



EDMUND RICE EDUCATION AUSTRALIA

**FLEXIBLE  
SCHOOLS**

**Safe Schools, thriving young people**

*Safeguarding – Beyond Compliance*

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# Safeguarding Framework

**September 2025**



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

We acknowledge the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples of Australia as the Traditional Owners and Custodians of the land of our schools. We are inspired and nurtured by their wisdom, spirituality and experience. We commit ourselves to actively work alongside them for reconciliation and justice. We pay our respects to the Elders; past, present and future. As we take our next step, we remember the first footsteps taken on this sacred land.



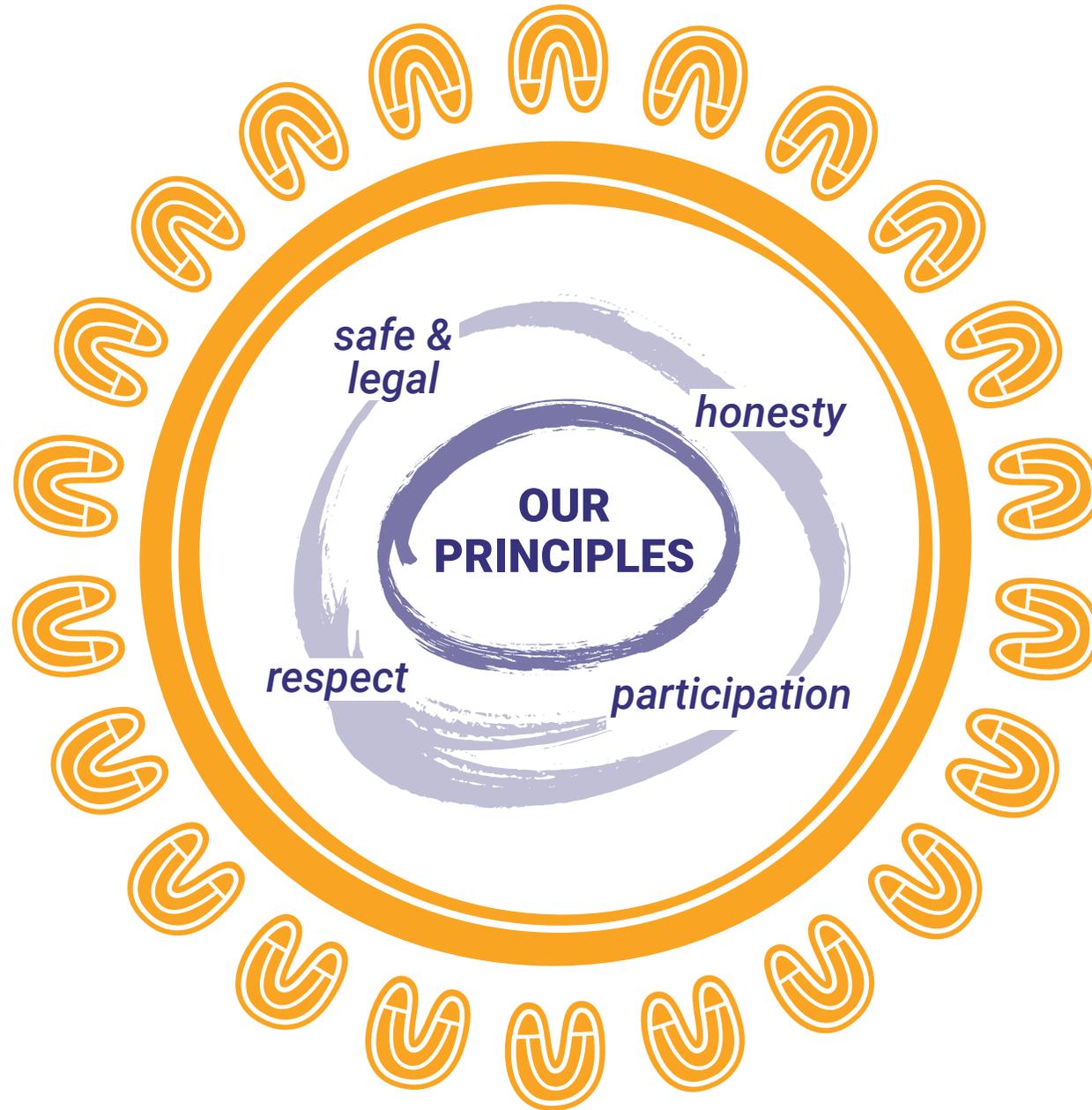
## ABOUT EDMUND RICE EDUCATION AUSTRALIA FLEXI SCHOOLS LIMITED

**Edmund Rice Education Australia ('EREA') Flexible Schools Ltd is a Company Limited by Guarantee and the Governing Authority for 24 Schools, including two special education Schools in New South Wales. The network of Schools under the governance of EREA Flexible Schools Ltd are Catholic Schools, administered in the Edmund Rice tradition. The charism of Blessed Edmund Rice expressed through the touchstones of Liberating Education, Gospel Spirituality, Inclusive Community, Justice and Solidarity, underpins our continued commitment to a safe and inclusive environment for all.**

All EREA Flexible Schools Ltd Schools, use Four Principles to create a 'Common Ground' for relationships to be established in a non-judgmental, inclusive and flexible way which helps young people engage in their learning and wellbeing. These Common Ground Principles are Respect, Safe and Legal, Participation and Honesty, and are used by everyone in the school community to encourage learning, build positive relationships and resolve conflict peacefully.

Our prime focus is to promote the safety and wellbeing of young people and young people under our care. We take our responsibilities for young person safeguarding extremely seriously and therefore we commit to ensuring that all our schools have appropriate policies and practices to make them places that are both safe and inclusive. Central to this is student voice and agency. Our schools' young person safeguarding programs are regularly updated and checked for compliance with regulatory requirements.

# Our principles



# From the CEO

**We have the privilege of working with incredible young people as they make their way in life, supporting them to navigate systems that sometimes fail them. We are pleased to be their partners in education and all the social and emotional connections and supports that school communities provide. We want our schools to be safe places for young people to grow and thrive.**

We are entrusted with their safety while they are part of our community. Of course this means their physical, emotional, cultural and spiritual safety, and a huge part of all of these is safeguarding young people from harm.

Building relationships with young people is critical to their educational and other success. But with trusting relationships and communities comes the risk of exploitation. Wherever there are adults and young people working together there is a power imbalance which can be exploited. Where there are young people mixing, there can be interactions that are harmful.

We are committed to doing everything we can to stop that from happening.

While there is a complex compliance environment in relation to safeguarding, and differences in all states and territories we work in, this Framework sets out that which unites us - our commitment to a culture of safeguarding. The Framework applies across jurisdictions, individual campuses and sites and to staff, volunteers, central office and our Board.

This Framework commits us to making our schools the safest they can be. This means moving beyond compliance.

We want an embedded culture of safeguarding, where all our people know their role in the prevention, detection and reporting of safeguarding concerns. We want openness, and transparency, where our commitment to safeguarding is demonstrated in our interactions with young people and each other. We want to make sure our staff have clear expectations of the way they interact with young people and that they understand how to speak up if they have concerns about someone's behaviour. We want to make sure young people in our schools are empowered to know that they should feel safe with us and to let us know if they have any concerns.

To staff we say – you will always be supported when you raise concerns in good faith.

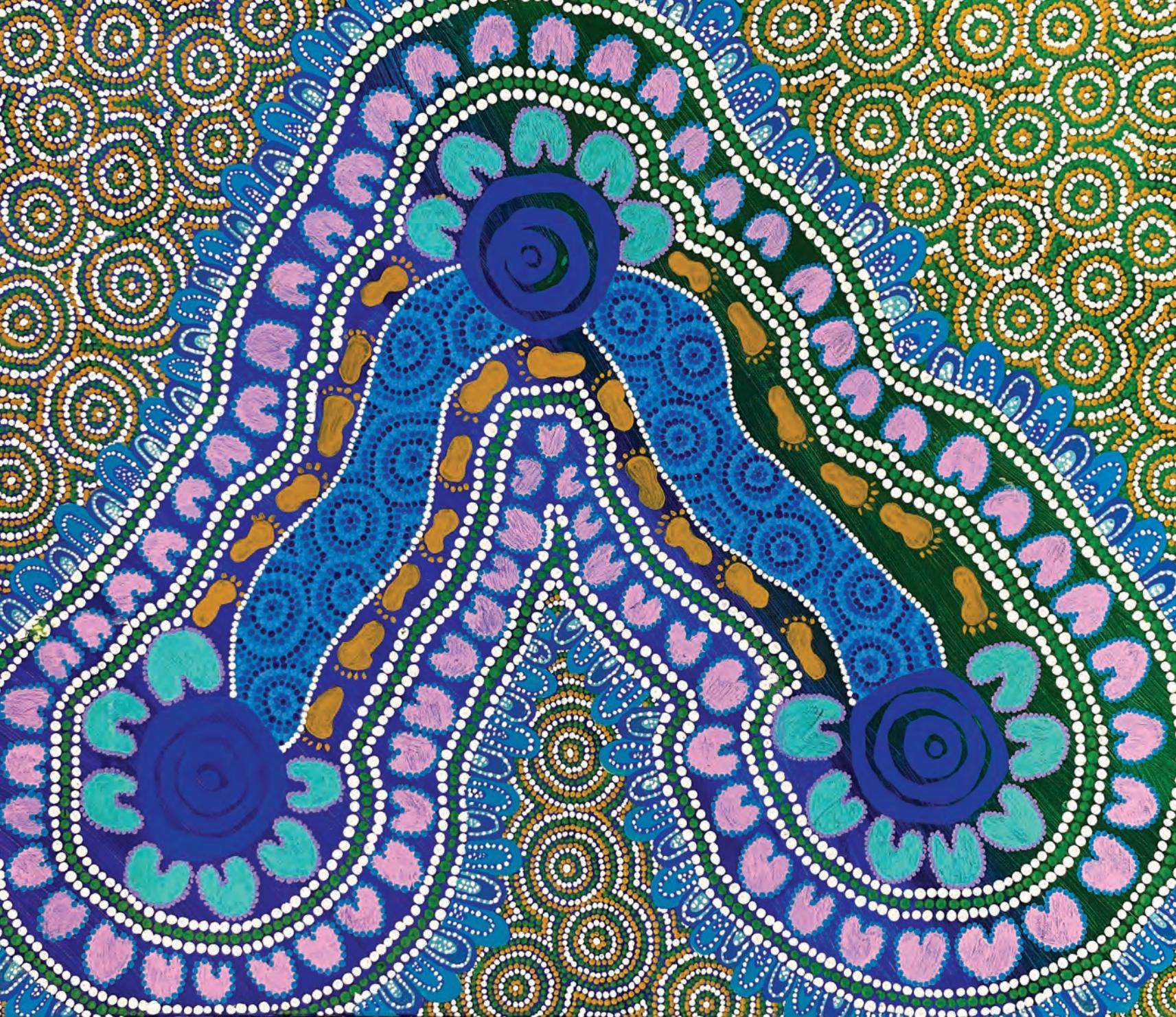
*To young people and your families and supporters we say – we take your safety and wellbeing seriously and we will always follow up where concerns are raised. Please talk to us if you have concerns about safety.*

Our Framework is based on the Building Blocks of Safeguarding Culture. Together the Building Blocks give us a solid foundation for being the safest schools we can be for young people.

We invite you to familiarise yourself with this Framework and the Building Blocks, talk about it in your teams and with the young people you work with and understand what it means for you.

We are grateful to everyone who has contributed to the development of this Framework, and we look forward to seeing it come to life.

**Dr Matt Hawkins**  
CEO



**EREAFS would like to acknowledge young person Kyeishia for her talent, bravery, and ambition in designing a beautiful artwork that tells the story of safety, deep listening, family and keeping young people safe and underscores the importance of deep listening and hearing their narratives.**

Kyieshia has designed a beautiful piece that visually captures this essence. Her artwork portrays a family by the river, with mountains in the background, symbolising their collective journey towards safety and support.

# Building Blocks Overview



## LEADERSHIP

We are committed to keeping young people safe.



## PEOPLE

Our people are great at working safely with young people.



## ENVIRONMENTS

Our environments are safe and welcoming for young people.



## RESPONSE

If something does go wrong, we all know what to do about it.

BB1

BB2

BB3

BB4

# Introduction

**The safety and wellbeing of the young people that we work with is the highest priority for EREAFSN.**

It is easy to make such a claim – and throughout this Framework we will set out how we go about embedding a culture which demonstrates that it is the case.

Our schools are in Queensland, New South Wales, Western Australia, the Northern Territory, Tasmania and South Australia. As such, we are subject to a variety of safeguarding legislative requirements and different child safe standards. These requirements are of course essential for compliance. However, we know that a poor culture can undermine compliance.

We are united in our aim to maintain a culture of safeguarding, where all EREAFSN people understand their role in prevention, detection and reporting of abuse, neglect and exploitation of the young people we work with; and we empower those young people by ensuring they know their rights, what they should expect of us and who to go to if something concerning is happening.

Using the Building Blocks to guide us, we can unite under this cultural framework to stand together across all our campuses and offices, with a deep and tangible commitment to making our schools the safest they can be.

## WHO IS WHO IN EREAFSL SAFEGUARDING?

At every level of the organisation there are roles to support to important work of Safeguarding.

National	Director of Safeguarding Safeguarding Practice Project Role
Regional	Leader of Safeguarding in every regional team
School Based	Safeguarding Officers Wellbeing Leaders Heads of Campus

## HOW DOES THIS FRAMEWORK FIT IN WITH OUR POLICIES AND PROCEDURES?

This Framework sets the context by which we implement and interpret our policies and procedures. It is the underpinning culture for safeguarding. We don't get stuck in the black and white of what our policies and procedures say – rather, we always act to prioritise the safety of young people, with our policies and procedures to guide our decision making and ensure consistent practice and process.

## A NOTE ON “MANDATORY REPORTING”...

Many school staff are “mandatory reporters” under state and territory legislation in relation to reporting certain harm to children to external authorities. In reality, mandatory reporting often relates to the familial or community context, and that is what people often think about when they think of safeguarding.

This Framework is not intended to override or conflict with these responsibilities. However, what this Framework addresses is the “institutional” context in which harm can occur – i.e. the risk of violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation of young people due to their contact with our schools. This includes the risk from staff and volunteers, other adults in the school community and from other young people in the school community.

There may be some overlap in reporting obligations, including from general “failure to report abuse” provisions that exist in many jurisdictions. However, managing institutional risk means we also want to be capturing concerns that may not meet external reporting thresholds, so that we can actively prevent abuse from happening in the first place.

If you are ever in any doubt, have a discussion with your line manager or safeguarding lead.

## WHAT DO I DO IF I HAVE A CONCERN ABOUT MY OR SOMEBODY ELSE'S SAFETY?

If someone has been harmed or is at immediate risk of harm, contact police on 000. If you would like to have a confidential discussion about a concern, you can contact any of the following:

Principal; Regional Leader of Safeguarding; Regional Director; National Director Safeguarding.

# The Building Blocks of our Safeguarding Culture

## BB1 LEADERSHIP



**We are committed to keeping young people safe and here is how we will show it.**

- The safety of young people is our number one priority
- Our board, managers and staff regularly talk about the safety of young people and what it means for us and the young people we work with
- You will see evidence of our commitment in our schools, on our websites, and in our policies and procedures
- We focus on the physical, spiritual, cultural and emotional safety of young people
- We have intentional programs to educate young people about their rights
- We celebrate and respect young people, including their families, cultures, individual identities, and we make safe spaces for them

## BB2 PEOPLE



**Our people are great at working safely with young people and here is how we make sure of that.**

- People working with us know that the safety of young people is our priority
- Recruit people including staff, volunteers and contractors, ask them why they want to work with young people and check their full employment history and references
- Everyone working with and around young people will have a valid working with children check
- People who work with us sign up to a Code of Conduct so everyone knows what's in and what's out and where our professional boundaries sit
- People who work with us will get training, support and supervision to be great at their jobs and work with young people in a safe way
- Our team know the signs of grooming and abuse and will speak up and act on concerns

## BB3 ENVIRONMENT



**Our environments are safe and welcoming for young people and here is how we go about that.**

- We know the safety risks in our environments and for young people, and we will eliminate them as much as possible
- We make our physical spaces safe for young people
- We make our online spaces safe for young people
- We make our spaces warm and welcoming for young people and families from all different backgrounds

## BB4 RESPONSE



**If something does go wrong, we all know what to do about it because:**

- We listen to young people, families and staff if they tell us something is concerning them or something is wrong
- We have a clear process for people to come forward to talk about any concerns
- We will work with authorities to protect anyone being harmed or at risk of harm
- We want to learn from reports, concerns and incidents to keep getting better at safety
- If a young person has been harmed, we respond with compassion and support and in a way that is meaningful to the young person



## BB1 LEADERSHIP

**We are committed to keeping young people safe and here is how we will show it.**

**1.1** The safety of young people is our number one priority

**1.2** Our board, managers and staff regularly talk about the safety of young people and what it means for us and the young people we work with

**1.3** You will see evidence of our commitment in our schools, on our websites, and in our policies and procedures

**1.4** We focus on the physical, spiritual, cultural and emotional safety of young people

**1.5** We have intentional programs to educate young people about their rights

**1.6** We celebrate and respect young people, including their families, cultures, individual identities, and we make safe spaces for them

**1.1** Whenever we are making decisions in our organisation we will consider the safety of young people. We commit to being open and transparent and are clear that the safety of young people is our highest priority. The **safety of any young person that we work with will be put first.**

**1.2** Safety is regularly discussed at all levels of our organisation, including our Board, leadership and staff. We all know what safeguarding means for our roles and we know what to ask to check in on how things are going with young people. Our Board gets a report from our leadership on safeguarding issues that arise, and the Board has high expectations that concerns will be thoroughly looked into.

Our Board, leadership and staff know their legal obligations and we all take responsibility for making sure we are meeting our requirements.

We have a Safeguarding subcommittee dedicated to the safety of young people in our schools. It is made up of representatives from the organisation – these people are young person safeguarding champions; they know practice and understand risks to young people in our organisation and how to reduce them.

**1.3** On our website and in our schools and other offices you will easily find information about our commitment to safeguarding and what this means for the young people we work with. Our policies and procedures give effect to our legal obligations and to our culture of safeguarding. Policies and procedures are regularly reviewed and kept up to date with legislative changes and changes in approach. The Board reviews this Framework annually.

**1.4** We know that safeguarding is more than just keeping young people physically safe – though of course that is part of it. The young people we work with are from diverse backgrounds which means that safety can look different for different people. We want young people to feel that they can raise any concerns with us and this means providing safety in relation to their cultural, spiritual and emotional needs. This means that we will all strive to be trusted adults for our young people so that they can raise any concerns with a person they feel connected to. We will also ensure that they know that we invite and welcome feedback, complaints and concerns on any matter, and we make sure we respond, so that young people feel heard and valued. If they feel confident to raise lower-level issues, they are more likely to turn to us with more sensitive concerns.

**1.5** We communicate with young people about the behaviour they expect should from us, their rights to feel safe and their right to tell someone if they have concerns and expect something to be done about it. To do this, we use language and tools that young people can easily access, understand and relate to, and make sure these messages are raised on a regular basis.

**1.6** Our young people are amazing, and we want them to know how important they are to our community. We will celebrate them and let them know we want to hear their voices. We know that every young person is different, and we will celebrate every young person as an individual, with respect to their culture, their ability, their gender diversity, their background and their hopes for the future. Celebrating young people creates safer environments where they know they are valued and respected.



## BB2 PEOPLE

**Our people are great at working safely with young people and here is how we make sure of that.**

**2.1** People working with us know that the safety of young people is our priority

**2.2** Recruit people including staff, volunteers and contractors, ask them why they want to work with young people and check their full employment history and references

**2.3** Everyone working with and around young people will have a valid working with children check

**2.4** People who work with us sign up to a Code of Conduct so everyone knows what's in and what's out and where our professional boundaries sit

**2.5** People who work with us will get training, support and supervision to be great at their jobs and work with young people in a safe way

**2.6** Our team know the signs of grooming and abuse and will speak up and act on concerns

**2.1** From the moment a person starts to think about working with us, they will see our commitment to safety. It will be written into job ads, position descriptions and applicant information material.

**2.2** In any interview for a young person related role, we ask people why they want to work with young people and how they maintain professional boundaries, and we listen carefully to the answers. We explore employment history, including any gaps or time working overseas. We undertake detailed reference checks including asking if the referee would employ the person again, and whether they have any concerns about the person working with young people. We look for red flags.

**2.3** Every person who works in a young person related role will have a current working with children check (and any other check required for the context e.g. teacher registration, disability worker screening; criminal history checking). We understand that these checks do not guarantee the ongoing suitability of a person to work with young people and that's why we do all the other things.

**2.4** People who work with us sign a Code of Conduct for working safely with young people. This sets out behavioral expectations of our team and our people are required to restate their commitment to the Code of Conduct annually. The Code of Conduct is a living, breathing document for us. It makes clear that there are professional boundaries we must observe. Professional boundaries are important because we know that abuse can occur where there are trusting relationships between staff, young people and families.

We want to create this trust to get the best outcomes for young people, so we need to make sure that these relationships are appropriate to schooling context. When there is blurring of the lines, there can be confusion, and this can be the type of situation where grooming and ultimately abuse can occur. This is why, for example, we prohibit staff and young people connecting on personal social media accounts and we don't let our staff babysit for the families we work with outside the service context.

**2.5** People who work with us will get training, support and supervision to be great at their jobs and work with young people in a safe way. Staff will know how much they are valued, and this will support them to do a great job with the young people they work with. We will make sure people working with young people get ongoing training on safeguarding issues. They will be supported to speak up about concerns. Supervision includes working as part of a team and includes opportunities to debrief and reflect on their own work practice. We will consider whether certain roles include key performance indicators in relation to safeguarding and build these into performance agreements as appropriate.

**2.6** We will ensure our team have at least annual training on the signs of grooming and abuse. This means that they know what to look for and are aware of the possibilities. Safeguarding will be regularly discussed in team meetings, performance reviews, staff gatherings and at the leadership and board level. There will be clear reporting processes, and all staff will take personal responsibility for making sure reports are followed up.



## BB3 ENVIRONMENT

**Our environments are safe and welcoming for young people and here is how we go about that.**

**3.1** We know the safety risks in our environments and for young people, and we will eliminate them as much as possible

**3.2** We make our physical spaces safe for young people

**3.3** We make our online spaces safe for young people

**3.4** We make our spaces warm and welcoming for young people and families from all different backgrounds

**3.1** We know there are things that can make environments safer for young people. Some of these are the way our people behave and treat young people as we talk about in BB2. The relationships our team has with young people, families and each other is critical to safety – these relationships must be appropriate to our school context and always maintain professional boundaries.

You should expect to see information about safety in our spaces – both physical and online. It will be visible in our communications to young people and families.

We understand that the nature of the work we do comes with the risk that someone will exploit the trust that is placed in us. We also know that many of the young people we work with have experienced difficulties in their lives and that this can make them more susceptible to abuse and exploitation by those showing them kindness and care.

We will take steps to mitigate the risk that comes with relationships of trust, taking into account the particular vulnerabilities of the young people.

**3.2** We will conduct risk assessments on our physical spaces. We will think about our spaces to ensure that there is natural surveillance wherever possible, that spaces are well lit, that there is appropriate privacy and supervision of toilets and areas where natural surveillance is not possible. We will think about transporting young people where that is required and make sure that is done in a safe way. Where young people of mixed ages are together, we will ensure that they are supervised. We will model respectful behaviors so young people know how we expect them to treat each other.

**3.3** In our online spaces, our relationships must be appropriate to the school context. Any online communications with young people and families will be through official channels, unless it is an emergency.

Where we are required to communicate with young people directly, we will use official channels (e.g. school email accounts) and official devices as appropriate. We will not connect with young people on social media and only communicate with young people as required as part of their school activities.

We will think about where prior, or family or community relationships exist, and we expect staff to disclose those relationships.

We will not photograph young people without written permission, and we will only use organisation owned devices not the personal devices of staff. Staff know and respect the reasons behind these limitations.

**3.4** We are passionate about giving young people great experiences and we will work hard to make our spaces warm and welcoming for young people and families. We will honour and respect cultural diversity, welcome young people with disabilities and honour the individual identities of the young people we work with. We know that some young people love hugs – and we will make sure staff know how to do that in a way that is safe and appropriate for the young person. Otherwise, it's high-fives, fist pumps and handshakes to make sure there is a great connection with those young people who like that kind of thing. And for those who don't, a bright and cheery greeting is what they can expect.

The young people we work with know that if they need help or guidance that they can come to us.



## BB4 RESPONSE

### If something does go wrong, we all know what to do about it because:

**4.1** We listen to young people, families and staff if they tell us something is concerning them or something is wrong

**4.2** We have a clear process for people to come forward to talk about any concerns

**4.3** We will work with authorities to protect anyone being harmed or at risk of harm

**4.4** We want to learn from reports, concerns and incidents to keep getting better at safety

**4.5** If a young person has been harmed, we respond with compassion and support and in a way that is meaningful to the young person

**4.1** Our staff are trained to know the different ways that young people might be telling us that they have a worry about their safety. And they will act on it quickly and professionally. Our staff know they don't have to wait for "proof" that abuse is occurring, and, that they do not need to make a judgement about what they are concerned about. They will raise it with their school leaders or Safeguarding Leader and decisions will be made about the next steps with the safety of the young person as the key consideration. If a staff member is not satisfied with how a report has been handled, they will be confident to report to the authorities themselves.

**4.2** We have a reporting process so that young people, families, and staff know who to talk to if they have concerns. This is a "no wrong door" approach in that young people can raise concerns with any trusted adult in our schools. We will make it as easy as possible for young people and others to raise concerns, including supporting reporting where there may be communication barriers or cultural sensitivities which make it difficult for young people and others to speak out. We will act to preserve privacy and confidentiality, while prioritising the safety of anyone at risk of harm.

**4.3** We will act on reports to follow up, check into what is going on and report to authorities as appropriate – this could be the police, the relevant child safety authority or other agency. We will cooperate with authorities and ensure that any official investigation can take place.

Some concerns will not meet external reporting thresholds. We still want to know about and act on these as it could help to prevent abuse or may detect it early. If we see patterns of concerning behaviours, we will act.

**4.4** Wherever there is a report about a safety concern, an allegation, an incident – whatever we call it – we will report that to our Board (as required by our national safeguarding policy). If we conduct an investigation, we will ensure that it is done in a way that is trauma informed and sensitive to the needs of the young person. Any investigation will follow the rules of natural justice and be independent of the school where the allegations have been made.

We will always take time to learn what we can learn from every allegation and complaint and amend our policy, procedure, and practice to keep improving. We will examine overall trends in feedback, complaints, and reports to help us continuously improve.

**4.5** Where a young person has been harmed, we will support the young person in a way that is meaningful to them. This could include access to counselling, support to talk to family and authorities, and an apology.

**4.6** Where a young person has caused harm to another young person, we will ensure that the safety of the person harmed is a priority but aim to engage in a productively with the young person who has caused the harm.



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