

MANDATORY REPORTING POLICY

1.0 INTRODUCTION

This *Mandatory Reporting Policy* (Policy) applies to St Michael's Catholic Primary School, Heyfield (the School), all Catholic schools managed and operated by Diocese of Sale Catholic Education Limited (DOSCEL) and to DOSCEL office staff. The Policy outlines the legal requirement to report suspected cases of child abuse and neglect.

All children and young people have a right to feel safe and to be safe. School staff members have a legal and moral responsibility to respond to serious incidents involving abuse and neglect of the children and young people with whom they have contact, and to report instances that they believe involve physical abuse, sexual abuse or neglect.

School Principals and registered teachers, as mandatory reporters must report, such matters to the Department of Family, Fairness and Housing (DFFH) Child Protection or Police as soon as practicable. A report must be made whenever, in the course of their work, they form a reasonable belief that a child or young person needs protection. This includes situations involving physical injury, sexual abuse or other forms of abuse. A report is also required when the child's parents, guardians or carers are unable or unwilling to protect the child or young person.

If a reasonable belief has been formed that a child or young person has been, is being, or is at risk of being abused, this must be reported on each occasion they form a belief, even if an employee in a position of authority does not share this belief. Please refer to *Appendix 1* for further information.

2.0 PURPOSE

This Policy supports the delivery of a sustainable and inclusive education that nurtures each student's potential, equips them to thrive in a dynamic world and is enriched by DOSCEL's flourishing Catholic culture. This Policy is underpinned by the DOSCEL values of *Integrity, Excellence and Inclusion*.

This Policy provides clarity to ensure that all School staff are aware of their roles and responsibilities in relation to protecting the safety and wellbeing of children and young people and, in particular, when mandatory reporting as defined in Section 184 of the *Children, Youth and Families Act 2005* is required.

This Policy informs the *Mandatory Reporting Procedures*.

3.0 CATHOLIC MISSION

The School brings to life the mission of the Catholic Church by engaging and aligning all efforts toward the achievement of DOSCEL's vision for education: *faith-inspired educational excellence for a hope filled future.*

4.0 COMMITMENT TO CHILD SAFETY

The School holds the care, safety and wellbeing of children and young people as a central and fundamental responsibility of Catholic education. This commitment is drawn from the teaching and mission of Jesus Christ.

5.0 SCOPE

This Policy fulfills the Victorian Registration and Qualification Authority's Minimum Standard for School Registration obligations, requiring the School to have policies ensuring all staff understand Mandatory Reporting requirements.

This Policy applies to the School Principal and registered teachers as mandated reporters.

The Policy provides clarity to ensure all School staff are aware of their roles and responsibilities in protecting the safety and wellbeing of children and young people and, in particular, when mandatory reporting is required.

The Policy is enacted within the following principles:

- 5.1 The dignity of each person, made in the image of God, is a fundamental tenet of the Catholic Church and therefore of Catholic education.
- 5.2 A safe environment is required to protect children and young people from harm and to prevent employees from abusing their position of authority and trust.
- 5.3 Employees need to be informed of matters related to child sexual abuse and be fully self-aware of their professional obligations and responsibilities.
- 5.4 All children and young people have the right to a thorough and systematic education in personal safety, including safety in relationships.
- 5.5 Abuse of children or young people by persons in positions of trust or authority is a serious matter. All allegations must receive a response and be dealt with promptly.
- 5.6 After a disclosure, any ongoing harm to the child or young person and the employee is minimised by:
 - adherence to agreed procedures
 - provision of appropriate social and emotional support and pastoral care, and
 - appropriate confidentiality.
- 5.7 The child or young person's ongoing safety and wellbeing should be the primary focus of decision-making.

- 5.8 Mandatory reporters must make a report to the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing (DFFH) (Child Protection) as soon as practicable if, in the due course of practising their profession or carrying out their duties they form a reasonable belief that a child or young person needs protection as a result of:
- physical injury or sexual abuse, and/or
 - the child or young person’s parents are unable or unwilling to protect the child or young person from that abuse.

6.0 POLICY OUTCOMES

- 6.1 Mandatory reporters report on each occasion, regardless of whether another mandatory reporter or employee in a position of authority does not share this belief.
- 6.2 Whenever another mandated reporter has undertaken to make a report, mandatory reporters will follow up and confirm that a report has been made (e.g. the Principal or other mandated reporters confirms that a report has been made).
- 6.3 The School and DOSCEL Office take all practicable steps to remove risks of suspected abuse to children and young people.
- 6.4 All staff demonstrate self-awareness of their professional obligations and report to police any reasonable belief of risk or act of sexual abuse against a child or young person.
- 6.5 The School provides children and young people with thorough and systematic education in personal safety, including safety in relationships.
- 6.6 All staff participate in approved professional learning related to mandatory reporting education.

7.0 COMMUNICATION

This Policy is available on the School Portal and provided to parents upon request.

This Policy is available through the staff portal and staff are annually upskilled on this Policy.

8.0 POLICY INFORMATION

Policy Owner	Governance
Approving Authority	DOSCEL Board
Assigned Board Committee	Culture Ethics and Conduct
Board Approval	12 December 2025
Risk Rating	Medium
Implementation	January 2026
Review Date	2028

POLICY DATABASE INFORMATION

Supporting Documents

APPENDIX 1 - Further information relating to Mandatory Reporting

For the purposes of this Policy, the following information is relevant:

- **Child and Young Person:** A child is legally defined as a person under the age of 16 years. A young person is any person who comes under or may come under the care, supervision or authority of the School.
- **Confidential:** Being entrusted with private and restricted information that must be treated as such, both in written and verbal form.
- **Duty of Care:** Employees, including volunteers and contractors working in Catholic schools, have a duty of care to support and protect the children and young people with whom they are professionally involved.

When employees form a reasonable belief that a child or young person has been harmed or is at risk of harm, they are ethically bound to take action to protect the safety and wellbeing of that child or young person. For some employees this obligation is legally mandated.

Duty of care is breached if a person:

- does something that a reasonable person in that person's position would not do in a particular situation.
 - fails to do something that a reasonable person in that person's position would do in the circumstances.
 - acts or fails to act in a way that causes harm to someone to whom the person owes a duty of care, fails to report when mandated.
- **Reasonable Belief:** A 'reasonable belief' is not the same as having proof. A 'reasonable belief' is formed if a reasonable person in the same position would have formed the belief on the same grounds.

For example, a 'reasonable belief' might be formed when:

- a child or young person states that they have been sexually abused
- a child or young person states that they know someone who has been sexually abused (sometimes the child or young person may be talking about themselves)
- someone who knows a child or young person states that the child or young person has been sexually abused
- professional observations of the child or young person's behaviour or development leads a mandated professional to form a belief that the child or young person has been sexually abused
- signs of sexual abuse lead to a belief that the child or young person has been sexually abused.

- **Excuses that are not reasonable** - You do not have a reasonable excuse for failing to disclose information if you are only concerned about the perceived interests of:
 - the person you believe committed, or was involved in, the sexual offence
 - any organisation.

Perceived interests include reputation, legal liability and financial status. For example, a religious minister's concern for the reputation of a church where an adult sexually abused a child is not a reasonable excuse for not reporting information to police.