



# PROFESSIONAL BOUNDARIES POLICY

**FOR STAFF EMPLOYED AT  
ST DOMINIC'S PRIORY COLLEGE**

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LAST REVIEW DATE	NEXT REVIEW DATE
February 2023	February 2027
<b>RESPONSIBLE OFFICER</b>	Policies Sub Committee

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## PREFACE

### COMMITMENT TO SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

St Dominic's Priory College ('the College') has zero tolerance to children and young people coming to harm of any kind. The safeguarding of our children and young people is intrinsic to our Dominican identity, and College Vision Statement:

*Inspired by the Gospel of Jesus Christ, we are a girls' College committed to truth and compassion. In the spirit of St Dominic, we contemplate the possibilities and honour the sacred dignity of each person through word and action. We aspire to provide an innovative, rigorous and inclusive education that leads girls and young women to achieve excellence in their studies and confidence in their future.*

As Dominicans, the College is actively invested in fostering a community of safeguarding that recognises and upholds the dignity and rights of all children and young people. In alignment with the *Child Safety (Prohibited Persons) Act 2016*, the *Children & Young People (Safety) Act 2017*, the National Principles for Child Safe Organisations, and the National Catholic Safeguarding Standards, the College is further committed to creating and maintaining a child safe environment, wherein:

- Every person within the College who interacts with children and young people commits to establishing safe and supportive relationships.
- Diversity within our community is respected, and each child and young person is valued and treated equitably.
- Children and young people are well-informed of their right to feel safe and know who to talk with if they have concerns or are feeling unsafe.
- Activities with children are proactively planned, organised and reviewed; with potential risks duly considered, reduced and eliminated where possible.
- Our Community of Staff and Volunteers actively seek to become, and remain informed, of the causes and signs of harm or risks of harm to children and young people, and the strategies to prevent, safeguard against, or respond effectively.

Further information about the College's principles and objectives can be found within the [2021 – 2025 Strategic Plan](#).

To read the College's **Safeguarding Commitment Statement** in full, and access *College Policies, Procedures* and other resources, please [click here](#).

### GOVERNANCE

Dominican Education Australia (DEA) is the governing authority of St Dominic's Priory College, an independent Catholic School. A Board of Directors, established in 1987, governs the College which is incorporated under the *Corporations Act 2001 (Cwlth)*. The Trustees of DEA and the College Board of Directors assures our Catholicity, fidelity to the Dominican charism, formation of Board members, excellence in teaching and learning and financial stability.

For more information about DEA visit: <https://dominicaneducationaustralia.com/>

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## 1. PURPOSE

- 1.1 St Dominic's Priory College (the **School**) is committed to protecting its students from all aspects of harm and has established strategies, practices, policies and procedures (collectively, a **student protection framework**) to uphold its public commitment to student safety and wellbeing.
- 1.2 As part of this framework, the School takes a zero tolerance approach to any behaviours that jeopardise student safety and wellbeing; this includes not only child abuse and grooming, but any type of behaviour by a staff member that crosses professional boundaries with a student.
- 1.3 It is not possible for the School to definitively identify all possible circumstances in which a staff member may cross professional boundaries. Accordingly, the Schedule attached to this policy:
  - (a) Clearly establishes a list of unacceptable behaviours by staff when interacting with current and former students.
  - (b) Otherwise creates awareness for and provides guidance to staff about maintaining professional boundaries with students to support personal, professional and ethical decision making.
  - (c) Serves to protect our students, reduce any opportunities for abuse or harm to occur, and promote student safety and wellbeing in our school environment.
- 1.4 All staff must familiarise themselves with and comply with this policy.
- 1.5 This policy is not an exhaustive list of the standards that apply to the School's staff in every aspect of a staff member's interactions with students. Indeed, the School has many codes of conduct, policies and procedures which set out the School's expectations regarding staff conduct and performance (which continue to apply). For example, this policy should be read in conjunction with the School's Child Safeguarding Suite of Policies and Procedures, Protective practices for staff in their interactions with children and young people Guidelines for staff working or volunteering in education or care settings, along with the SDPC Staff and CESA Staff Codes of Conduct.
- 1.6 The processes outlined in this policy are intended to be practical, non-adversarial and non-legal.
- 1.7 The School reserves the right to vary, replace or withdraw this policy at any time.
- 1.8 This policy does not form part of a staff member's contract or terms of employment.



## 2. SCOPE

- 2.1 In this policy:
- (a) **'Staff'** and **'colleagues'** means employees (whether employed on a permanent, temporary or casual basis), university and work experience students on placement, contractors, and volunteers, including Board Directors, employed or engaged by the School.
  - (b) **'School community'** includes the School's Board, the Principal, staff, students, parents, volunteers, contractors and alumni.
- 2.2 The policy applies at all times, to all staff for the duration of their employment or engagement. The application of this policy is not limited to the School's grounds and operating hours. Indeed, this policy also extends to situations when staff are:
- (a) On School grounds.
  - (b) At any school-related activities and events (including but not limited to speech nights, parent-teacher interviews, camps, events held by or in connection with the School).
  - (c) Representing the School, including when off-campus or in a digital environment.
  - (d) Travelling to and from the School, as well as to and from off-site activities or events.
  - (e) Wearing School logos or uniform (including staff name badges).
  - (f) Upholding the School's or a Teacher's legal duty of care owed to students.
  - (g) Interacting with students.
  - (h) Otherwise engaging in behaviour which in the reasonable opinion of the School may adversely affect student health and safety, student relationships, staff health and safety, staff-student relationships, perceptions regarding a staff member's professionalism, a staff member's relationships with other members of the School community, or the reputation of the School.
- 2.3 In some cases, this policy will apply to staff interactions with former students.

## 3. QUESTIONS OR CONCERNS ABOUT THIS POLICY

- 3.1 If a staff member is concerned that compliance with a particular aspect of this policy is not practical, or otherwise has questions about this policy, the staff member should promptly – and before acting in a way which may be contrary to this policy – raise the concern with their supervisor or the Principal.



#### **4. BREACH OF THIS POLICY**

*"The standard you walk by is the standard you accept."*

- 4.1 Staff are encouraged to be upstanders, as it is no longer appropriate to be a bystander to the unacceptable behaviour of others (particularly where the safety and welfare of students may be at risk). It is expected that all staff will promptly report any concerns or information about possible breaches of this policy (whether by themselves or colleagues) to their supervisor or the Principal.
- 4.2 The School will respond to actual or alleged breaches of this policy in accordance with the School's relevant policies, procedures, and guidelines.
- 4.3 The School recognises that all individuals can make mistakes. However, any behaviour that has the potential to jeopardise student safety and wellbeing or undermine the School's commitment to student safety and wellbeing, will be treated as a serious issue. Accordingly, a possible consequence for a breach of this policy may be dismissal or termination of engagement.
- 4.4 The School is responsible for determining when a staff member's behaviour falls short of the School's standards and warrants consequences. The final decision regarding such matters rests with the Principal.

#### **5. COMMUNICATION AND IMPLEMENTATION**

- 5.1 This policy is available to staff as part of the School's internal policies and procedures. Aspects of (and updates to) this policy will be addressed in the School's professional development updates, training programs, briefings and bulletins.
- 5.2 To properly implement this policy:
  - (a) The School will review this policy as part of the School's regular review cycle (or more frequently, including in response to legislative amendments, an incident, changes to the School's internal procedures or practices, or otherwise as requested by the Principal).
  - (b) Periodic training and refresher sessions on this policy are provided to all staff.

# SCHEDULE: PROFESSIONAL BOUNDARIES



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## 1. WHAT ARE PROFESSIONAL BOUNDARIES

- 1.1 Staff must act professionally, including by maintaining professional boundaries, at all times when interacting with students.
- 1.2 The relationship between a staff member and a student is not equal. Teachers in particular are in a unique position of trust, care, authority and influence with students, which means that there is always an inherent power imbalance between a Teacher and the School's students.
- 1.3 There is no definitive source on where professional boundaries are in relation to interactions between staff and students. Behaviour may cross professional boundaries because:
  - (a) It constitutes an actual abuse of a staff member's position of trust and authority over a student (e.g., child abuse and grooming).
  - (b) It involves the creation or perception of a personal or 'special' relationship between a staff member and a student (e.g., giving gifts or providing preferential treatment).
  - (c) It creates a situation whereby a student is more susceptible to inappropriate behaviour by others (e.g., asking students to keep secrets).
  - (d) It was unnecessary as part of a staff member's professional duties.
  - (e) It was contrary to the School's codes of conduct, policies, procedures and rules.
  - (f) It was contrary to community standards.
- 1.4 In this regard, staff need to understand that behaviour may cross professional boundaries even if there is no romantic or sexual element to it.
- 1.5 Some conduct (e.g., child abuse and grooming) is obviously unacceptable. In other cases, staff must take personal responsibility (and will be held accountable) for exercising professional judgment to ensure that appropriate boundaries are maintained with students, and that all interactions have a valid professional context. At all times, staff must err on the side of caution in deciding whether certain behaviour may cross professional boundaries.
- 1.6 This means that staff must:
  - (a) Exercise good judgment;
  - (b) consider carefully the implications and potential consequences and risks of certain actions; and
  - (c) prioritise a student's own needs (including education, safety and welfare).

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- 1.7 There may be limited circumstances where behaviours discouraged in this policy may be undertaken for legitimate and laudable reasons. For example, a staff member may wish to provide money to buy groceries for a disadvantaged student. However, a key theme of professional boundaries is ensuring that any behaviour which may raise questions takes place in a manner which is as transparent as possible (e.g., with Principal approval).
- 1.8 Questions which staff may wish to ask themselves when deciding whether certain interactions with a student are appropriate, or perhaps warrant a discussion with the School leadership, include:
- (a) Do the School's codes of conduct, policies, procedures and rules have anything to say about my behaviour?
  - (b) Am I dealing with a particular student differently from the way I deal with other students under the same circumstances?
  - (c) Would I be acting primarily for the student's benefit, or my own?
  - (d) Would I engage in the same behaviour if the Principal was present?
  - (e) Is it possible that my behaviour may be perceived negatively by others?

## **2. BE VIGILANT**

- 2.1 Staff must not:
- (a) Engage in conduct that shows, or that can be interpreted as showing, a personal rather than a professional interest in a student.
  - (b) Encourage or maintain a personal rather than professional relationship with any student.
  - (c) Hold conversations with a student of an intimately personal nature, for example where they disclose information about themselves, without a valid professional context (e.g. counselling).
  - (d) Engage in sensitive conversations with students. In saying this, staff may, as part of their pastoral care role, sometimes be required to engage in sensitive discussions with students. However, staff must be extremely cautious about making personal comments about a student or asking questions that probe a student's sexuality or relationships.
  - (e) Give gifts or other benefits (whether monetary or non-monetary) to students.
  - (f) Invite students to their home.
  - (g) Visit students at their home.
  - (h) Attend parties or socialise with students.
  - (i) With the exception of those specifically engaged by the School as tutors or coaches, engage in tutoring or coaching students from the School.

- 2.2 Staff can maintain professional boundaries by:
- (a) Promoting the care, safety and welfare of students.
  - (b) Not making physical contact with students without a valid professional context (e.g., to protect a student from imminent harm).
  - (c) Ensuring all communications with students have a valid professional context and occur via authorised School channels.
  - (d) Not being alone with students unless it is necessary to fulfil a staff member's duty of care or professional duties.
  - (e) Not holding conversations with a student of an unnecessarily personal nature (including those relating to sexuality or a student's relationships).
  - (f) Not unnecessarily sharing personal information with students.
  - (g) Not sharing food with students.
  - (h) Not engaging in any behaviour which may pose a risk to the care, safety and welfare of students (including bullying, child abuse, discrimination, emotional or psychological harm, grooming, physical violence, sexual harassment and sexual misconduct).

### **3. RELATIONSHIPS WITH STUDENTS**

- 3.1 Staff must not encourage, engage in or maintain a romantic, sexual or overly personal relationship with a student. It is irrelevant whether the relationship is with a student over the age of 18 years, is consensual or non-consensual, or is condoned by parents or caregivers.
- 3.2 It is also important to note that a professional boundaries issue may arise if a staff member has a romantic, sexual or overly personal relationship with a former student. Relationships formed during a student's enrolment at the School can create a power imbalance that may continue for a number of years. At the very least, a staff member should not have a relationship of any kind with a former student within two years after they have left the School (regardless of their age).
- 3.3 Staff are reminded that:
- (a) the law creates a criminal offence for sexual relations with a person under the age of consent (16 years); and
  - (b) the law may otherwise create a criminal offence for sexual relations between a teacher (or someone else in a position of trust, care, authority and influence) and a student.
- 3.4 Staff must also not engage in grooming or other forms of sexual abuse or misconduct.
- 3.5 Should staff form concerns that a student is being overly familiar, seeking to establish a relationship or has a crush on them, that staff member must report their concerns to their supervisor and/or the Principal as soon as possible so that a plan can be established to manage the situation effectively and sensitively.

#### **4. MEETING WITH STUDENTS**

- 4.1 Staff should only meet with students for valid work-related purposes (such as counselling or meeting a student on an ad hoc basis to help them with assessments or other school-related issues), and only to the extent that it is necessary to achieve that purpose.
- 4.2 One-on-one meetings should generally only occur where it is not practicable for another staff member to be present (e.g., counselling sessions). Staff should otherwise avoid situations where they are alone in an enclosed space (e.g., in a room with a closed door) with a student.
- 4.3 If staff are meeting or having a private conversation with a single student, then staff should:
  - (a) Hold the meeting at school, during normal school hours and, wherever possible, generally only in settings where other people are also present in the general area or able to observe the meeting (unless this is not practicable due to the inherent nature of the meeting, for example, a counselling session).
  - (b) Consider the time and venue carefully to ensure the safety of the student is not compromised, and avoid compromising the staff member and the School.
  - (c) Ensure that the door is left open where possible.
  - (d) Avoid locating themselves between the student and the door.
- 4.4 If there are issues complying with the above, staff should notify their supervisor or the Principal (preferably before the meeting takes place).

#### **5. TRANSPORTING STUDENTS**

- 5.1 Staff must not drive a student in their private vehicle unless they have specific permission from the School to do so. In the event of an emergency, staff should exercise discretion (for example, by ensuring that a student sits in the back seat of the vehicle) and subsequently report the matter to their supervisor.

#### **6. CONFISCATION OF STUDENT PROPERTY**

- 6.1 Students and their belongings should only be searched in the presence of two staff members, with the knowledge of the Principal or a Deputy Principal (unless a staff member is acting urgently to address a reasonable concern about a serious risk to a student or colleague's health and safety), and in accordance with the School's student behaviour management policies and procedures.
- 6.2 When confiscating personal items, such as mobile phones or hats, staff should ask the student to hand the items to them. Staff should only forcibly take items directly from students in circumstances where the staff member is reasonably concerned about a serious risk to a student or colleague's health and safety.

## **7. PHYSICAL CONTACT WITH STUDENTS**

- 7.1 Staff must not impose corporal or physical punishment on a student, or engage in physical violence.
- 7.2 Staff should minimise physical contact with students and avoid any unnecessary contact. When physical contact with a student is a necessary part of the teaching/learning experience, or to protect a student or others from imminent harm, staff must exercise caution to ensure that the contact is appropriate and acceptable.
- 7.3 Physical contact of a limited duration and respectful nature that would generally be acceptable between acquaintances (e.g., high-fiving, shaking hands) may occur. However, staff must refrain from engaging in physical contact with students if there is a chance that it may be perceived as inappropriate by the student or other people.
- 7.4 Under no circumstances should a staff member have physical contact with a student which:
- (a) involves contact with a private part of the student's body (e.g., breast, groin, buttocks);
  - (b) could be perceived as romantic or sexual (e.g., touching hair, tickling); or
  - (c) could be perceived as overly physical (e.g., wrestling, horseplay).
- 7.5 If a student withdraws consent to physical contact (either verbally or by their conduct, e.g., pushing the staff member away), then the staff member should refrain from any further contact.
- 7.6 If a staff member is required to touch a student in the course of assessing them for injury or illness, the staff member must advise the student prior to instigating contact and seek (where practicable) the student's consent. Staff should not perform medical assessments on students unless they are qualified and authorised by the School to do so.
- 7.7 If staff are required to restrain a student from self-harm, or harm to others, any reasonable force used must be in accordance with the School's student behaviour management policies and procedures, or a student's individual management plan. Such incidents must be reported to the Principal.
- 7.8 If inadvertent physical contact occurs, and this is significant contact or may involve contact between a staff member and a private part of a student's body (e.g., breast, groin, buttocks), a file note should be promptly made and forwarded to the Principal.
- 7.9 Staff should exercise caution when attending to the toileting needs of young children or students with a disability and ensure that the door remains open where it is appropriate. Where a student requires assistance with toileting due to disability, staff should act in accordance with the student's individual management plan.

## **8. ELECTRONIC AND PRIVATE COMMUNICATIONS WITH STUDENTS**

- 8.1 Staff must only communicate with students through School channels (i.e., using the School's own email addresses, systems and devices), except where the School has expressly approved otherwise.
- 8.2 Communications with students must always have a valid professional context and use appropriate and professional language and tone. Staff should be particularly careful about the use of emojis; for example, including 'eggplant' and 'love-heart' emojis in emails to students would be unacceptable.
- 8.3 Staff should only communicate with students during normal school hours, except where it is not practical to do so.  
For example: Sending an email to a student's school email address at night simply attaching assessment results is acceptable. However, sending an email to a student about non-school matters outside school hours, or to a student's private email address, is not acceptable. Similarly, staff should refrain from engaging in back-and-forth emails with students outside school hours, when the discussion could wait until the following day.
- 8.4 Staff must not invite students to join their personal electronic social networking site or otherwise engage with students on social media except through authorised channels (e.g. on the School Facebook page, or where the use of social media for a valid work-related purpose has been approved by the School).
- 8.5 Teachers who have been given permission by the School to integrate social media into their professional practice must ensure that any personal content associated with staff member's account is not accessible to students.
- 8.6 Staff must only use students' personal contact details for valid work-related purposes
- 8.7 Staff must not give out their personal telephone numbers or contact details (including social media contact details) to students, except where the School has expressly approved otherwise.
- 8.8 Staff must not delete or destroy communications with students (whether such communications are through authorised School channels or otherwise).
- 8.9 Staff must not view a student's social media page or platform, nor should they connect, interact or correspond with students on social media (regardless of who initiated the contact).

## **9. PHOTOGRAPHY OF STUDENTS**

- 9.1 School photography, including photographs of students, is only allowed with the Principal's approval.

## **10. STAFF ARE ENTITLED TO PERSONAL LIVES**

- 10.1 The School recognises that many staff have children of their own, and in any case will socialise with other adults who may have children, who are enrolled as students. Such staff may have legitimate reasons for socialising around, and on occasion with, those students.
- 10.2 This policy is not intended to interfere with a staff member's right to a private life. However, working at the School requires a serious commitment to student safety. Furthermore, Teachers are always in a position of trust and authority with their students, whether they are interacting with the students in or outside the school setting.
- 10.3 Accordingly, in all aspects staff are expected to conduct themselves in a way consistent with this policy, including by avoiding in private and social situations (including on social media) behaviour which could be perceived as contrary to this policy or involving a risk to student safety and wellbeing.
- 10.4 For example:
- (a) A staff member's interaction with a student in the course of carrying out their duties and responsibilities to the School should always strictly comply with this policy.
  - (b) Staff should refrain from transporting students other than their own to and from work, or during the workday, even if they are friends with the student's parents. Where this is necessary, permission should be obtained from the Principal.
  - (c) Social contact with a student, who is not a family member, should arise from a social relationship with the student's parents (rather than from a social relationship with the student directly). Staff should avoid being alone with a student in these situations, or communicating electronically or online with a student, without the parents' knowledge and consent.
  - (d) Staff should conduct themselves in a way that will not give others reason to question whether they are crossing professional boundaries with a student.
  - (e) Teachers should notify the Principal if they become aware they are teaching a relative, or a child of a close friend or romantic/sexual partner. This is necessary to enable the School to manage any conflicts of interest which may arise and is not necessarily a reflection of the staff member's professionalism.
  - (f) Children of staff members may only be in the staff room if it is outside normal work hours (e.g., dinner time or when a function is on).
  - (g) Children of staff members should not be in shared staff offices.

## **11. MANAGING A CONCERN THAT YOUR ACTIONS MAY HAVE CROSSED PROFESSIONAL BOUNDARIES**

- 11.1 Staff must report to their supervisor or the Principal any concern that their own behaviour, the behaviour of a student towards that staff member, or the behaviour of another staff member, has (or may have) crossed professional boundaries as soon as possible so that a plan can be developed to manage the situation appropriately. This includes, for example, situations where a staff member is concerned that a colleague may be too close to one student (irrespective of whether there is any 'evidence' of a romantic or sexual relationship).
- 11.2 If a student instigates conduct that crosses professional boundaries, staff must make clear to the student that the conduct is inappropriate. If the student continues to engage in such conduct, staff should remove themselves from the situation once they have made sure that doing so will not pose a safety risk to the student (e.g. if the student would otherwise be left unsupervised).

## **12. FURTHER POLICY DETAILS**

### **POLICY AVAILABILITY**

- 12.1 This policy is made available on the St Dominic's Priory College website. This is in keeping with the requirement of s 1317A(5)(f) of the Act.

### **RELATED POLICIES**

- 12.2 This policy should be read in conjunction with St Dominic's Priory College's other relevant policies including:
- (a) Safeguarding Children and Young People Policy
  - (b) Safeguarding Children and Young People Code of Conduct
  - (c) Parent Code of Conduct
  - (d) Staff Code of Conduct
  - (e) Student Wellbeing and Child Protection Policy
  - (f) St Dominic's Priory College ICT Acceptable Use Policy
  - (g) St Dominic's Priory College Whistleblower Policy

### **RELATED POLICIES**

- (a) [Protective practices for staff in their interactions with children and young people Guidelines for staff working or volunteering in education and care settings 2017 \(2nd Edition, revised 2019\)](#)
- (b) [Dominican Education Australia LTD Policy and Procedures for Management of Complaints](#)
- (c) [Managing allegations of sexual misconduct in SA education and care settings](#)
- (d) [Managing Allegations of Misconduct - Guidelines](#)

### 13. REVISION RECORD

Document Title	Professional Boundaries Policy					
Document Type	Policy					
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Process Owner	Policies Sub Committee					
Contact	Dr. Helen Steele ( <a href="mailto:hsteele@stdominic.sa.edu.au">hsteele@stdominic.sa.edu.au</a> )					
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