



## ST JOHN'S PARISH SCHOOL MITCHAM

### **SAFE and SOUND PRACTICES (Safe Work Environment) POLICY**

#### **Rationale:**

St John's Primary School Mitcham has a duty of care for providing a safe learning and working environment for students and staff. Under the *Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004 (Vic.)* [*OHS Act*] St John's institutes measures that either eliminate risks to student and staff safety or reduce risks as far as is possible.

#### **Definition/s:**

**Occupational Violence:** any incident where an employee is physically attacked or threatened in the workplace. The violent or threatening behaviour can include:

- Physical acts
- Harassing gestures or expressions
- Vandalism of a person's property
- Oral or written statements, including those communicated via SMS, phone, emails or social media
- Stalking

**Violence In Schools:** in any situation where a member of the school community (teacher, student, other staff member, parent or visitor) is intimidated, bullied, abused, threatened or assaulted; or their property is deliberately damaged by another member of that community or the public in circumstances arising out of their activities in a school.

**Aggressive Behaviours:** behaviours that present a risk to a person's physical and/or psychological health and safety and that can escalate into serious incidents of violence.

**Parents:** a student's natural, adoptive or foster parents; guardians; and/or caregivers, who are authorised and entitled to participate in making decisions concerning the learning, safety and wellbeing of a student.

(*Ref. Safe and Sound Practice Guidelines (Occupational Violence): Guidelines for School Principals. CECV, 2014*)

#### **Aims:**

- To reinforce within the school community what occupational violence is and build an awareness of safe and sound practices at St John's Mitcham in preventing and minimising the risk of aggressive incidents.
- To guide discernment and decision making when confronted with harmful behaviours, drawing on Catholic social teaching in this process.
- To build and maintain a positive and inclusive culture and a safe learning and work environment for students and staff.
- To develop a shared understanding of the rights and responsibilities of members of our community as powerful drivers of violence prevention in schools.
- To understand the process of complaints procedures and to reduce the risk of student and parent challenging behaviours escalating into aggression and/or violence.

## **Implementation:**

- Family, teachers, students and the community will be aware of the school's position on occupational violence.
- The school community will follow expectations and responsibilities as agreed upon in the Parent-School Relationships Code of Conduct.
- The school will aim to reduce complaints escalating into aggression and/or violence by adhering to the St John's Mitcham Complaints Policy.

### **A. Relational and Engaging Learning Environments**

Relational and engaging learning environments are a powerful antidote to disruptive, challenging and aggressive student behaviours. At St John's we aim to continuously 'raise the bar' in improving the learning experiences that advance a student's wellbeing and learning engagement.

### **B. Strong Parent and Community Partnerships**

Strong partnerships with parents are essential for developing and maintaining safe and supportive learning environments for students and staff. In instances where a student exhibits challenging behaviours and/or repeated breaches of behaviour expectations, schools rely on parent input and support to understand, manage and change the behaviour. Parent support is more likely to be offered and effective when the parent-school partnerships are inclusive, relational and respectful.

### **C. Respectful Relationships**

A whole-school approach and commitment to respectful relationships are essential elements of violence prevention measures in schools. A whole-school approach that is supported and promoted through policies and codes of conduct fosters shared understandings and commitments among teachers, other staff, students and parents.

- Expectations of Staff - Staff are provided with information and development opportunities to improve understanding of their professional responsibilities in modelling and promoting respectful interactions, even if this behaviour is not reciprocated.
- Expectations of Students - Staff, parents and students will be aware of expected student behaviours and how these behaviours will be managed in the event of breaches as per our wellbeing (behaviour management) policy. Clear expectations and communication of these is central to the building and sustainability of respectful relationships.
- Expectations of Parents - Parents will agree to their code of conduct as per our Parent-School Relationships Code of Conduct (this document will also outline the schools response to aggressive behaviour or violence. The intention of this agreement is to promote and advance respectful, cooperative and supportive relationships.
- Social Media Policy - Social media is defined as any form of online or web-based publication, forum or presence that allows interactive communication including, but not limited to, Facebook, LinkedIn, Instagram, blogs, forums, discussion boards, chat rooms, Twitter or YouTube. The St John's Social Media Policy outlines the school's expectations with regard to respecting the dignity of each person when using social media.

### **D. Complaints Policy and Procedures**

The policy and procedures are founded on the following principles and commitments:

- All members of the school community have a right to make a complaint or raise a concern.
- Every complainant deserves to be treated with respect and have his/her complaint properly considered.
- All parties have rights, responsibilities and expectations that ought to be taken into account in the complaint resolution process.

- Communications and negotiations that are courteous, culturally sensitive, respectful and fair help to build trust and confidence and a shared commitment to satisfactory resolutions.
- Early and timely responses to complaints, in contexts where people feel they have been heard, are an antidote to escalation.
- Widespread promulgation and promotion of the policy and procedures, and periodic reviews of their efficacy, will contribute to shared commitments and compliance.

#### **E. Assessing, reducing and monitoring risks**

The school has a duty under the OHS Act to institute measures to either eliminate the risk to employees or reduce the risk as far as is practicable. This requires the following steps to be followed to manage the risks associated with occupational violence:

1. Identify hazards.
2. Identify the people at risk.
3. Assess risks.
4. Control risks.

Among the criteria for review, risk assessments seek to ascertain:

- how likely an incident will be in terms of frequency and duration of exposure
- how serious any possible injury will be if an incident occurs
- who might be affected by the incident.

The school is responsible for ensuring effective control measures for minimising the risk of occupational violence, with the control measures incorporating:

- the establishment and maintenance of a culture of safety
- the maintenance of routine work practices that enhance safety
- the effective management of conflict
- the building and maintenance of skilled and confident staff
- the implementation of a framework when managing difficult and challenging situations.

#### **Intervention Practices and Incident Reponse**

When distressing or aggressive behaviours or a pattern of behaviours are exhibited by students, staff are encouraged to share their observations with the Principal/Deputy Principal or Student Wellbeing Leader (if Principal is not available) to ensure effective structures and procedures are developed to minimise risk of escalating behaviours. When such behaviours are exhibited by parents, there ought to be an expectation that a staff member's concerns are reported to the appropriate senior member of staff for follow-up as deemed appropriate.

The nature and severity of a challenging situation will necessarily determine responses that can and should be made by a member of the Leadership team (or staff member as proxy). In severe, dangerous and/or high-risk incidents where physical violence is either threatened or unfolding, or where damage to property is ensuing, elements of the school's emergency management or critical incident plan may need to be enacted.

**Physical Restraint of a Student** - The use of physical restraint of a student to prevent or curtail a violent incident is not acceptable practice unless in exceptional circumstances. In this matter, the CECV endorses the policy of the Victorian Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD), entitled *Restraint of Student*. Drawing on regulation 15 of the *Education and Training Reform Regulations 2007* (Vic), the policy states that school staff may only use physical restraint when **all** of the following conditions are met:

- the situation is an emergency and the danger of harm to the student and/or others is imminent;
- the restraint is used to prevent the student from inflicting harm on him/herself and/or others;
- there is no reasonable alternative that can be taken to avoid the danger.

## **Post Incident Responsibilities**

The school will advise a staff member harmed by a violent incident of their entitlements and legal rights regarding the incident as identified under Workcover and may offer the staff member counselling support, reduced or changed duties for a negotiated period of time and compensation for damage to their personal property at the discretion of the school. In many instances, a violent incident will also have an adverse emotional impact on those who witnessed the incident (e.g. students, co-workers, other parents or visitors to the school). The school may seek external assistance in facilitating debriefing sessions and arranging counselling services for those affected if deemed necessary.

## **Reporting an Incident**

Following CECV *Safe and Sound Practices Guidelines* (2014) the Principal, or designated Leadership staff member, will report the incident on the school's accident/incident register and has been forwarded to the appropriate diocesan CEO personnel.

## **Relevant Policies and Documents**

- St John's Mitcham Student Wellbeing Policy
- St John's Mitcham Behaviour Management Policy
- St John's Mitcham Parent-School Code of Conduct
- St John's Mitcham Social Media Policy
- CECV *Safe and Sound Practices (Occupational Violence) for School Principals* (2014)
- Victorian Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD) *Restraint of Student*. Drawing on regulation 15 of the *Education and Training Reform Regulations* 2007 (Vic)
- *Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004 (Vic.)* Sometimes referred to as the 'OHS Act'

## **Evaluation:**

<b>Date Developed/Reviewed</b>	<b>Ratified (date/who)</b>	<b>Date of Future Review</b>
<b>2015</b>	<b>2019 Ed' Board</b>	<b>2023</b>