number of policies and procedures they follow to respond to, and address any concerns about a child's safety while on school premises or in a school activity. These processes include:

- Any concern about a child's safety while at school should be reported immediately to the principal.
- The principal will determine if the matter requires a report to an external authority and undertake a risk assessment.
- If the matter requires a mandatory report to FACS or NSW Police, this will be undertaken by the principal.

- If the concern relates to an environmental safety issue – such as the security of a gate into the school – the principal will contact its safety personnel at the SCS regional or central office.
- The principal will work with parents/carers and child to address any safety issues at school.
- If a concern about a child's safety relates to actions of a staff member, a contractor, or a volunteer, the principal will work with SCS to investigate the concern in accordance with school and SCS procedures. In some instances, the concern may require a report to an external authority as noted above for example – NSW Ombudsman, NSW Police or FACS.
- If a concern regarding safety relates to a principal, a report should be made immediately to the SCS regional office.
- In making the above assessments, the protection of children is paramount and takes precedent over any other competing interest.

4. PARENTAL RESPONSIBILITIES AND CHILD SAFE COMMUNITIES

Sydney Catholic systemic schools recognise the joint parenting responsibility naturally afforded to parents. In this regard, our schools will engage with all parents and legal guardians objectively and equally in relation to their child's education and wellbeing at school, unless a court order under the *Family Law Act, 1975* (Cth), changes the responsibilities of either parent in relation to the child's education. A copy of any court order that changes the parenting responsibilities of a parent should be provided to a school to assist the school in undertaking its own responsibilities in educating the child.

Any conflict between parents or carers is not tolerated on school premises as it poses a risk to the safety of children and disruption to their education. It is expected that parents and carers will resolve any disputes in relation to their responsibilities for parenting of a student outside the school, and through appropriate processes.

5. SCS RESPONSIBILITIES

Sydney Catholic Schools supports principals in working to build a strong culture in which:

- a) There are processes in place to ensure persons engaging in work (paid or unpaid) in the school are suitable.
- b) Staff and others engaging with our schools are open to, and capable of, responding to concerns of a child protection nature.
- c) Students and staff are comfortable and supported to report any concern of a child protection nature.

Some of the ways SCS supports schools include:

- Providing information and professional development to ensure all staff are aware of their legal and pastoral care responsibilities to students in relation to child protection.
- Providing information and resources for principals to induct and assess the suitability of volunteers in our schools.

- Educating teachers in the effective implementation of child protection education to help students understand personal safety.
- Having in place appropriate recruitment practices for paid employees to ensure persons who are fit and proper to be working in education with children occupy positions in Sydney Catholic systemic schools.
- Having in place policies to support schools in reducing risks to children such as acceptable use of social media or anti-bullying policies.
- Having in place a clearly documented process for responding to complaints of improper conduct with or involving, students by employees, contractors, and volunteers.
- Ensuring clear procedures are in place and accessible so SCS and its schools can comply with all legislative and reporting requirements in relation to child protection.
- Having in place a process for the receipt of, and response to, any historical allegation of child abuse relating to a school or SCS.
- Accessible information and policies for parents/carers in respect of child safe communities (child protection).
- Advice and support services for principals in managing difficult behaviour of parents or students that may pose a risk to safety or disrupt the education of children in the school.
- Supporting the work of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse.

6. WHAT CAN PARENTS DO IF THEY HAVE CONCERNS ABOUT A STUDENT'S SAFETY AT SCHOOL?

Parents should raise any such concerns with the principal in the first instance.

If the concern involves the principal they should take their concern to the relevant SCS regional office. These steps are outlined in SCS' relevant policies available to parents/carers.

Parents/carers always have a right to report a relevant concern to the NSW Police or FACS at any time.

7. HELPFUL CONTACTS RELEVANT TO THE INFORMATION IN THIS PAMPHLET

a) NSW Office of the Children's Guardian

Website: www.kidsguardian.nsw.gov.au

General Phone: 02 8219 3600

WWCC Phone: 02 9286 7219

b) Department of Family and Community Services

Website: www.community.nsw.gov.au

Phone: Child Protection Helpline on 132 111 (TTY 1800 212 936)

c) NSW Ombudsman

Website: www.ombo.nsw.gov.au

Phone: 02 9286 1000

d) NSW Police

Website: www.police.nsw.gov.au

Phone options:

- Your local police station
- Dial 131444 for general police inquiries
- Dial 000 for emergencies

e) Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse

The Royal Commission may be contacted on:

Phone: 1800 099 340

E: Contact@childabuseroyalcommission.gov.au

Write to: GPO 5283, Sydney, NSW 2001

Website: www.childabuseroyalcommission.gov.au

Support services offered by the Royal Commission include:

- A 24/7 telephone and online crisis service
- Counselling, information and referral for anyone in Australia who has experienced or been impacted by sexual assault, domestic or family violence
- Trauma specialist counsellors, phone: 1800 099 340

Support services for adults surviving child sexual abuse include:

- National professional phone counselling, information and support for adult survivors of child abuse with referral database of experienced professionals and agencies 9-5 EST, 7 days.
- Workshops for survivors, workshops for family members, partners and friends. Professional development for health professionals also available.

Phone: 1300 657 380

Website: www.asca.org.au

f) Sydney Catholic Schools

For further information on the policies and procedures referred to in this document please contact your school's principal, your regional office, or the Legal, Safety, Wellbeing and Professional Service Team at SCS, Leichhardt.

Inner West Regional Office

2 Keating Street
Lidcombe NSW 2141
Ph: (02) 9643 3600

Southern Regional Office

300 The River Road
Revesby NSW 2212
Ph: (02) 9772 7000

Eastern Regional Office

33 Banks Avenue
Daceyville NSW 2032
Ph: (02) 8344 3000

Sydney Catholic Schools

38 Renwick Street (PO Box 217)
Leichhardt NSW 2040
Ph: (02) 9569 6111

www.sydcatholicschools.nsw.edu.au

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* A Sydney Catholic systemic school is a school administered by SCS under the direction of the Archdiocese of Sydney.