



Oakleigh Grammar

Policy Document Name	Staff Conduct and Professional Boundaries
Date Ratified by Board of Management	May 2023
Date for Review	May 2026

1. Preamble

Our School is committed to child safety, preventing child abuse and identifying risks early, and removing and reducing these risks. The School is committed to promoting a culture of child safety.

All students have a right to feel safe and to be safe. We want our students to be safe, happy and empowered. We support and respect all children, as well as our teachers, non-teaching staff and volunteers. We are committed to the safety, participation and empowerment of all children.

Oakleigh Grammar as a zero tolerance of child abuse, and all allegations and safety concerns will be treated very seriously and consistently with our rigorous policies and procedures. The School must comply with the minimum standard for the care, safety and welfare of students as detailed in the child safe standards specified by *Ministerial Order No. 870*. Underpinning the information and procedures discussed in this policy is the *Children, Youth and families Act 2005*.

All teachers, staff, volunteers and Board of Management of Oakleigh Grammar are required to observe child safe principles and expectations for appropriate behaviour towards and in the company of children, as noted below.

Our Senior Leadership Team, consisting of Heads of School and Deputy Principals, take the lead in protecting children from abuse and have procedures in place to address child abuse allegations and risks and take responsibility for ensuring an appropriate response. The Deputy Principal – Operations is the designated Child Safe Officer.

2. Objectives

To set out the standards of behaviour that Oakleigh Grammar expects of all employees, volunteers and contractors.

To enforce our School's commitment to child safety.

To ensure employees of the School, volunteers, contractors and external providers, understand that they have a legal and moral responsibility to respond to situations involving:

- child abuse
- allegations of child abuse

- concern of potential child abuse
- managing the risk of child abuse
- providing support to a child at risk of child abuse and to actively maintain a safe school environment* both during school hours and outside the school day.

3. Scope

This policy applies to all teaching staff, non-teaching staff, Board Members, volunteers, third party contractors and external educational providers.

This document will be read in conjunction with Oakleigh Grammar's:

- Child Safe Policy
- Mandatory Reporting Policy
- ICT Acceptable Use and Social Media Policy
- Code of Conduct School Community Policy.

Oakleigh Grammar staff hold a unique position of influence, authority, trust and power in relation to students at the School. As such, it is their duty, at all times, to maintain professional boundaries with students.

This policy and associated guidelines are designed to outline situations where the blurring of professional boundaries may occur between members of the school community and some strategies to minimise the risk of boundary violations.

This policy will not cover every situation. It is expected that staff will use their professional acumen and own good judgment. If in doubt, staff are encouraged to seek advice from their Head of School or one of the Deputy Principals.

The policy should be reviewed by each staff member annually.

3. Professional Conduct

The quality of a staff members' professional conduct is characterised by the quality of the relationships they have with their students, parents, families, community members and colleagues.

All teaching staff at Oakleigh Grammar will abide by the Victorian Institute of Teaching's Code of Teaching and Code of Ethics.

In addition, it is recognised that other professionals working in our School are bound by their respective professional codes of conduct e.g. Australian Psychological Society Code of Ethics that set standards of behaviour.

3a Personal and Professional Conduct

It is recognised that the personal conduct of a teacher and staff member will have an impact on the professional standing of that teacher and/or on the profession as a whole. Although there is no definitive boundary between the personal and the professional conduct of a teacher and staff member, it is expected that all staff will:

- Be positive role models at the School and in the community
- Respect the rule of law and provide a positive example in the performance of civil obligations
- Uphold the highest standards of honesty and integrity in the conduct of duties
- Treat other staff members and other members of the School community fairly and with respect
- Make decisions ethically, fairly, and without bias using the best factual information available
- Not exploit their position for personal or financial gain
- Ensure that their personal or financial interests do not interfere with the performance of their duties
- Act with discretion and maintain confidentiality when discussing workplace issues
- Support the Orthodox values of the School
- Carry out all legal requirements that pertain to their profession
- Comply with all Oakleigh Grammar policies and procedures relevant to their position

3b Security of information and confidentiality

All employees have an obligation to act in the best interests of the School and to refrain from damaging those interests by disclosing or improperly using confidential information acquired during the course of their employment.

Confidential information includes all information relating to the School, its employees and operations which is not available to the public and includes but is not limited to marketing and technical information, processes and procedures, business strategies, employee information or any other information used in the business of the School to give it a competitive advantage.

- Employees should only use or disclose confidential information in the course of their employment and in circumstances where the disclosure is strictly necessary to perform their duties.
- Employees shall not otherwise disclose any confidential information to any person other than employees of the School, without the prior written consent of the Principal.
- Employees should not make any copies of any item of confidential information otherwise than strictly for the purposes of performing their duties with the School.
- Employees shall use their best endeavours to prevent the unauthorised use or disclosure of confidential information by their parties.
- Employees shall immediately advise the Principal if they become aware of the disclosure or improper use of any confidential information.
- Employees must return all confidential information upon cessation of employment.

It is every employee's obligation to ensure they comply with the sections of Intellectual Property and Confidentiality that are contained within each staff member's employment contract and or letter of employment.

3c. Staff maintain a professional relationship with parents, guardians and caregivers.

All staff should be respectful of and courteous to parents, guardians, and community members.

Staff should:

- Consider parents' perspectives when making decisions which have an impact on the education or wellbeing of a student
- Take appropriate action when responding to parental concerns
- Respond appropriately to parents within 48 hours, having acknowledged the initial contact as soon as possible

3d Collegiality is an integral part of the work of teachers

All staff demonstrate collegiality by:

- Treating each other with courtesy and respect
- Valuing the input of their colleagues
- Using appropriate forums for constructive debate on professional matters
- Sharing expertise and knowledge in a variety of collaborative contexts
- Respecting different approaches to teaching
- Providing support for each other, particularly those new to the profession
- Sharing information relating to wellbeing of students

3e. A focus on teaching, learning and wellbeing

The main focus of teaching is effective student learning and wellbeing and as such, teachers are expected to support their students with their professional expertise so as to offer them the best education in their individual circumstances. The quality of teaching and learning and pastoral care between teachers and students characterises their relationship.

Teachers demonstrate their commitment to each students' learning and wellbeing by:

- Knowing their students well, recognising and developing each student's abilities, skills and talents by catering to their individual abilities and respecting their individual differences
- Maintaining a safe and challenging learning environment that promotes mutual respect
- Accepting professional responsibility for the provision of quality teaching
- Having high expectations of every student, recognising and developing each student's abilities, skills and talents.
- Considering all viewpoints fairly and without bias, and not engaging in preferential treatment
- Communicating respectfully and appropriately with their students
- Protecting students from intimidation, embarrassment, humiliation, or harm
- Not discriminating against any student on the basis of race, sex, sexuality, appearance, disability or religious or political conviction
- Enhancing student autonomy and sense of self-worth; encouraging students to develop and reflect on their own values

- Respecting a student's privacy in sensitive matters, such as health or family problems, and only reveal confidential matters when or where appropriate, and according to law.
- Managing student behaviour in a respectful and supportive manner
- Always making decisions in students' best interests.

4. Professional Boundaries with Students

Professional boundaries are parameters that describe the limits of a relationship in circumstances where a student entrusts their welfare and safety to a staff member, in circumstances where a power imbalance exists.

The fact that School staff are in a unique position of trust, care, authority, and influence with students means that there is always an inherent power imbalance that exists between them. It also means that professional boundaries must be established, maintained, and respected at all times.

When unsure about whether professional boundaries are being, or have been, breached, ask yourself:

- Would I modify my behaviour if a colleague was present?
- How would I feel about explaining my actions at a staff meeting?
- Am I sharing information for the student's benefit, or for my benefit?
- Am I dealing with this student differently from others in similar circumstances?
- Is my language or demeanour different from normal when dealing with this particular student?
- Will I put a child at risk of abuse (eg. by locking doors or meeting in isolated rooms)?
- Should I assist a child that they can do for themselves eg. such as toileting or changing clothes?

4a. Intimate Relationships

Staff must not initiate or develop a relationship with any student that is or can be interpreted as having a romantic or sexual, rather than professional basis.

The professional relationship of staff and students will be breached by:

- Flirtatious behaviour or dating
- Development of an intimate personal relationship either in person or online
- Sexual relations
- The use of sexual innuendo, inappropriate language and/or material with students
- Unwarranted and inappropriate touching
- Unwarranted and inappropriate filming or photography
- Deliberate exposure to sexual behaviour of others (e.g. pornography)
- Having contact without a valid and approved context via written or electronic means (e.g. email, letters, telephone, text messages, social media sites or chat rooms)
- Going out, whether alone or in company, to social events such as the movies or dinner

- Exchanging gifts of a personal nature that encourages the formation of an intimate relationship.

Staff should also be aware that developing or encouraging romantic or sexual relationships with recent former students (over 18 years of age) may violate professional boundaries and are strongly discouraged from doing so.

The imbalance of power and authority that exists in the staff/student relationship does not suddenly disappear after the student finishes their schooling. Staff should not assume that they will be protected from disciplinary action by claiming that a relationship began only after the student left the School as there may be a reasonable belief that the emotional intimacy of the relationship developed while the staff/student relationship existed.

4b. Personal Relationships

Staff must not initiate or develop a relationship with any student that is or can be perceived or misinterpreted as having a personal rather than professional element. It is the student's perception of staff behaviour and not the intention of the staff member that is important.

An established and expected professional relationship between staff and students may be compromised by staff:

- Attending parties or socialising with students outside of organised School events (without parental/carer permission)
- Sharing personal details about their private lives with students
- Meeting with students outside of school hours in a non-professional, non-school related capacity
- Staff must recognise at all times that their role is not to be a 'friend' or 'parent' to a student
- Contact with students via social media using personal profiles.

4c. Electronic Communications between Staff & Students

Staff are to ensure they read carefully and follow the detailed guidelines as outlined in the *Oakleigh Grammar ICT Acceptable Use and Social Media Policy*.

4e. Physical Contact with Students

All staff should be aware that situations may arise that can be perceived in a manner that was not intended. For this reason, all staff at the School should adhere to the following guidelines for contact with students both in and outside of School grounds:

- Staff should avoid unnecessary physical contact with students
- Minimal, non-lingering, non-gratuitous physical contact in the context of the situation is acceptable (e.g. congratulatory pat on the back or handshake)
- Contact for sport, drama and dance instruction is acceptable in a class situation but not in a 1:1 situation. If physical contact is required for specific technical instructions, it must be brief and only with the consent of the student. Note that a student may

withdraw consent for this contact either verbally or by gesture and staff must remain vigilant whilst engaging in necessary contact situations. Once consent has been withdrawn **no** further contact can be or should be made.

4f. Off-Campus Excursions and Camps

During off-campus excursions or camps, the same physical contact guidelines apply as well as the following:

- Checking of sleeping arrangements, or supervising students changing should be done, where possible, with another staff member present and always in a manner that respects student privacy and personal space
- Always knock and advise of presence prior to entering a bedroom or dormitory
- Ensure that while in a bedroom or dormitory a strict staff/student relationship is upheld and that inappropriate behaviour, such as sitting on a student's bed, is not undertaken
- If a student needs comforting or assistance in some way, move the student to a public space and where possible have another member of staff to assist as well

4g. Managing Conflicts of Interest

Where personal relationships with students such as family relationships and close friendship networks exist, questions of conflicts of interest may arise. In this context, staff participation in 'out of school' activities (e.g. non-school social activities) may not be appropriate. It is expected that staff will think very carefully about taking part in such events and the implications and potential consequences of engaging in certain behaviours with students and parents. If in doubt, staff are encouraged to seek advice from the Deputy Principal – Professional Culture and Junior School.

Where a staff member knows or feels that a conflict of interest may exist, they should notify the relevant Deputy Principal and arrangements should be implemented to avoid the conflict situation if possible. For example, private tutoring of students by a staff member is not permitted.

Any significant decisions relating to these students in the School (such as the appointment of classes or selection in sports teams) should be referred to another staff member and endorsed by a supervisor.

4h. Disclosure of Staff/Student Interactions

All staff are encouraged to declare any friendships or expected interactions with students outside school hours. These interactions may include instances where the staff member is:

- Related to the student
- Friends with the student's parents or family
- Given parental consent to interact with the student for academic purposes outside of school hours and has notified the School. This is not permitted if paid, or without prior consent of the Deputy Principal – Teaching and Learning

5. Occupational Health and Safety

All staff have a responsibility to:

- Comply with Victorian OHS Legislation and the School's policies and procedures
- Perform duties in a safe manner without risk to his/her own health and safety, or the health and safety of others, including, but not limited to students, other staff, contractors, volunteers and visitors
- Report any hazard, incident, injury, or illness as soon as practical to the Business Manager or Deputy Principal – Student Wellbeing and Operations
- Make OHS a priority, by completing, or contributing to, required risk management plans whilst undertaking tasks in the School operations.

6. Responsibilities

All staff, volunteers and contractors are to:

- Be aware of and comply with the Policy
- Report any behaviour that may be contrary to the Policy and required standards of behaviour
- Report conflicts of interest to your Line Manager and/or a Deputy Principal
- Remove themselves from decision making where a conflict has been identified.

Deputy Principals and Line Managers:

- Be aware of and comply with the Policy.
- Ensure all employees, contractors and volunteers are aware of the conduct and behaviours expected of them as described in the Staff Conduct and Professional Boundaries policy.
- Take appropriate steps to resolve conflict that arises in the workplace to ensure a healthy and harmonious work environment.
- Take an appropriate action to address breaches of the Policy by employees, volunteers and contractors.

6. Consequences of non-compliance with this policy

The obligations outlined in this Policy prescribe and regulate the standards of conduct required of all staff members and all other members of the School community.

Where a staff member suspects a breach of the Policy may have occurred, or are aware of possible breach of the Policy, they need to report it to their Line Manager or HR Officer.

If a staff member has breached this Policy, they may be subject to disciplinary action, up to and including termination of employment.

7. Related Policies

- Complaints Management Policy
- Harassment, Discrimination and Grievance Policy
- ICT Acceptable Use and Social Media Policy
- Unsatisfactory Work Performance and Misconduct Management
- Staff Dress Code
- Child Safety and Wellbeing Policy
- Child Safety Reporting Obligations Policy and Procedures (incl. Mandatory Reporting)