

NSW Department of Education



NSW Department of Education Child Safe Action Plan

2023 - 2026



Acknowledgement of Country

The NSW Department of Education (the department) recognises the Ongoing Custodians of the lands and waterways where we work and live. We pay respect to Elders past and present as ongoing teachers of knowledge, songlines and stories. We strive to ensure every Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander learner in NSW achieves their potential through education



Artwork created by Suzanna, a former student from Boggabilla Central School.

Executive Message

I am pleased to present the NSW Department of Education's Child Safe Action Plan (the Plan) 2023–2026. As the largest provider of public education in Australia, the department has a unique and important role to play in leading, influencing and raising awareness to embed child safe practice and Child Safe Standards. The Plan details our commitment to strengthening our current practice to ensure our students are safe in NSW Public Schools and leading by example in creating a culture that prioritises child safety and the wellbeing of our students.

The department's vision is to be Australia's best education system and one of the finest in the world. Our purpose is to transform lives through public education. We want every student to learn, grow and belong to an outstanding and equitable education system. We recognise that NSW public schools are diverse and are committed to identifying and addressing the full range of risks to child safety in our schools and ensuring we are responsive to, and inclusive of, the needs of all students, regardless of where they live, their identity, cultural and/or linguistic background or disability status.

This Plan provides a four-year roadmap to ensure our students' safety, welfare and wellbeing are at the forefront of what we do. It was developed in consultation with key stakeholders and commits to ongoing collaboration. The Plan outlines the department's high-level strategies to:

- Continue to build awareness in the community about the importance of child safety
- strengthen capability to implement the Child Safe Standards and

- improve the safety of children by building on current strong practices to implement the Child Safe Standards.

Schools play a key role in educating and supporting our students to thrive and prepare for life beyond school. As child safe organisations, the department and public schools, including public pre-schools, are committed to the adoption and implementation of the ten Child Safe Standards and further embedding child safe practice in our culture, organisation and work. Everyone – from staff, schools, students, parents and carers, organisations we work with and the community – has a role and responsibility to ensure the safety and wellbeing of our students. In line with our Plan for Public Education, we will know we have been successful when our students tell us they feel known, valued and cared for in our schools.

I look forward to sharing our journey with you in the implementation of our first Plan. We will continue to collaborate closely with our key stakeholders in the implementation to ensure we are all doing our part to keep our students safe.



Murat Dizdar
Secretary,
NSW Department of Education.

“Every student is known, valued and cared for in our schools”



Roles and Responsibilities



The NSW Department of Education's (the department) role includes both leading, influencing and raising awareness across the education sector to embed child safe practice and Child Safe Standards, and supporting consistent implementation of Child Safe Standards across NSW public schools.¹

The department and schools are responsible for providing a safe learning environment. As child safe organisations, the department and NSW public schools are responsible for:

- raising awareness of the Child Safe Standards
- implementing the Child Safe Standards
- ensuring all staff and services engaged are suitable to work with students
- reporting child protection concerns as they arise, as mandatory reporters
- ensuring all staff are up to date with their mandatory child protection training and updates to key policies, procedures and resources
- contributing to culturally safe and inclusive learning environments that support the safety and wellbeing of all students
- continuous improvement to child safe practice to build on and ensure the ongoing safety and wellbeing of all students.

Child Safe Standards

Standard 1	Child safety is embedded in organisational leadership, governance and culture
Standard 2	Children participate in decisions affecting them and are taken seriously
Standard 3	Families and communities are involved
Standard 4	Equity is upheld and diverse needs are taken into account
Standard 5	People working with children are suitable and supported
Standard 6	Processes to respond to complaints of child abuse are child focused
Standard 7	Staff are equipped with the knowledge, skills and awareness to keep children safe through continual education and training
Standard 8	Physical and online environments minimise the opportunity for abuse to occur
Standard 9	Implementation of the Child Safe Standards is continuously reviewed and improved
Standard 10	Policies and procedures document how the organisation is child safe

1. This includes the 100 NSW public preschools located on NSW public schools.



NSW Office of the Children's Guardian

OCG is responsible for implementing the Child Safe Scheme across NSW. OCG supports implementation of the Child Safe Standards by:

- providing guidance to prescribed agencies in developing Child Safe Action Plans through consultation and review of plans
- providing generic and sector-specific support to build capability in organisations to implement the Child Safe Standards
- engaging with key stakeholders, including children and the broader community, to raise awareness of the Child Safe Standards
- monitoring, investigating and enforcing the Child Safe Standards through ongoing risk assessments of priority sectors and organisations.



NSW Department of Education

Function and Services

Our students are at the heart of all of our decision making. We have responsibility for delivering high-quality public education to two-thirds of the NSW student population. We also work closely with the non-government school sector to ensure the delivery of high-quality and equitable education for all students. We build pathways for lifelong learning and support the delivery of a skilled and employable workforce for NSW through vocational education and training and higher education. The department employs, develops and supports teachers, leaders and other staff to deliver the best outcomes for students.

Key Risks to Child Safety

Child safety is core to our work. As the largest provider of public education in Australia, the department employs and engages a large number of people (including contractors and volunteers) and organisations who come into contact with students in the delivery of its services. The department aims to lead by example by promoting best practice and proactively identifying and responding to risks that impact on the safety and wellbeing of our students. Some examples of key risks specific to education settings that may pose a threat to the safety and wellbeing of students include:

- the amount of time students spend in school
- the hierarchical relationship between students and teachers (and other school staff)
- the fact that students of different ages attend school together
- high risk locations, including private spaces on school grounds, excursions and overnight camps.





Keeping Children and Young People Safe from Harm

The department uses a proactive and risk-based approach to inform all planning and decision-making as well as ensuring compliance with State and Commonwealth legislative requirements. Risk management is essential to the operations of the NSW public education system and ensures a safety-oriented mindset is firmly embedded in our culture and practice. The department as a system, and our schools routinely undertake risk assessments to identify potential risks and establish appropriate mitigation strategies. We continuously review and enhance our systems, policies, procedures and practices to identify risks that impact the safety of students, staff and others and put in place measures to either eliminate or significantly reduce risks in our educational settings. Some measures in place to keep students safe and protected from harm include:

- annual mandatory staff training, policies, procedures and resources on child protection that focus on key/emerging child protection issues and identification and response
- all staff are mandatory reporters who are required to report concerns about suspected risk of significant harm to students

- an internal Child Wellbeing Unit that provides advice, support and assistance to schools relating to child protection concerns and works in partnership with its respective groups in NSW Police, Department of Communities and Justice and NSW Health
- dedicated policies, plans and support services for student wellbeing and inclusion
- interagency collaboration with other NSW government agencies to share information and ensure consistency in approach in key child protection issues such as problematic and harmful sexual behaviour (PHSB)
- a mandatory curriculum on child protection that provides strategies to students to recognise and respond to unsafe situations, seek assistance and develop knowledge and skills in protective strategies and respectful relationships.
- A robust, long-standing systematic approach to the monitoring and assurance of the Child Safe Standards across all NSW government schools, confirming that there is within the department, a culture of reflection and continuous improvement.



Levers for Change

Key levers for delivering the department's commitment to enhancing child safety are:

- a committed and well-supported workforce
- a mature approach to using data to review and refine current practices
- system wide processes for students, families and staff to raise issues and concerns
- policies, procedures and staff training aligned to Child Safe Standards
- the importance of child safe practice is modelled and communicated by senior executive throughout the department
- existing and new programs and services consider and demonstrate how they meet child safe standards
- engaging student, parent and carer voices
- promoting Child Safe Standards through internal and external communication channels.

Department's Child Safe Action Plan



Developing Our Plan

This Plan was developed to further strengthen our child safety procedures while reducing administration burden on schools. The Plan has been developed in consultation with the NSW Office of the Children's Guardian. Views of our students, parents and carers were considered in the development of the Plan through a range of existing consultation mechanisms. Consultation on the Plan included engagement with the department's Aboriginal Outcomes and Partnership group and the Aboriginal Education Consultative Group – the peak community advisory body to the department on Aboriginal education and training at all levels and in all stages of planning and decision making.

The department has a separate Child Safe Action Plan specific to the early childhood education and care (ECEC) sector – [NSW Regulatory Authority's Child Safe Action Plan](#). This is in recognition of the unique regulatory function of the department's NSW Regulatory Authority over the ECEC sector in accordance with the National Quality Framework.



Governance and Accountability

The department has a child protection governance system for monitoring and accountability of child safety issues. The Child Protection Executive Directors Group (the Group) meets quarterly to proactively share expert knowledge, examine system-wide data, monitor actions and progress and make informed decisions and advise on key child safety risks or raise emerging issues. The Group is responsible for:

- endorsing the department's Plan every four years
- endorsing annual and progress reports and
- overseeing the annual review of progress.

The Group taps into existing feedback mechanisms for continuous improvement with schools, students, parents and staff to review the implementation and impact of the Plan, including identified gaps, areas for improvement and specific impacts and/or challenges for Aboriginal students, students with disability and other student groups. Each annual review tracks progress and actions and considers any new areas of work to be incorporated into future Plans.



Objectives

1. Build awareness in the community about the importance of child safety in the Department of Education, public schools and public pre-schools as child safe organisations

Actions	Outcomes	Owner/s	Data points	Completion Date
<p>1. Maintain an accessible, dedicated webpage on child safety and Child Safe Standards that is referenced on each NSW public school website</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Staff, schools, students, families, school communities and organisations are informed about child safety and are aware of the Child Safe Standards Information on the department's child safe practice and Child Safe Standards is publicly available and communicated to students, families and school communities through a range of accessible communication channels 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teaching, Learning and Student Wellbeing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Number of visits to the department's website on child safety and Child Safe Standards Number of downloads of resources provided by the department 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Late 2023 (website) Ongoing (updates)
<p>2. Develop and share resources for schools to promote Child Safe Standards and child safe practice through existing communication channels</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Staff, schools, students, families, school communities and organisations are informed about child safety and are aware of the Child Safe Standards Information on the department's child safe practice and Child Safe Standards is publicly available and communicated to students, families and school communities through a range of accessible communication channels 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teaching, Learning and Student Wellbeing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Number of promotional resources developed for schools (e.g. School website content, newsletter content) Examples of communications to schools (e.g. Staff Noticeboard articles) Number of resources downloaded Examples of communications shared with the school community 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 2023 and ongoing

ULTIMATE OUTCOMES:

- NSW children and young people are safe in the organisations that they learn, play and live in
- Reduction in child abuse in organisational settings
- Improved responses and reporting of child abuse.

2. Further develop the capability of child safe organisations to implement the Child Safe Standards

Actions	Outcomes	Owner/s	Data points	Completion Date
1. Develop and promote resources to support capability building in relation to Child Safe Standards, including training and the Child Safe Self-Assessment tool	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Staff, schools and organisations are aware of and understand their role in implementing Child Safe Standards Staff, schools and organisations can assess their current maturity and progress in the implementation of Child Safe Standards and identify actions to build capability and progress implementation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teaching, Learning and Student Wellbeing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Number of completions of training Number of resources downloaded Self-assessments of maturity and progress in implementation of Child Safe Standards 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 2023 and ongoing
2. Maintain and continue to build the capability of specialist teams and groups in the department dedicated to child safety and wellbeing to support schools/students by raising concerns and providing expert advice on emerging child safety issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Staff and schools receive expert advice that is consistent and based on evidence/policy on emerging issues to child safety Emerging issues to child safety are identified and reported early for advice 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teaching, Learning and Student Wellbeing, Public Schools 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Case study examples of support provided to identify and implement local responses to support student and families where there are safety, welfare or wellbeing concerns Number of contacts to Child Wellbeing Unit 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ongoing
3. Develop, update and share resources, including staff training, on emerging risks to child safety such as resources on Problematic Harmful Sexual Behaviour, Domestic and Family Violence, and student behaviour	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Staff and schools are supported to respond to emerging risks to child safety Staff and schools develop understanding and skills in responding to emerging risks to child safety 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teaching, Learning and Student Wellbeing, Public Schools Operations and People Group 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Number of completions of staff training Number of resources developed Number of resources downloaded Number of communications to promote resources and training 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 2023 and ongoing

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3. Improve the safety of children by strengthening current practice and implementing the Child Safe Standards

Actions	Outcomes	Owner/s	Data points	Completion Date
1. Executives in the department and NSW public education settings model and promote child safe practice and Child Safe Standards	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Importance of child safe practice and Child Safe Standards are demonstrated by the department executive The department influences the sector to embed Child Safe Standards and child safe practice 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Department executive 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Examples of executive communication on the public commitment to child safe practice and Child Safe Standards 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 2023 and ongoing
2. Conduct a line-by-line review of child protection policies and procedures to ensure alignment to the Child Safe Standards and identify opportunities for improvement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The department's child protection policies and procedures are streamlined, up to date and provide clear guidance on best practice in ensuring child safety The department's child protection policies and procedures are aligned to the Child Safe Standards 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teaching, Learning and Student Wellbeing, Early Childhood Outcomes, People Group 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Changes made to child protection policies to ensure alignment with Child Safe Standards 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Term 4, 2024 and ongoing
3. Identify and take action to mitigate risks to child safety in physical and online environments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Potential risks to child safety are identified and minimised, including risks that may particularly affect Aboriginal students, students with disability and other specific groups of students Schools provide a safe and inclusive learning environments (offline and online) for all students 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teaching, Learning and Student Wellbeing, Operations, School Infrastructure, and Public Schools 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Case studies on risks to child safety identified and actions taken to minimise them NSW Public Schools Survey results Risks captured and updated in department's risk register 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Term 4, 2024 and ongoing

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Actions	Outcomes	Owner/s	Data points	Completion Date
4. Engage and reflect the voices of students, parents and carers in ongoing implementation and review of the Plan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students', parents' and carers' voices are heard in assessing implementation and impact of the Plan The department and schools provide information and opportunities for students, parents and carers to provide feedback and make complaints 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teaching, Learning and Student Wellbeing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Insights on Plan implementation from the Minister's Student Council (DOVES) NSW Public Schools Survey results Child-focused and accessible complaints policy and procedures 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 2023 and ongoing
5. Maintain and continue to build the capability of dedicated teams and resources to support student safety and wellbeing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students and schools are supported to respond to and manage risks to student safety and wellbeing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teaching, Learning and Student Wellbeing, Early Childhood Outcomes, and Public Schools 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Number of specialist staff supporting students Professional development completed by relevant teams to build capability to identify and respond to risks to student safety and wellbeing Number of resources on student safety and wellbeing available and accessed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 2023 and ongoing
6. Identify opportunities to improve data quality, collection and reporting methods to support monitoring and early identification of child safety trends and/or risks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Department data supports system level monitoring and early identification and response to possible and emerging trends and/or risks around child safety 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teaching, Learning and Student Wellbeing, Public Schools, Education and Skills Reform (CESE) division 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Meetings held by data owners Issues identified through improved data collection and reporting 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 2023 and ongoing

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Say hello

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