NATIONAL SAFE SCHOOLS FRAMEWORK

All Australian schools are safe, supportive and respectful teaching and learning communities that promote student wellbeing

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National Safe Schools Framework (revised 2010; updated 2013)

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Introduction

Schools are among the safest places in the community for children and young people. This National Safe Schools Framework builds on the original 2003 Framework. It recognises the progress that individual schools, systems and sectors have made since the publication and dissemination of the original framework to create safe, supportive and respectful learning and teaching communities throughout Australia.

The Framework provides a vision and a set of guiding principles for safe and supportive school communities that also promote student wellbeing and develop respectful relationships. It identifies nine elements to assist Australian schools to continue to create teaching and learning communities where all members of the school community both feel and are safe from harassment, aggression, violence and bullying. It also responds to new and emerging challenges for school communities such as cybersafety, cyberbullying and community concerns about young people and weapons.

The Framework adopts a whole school approach to safety and wellbeing. It provides a comprehensive range of evidence-informed practices to guide schools in preventing and responding to incidents of harassment, aggression, violence and situations of bullying and to implement their responsibilities in relation to child protection issues.

A safe and supportive school is described in the following way:

In a safe and supportive school, the risk from all types of harm is minimised, diversity is valued and all members of the school community feel respected and included and can be confident that they will receive support in the face of any threats to their safety or wellbeing.

The Framework's whole school approach to creating safe and supportive learning and teaching communities acknowledges the strong interconnections between student safety, student wellbeing and learning. Harassment, aggression, violence and bullying are less likely to occur in a caring, respectful and supportive teaching and learning community.

Student safety and wellbeing are enhanced when students feel connected to their school, have positive and respectful relationships with their peers and teachers, feel confident about their social and emotional skills and satisfied with their learning experiences at school.

Vision

The National Safe Schools Framework is based on the following overarching vision:

All Australian schools are safe, supportive and respectful teaching and learning communities that promote student wellbeing.

Guiding principles

The vision is underpinned by the following guiding principles that represent fundamental beliefs about safe, supportive and respectful school communities. These guiding principles emphasise the importance of student safety and wellbeing as a pre-requisite for effective learning in all school settings.

Australian schools:

- affirm the rights of all members of the school community to feel safe and be safe at school
- acknowledge that being safe and supported at school is essential for student wellbeing and effective learning
- accept responsibility for developing and sustaining safe and supportive learning and teaching communities that also fulfill the school's child protection responsibilities
- encourage the active participation of all school community members in developing and maintaining a safe school community where diversity is valued
- actively support young people to develop understanding and skills to keep themselves and others safe
- commit to developing a safe school community through a whole-school and evidence-based approach

Context of the Framework

It is essential that all schools promote and provide a supportive learning community where all students feel and are safe. Students have a fundamental right to learn in a safe, supportive environment and to be treated with respect. School staff, parents and the local community also have the right to teach, work and participate in an environment that is safe and supportive. Similarly, parents and other local community members have a right to feel safe, supported and respected in the school context.

The Australian community rightly expects all education systems and leaders to take every available measure to ensure the safety of students, and the broader school community, and to protect and support them. In doing this schools will establish clear, transparent and explicit policies and programs to fulfill this important responsibility.

As the Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians (December 2008) highlights:

"Schools play a vital role in promoting the intellectual, physical, social, emotional, moral, spiritual and aesthetic development and wellbeing of young Australians…."

This Framework outlines how this fundamental role of schools can be achieved. It also acknowledges that parents, carers and the wider community have an important role to play in working with schools to create and maintain schools as safe and supportive learning and teaching communities that build respectful relationships.

The Framework aligns with:

- The Australian Curriculum
- Diverse national, state and territory initiatives, polices and legislative frameworks currently in place to support students' safety and wellbeing.

Elements of the Framework

The Framework identifies nine key elements to assist schools in planning, implementing and maintaining a safe, supportive and protective learning community that promotes student safety and wellbeing.

The nine elements of the National Safe Schools Framework

1. Leadership commitment to a safe school
2. A supportive and connected school culture
3. Policies and procedures
4. Professional learning
5. Positive behaviour management
6. Engagement, skill development and safe school curriculum
7. A focus on student wellbeing and student ownership
8. Early intervention and targeted support
9. Partnerships with families and community

These nine elements are based on a combination of good practice, research-based literature, and feedback from representatives from all educational systems, sectors and educators. Teachers are encouraged to be both proactive in building safe and supportive learning communities as well as reactive in responding effectively to situations involving child maltreatment, harassment, aggression, violence and bullying. The nine elements also reflect a view that responsibility for the development and maintenance of a safe and supportive school community requires a respectful partnership among students, teachers, parents and carers, as well as the broader community and education systems and sectors.

Key Characteristics of the Nine Elements

The key characteristics of the nine elements of the National Safe Schools Framework are outlined below. Examples of key actions and practices of each characteristic are detailed in the Framework's supporting materials located on the Safe Schools Hub website.

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Leadership commitment to a safe school

1.1 Acceptance of responsibility for the development and maintenance of a safe, supportive and respectful learning and working environment for all members of the school community.

1.2 The development and communication of a clear vision for a safe, supportive and respectful school. This includes actions that encourage staff to commit to the vision and to feel confident about their participation in its implementation.

1.3 Planning for sustaining the vision.

1.4 Regular evaluation and review of the school's current capacity to enhance the safety and wellbeing of its staff and students and identification of areas that need to be enhanced.

1.5 Facilitation of access to resources to support implementation of the school vision for a safe and supportive school.

1.6 Identification and support of key staff with specific responsibilities for student safety and wellbeing.

1.7 Ongoing data collection (including incidence and frequency of harassment, aggression, violence and bullying) to inform decision-making and evaluate effectiveness of policies, programs and procedures.

1.8 School leaders developing a comprehensive knowledge of the school community.

1.9 An awareness of mandatory requirements and legal issues in relation to child maltreatment, harassment, aggression and violence and communication of these to staff.

1.10 An awareness of the rights and responsibilities of school leadership in relation to safety issues occurring outside school hours and off school grounds involving or affecting students and staff.

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A supportive and connected school culture

2.1 Student connectedness to the school.

2.2 Teaching, staff modeling and promotion of explicit pro-social values and expectations for behaviour in accordance with these values.

2.3 Clear demonstration of respect and support for student diversity in the school's inclusive actions and structures.

2.4 Positive, caring and respectful student-peer relationships, student-teacher relationships and teacher-teacher relationships.

2.5 Parent and carer connectedness to the school.

2.6 A focus on staff wellbeing and safety.

2.7 Appropriate monitoring of and response to child protection issues.

2.8 Recognition of the distinctive needs of specific groups in the school community (e.g. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, refugee and immigrant families).

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Policies and procedures

3.1 Whole school, collaboratively developed policies, plans and structures for supporting safety and wellbeing.

3.2 Clear procedures that enable staff, parents, carers and students to confidentially report any incidents or situations of child maltreatment, harassment, aggression, violence or bullying.

3.3 Clearly communicated procedures for staff to follow when responding to incidents of student harm from child maltreatment, harassment, aggression, violence , bullying or misuse of technology.

3.4 Agreements for responsible use of technology by staff and students.

3.5 Regular risk assessments of the physical school environment (including environments related to off-campus and outside of school-related activities), leading to the development of effective risk management plans.

3.6 Established and well-understood protocols about appropriate and inappropriate adult to student contact and interactions within the school context.

3.7 Effective strategies for record keeping and communication between appropriate staff about safety and wellbeing issues.

3.8 A representative group responsible for overseeing the school's safety and wellbeing initiatives.

3.9 Protocols for the induction of casual staff, new staff and new students and families into the school's safety and wellbeing policies and procedures.

Professional learning

4.1 Evaluation of the current level of staff knowledge and skills related to student safety and wellbeing and their capacity to respond effectively and sensitively to possible situations of child maltreatment, harassment, aggression, violence and bullying.

4.2 Ongoing professional learning about emerging changes in research and technology related to student safety and wellbeing.

4.3 The inclusion of non-teaching and casual, specialist and visiting staff in relevant professional learning opportunities.

Positive behaviour management

5.1 Careful selection of evidence-informed positive behaviour management approaches that align with the school community's needs.

5.2 The promotion and recognition of positive student behaviour.

5.3 A clear understanding and consistent implementation by all staff of the school's selected positive behaviour management approaches within both the school and classroom context.

5.4 Effective risk prevention plans for the use of technology in the classroom and for playground organisation and supervision.

5.5 Effective risk prevention plans for student behaviour management during off-campus and school-related out-of-hours activities.

Engagement, skill development and safe school curriculum

6.1 A strong focus on the enhancement of student engagement with learning.

6.2 The extensive use of cooperative learning and other relational teaching strategies.

6.3 Teaching of skills and understandings to promote cybersafety and for countering harassment, aggression, violence and bullying.

6.4 Teaching of skills and understandings related to personal safety and protective behaviours.

6.5 Teaching of social and emotional skills (e.g. listening, negotiation, sharing, empathic responding) in all subjects and across all year levels.

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A focus on student wellbeing and student ownership

7.1 Defined structures and strategies for enhancing student wellbeing.

7.2 Provision of multiple opportunities for students to develop a sense of meaning and purpose .

7.3 Adoption of strengths-based approaches to student learning and participation.

7.4 Provision of a range of opportunities for student ownership and decision-making, student voice and peer teaching.

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Early intervention and targeted support

8.1 Effective processes for the early identification of students and families who need, or could benefit from, additional support.

8.2 Appropriate early intervention with students requiring support and skill development (e.g. students who exhibit anti-social behaviour or experience peer difficulties).

8.3 Ongoing and follow-up support to individual students and families in times of need.

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Partnerships with families and community

9.1 Working collaboratively with parents and carers by providing opportunities for education on issues related to student safety and wellbeing.

9.2 Working with community organisations to provide a consistent message about safety and wellbeing.

9.3 Working with community organisations to extend support to students and families as needed.

9.4 Working with the justice system in relation to child maltreatment, aggression, violence and cybersafety issues at both a preventative and legal level.

About the Safe Schools Hub

The Safe Schools Hub is a one-stop shop for information and resources on safe school strategies to assist:

- teachers and school leaders
- students
- parents
- specialist professionals supporting students
- pre-service teachers.

The Safe Schools Hub is underpinned by the National Safe Schools Framework.

The Hub provides the tools and knowledge that will enable all members of the school community to:

- nurture student responsibility and resilience
- build a positive school culture
- foster respectful relationships
- support students who are impacted by anti-social behaviour, including bullying and cyberbullying.

The Safe Schools Hub project is funded by the Australian Government, working in partnership with state and territory governments, the non-government school sectors and Education Services Australia.

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