staff and student professional boundaries

Ballarat Clarendon College (**Clarendon**) is committed to the safety and wellbeing of the children in its care and upholding its legal, ethical and moral responsibilities with respect to their protection. This includes a commitment to a culture of child safety that permeates all aspects of the school's operations.

This policy applies to all teaching employees, non-teaching employees, volunteers, independent contractors, Third Party Contractors, External Education Providers and Board Members (together, known as 'staff' for the purposes of this Policy only).

Clarendon staff hold a unique position of power, trust, authority and influence in relation to students at Clarendon. As such, it is a non-negotiable requirement to always maintain clear professional boundaries.

Interactions with students extend beyond the school setting, including outside of school hours, outside of school grounds and by any medium of technology (including social media).

This policy applies regardless of:

- the location of where an interaction occurs, whether during or outside school grounds or during or outside school hours;
- a student's age;
- a student's consent;
- the consent of parents/guardians and families; or
- who initiates the interaction.

This policy is designed to provide clarity around required boundaries to be adhered to by staff in their interactions with students and should be read in conjunction with the school's Child Safety Framework Policy and Child Safety Code of Conduct.

ballarat clarendon college's policy

It is Clarendon's policy that:

- staff exercise their responsibilities in a way that recognises professional boundaries with regard to their relationships with students at all times;
- staff interaction with students is compliant with all policies that pertain to child safety at all times, including inside and outside of school hours and/or the school setting;
- conflict of interest issues must be reported to the Principal as soon as practicable – via the Conflict of Interest Declaration Form;
- equal learning opportunities are given to each student without discrimination;
- staff must report concerns that they become aware of relating to the behavioural breaches of any staff working within the school as soon as practicable; and
- staff identify, discourage, reject and immediately report any contact or communication of an inappropriate nature initiated by a student.

what are professional boundaries?

Clarendon staff are in a unique position of power, trust, authority and influence with students. This 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.

The examples below are not exhaustive. Where a staff member is uncertain whether a particular interaction may compromise professional boundaries, they must prioritise student safety, avoid the interaction where possible, seek guidance and disclose the matter immediately. The following should be true at all times.

- I would not modify my behavior if a co-worker was present.
- I could confidently explain my actions to other staff.
- My actions are driven by the best interest of the student.
- My language and approach are consistent with all students.

intimate relationships

Any relationship with a student that is, or could be, interpreted as being overly personal, romantic or sexual is unacceptable regardless of any other factor. Such relationships are abuse, breachlegal, moral and ethical responsibilities and must be pursued by the school through the relevant child safety reporting processes, including the Social Servies Regulator, the Victorian Institute of Teaching and Victoria Police.

Professional boundaries between staff and a student are compromised by:

- development of an intimate personal relationship/sexual relations;
- flirtatious or overly familiar behaviour;
- the use of sexual innuendo, inappropriate language and/or material with students;
- unwarranted /unnecessary touching, including hugging;
- unwarranted and inappropriate filming or photography;
- deliberate exposure to sexual behaviour of others (for example, pornography) or other sexualised content;
- contact without a valid context via written or electronic means (for example, email, letters, telephone, text messages, social media sites or chatrooms);
- sharing overtly personal details about a staff member's private life with students;
- any social contact outside of school-organised events;
- being in a situation where a staff member is alone with a student without a valid reason (refer to one-on-one situations information later in this policy);
- engaging in a personal or social rather than a professional capacity; or
- treating a student with favouritism, or perceived favouritism, such as individual or personalised feedback, preference in selection, leadership opportunities, etc.

The above relates to perception as much as any specific action undertaken. Staff should also be aware that developing or encouraging romantic, sexual or intimately personal relationships with recent former students (over 18 years of age) is a violation of the school's policy, VIT regulation and may be a grooming offence under Victorian law, where a relationship has developed with the former student while they attended Clarendon. The imbalance of power and authority that exists in the staff/student relationship continues beyond an individual's time as a student.

electronic communications between staff and students

It is expected that all staff at Clarendon will adhere to the following guidelines:

- all use of technology should be for educational purposes or for the organisation of co-curricular activities and must at all times be professional and use language expected of a teacher;
- all email communication between staff and students should be via the Clarendon email system and reflect a professional staff/student relationship;
- text messages to students are only acceptable when transmitted via a school phone for express school purposes (such off campus excursions);
- staff must not give out their personal telephone numbers or social media contact details;
- staff are not to accept or request students as 'friends' on social media or otherwise use social media to communicate in any way that is not condoned or approved by Clarendon;
- staff must not exchange personal pictures with a student; and
- any student personal contact numbers or other personal contact details made available to the school should only be used for Clarendon communications.

For the purpose of this policy, 'technology' includes, without limiting its ordinary meaning, information and communication technologies (ICT), communication devices, storage devices or applications, encompassing radio, television, mobile phones, computer (laptops, tablets), data storage, printers, faxes and network hardware and software, satellite systems and all other digital communications, as well as the various services and applications associated with them, such as web-based and mobile technologies (for example, text and video messages, email, social media, file sharing, online data storage and videoconferencing).

physical contact with students

Staff should not have physical contact with students unless it is professionally necessary in the performance of their role, explained to the students and justifiable to a third party or higher authority.

Clarendon must adhere to the following guidelines for physical contact with students both in and outside of school grounds.

No physical contact should occur with students unless strictly necessary and developmentally appropriate, such as provision of medical care, specific finger placement in music, some specific skills in Physical Education instruction. There may be times where some contact is required by staff in early learning, where some physical redirection of students may be required or where some level of reassurance that includes physical contact may be expected and needed by the child. This should only occur in full view of other staff and students. In these circumstances such contact should only occur because it is required to ensure the physical or emotional wellbeing of the child and not because it is normalised practice for staff in this setting.

The needs of students at both an instructional and personal level will change across their life cycle, younger students (ELC, early primary) may need more specific assistance with some tasks that may require physical contact, but this should be dictated by absolute necessity and be the minimal intervention that is required to ensure the safety and wellbeing of the child.

one-on-one situation

Staff should avoid situations in which they are alone with a student where this is not absolutely necessary. Staff should adhere to the following guidelines in all individual interactions with students:

- arrange contact in public spaces or shared offices;
- keep doors open and remain in the line of sight of passers-by;
- include another adult in sensitive conversations;
- ensure formal interactions occur within normal school operational hours where there are other staff and students around;
- avoid physical contact, keep appropriate distance and adhere to professional language at all times; and
- report any concern arising from interactions immediately.

camps, boarding houses and yuulong program

Specific guidelines exist in each of these areas to ensure that processes and procedures are respectful of the student's privacy and provide clarity to staff in upholding their professional and child safety responsibilities.

See Boarding Staff Handbook
Yuulong Staff Handbook
Camp Staff Handbook

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 both in practice and perception. Where a staff member feels that a conflict of interest may exist, they should notify the Principal or the Chair of the Board if the conflict involves the Principal and arrangements should be implemented to avoid the conflict situation if possible. People and Culture are available to consult to discuss any potential conflict of interest. For example, the teaching of students by a staff member with a conflict should be avoided.

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

disclosure of staff/student interaction

All staff should disclose any interaction which has the potential to conflict with this policy in the interest of both student safety and transparency. This includes proactively declaring when situations might reasonably be foreseen to arise that may lead to a breach of this policy such as contact at sporting clubs, external productions, individual music lessons outside of Clarendon's IMT program or other community events where students may have contact with staff. Information can be provided to the Child Safety Officers, line manager or Principal or via the Conflict of Interest Declaration Form.

staff responsibilities

All staff are to:

- comply with this policy;
- immediately report any conflicts of interest and remove themselves from the decision-making process where this is the case or could be perceived to be; and
- immediately report any concern that relates to any member of the school community that may be in breach of this policy.

Where a staff member breaches this policy, Clarendon may take disciplinary action up to and including summary termination of employment or termination of contract.

Related Documents

Child Safety Framework Policy
Child Safety Code of Conduct
Child Safety Reporting Policy
Clarendon Code of Conduct Procedure
Staff Electronic Communication and Database Policy

Ballarat Clarendon College

Owner: Principal	Approved: Principal	Staff and Student Professional Boundaries
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