

2014

# Child Protection Information for Parents

Enrolment Package



Catholic Education Office, Sydney



## **Child Protection Information for Parents**

### **Catholic Education Office, Sydney Schools and Child Protection**

Child Protection is a community responsibility. The Catholic Education Office of Sydney takes the safety of children in our schools most seriously. There are a number of steps our schools undertake to protect children which are both preventative and responsive.

This includes complying with NSW laws about child protection by screening people who work with children, risk assessments and reporting allegations of abuse or neglect to relevant authorities. However, it goes further than that. It means creating a safe school environment for children to learn within, when they attend school. It means we expect others in the community, who are involved in our schools, to support our school processes for ensuring student safety. This includes staff, volunteers, parents, family members, students themselves, visitors, contractors, religious and clergy.

The key areas are outlined below.

#### **1) Preventative Responsibilities**

##### **NSW Working with Children Check**

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

This means that any person who seeks to work (paid or unpaid) with children at a CEO Sydney school must comply with the requirements of the NSW OoCG which includes "the check". Fact Sheets for parents about the process can be located on the OoCG website at [www.kids.nsw.gov.au](http://www.kids.nsw.gov.au).

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The CEO verifies the clearance number for those required to undertake “the check” to ensure they are not barred to work with children. This is managed centrally through the CEO.

### Other CEO Procedures

Regardless of whether a person has to undertake “the check” or not, CEO schools also have other procedures to ensure children are safe in our schools. Persons seeking to volunteer in one of our schools 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 CEO school. A CEO Application Form for Volunteers will be provided by the school.

Schools have a duty of care to ensure that children are safe when in 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 child they have 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 child they have a duty to stop that activity until further assessment can be undertaken to reduce the concerns. There are procedures in place for such situation if they arise.

Inappropriate 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.

A Principal may request information from certain authorities and other agencies if that information is required to assess, investigate or respond to the safety, well-being or educational needs of a child in its care.

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### **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 the NSW law. The Department of Family and Community Services 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 Community Services if they have “reasonable grounds” to suspect a child 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.

Whilst not mandated under NSW law to report a young person, (age 16 or 17 years), our staff will make such a report, given their duty of care to children in our schools, if their professional judgment believes a statutory intervention is required for the young person’s safety and well-being (that is a student aged 16 or 17 years). 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 Act.

The types of reports our staff are required to make to Community Services are when they have reasonable grounds to suspect a child/young person are at significant risk of harm include:

- Physical abuse
- Neglect of – supervision, physical shelter/environment, food , medical care, mental health care, education
- Sexual abuse

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- Problematic sexual behaviour
- Psychological harm
- Relinquishing Care
- Carer concerns – parent/carer substance abuse; parent /carer mental health; parent/carer domestic violence
- Unborn child

It is Community Services 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 at law (Part 3A NSW Ombudsman Act 1974) to report to the NSW Ombudsman allegations of “reportable conduct” involving an employee or volunteer. The role of the NSW Ombudsman is to oversight how each 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. The CEO 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](http://www.ombo.nsw.gov.au).

### NSW Office of the Children's Guardian (OoCG)

All schools in NSW are required to report to the Children's Guardian any finding of misconduct that the following conduct occurred by a person working with children within the school:

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

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

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

### **b. Other CEO Schools internal procedures**

The CEO has internal procedures for managing and responding to reports of information that relates to the protection of a child in our schools. Any concern in relation to safety and protection is assessed and the appropriate process implemented. This may involve reporting to external authorities such as the NSW Police or Community Services. It may require the school or CEO to undertake its own inquiries and investigations. It always involves risk assessment.

Our schools consult and working closely with the police and community services to respond to concerns of safety for children and young people. Our schools will assist police and community services with inquiries if requested.

Sydney CEO has three regional offices. Each office has a Student Wellbeing Coordinator. Each school has a Regional Consultant who works to support and advise the school. Both the Student Wellbeing Coordinator and School Consultant will support the Principal of a CEO School in any issue relating to child protection and safety. The CEO Head Office in Leichhardt has a Safety, Wellbeing and Professional Service Team (SWAPS) that supports all Regional Offices and schools in child protection and safety.

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### **3. Children's Safety at School**

The CEO and our schools have a number of policies and procedures they follow to respond to and address any safety issues of a child whilst on school premises or in a school activity. Consistent to all are the following:

- Any concern about a child's safety whilst 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 Community Services this will be undertaken by the Principal
- If the matter requires a report or consultation with the 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 the CEO SWAPS team in Leichhardt
- The Principal will work with parents/carer and child to address any safety issues at school
- If a concern about a child's safety relates to actions of a staff member or a volunteer the Principal will work with the Catholic Education Office to investigate the concern in accordance with the school and Catholic Education Office procedures. In some instances the concern may require a report to an external authority as noted above for example – NSW Ombudsman, NSW Police or Community Services.
- If a concern regarding safety relates to a Principal a report should be made immediately to the Catholic Education Regional Office.
- In making an assessment the protection of children is paramount and takes precedent over any other competing interest

### **4. Parental responsibilities and the School**

CEO Sydney schools recognise the joint parenting responsibility naturally afforded to parents other than where this is changed by an Order under the Family Law Act (Cth). 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 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

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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. The Catholic Education Office (CEO) Sydney's responsibilities**

The CEO Sydney supports Principals in taking a number of key steps to ensure the safety of children in our schools. This includes working to build a strong culture in which a) there are processes in place to minimise risk that persons unsuitable to be working with children are able to engage with our schools, and b) those engaging with the CEO and our schools experience an openness and willingness to respond to concerns of a child protection nature.

Some of the ways the CEO supports schools includes:

- Providing information and professional development for all staff to be aware of their legal and pastoral care responsibilities to students and child protection.
- Providing information and resources for Principals to induct and assess suitability of volunteers in our schools
- Inservicing 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 CEO Sydney schools.
- Having in place policies to support schools in reducing risks to children such as, although not limited to, Social Media or Anti Bullying Policies.
- Having in place a clearly documented process for responding to complaints of improper conduct by employees and volunteers, which is fair to all parties.
- Ensuring clear procedures are in place and accessible for the CEO and its schools to comply with all legislative and reporting requirements in relation to child protection

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- Having in place a process for the receipt of, and response to, the receipt of any historical allegation of child abuse relating to the school or CEO.
- Advice and support services to Principals in managing difficult behaviour of parents or students that may pose a risk to safety or disruption of education for children in the school.

### **What can parents do if they have concerns about a child/student 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 CEO Regional Office.

Parents have a right to report a relevant concern to the NSW Police or Community Services at any time.

### **Helpful Contacts relevant to the information in this pamphlet**

#### **NSW Office of the Children's Guardian**

Website: [www.kids.nsw.gov.au](http://www.kids.nsw.gov.au)

General Phone: 02 9286 7276

WWCC Phone: 02 9286 7219

#### **Community Services**

Website: [www.community.nsw.gov.au](http://www.community.nsw.gov.au)

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

#### **NSW Ombudsman**

Website: [www.ombo.nsw.gov.au](http://www.ombo.nsw.gov.au)

Phone: 02 9286 1000

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### NSW Police

Website: [www.police.nsw.gov.au](http://www.police.nsw.gov.au)

### Phone options:

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

### Catholic Education Office, Sydney

For further information on the policies and procedures referred to in this document please contact your school's Principal, Regional Office, or the Safety, Wellbeing and Professional Service Team at the CEO, Leichhardt.

#### **Inner West Region Office**

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

#### **Southern Region Office**

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

#### **Eastern Region Office**

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

#### **Catholic Education Office, Sydney**

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

[www.ceosyd.catholic.edu.au](http://www.ceosyd.catholic.edu.au)

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