Catholic Schools
**Child Safe** Schools

RESOURCE GUIDE:

# Children from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) Backgrounds

**Addressing the Principle of Inclusion:**
**Child Safety in Catholic Schools in Victoria**

ce+cv

The Catholic Education Commission of Victoria Ltd (CECV) is committed to the ongoing safety of children and young people and to supporting Catholic schools in providing a safe and nurturing school environment for all.

As part of the Victorian Government's drive to build safer futures for children, all Victorian schools are required to meet the Child Safe Standards (the Standards), introduced into Victorian law in late 2015. Ministerial Order No. 870 specifies the actions schools must take to systematically create and promote a culture of child safety and wellbeing with a 'zero tolerance' to abuse.

This Guide draws upon research, best practice and Catholic sector advice to provide child safety considerations for children from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds in Catholic schools in Victoria. It should be read in conjunction with the *Introduction to the Principle of Inclusion: Overview of Resource Guides*.

**Terminology:** The term 'children' is applied to mean all children and youth enrolled in Catholic primary and secondary schools in Victoria.

## Meeting the Standards

The Standards represent a holistic organisational approach to creating cultural change in organisations so that preventing harm and protecting children from abuse is embedded in the everyday thinking and practice of the community.

Catholic schools are culturally and linguistically diverse communities, with recent data showing that students come from 166 countries and speak 137 different languages (CECV August 2017 census). Catholic educators play a significant role in supporting the safety, wellbeing and learning of children from CALD backgrounds, actively contributing to a school culture that respects the dignity of its members and affirms the gospel values of love, care for others, compassion and justice.

As noted in the *Final Report*, 'children from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds can experience specific impacts from racism and cultural isolation in schools' (Royal Commission 2017, vol. 13, p. 15). *Cultural* safety is therefore an integral aspect of child safe organisations reflected through policy and practice. Schools need to consider approaches that raise awareness of diversity and develop understandings that lead to cultural sensitivity and cultural competence across the implementation of all the Standards.

In practice this means that child safe schools must be alert to children's diverse circumstances and be responsive to the unique needs of the families and communities they serve. In this way children from CALD backgrounds are embraced in their endeavours to become fully flourishing students who are welcomed, valued, acknowledged and supported to become actively engaged in their education journey.

# Principle of Inclusion

Valuing children and their rights is an essential feature of all child safe institutions. Australia has ratified international human rights treaties including the United Nations' *Convention on the Rights of the Child*, 1989 (the Convention).

Catholic schools uphold the sacred dignity of children and their rights through their public commitments, their inclusive and respectful practices and by creating culturally safe environments. All children are entitled to enjoy their rights free from any kind of discrimination, including discrimination based on their cultural origin or identity (Article 2 of the Convention).

Rights included under the Convention are:

- the best interests of the child (Article 3)

- the rights and responsibilities of families to guide their children (Article 5)

- the right for children to have their opinions taken into account in decisions that affect them (Article 12)

- the right to learn and use the language and customs of their families (Article 30)

- the right to protection from sexual abuse (Article 34).

# Creating Culturally Safe Environments

Creating child-safe school environments is a dynamic process that involves active participation and responsibility by schools, families and their communities. It is marked by collaboration, vigilance and proactive approaches across policies, procedures, curriculum and practices (CECV 2016).

## School leadership

Meeting the complex educational needs of students from CALD backgrounds requires organisational leaders to embrace these students and families in their school communities, in an approach that is both coordinated and supports a community-strengthening environment.

This takes ongoing commitment and effort. It requires a leadership team that is culturally sensitive and competent and is able to lead staff who consider the religious, social, cultural, linguistic, historical, political, economic and ethical influences on the children and families in their school communities.

## Cultural competence

It is critical that all teachers and staff in our Catholic school communities display characteristics of cultural sensitivity and competency, through understanding the cultural and linguistic background as well as the life experiences of their students. Ultimately, this involves connections, relationships and respect for our own and each other's identity.

Culturally competent Catholic school communities are able to differentiate the curriculum effectively to meet the needs of their CALD communities, in order to produce high-quality learning and wellbeing outcomes for students from CALD backgrounds.

Catholic schools must embrace and enact an inclusive pedagogy and a commitment to uphold the rights of CALD families in their communities in order to:

- support settlement and integration

- ensure their safety and wellbeing

- develop students' English language proficiency and academic learning.

This will require staff to participate in ongoing professional learning, designed to build cultural competence and meet the educational needs of their students.

Cultural competence is not static: it is a process that continually evolves. These behaviours, attitudes and policies come together in a system or agency to enable professionals to work effectively in cross-cultural situations (Cross et al. 1989, cited in NCCC 2006).

Practical ways to raise awareness and strengthen cultural competence among staff will include:

- reflection on own values and cultural identity

- development of positive attitudes towards cultural differences

- knowledge of different cultural practices and world views and an understanding of how these shape and impact on people's responses

- development of skills for communication and interaction across cultures including working with interpreters and bicultural workers

- understanding of parenting and managing self in culturally diverse situations

- engaging with local communities and agencies to promote ongoing organisational practice and improvement.

## Listening to children's voices

> **Catholic schools have a moral, legal and mission-driven responsibility to create nurturing school environments where children and young people are respected, their voices are heard and where they are safe and feel safe** (CECV 2016).

Research suggests that enabling children and young people to identify and raise their safety concerns is a vital feature of child safe organisations. By understanding how children think about feeling and being safe, adults can open up opportunities to better respond to safety concerns and create and implement strategies that are more effective (Moore et al. 2016).

Children from CALD backgrounds are among the most vulnerable students in our school communities. It is imperative they feel safe and are protected and empowered to raise concerns they may have regarding their own or others' wellbeing and safety. One way that schools can support children's safety is to provide them with opportunities to identify the risks they encounter and what worries them. In partnership with adults and with their peers, they should be given opportunities to develop solutions to improve the situation.

As part of a school's procedures for settlement, schools should ensure each CALD student:

- has a team of people to support them in their new environment, including but not limited to peer and teacher mentors. This provides them with a platform to express their needs and concerns in a safe manner;

- will explicitly be taught the process of expressing and/or raising concerns (child-focused complaints processes);

- can access posters and visuals with key messages about how to raise concerns;

- is involved in classroom talk about the factors and circumstances that help them feel safe in schools;

- has an opportunity to contribute their ideas and solutions to improve safety;

- is part of an environment where they feel their views are valued.

Schools should also consider sensitively gathering information from CALD parents/carers to compile a profile of each student in order to better cater for student wellbeing and learning needs.

## Engaging Families and Communities

> **When people feel acknowledged that their community genuinely understands their values, hopes and dreams, their sense of belonging is strengthened and they are more open to collaboration, sharing information and participating in decision-making** (Catholic Education Melbourne 2017, p. 5).

Effective engagement of families and communities involves creating collaborative partnerships with families that treat them with dignity and respect, honour their values and choices, and provide support and education to inform choices which strengthen and enhance their functioning as a family (Dunst et al. 2014).

CALD families who feel welcome are better able to engage meaningfully with the school. Parental engagement for child safety and wellbeing requires schools to take deliberate steps to identify multiple ways to build trust and work with all parents in their community. Developing positive relationships with CALD families requires effective communication and flexibility. Being sensitive to the way families wish to engage with school life is vital for open communication.

For example, '[s]ome cultures (and some families) emphasise relying on family rather than outsiders to resolve difficulties. This can make parents and carers reluctant to discuss their concerns about children with school staff' (KidsMatter 2012, p. 4).

CALD parents will have expectations of their school communities and, where encouraged and welcomed, a relationship will develop where both partners are able to engage in open conversation which honours the uniqueness of each child and their specific needs.

From this base of trust, schools can:

- actively seek out and talk to families about their expectations of the school;

- invite families into conversations about child safety and the prevention of abuse to gain an insight into their perspectives, concerns and hopes;

- equip parents with tools, strategies and resources to confidently have age and developmentally appropriate conversations with their children about personal safety;

- support them to respond more effectively when concerns arise or issues are identified or disclosed.

To support effective communication, it is essential that staff and student announcements are translated into appropriate languages for communication to families and friends, for those literate in their first language. The use of accredited interpreter services are also important where direct information is required to be communicated, while acknowledging the CALD families' right to request or decline such services.

## Addressing Potential Child Safety Risks

Being aware of and pre-empting potential risk is a key factor in minimising harm and improving child safety.

As Catholic schools work to further improve practice and embed the Standards, they must consider how well they are promoting the cultural safety of children and what they can do to better make their organisation a safe and welcoming place for all families.

Discrimination, both direct and indirect, can have a negative impact on the mental health and wellbeing of students from CALD backgrounds. Schools must therefore ensure their environments demonstrate zero tolerance for discrimination.

Proactive steps schools might consider to minimise risk in their school communities include:

- Translate child safety policies and codes into key languages of the community.

- Check in with CALD families to ensure that the school's commitment to child safety and its procedures and strategies are understood.

- Empower families and children to raise complaints and ensure any concerns are taken seriously.

- Work with key agencies to increase staff training on cultural safety and minimise language and cultural barriers.

- Create opportunities for ongoing learning to increase the understanding of diverse cultural groups and their practices and expectations for child safety and wellbeing.

- Recognise and address direct and indirect race-based discrimination among students, families and staff including volunteers and contractors.

- Utilise programs that deal with racism and discrimination such as 'Racism. No way'.

Schools should also ensure the complaint and behaviour management processes are easily understood and provided in culturally relevant and sensitive ways. Schools that have developed trust with CALD families will have provided for children and families to understand their rights within the school community and the appropriate processes to follow should their trust or safety be compromised.

## For Further Information – Diocesan Contacts

For Catholic Education Office advice, please contact the Learning Diversity Education Officer at each Diocesan Office:

**Catholic Education Melbourne** (03) 9267 0228
**Catholic Education Office Ballarat** (03) 5337 7135
**Catholic Education Office Sale** (03) 5622 6600
**Catholic Education Office Sandhurst** (03) 5443 2377

## References

Catholic Education Commission of Victoria Ltd (CECV) 2016, *Commitment Statement to Child Safety: A safe and nurturing culture for all children and young people in Catholic schools,* CECV, East Melbourne. Available at http://www.cecv.catholic.edu.au/getmedia/b5d43278-51b9-4704-b45a-f14e50546a70/Commitment-Statement-A4.aspx.

Catholic Education Melbourne 2017, *Foundation Statement: Wellbeing in a Catholic School*, Horizons of Hope, Catholic Education Melbourne, East Melbourne. Available at https://www.cem.edu.au/CatholicEducationMelbourne/media/Documentation/Documents/HoH-Wellbeing.pdf.

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KidsMatter 2012, *Cultural diversity and children's wellbeing*, Commonwealth of Australia. Available at https://www.kidsmatter.edu.au/sites/default/files/public/KMP_C1_CDCW_CulturalDiversityAndChildrensWellbeing.pdf.

Moore, T, McArthur, M, Heerde, J, Roche, S & O'Leary, P 2016, *Our safety counts: Children and young people's perceptions of safety and institutional responses to their safety concerns*, Melbourne: Institute of Child Protection Studies, Australian Catholic University. Available at http://www.childabuseroyalcommission.gov.au/policy-and-research/our-research/published-research/our-safety-counts.

National Centre for Cultural Competence (NCCC) 2006, *Conceptual Frameworks/Models, Guiding Values and Principles*, Georgetown University Centre for Child and Human Development, Washington DC. Available at https://nccc.georgetown.edu/foundations/framework.php.

Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse 2017, *Final Report*, vol. 13. Available at https://www.childabuseroyalcommission.gov.au/sites/default/files/final_report_-_volume_13_schools.pdf.

United Nations 1989, *Convention on the Rights of the Child*. Available at http://www.unhcr.org/uk/4aa76b319.pdf.

## Resources

CECV, *New Arrivals and Refugee Guidelines* (draft, to be published in 2018).

Centre for Multicultural Youth at http://www.cmy.net.au/.

Ethnic Communities' Council of Victoria at http://www.eccv.org.au/.

Foundation House at http://www.foundationhouse.org.au/.

Victorian Multicultural Commission at www.multicultural.vic.gov.au.

This is one of three Guides designed to assist Catholic schools to integrate the *Principle of Inclusion* as part of school strategies and practice for the safety and wellbeing of children in their care.