

DUTY OF CARE POLICY

RATIONALE

Yarra Hills Secondary College values of *Respect, Endeavour, Achievement and Pride* are reflected in all aspects of school life including staff duty of care of students. Yarra Hills is committed to student success in a safe environment which includes adequate supervision (see *On-site supervision policy*) for all students. In addition to their professional obligations, Principals and Teachers have a legal duty to take reasonable steps to protect students in their charge from risks of injury that are reasonably foreseeable.

Definition

'Teacher' also refers to all staff employed by the Education Department and includes all Education Support staff. Whenever a student-teacher relationship exists, the teacher has a special duty of care. This is defined as: "A teacher is to take such measures as are reasonable in the circumstances to protect a student under the teacher's charge from risks of injury that the teacher should reasonably have foreseen." (*Richards v State of Victoria* (1969) VR 136 at p. 141) As part of that duty, teachers are required to supervise students adequately. This requires not only protection from known hazards, but also protection from those that could arise (that is, those that the teacher should reasonably have foreseen) and against which preventative measures could be taken. Schools normally satisfy the duty of care by allocating responsibilities to different staff. For example, the Principal is responsible for making and administering such arrangements for supervision as are necessary according to the circumstances in each school, and teachers are responsible for carrying out their assigned supervisory duties in such a way that students are, as far as can be reasonably expected, protected from injury. This duty extends to intervention in single-sex areas if need be by a teacher of the other gender.

Aims

To ensure that staff have an understanding of their duty of care to students, and behave in a manner that does not compromise these legal obligations.

Implementation

Although the general duty is to take reasonable steps to protect students from reasonably foreseeable risks of injury, specific (but not exhaustive) requirements of the duty involve providing adequate supervision in the school, or on school activities, as well as providing safe and suitable buildings, grounds and equipment.

A teacher's duty of care is not confined to the geographic area of the school, or to school activities, or to activities occurring outside the school where a student is acting on a teacher's instructions. The duty also applies to situations both before and after school where a teacher can be deemed to have 'assumed' the teacher student relationship.

Quite apart from mandatory reporting requirements, a teacher has a concurrent duty of care to protect a student from harm that is reasonably foreseeable. A breach of this duty of care may lead to legal action being taken against the individual teacher or teachers concerned. A breach of this duty of care will be established if a teacher or principal failed to take immediate and positive steps after having acquired actual knowledge or formed a belief that there is a risk that a child is being abused or neglected, including sexual abuse.

The teacher's duty of care is greater than that of the ordinary citizen in that a teacher is obliged to protect a student from reasonably foreseeable harm or to assist an injured student, while the ordinary citizen does not have a legal obligation to respond.

Whilst each case regarding a teacher's legal duty of care will be judged on the circumstances that occurred at the time, the following examples are expectations of all staff in order to meet their legal duty of care responsibilities to their students:

- Arriving on time to class to supervise students entering class and not leaving before the bell
- Arriving on time to scheduled timetabled yard duty responsibilities
- Always acting appropriately to protect a student who claims to be bullied
- Believing that a child is being abused and reporting the matter appropriately
- Never leave students unattended in the classroom
- Never ignoring dangerous play
- Staff must sign out and in at the office using Compass if they need to leave the school during school hours
- Adequate supervision on a school excursion, incursion or camp

Staff members are also cautioned against giving advice on matters that they are not professionally competent to give (negligent advice). Advice is to be limited to areas within a teacher's own professional competence and given in situations arising from a role (such as careers teacher, year level coordinator or subject teacher) specified for them by the Principal. Teachers must ensure that the advice they give is correct and, where appropriate, in line with the most recent available statements from institutions or employers. Teachers should not give advice in areas outside those related to their role where they may lack expertise.

Risks to students outside the school environment

Legal cases establish that a teacher's duty of care does not start nor end at precise times during the day. The approach generally taken is that a teacher's duty applies irrespective whether the risk occurs in or outside the school environment. However, the important issue in all cases will be whether the school took reasonable steps to protect the student from the risk. Risks outside the school environment may sometimes call for immediate and positive steps by a school depending on the age of students, urgency and threat of injury. For example, if a live power line came down outside the school, no emergency workers had arrived, and students are about to be dismissed to walk home. No school would allow students to walk out to that danger unsupervised.

There will be a number of other situations where the school will be under a duty to take reasonable steps. In some instances, the school's control over the activity may require it to take more active measures to satisfy the requirement that it take reasonable steps. For example, a known bully on a school bus may require the school to suspend or refuse to transport the bully. In other instances, the school may not control the activity, and the reasonable measures available to it will be limited. For example, fights at a local train station or bus stop between students from rival schools may involve informing the police, contacting the other school to implement preventative measures, and notices to parents and students.

While students are generally free to move around the buildings and work independently in break out spaces and designated study areas they must be under (indirect) adult supervision at all times. Staff are responsible for their students at all times. The following instructions and notices apply to all staff.

Classroom Supervision

- Teachers must **not** leave the classroom unattended at any time during a lesson.
- It is **not** appropriate to leave students in the care of ancillary staff, voluntary staff, parents or trainee teachers (At law, the Duty of care cannot be delegated)
- It is **not** appropriate to leave students in the care of external education providers for example incursions (At law, the Duty of care cannot be delegated)

- In an **emergency situation** use a phone, if available, for assistance from the Principal, Assistant Principal or contact the teacher in the next room. (if appropriate – send another student for assistance)
- **No student** should be left unsupervised **outside the classroom** as a withdrawal consequence for misbehaviour. Withdrawal is to be conducted by sending a reliable student to the office for a staff member to remove the student. This should be accompanied by the appropriate follow up.
- If a student needs to use the “cool off” card and step outside for 5 minutes then the student must stay within sight of the classroom teacher. If the student needs longer to cool off, then he or she must be referred to the Coordinator or to the Office.

Movement of Students

- Care needs to be taken in allowing students to leave the room to work in other areas of the school. Students must be within sight of staff.
- Use of students as monitors outside the room during class time must only occur with the approval of the Principal or Assistant Principal
- Written permission is to be used when allowing students to visit the toilet, the lockers or the Library Resource Centre during class time.

Yard supervision

- Yard supervision is an essential element in all staff duty of care. It is now clearly established that in supervising students, a staff member’s duty of care is one of positive action. Be aware that students are usually less constrained and more prone to accident and injury than in a more closely supervised classroom.
- Be aware that yard duty supervision within the school requires the staff member to fully comply with DET guidelines and brings with it an increased duty of care. It is all staff’s responsibility to be aware of these guidelines and duty of care responsibilities. Staff are also expected to follow College policy whilst on yard duty. Staff rostered for duty are to attend the designated area at the time indicated on the roster.
- Staff on duty are to remain in the designated area until the end of the break period or until replaced by the relieving staff member, whichever is applicable.
- The handing over of duty from one staff member to another must be quite definite and **must occur in the area of designated duty**. Where a relieving teacher does not arrive for duty, the staff member currently on duty should send a message to the office, **but not leave the area until replaced**.
- No changes to the yard duty roster are to be made without the approval of the Daily organiser, or Campus Principal.
- Be alert and vigilant -intervene **immediately** if potentially dangerous behaviour is observed in the yard - enforce behaviour standards and logical consequences for breaches of safety rules.
- You should always be on the move and highly visible.

Excursions, Incursions and Camps

- Be aware that students are usually less constrained and more prone to accident and injury than in a more closely supervised classroom.
- Be aware that an incursion with an external provider does not absolve supervision duties of the teacher, including first aid duties. A teacher must be present at all times and remain the person designated with duty of care responsibilities.
- Be aware that camps and excursions outside the school require the teacher to fully comply with DEECD guidelines and bring with it an increased duty of care. It is a teacher’s responsibility to be aware of these guidelines and remain the person designated with duty of care.
- Be aware that excursion and camp activities require the teacher to ensure that the venue and transport adhere to DEECD guidelines.

- Be aware that school policy is for students to be counted on and off transport and at other times on a regular basis whilst on excursion or camp activities.
- The teacher in charge will have copies of all confidential medical forms and permission notes with contact details. A copy of this material will also be kept at school.
- Arrangements will be made for students not attending to continue their normal program at school under supervision of another classroom teacher.
- The teacher in charge or designated teacher of an excursion or camp will carry a mobile phone and a first aid kit.
- If the return time from an excursion or camp is delayed, the teacher in charge will contact the school to inform the Principal of the new arrival time so that parents can be contacted and a senior staff member will remain at school until they arrive.
- If crossing roads students are to use designated crossing points. Staff are to walk to the middle of the crossing to ensure visibility and orderly crossing. Other staff control the flow of students across the road.
- All staff must follow the DET guidelines when organising an excursion, incursion or camp. All procedural steps contained in the School camping, excursions and incursions Policy and Procedure outlines must also be followed.
- In the event students are required to be more independent on an excursion, staff will ensure mobile numbers have been exchanged with all students and regular contact and/or meeting times are made throughout the excursion time.
- For further information see *Camps Policy*

Informing Staff of the legislative liability of Duty of Care

All staff will be informed of their legal requirement via:-

- A copy of this document will be provided to each member of staff at the first staff meeting at the commencement of the school year, and will be placed on the college website.
- New staff will be informed of their Duty of Care as part of the school's Induction Program
- Duty of Care will be an agenda item at staff meetings and staff will be directed to familiarise themselves with section Student Safety of the Victorian Government Schools Policy Advisory Guide.
- Staff will complete a risk assessment including duty of care when completing planning for camps, excursions and incursions.
- Staff will be directed to the student wellbeing policy annually.

References: <http://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/principals/spag/safety/pages/dutyofcare.aspx>

Ratified by School Council May 2017