Child Safe Policy

1. Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to affirm the commitment of the Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority (**VCAA**) to provide a child safe and child friendly environment, where children and young people with whom we have contact are safe and feel safe, and are able to actively participate in decisions that affect their lives. The VCAA interacts with children and young people to fulfil its functions as a provider of curriculum, assessment and reporting for Victorians from birth to senior secondary. The VCAA’s policies reflect our commitment to child safety within that context.

The Child Safe Standards apply to the VCAA, as a category 1 entity under the *Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005* (Vic).

1. Application

This policy (and the Scheme) applies to all **VCAA Staff**.

“**VCAA Staff**” includes anyone aged over 18 engaged by the VCAA (whether paid or unpaid, employee, honorary or volunteer), Department of Education and Training (**DET**) staff undertaking work or activity for the VCAA, personnel employed by an agency or labour hire arrangement working at the VCAA, board members, other committee or group members and contractors.

A reference in this policy to “**staff**” or “**staff member**” means **VCAA Staff**.

1. Statement of commitment child safety

The VCAA is committed to being a child safe and child friendly organisation that recognises, respects and promotes children’s rights.

The VCAA recognises its responsibilty to keep children safe from abuse by those associated with the VCAA. The safety of children is always our first priority.

The VCAA takes a zero tolerance approach to child abuse.

The VCAA takes all child abuse allegations and child safety concerns seriously.

The VCAA values diversity and does not tolerate discriminatory practices.

In becoming a child safe organisation, the VCAA will:

* Foster an environment in which children are listened to, their views valued and their concerns acted upon
* Actively encourage children to have a say about things that are important to them, including contributing to how we plan for, design and develop our services and activities
* Proactively assess and manage the risk of abuse to children who come into contact with our services
* Welcome concerns being raised about the safety of children with whom we have contact
* Listen to and act decisely on any child safety concerns or allegations of abuse that are made
* Have specific policies, procedures and supports in place to enable us to meet these obligations.
1. Principles for creating and maintaining a child safe organisation

The VCAA is committed to developing and implementing a child safe system. In developing and implementing the system, the VCAA will:

* Consult with VCAA staff and other appropriate parties, including children
* Develop a system that reflects the risk of child abuse within this organisation
* Take a preventative, proactive and participatory approach to child safety
* Foster a culture of openness that supports all persons to safely disclose risks of harm to children
* Recognise, respect and foster children’s rights
* Provide written guidance on appropriate conduct and behaviour towards and in the presence of children
* Engage people who are suitable to work with children and have high quality staff and volunteer supervision and professional development
* Report suspected abuse, neglect or mistreatment promptly to the appropriate authorities
* Share information appropriately and lawfully with other organisations where the safety and wellbeing of children is at risk
* Value the input of and communicate regularly with children, parents, guardians, families, carers, schools and teachers.
1. Roles and responsibilities

**All VCAA staff** are responsible for contributing to achieving a child safe environment. They are responsible for:

* complying with this policy, and related processes referred to in this policy
* adhering to the Code of Conduct for Victorian Public Sector Employees and the VCAA’s Child Safety Code of Conduct
* reporting child safety concerns and suspected or alleged child abuse, in accordance with VCAA reporting procedures and any applicable other legal or policy reporting obligation

**Unit Managers, Directors and Executive Directors** are also responsible for:

* ensuring staff are aware of and adhere to this policy and procedures
* coaching staff on managing child safety risks
* ensuring staff understand and adhere to the VPS Code of Conduct and the VCAA Child Safety Code of Conduct
* ensure new staff are aware of roles and responsibilities during induction process
* encourage discussion and learning about child safe risks and changing risks

The **Chief Executive Officer** is also responsible for:

* ensuring policies and procedures are current and address the risks of child abuse
* addressing allegations of child abuse by VCAA staff
* promoting internal and external discussion about a culture of child safety
* promoting understanding and practices of cultural safety
* facilitating learning on cultural safety and procedures
* ensuring organisations the VCAA works with understand our policy
* seeking external feedback on our practices
1. Privacy and confidentiality

The VCAA respects the privacy of students, their families, teachers and VCAA staff, and will comply with the *Privacy and Data Protection Act 2014* (Vic) in relation to the collection, use and disclosure of personal information.

In order to comply with obligations under this Policy and the Child Safe Standards, the VCAA and the VCAA CEO are required to disclose information to Victoria Police, and regulators.

The VCAA Privacy Policy is available at: <http://www.vcaa.vic.edu.au/Pages/aboutus/policies/index.aspx>

1. Definitions

**Child**

In this policy, the term child means a person under the age of 18.

**Child safety concern**

In this policy, a child safety concern means any concern relating to the physical, emotional or cultural safety of a child with whom the VCAA has contact. It includes, but is not limited to, allegations or suspicions of child abuse.

A child safety concern may include, for example:

* inappropriate or special relationships developing between an adult and a child (that may indicate grooming behaviour)
* inadequate staff supervision of children
* feelings of discomfort about interactions observed between an adult and a child
* any action or inaction that demonstrates failure to adhere to the VCAA’s Child Safe Policy or Child Safe Code of Conduct

Child safety concerns, including suspected child abuse, may be identified through:

* a suspicion or belief that abuse or harm has occurred or is likely to occur
* a disclosure made by a child, their parent, guardian or carer, a teacher or any other person, including another child
* observations of concerning behaviour about a person’s conduct towards or in the presence of a child.

**Child abuse**

In this policy, the term child abuse means

* Sexual abuse and grooming
* Physical abuse or violence
* Serious emotional and psychological abuse
* Serious neglect

**Children’s rights**

Under the *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006* (Vic), every child has the right, without discrimination, to such protection as is in his or her best interests and is needed by him or her by reason of being a child.

Under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, children have a number of rights, including the right to:

* Be treated fairly
* Have a say about decisions affecting them
* Live and grow up health
* Have people who do what is best for them
* Know who they are and where they come from
* Believe what they want to believe
* Privacy
* Find out information and express themselves
* Be safe no matter where they are
* Be cared for and have a home
* Education, play and cultural activities
* Help and protection if they need it.
1. VCAA contacts

If you have questions about this policy, or wish to speak to someone about child safety at the VCAA, please contact us by phone or email

(03) 9032 1700
1800 134 197
vcaa@edumail.vic.gov.au

1. Commission for Children and Young People

More information about the Child Safe Standards, including information sheets, is available from the Commission for Children and Young People: <https://ccyp.vic.gov.au/child-safety/being-a-child-safe-organisation/the-child-safe-standards/>

**General enquiries**

**Telephone**: 1300 78 29 78

**Fax**: (03) 8601 5877

**Email**: childsafe@ccyp.vic.gov.au

1. Related policies and procedures
* VCAA Reportable Conduct Policy
* VCAA Reporting Matters of Concern Policy
* Pre-employment Checks, including Working with Children Check
* VCAA Complaints Policy

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| **Date Issued**: November 2018 | **Status**: Current |  |
| **Date Due for Review**: October 2019 | **Responsible Officer**: Chief Executive Officer | **Approved by**: Chief Executive Officer |