



Staff and Student Professional Boundaries Policy

1.0 Purpose

Waverley Christian College is committed to the safety and wellbeing of all children and young people. This is the primary focus of our care and decision-making.

The following policy and guidelines are designed to raise awareness of situations where professional boundary violations may occur and some strategies to minimise the risk of boundary violations.

The practice of protective behaviours at all times will also reduce the possibility of vexatious claims being brought against staff.

2.0 Scope

This policy applies to all staff, including casual staff and interns. Additionally, this policy seeks to provide guidance regarding the minimum standard of conduct expected of someone associated with the College or working with its students, such as members of the College Council, volunteers, third party contractors and external education providers.

Every person involved in the College has a responsibility to understand the important and specific role they play individually and collectively to ensure that the wellbeing and safety of all children and young people is at the forefront of all they do and every decision they make.

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

3.0 Policy Statement

This Policy aims to protect children and reduce any opportunities for child abuse or harm to occur. It also assists in understanding how to avoid or better manage risky behaviours and situations. Staff should refer to the Child Safety Code of Conduct as a complementary document. It is also intended to complement child protection legislation, College policies and procedures and professional standards, codes or ethics as these apply to staff and other personnel.

It is our policy that:

- Staff exercise their responsibilities in a way that recognises professional boundaries with regard to their relationships with students at all times
- Staff identify, discourage and reject any advances of a sexual nature initiated by a student and report to their manager, immediately, of such behaviour
- Staff interaction with students is professional and appropriate at all times, including inside and outside of school hours and places, including physical and online locations
- Conflict of interest issues must be reported as soon as practicable

- Equal learning opportunities are given to each student without discrimination
- Appropriate consequences will be applied to staff who breach professional boundaries

3.1 Staff and Student Relationships

Staff must not initiate or develop a relationship with any student that is or can be misinterpreted as anything other than on a professional basis. This is regardless of whether the relationship is consensual, non- consensual or condoned by parents/carers.

Non-professional relationships have a negative impact on the teaching and learning of students and colleagues, and may carry a serious reputational risk for the staff member and, in turn, the College.

It is the student's perception of staff behaviour and not the intention of the staff member that is important. Staff should, at all times, make decisions in the student's best interests, interact with students without displaying bias or preference and recognise that their role is not to be a "friend" or "parent" to a student.

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

- flirtatious behaviour or dating
- development of an intimate personal relationship
- 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)
- engaging in communications beyond the boundaries of a professional relationship via verbal, written or electronic means (e.g. email, letters, telephone, text messages, social media or chatrooms)
- sharing personal details about their private lives with students
- going out, whether alone or in company, to social events such as the movies or dinner
- attending parties or socialising with students outside of organised College events (without parental/carer permission)
- meeting with students outside of school hours without permission from the College.
- one-on-one meetings at a private residence or secluded place including on College grounds during or after school hours
- accepting or giving gifts which could be reasonably perceived as encouraging the formation of a personal, romantic, sexual or intimate relationship or which could reasonably be perceived as bias or preferential treatment

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 College as there may be a reasonable belief that the emotional intimacy of the relationship developed while the staff/student relationship existed.

Staff should be aware that developing or encouraging romantic or sexual relationships with former students within two years of the student completing their senior secondary schooling or equivalent may violate professional boundaries and are strongly discouraged from doing so. In all circumstances, a former student must be at least 18 years of age before a relationship commences

Any staff member who is in a romantic relationship with a current student when they commence employment at the College will need to end the relationship to be eligible for employment.

3.2 Fair Learning Opportunities

The College seeks to foster engaging and meaningful learning experiences to help each student understand our world, how to live with godly perspective and effectively utilize their unique gifts and abilities in service. The main focus of teaching is effective student learning 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.

Teachers should demonstrate their commitment to student learning by:

- maintaining a safe and engaging learning environment that promotes mutual respect
- recognising and developing each student's abilities, skills and talents by catering to their individual
- abilities and respecting their individual differences
- encouraging students to develop and reflect on their own values
- interacting with students without bias
- not engaging in preferential treatment
- not discriminating against any student on the basis of race, sex, sexuality, disability or religious or political conviction
- always making decisions in the student's best interests

3.3 Electronic Communications between Staff and Students

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

- All use of technology should be for educational purposes or for the organisation of co-curricular activities
- All email communication between staff and students should be via the College email system and reflect a professional staff/student relationship
- Staff should not communicate with students via text message where it is not in a professional context
- Staff should not give out their personal telephone numbers or social media contact details except where there exists a clear educational purpose or duty of care
- 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 the College, except where there exists a clear educational purpose or duty of care
- Staff should not accept 'friend' requests on social media or otherwise of graduating students until 2 years after graduation
- Staff should not exchange personal pictures with a student
- Staff should use Pixevely to take and store photos of students and school events so that photos are not stored on personal devices
- Teachers are not expected or encouraged to respond to concerns of parents/carers or students on holidays, weekends or in the evening, except in relation to matters of a duty of care
- Any student personal contact numbers or other personal contact details made available to the College should only be used for College communications

Refer to our Privacy Policy

3.4 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 College should adhere to the following guidelines for contact with students both in and outside of College grounds:

- Staff should avoid unnecessary physical contact with students. Physical contact should be appropriate for the age and gender of the student
- 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 gesturally 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.

3.5 Off-Campus Excursions and Camps

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

- wherever possible and practicable, staff, parents and volunteers should not be sleeping in the same room as students
- checking of sleeping arrangements, or supervising of students' changing should be done, where possible, by the same gender, with another staff member present and always in a manner that respects students' 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

3.6 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. Professional boundaries may be tested due to the nature and size of the community, and therefore staff need to be diligent in developing and maintaining these boundaries. It is important that staff conduct themselves in accordance with Christian principles of moral and ethical behaviour and at all times, act honestly, impartially, transparently and in the best interests of the College (See the College's Staff Code of Conduct)

Where a staff member feels that a conflict of interest may exist, they should notify their SMT member and arrangements should be implemented to avoid the conflict situation if possible. If the conflict involves a member of the SMT, the Principal should be notified, and in the case of the Principal, the Chair of the Council. For example, the teaching of students by a staff member with a conflict should be avoided.

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

3.7 Disclosure of Staff/Student Interactions

It is Waverley Christian College's policy that all staff are encouraged to declare any interactions with students outside of school hours that are beyond such contact that normally occurs in the context of

church attendance, small groups and children and young people activities. Such non-declarable interactions are likely to include instances where the staff member is:

- related to the student
- friends with the student's parents or family

Instances where declarations would be expected, and parent permission gained, include activities such as:

- coaching of an individual or small group of students alone
- interacting frequently with a student for educational purposes outside of school hours ; e.g., tutoring

The Heads of School maintain records of all declarations made by staff related to their interactions with students, or relationships with students, that exist outside of school hours or on College premises.

3.8 Support for Staff and Students

Students seeking support should speak to a responsible adult that they are comfortable with, for example their classroom teacher, Year Level Coordinator or a member of the Student Wellbeing team. Staff should be aware of any resultant reporting requirements.

Staff may seek advice from the College's Employee Assistance Program or consult with their SMT member when in need of guidance in relation to the boundaries outlined in this policy.

4.0 Definition - What are professional boundaries?

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

The fact that 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.

In most cases this power imbalance is clear, however sometimes it may be more difficult to recognise especially for younger staff who may only be a few years older than their students.

The guidelines in this policy are not exhaustive, and given that sometimes "grey areas" may occur, it is expected that all staff (no matter their age or experience) exercise wisdom, use their own good judgment, think very carefully about the implications and potential consequences of engaging in certain behaviours with students, and always err on the side of caution.

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 to others, (e.g., 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?
- Would I judge my conduct negatively if I observed it in someone else?
- Is my language or demeanour different from normal when dealing with this particular student?
- Am I engaging in behaviours and discussions either personally or 'online' that are age appropriate?

5.0 Roles and Responsibilities

ROLE	RESPONSIBILITY
All Staff <i>(including casual staff and interns)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Follow the guidelines as set out in this policy• Immediately report any conflicts of interest• Remove themselves from decision making where a conflict has been identified
College Council	
Volunteers	
Third party Contractors	
External Education Providers	

Where a staff member breaches this policy, the College may take disciplinary action, including in the case of serious breaches, summary dismissal.

5.1 Implementation

These guidelines are implemented through a combination of:

- Staff training and development in professional conduct
- Student and parent/carer education and information
- Effective management of teachers engaging in inappropriate relationships with students
- Effective management of conflicts of interest
- Effective communication and incident notification procedures
- Effective record keeping procedures
- Initiation of corrective actions where necessary

6.0 Relevant Policies Procedures

- Child Safety Code of Conduct
- Child Safety Policy
- Child Safety Responding and Reporting Policy
- Child Safety and Mandatory Reporting Flowchart
- Conflict of Interest Policy
- Privacy Policy
- Staff Code of Conduct

7.0 Relevant External Resources

The Crimes Act 1958 (Vic) and Child Safe Standards include certain offences for persons, including teachers, whose position places them in a position of care, supervision or authority, with a student. Staff registered with professional bodies (for example, the Victorian Institute of Teaching, Nursing and Midwifery Board of Australia, etc.) should also be aware of the requirements of their respective Codes of Conduct and Ethics.

Version Information

Version	Description (include any changes)	Date	Date of next review
1.0	Original version	July 2021	July 2022
2.0	New format. Updated content	August 2024	August 2025
3.0	Updated Roles & Responsibilities and Relevant Policies Procedures	August 2025	August 2026

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Policy Owner and Approval

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