

# Staff and Student Professional Boundaries Policy

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## 1. Statement of Commitment to Child Safety

The Geelong College is a Child Safe School. We have a zero-tolerance stance on child abuse and are committed to the protection of all children from all forms of abuse. The Geelong College recognises that in order to achieve a child safe environment at the College which meets students' intellectual, physical, social, emotional and moral needs, students need to be involved in the creation and maintenance of such an environment.

We are committed to taking a preventative and proactive approach to providing a child safe environment where children and young people are safe and feel safe; they are empowered to use their voices when decisions are being made that affect their safety. We are also committed to providing simple and accessible processes to assist all children to identify and communicate when they do not feel safe. Particularly, this includes those who are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, from culturally diverse backgrounds and those with a disability.

We are clear about our behavioural expectations of every person in our community and are committed to having a shared understanding of and responsibility for child safety. All staff are expected to uphold a culture that protects children from all forms of harm.

## 2. Purpose

This policy details the College's commitment to providing a safe environment for all students. The provisions within ensure all students are respected and treated with dignity in an appropriate, professional, and caring manner that does not compromise any child's safety.

The need to maintain professional boundaries with students is an absolute duty, which must be maintained at all times.

The practices detailed below are ultimately intended protect students from harm and to reduce any risk of vexatious claims being brought against staff for perceived misconduct. By being aware of situations where professional boundary violations could occur and adopting strategies to prevent such circumstances from arising, staff are protecting both students and themselves.

## 3. Scope

This policy and associated guidelines apply to **all staff** employed at the College as well as Council Members, Third-Party Contractors, and External Education Providers. All parties referred to within this scope will subsequently be referenced as "staff" throughout this Policy.

## 4. Staff Expectations

All staff are expected, at all times, to:

- a. Exercise their responsibilities in a way that recognises professional boundaries with respect to their relationships with students.
- b. Act and behave in a professional manner that always aims to advance the most positive educational experience for all students.
- c. Identify, discourage, and reject any advances of a sexual nature that is initiated by a student.
- d. Interact with students in a professional manner that align with the College's values, codes of conduct, and the expectations set out in its policies.
- e. Report any conflicts of interest to the Principal at the earliest possible opportunity.

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- f. Promote and ensure that equal learning opportunities are provided to each student, free of any discrimination or favouritism.

## 5. Identifying Professional Boundaries

The following expectations are a non-exhaustive list of guidelines for situations where professional boundaries and obligations become obscured. The overarching principles of this advice are:

- a. Where a staff member finds themselves in circumstances where professional boundaries are obfuscated for whatever reason, they must exercise good judgment. This involves carefully considering the implications and potential consequences of engaging in certain behaviours with students, and always erring on the side of caution.

If a staff member is ever unsure of how to respond to a situation, seek clarification from a colleague or Child Protection Officer should they need assistance exercising prudent judgment.

### 5.1 Key Questions

Staff should ask themselves the following key questions when unsure about whether professional boundaries are being, or have been, crossed:

- b. Would I modify my behaviour if a colleagues was present?
- c. How would I feel about explaining my actions at a staff meeting?
- d. Am I sharing information for the student's benefit or my benefit?
- e. Am I dealing with this student differently from others in similar circumstances?
- f. Is my language or demeanour different from normal when dealing with this particular student?

### 5.2 Intimate Relationships

- a. Under no circumstances is it appropriate for a staff member to initiate or develop a romantic and/or sexual relationship with a student. This is irrespective of whether the relationship is consensual, non-consensual, and/or condoned by parents.
- b. Intimate relationships between a staff member and a student:
  - (i) Adversely affects students, potentially for life.
  - (ii) Affects colleagues.
  - (iii) Places the College into disrepute.
  - (iv) Has the potential to damage the reputation and end the career of the staff member involved.
- c. The professional relationship of a staff member may be breached by engaging in the following behaviours or actions with students:
  - (i) Dating.
  - (ii) Flirtatious behaviour.
  - (iii) Development of an intimate personal relationship.
  - (iv) Sexual relations.
  - (v) The use of sexual innuendo, inappropriate language and/or inappropriate material with students.
  - (vi) Unwarranted and inappropriate touching.
  - (vii) Unwarranted and inappropriate filming or photography.
  - (viii) Deliberate exposure to sexual behaviour of others (i.e. pornography).
  - (ix) Having intimate contact without a valid context via a written or electronic means (i.e. email, letter, telephone, social media sites, chatrooms, text messages).
  - (x) Going out, whether alone or in company, to social events such as the movies or dinner.
  - (xi) Exchanging gifts of a personal nature that encourages the formation of an intimate

relationship.

- d. Any other like behaviours or actions.
- e. Developing or encouraging romantic or sexual relationships with recent former students over the age of 18 years is more than likely to violate professional boundaries.
  - (i) Staff are strongly discouraged from engaging in such relationships.
  - (ii) The imbalance of power and authority that exists between staff and students does not disappear after the student has completed their schooling. As such, staff should not assume that they will be protected from disciplinary action by claiming that a relationship begun after the student left the College as there may be a reasonable belief that the emotional intimacy began and developed while a formal staff/student relationship existed.

### **5.3 Personal Relationships**

- a. Staff must acknowledge and recognise that their role is not to be a friend or a parent to a student.
- b. 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 a professional element. This is irrespective whether the relationship is consensual, non-consensual, and/or condoned by parents or carers.
  - (i) In judging this element, it is the student's perception of the staff member and not the intention of the staff member that is important.
- c. An established and expected professional relationship between staff and students may be compromised by staff:
  - (i) if a staff member attends parties or socialises with students outside of organised College events, and without parental / carer permission.
  - (ii) by sharing personal details about their private life with students.
  - (iii) meeting with students outside of school hours without permission from the College for a specific school related purpose.

### **5.4 Fair Learning Opportunities**

- a. The core focus of teaching is to effectively facilitate learning opportunities for our students. On this basis, all staff are expected to support students within the scope of their professional expertise and in a way that advances the student's education given their individual circumstances.
- b. The quality of teaching and learning characterises the professional relationship that is expected to exist between staff and students. Staff must demonstrate their endeavour towards this commitment by:
  - (i) Maintaining a safe and challenging learning environment that promotes mutual respect.
  - (ii) Recognising and developing each student's abilities, skills and talents in a way that caters for their individual learning needs.
  - (iii) Respecting individual differences.
  - (iv) Encouraging students to develop and reflect on their own values.
  - (v) Interacting with students without bias.
  - (vi) Not encouraging preferential treatment.
  - (vii) Not discriminating against any student on the basis of race, sex, sexuality, disability, religion, and/or political conviction.
  - (viii) Always making decision in the best interests of students.

### **5.5 Electronic communication between staff and students**

All staff are expected to adhere to the following:

- a. Electronic communication between staff and students should only occur on College sanctioned and College managed platforms. This means staff should only use the following means to communicate with students electronically:

- (i) College email
  - (ii) MS Teams
- d. Technology should be used for educational purposes or for the organisation of co-curricular activities.
  - e. Staff must never provide students with their personal telephone numbers or social media contact details.
  - f. Staff must never communicate with students via text message outside a professional context.
  - g. Staff are not to accept or request students as 'friends' on social media or otherwise use social media to communicate in anyway that is not condoned or approved by the College.
  - h. Staff should not exchange personal pictures with a student.
  - i. Staff are not expected or encouraged to respond to communications from students, parents, or carers while on holidays, weekends, or in the evening.
  - j. Student personal contact numbers or other personal contact details made available to the College should only be used for College communications.

## **5.6 Physical Contact with Students**

All staff must be aware of the possibility that situations may arise that can be misinterpreted or perceived in a manner that was not intended. For this reason, all staff must adhere to the following guidelines in relation to physical contact with students, both within and outside the College:

- a. Staff must avoid unnecessary physical contact with students.
- b. Minimal, non-lingering, non-gratuitous physical contact in the context of a given situation is acceptable and appropriate. For example, a congratulatory handshake when receiving an award is acceptable.
- c. In the context of sport, drama, or dance instruction, appropriate physical contact is acceptable. However, physical contact should never be made in a one-on-one situation.
  - (i) If physical contact is required for specific technical instructions, it must be brief and only made with the express consent of the student.
  - (ii) If a student withdraws consent for the contact, either verbally or through gesture, the staff member must accept and cease the action immediately. No further contact can be made once consent has been withdrawn.
  - (iii) In all circumstances, a staff member making physical contact with a student/s should only be if it is absolutely necessary and it is professional to do so. Prudent professional judgment should be exercised in such circumstances.

## **5.7 Off-Campus Excursions, Boarding, Sporting Events, and Camps**

The expectations around physical contact with students outlined in 5(f) apply in the context of off-campus excursions, boarding, sporting events, and camps. Additionally, the following expectations also apply to protect both the staff member and the student:

- a. Two staff members must always be present when checking sleeping arrangements or supervising students when they may be changing.
- b. Always knock and advise of presence before entering a change room, bedroom, dormitory or any other such premises.
- c. While in a premises outlined in 5(g)(ii), ensure that a strict staff and student relationship is upheld. Under no circumstances is it appropriate to engage in inappropriate behaviour, such as sitting on the student's bed.

## **5.8 Identifying Grooming Behaviours**

It is important that members of staff are aware of behaviours which are inappropriate and may be considered as crossing the normal boundaries of the student/teacher relationship.

Grooming is a pattern of behaviour aimed at engaging a student as a precursor to sexual abuse. The grooming process can include:

- a. persuading a student that a special relationship exists; spending inappropriate special time with a student;
- b. inappropriately giving gifts;
- c. showing special favours to a student but not other students (e.g. special lessons and tutoring);
- d. allowing the student to overstep rules; and,
- e. testing of boundaries.

It is important to have an understanding of, and be able to, recognise when a staff member/student relationship is at risk of being seen as inappropriate.

Warning signs of boundary crossing include but are not limited to:

- f. A disproportionate amount of instructional time is being spent with one student.
- g. The student is being seen alone by the staff member outside of the school day.
- h. The staff member believes that they are the only one who is reaching the student.
- i. There are secrets between the staff member and the student.
- j. The staff member ignores legitimate student requests.
- k. The staff member reports only all negative or all positive aspects of the student's behaviour.
- l. The staff member is defensive when questioned about the relationship they have with a certain student.
- m. The staff member allows the student to miss other classes when there is a student/teacher conflict in that class.
- n. The student gives the staff member inappropriate notes, letters and gifts.
- o. The staff member initiates contact with the student for personal reasons at or outside of school.

Behaviour that promote boundary violations include but are not limited to:

- p. The use of derogatory names.
- q. Ignoring a student because you do not like them.
- r. Depriving the student of what is within his rights.
- s. Speaking about students in an intimidating manner.
- t. Sexual involvement with students.
- u. Ignoring inappropriate behaviour in a manner that is not consistent with class expectations.
- v. The use of harsh punishment before a lower-level intervention has been tried.
- w. Sharing personal information that does not assist the student.
- x. Exchange tangible items with a student for personal gain.
- y. Using alcohol or other drugs while interacting with students.

## **6. Managing Conflicts of Interest**

- a. Where a personal relationship with students, such as family relationships and close friendship networks exist, questions of conflict of interest may arise. Given the size of the College in the context of a regional town, it is inevitable that the professional boundaries between staff and students will be tested from time to time. Staff are advised that they should be conscious of, and diligent in, developing and maintaining professional boundaries by ensuring that such personal relationships do not create any perception of bias or favouritism.
- b. Where a staff member believes that a conflict of interest may exist, they must notify the Principal, or the Chair of Council if the conflict involves the Principal, and arrangements should be implemented to avoid the conflict if possible. Such circumstances may relate to:
  - (i) Teaching of a student by a staff member with a conflict.
  - (ii) Coaching a student by a staff member with a conflict.
- c. If a staff member is required to make a decision that involves a student with whom a conflict of interest exists, the staff member should refer the matter to another staff member, the Head of School, or the Principal, who is able to objectively make the decision. Such circumstances could involve the appointment of classes, selection of sporting teams, prefect selections and so on.

## 7. Staff Responsibilities

All staff are required to:

- a. Follow the expectations disclosed in this policy.
- b. Immediately report any conflicts of interest.
- c. Remove themselves from decision-making where a conflict has been identified.

Where a staff member is in breach of this Policy, the College may take disciplinary action, including up to summary dismissal where breaches are of a serious nature.

## 8. Development, Review, and Approval Process:

<b>Initial Development / Review:</b>	PMG
<b>Committees to be consulted:</b>	Heads of School SSLT MSLT JSLT
<b>Review before approval:</b>	PMG
<b>Final approval:</b>	Executive / Council