



Professional Boundaries Guidelines

PURPOSE

Ballarat Grammar is committed to ensuring the safety, wellbeing, and welfare of all students by maintaining a child-safe culture in compliance with Ministerial Order 1359 and the Victorian Child Safe Standards (2022). Our policies, practices, and procedures are designed to protect students from harm and promote their overall wellbeing in alignment with VRQA minimum standards and relevant State and Commonwealth laws.

We have a zero tolerance for child abuse and are committed to acting in student's best interests and keeping them safe from harm. The School regards its student safety responsibilities with the utmost importance and as such, is committed to providing the necessary resources to ensure compliance with all relevant child protection laws and regulations and maintain a student safe culture.

Ballarat Grammar Staff hold a unique position of influence, authority, trust and power in relation to students at the School. As such, it is their duty, at all times, to maintain professional boundaries with students. The Crimes Act 1958 (Vic) includes certain offences for persons, including teachers, whose position places them in a position of care, supervision or authority, with a student.

The Professional Boundaries Guidelines are designed to provide strategies for staff, volunteers, and contractors at Ballarat Grammar in maintaining ethical, respectful, and appropriate relationships with students, colleagues, and the School community.

SCOPE

All adults in the Ballarat Grammar School community have a shared responsibility for contributing to the safety, wellbeing and protection of students. Ballarat Grammar, its Headmaster, and staff owe a non-delegable duty of care to all students which applies onsite and offsite, during school hours and outside school hours, including in School-organised activities such as excursions, camps, student exchanges, and in the boarding house environment.

The School's Professional Boundaries Guidelines applies to all adults in the School community, whether or not their work involves direct contact with students, including:

- Staff and Direct Contact Contractors (including External Education Providers) who are "school staff" within the meaning of Ministerial Order 1359
- Other types of contractors
- Volunteers
- Visitors

These guidelines apply in all physical, virtual, and online School environments used by students during or outside of school hours, including all locations provided for a student's use, (for example on-site and off-site School grounds, boarding houses, sporting events, camps, excursions, student exchanges and homestay experiences, extra-curricular activities and environments provided by External Education Providers and other Contractors).

These guidelines should be read in conjunction with all of the School's student safety strategies, policies and procedures and not independently.

DEFINITIONS

Term	Definition
Professional Boundaries	Professional Boundaries refer to the clear, ethical, and appropriate limits that define safe and respectful relationships between School staff, contractors, volunteers and students. These boundaries ensure that interactions remain professional, supportive, free from favouritism, exploitation or harm.
Staff	Staff and Direct Contact Contractors (including External Education Providers) who are "school staff" within the meaning of Ministerial Order 1359





STATEMENT

Ballarat Grammar is committed to providing a safe, physical, virtual and emotional environment where our students are respected and treated with dignity in an appropriate professional and caring manner where the risk of child abuse is minimised, and a supportive student safe environment is maintained.

It is our policy that:

- Staff and volunteers exercise their responsibilities in a way that always recognises professional boundaries with students, including out of school hours. This includes within the boarding community, camps, extra-curricular activities and at out of hours social events which do not relate to the School
- Staff and volunteers identify, discourage and reject any advances of a sexual nature initiated by a student
- Staff and volunteer interaction with students is always professional, including inside and outside of school hours
- Conflict of interest issues must be reported to Headmaster as soon as practicable
- Equal learning opportunities are given to each student without discrimination
- Appropriate consequences will be applied to staff and volunteers who breach professional boundaries.

Due to the position of trust, care, authority and influence staff have with students, there is always an inherent power imbalance 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 following guidelines are not exhaustive and given that sometimes “grey areas” may occur, it is expected that all staff (no matter their age or experience) 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 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 other students in similar circumstances?
- Is my language or demeanour different from normal when dealing with this particular student?

GUIDELINES

Intimate Relationships

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

Such 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 School.

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)
- Having intimate contact without a valid context via written or electronic means (e.g. email, letters, telephone, text messages, social media sites or other digital platforms)





- Going out, whether alone or in company, to social events such as the movies or dinner
- Exchanging gifts of a personal nature that encourages the formation of an intimate relationship.

Staff should also be aware that developing or encouraging romantic or sexual relationships with former students (over 18 years of age) within two (2) years of said student ceasing to be in a student/teacher situation with the staff member may violate professional boundaries and are strongly discouraged from doing so.

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

Personal Relationships

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 professional element. This is regardless of whether the relationship is consensual, non-consensual or condoned by parents or carers.

*It is the student's **perception** of staff behaviour and not the intention of the staff member that is important.*

An established and expected professional relationship between staff and students may be compromised by staff:

- Attending parties or socialising with students outside of organised School events (without parental/carers permission)
- Sharing personal details about their private lives with students
- Meeting with students outside of school hours without permission from the School
- Having contact and/or making connections with students on social media platforms.

Staff must recognise at all times that their role is not to be a “friend” or “parent” to a student.

Fair Learning Opportunities

Teachers are expected to support their students with their professional expertise so as to offer them the best education in their individual circumstances. The quality of teaching and learning between teachers and students characterises their relationship.

Teachers should demonstrate their commitment to student learning by:

- Maintaining a safe and challenging 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 students' best interests.

Electronic Communications between Staff and Students

It is expected that all Staff at the School 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 School 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
- 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 School





- New staff must not establish or maintain friendships with students upon commencing employment at the School however the School acknowledges that pre-existing relationships (such as family connections, community ties or parental relationships) may exist. In these cases, staff must maintain clear professional boundaries and disclose any potential conflict of interest to School leadership
- Staff should not exchange personal pictures with a student
- Teachers are not expected or encouraged to respond to concerns of parents/carers or students on holidays, weekends or in the evening
- Any student personal contact numbers or other personal contact details made available to the School should only be used for School communications.

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

- Staff should avoid unnecessary physical contact with students. Whilst physical contact in an early learning environment is required, it should always be appropriate, purposeful, and in the best interests of the child. Staff may engage in necessary and appropriate physical interactions such as comforting a distressed child, assisting with personal care, or ensuring safety. However, all physical contact must be respectful, age appropriate, and guided by professional boundaries, ensuring that students are safe and supported while maintaining their dignity and autonomy
- 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, design and instrumental music 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.

Boarding Environment

Due to the unique nature of boarding, where staff and students share communal spaces, maintaining clear professional boundaries is essential to ensure student wellbeing, safety and staff integrity:

- *Maintain a clear staff/student relationship* – Interactions should always be professional, respectful, and appropriate, ensuring staff are approachable without becoming a friend or confidant.
- *Respect personal space and privacy* – Only enter student rooms when necessary and in accordance with school policies, always knocking and announcing presence before entering.
- *Appropriate communication* – Use school-approved channels for all communication with students; avoid personal phone numbers, private messaging, or social media connections.
- *Avoid one-on-one situations* – Where possible, engage with students in open, observable spaces or ensure another staff member is aware of the interaction.
- *Set clear boundaries in social settings* – While boarding environments are communal, staff should not engage in informal social activities with students that blur professional lines, such as sharing personal stories.
- *Remain consistent and fair* – Treat all students equally and professionally, avoiding favouritism, special treatment, or forming exclusive relationships.
- *Understand the Duty of Care obligations* – Always act in the best interests of students' safety and wellbeing, being mindful of the power imbalance between staff and students.
- *Report and seek guidance* – If unsure about a boundary issue or if a student attempts to develop an inappropriate relationship, report the concern to school leadership immediately.

Off-Campus Excursions and Camps

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

- Checking of sleeping arrangements, or supervising of students changing should be done, where possible, 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.
- If at any stage a student is homesick or seeks comfort from a staff member, such comfort must be provided in a communal area with other staff members present and clear consent obtained.

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. In these circumstances, staff need to be far more diligent in developing and maintaining these boundaries.

Where a Staff Member feels that a conflict of interest may exist, they should notify the Headmaster, or the Chair of the Board if the conflict involves the Headmaster, and arrangements should be implemented to avoid the conflict situation if possible. 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 School (such as the appointment of classes or selection in sports teams) should be referred to another staff member and endorsed by a supervisor.

Disclosure of Staff/Student Interactions

All staff are encouraged to declare any interactions with students outside school hours. These interactions may include instances where the staff member is:

- Related to the student
- Friends with the student's parents or family
- Given parental consent to interact with the student for academic purposes outside of school hours and has notified the School.

Ballarat Grammar maintains records of all declarations made by staff related to their interactions with students, or relationships with students, that exist outside of school hours or School premises. These records are kept for a period of seven (7) years.

BREACH OF POLICY

All staff, volunteers and those engaged by Ballarat Grammar are expected to enact this *Professional Boundaries Guideline* in support of student and community learning, health, safety and wellbeing. Any breach of a Student Safety policy document is a student safety incident that must be reported internally. Any breach that meets the threshold for external reporting must also be reported to the relevant external authority.

REVIEW

Ballarat Grammar is committed to the continuous review and improvement of all its operations, including this *Guideline*. It is the responsibility of the Senior Student Safeguarding Officer to regularly monitor and review the effectiveness of the Student Safety policies to ensure they are working in practice and revise the policy and program* when required and after any significant student safety incident. It is the responsibility of the Senior Student Safeguarding Officer along with the Safety & Risk Officer to engage with students, parents and the broader community in relation to the review of the School's Student Safety policies. *The Student Safety Program is the name given to the full collection of policies, procedures and documents that assist the School to provide a safe environment for students and to meet the requirements of the Victorian Child Safe Standards and Ministerial Order 1359. It includes policies and procedures for:

- Responding to and reporting student safety incidents and concerns
- Student safe human resources management (including WWC clearances)
- Participation and empowerment of students
- Informing and involving families and relevant communities in student safeguarding issues





- Equity and diversity
- Student safeguarding risk management strategies
- Strategies for embedding a culture of student safety at the School; and
- Regular reviews and continuous improvement of student safety policies, procedures, and practices.

GOVERNANCE DOCUMENT RESPONSIBILITIES AND COMMUNICATIONS

All documentation within the Governance Framework will be communicated throughout the School including, but not limited to, internal communications such as Nexus posts, staff emails, staff inductions and documentation distribution.

Document Owners are responsible for identifying and managing information-related risks and issues for their assigned information entities and for escalating these to Approval Authorities accordingly. Owners of Governance Documents are accountable for their respective procedures, manuals and work instructions in alignment with their position descriptions.

The Student Safety Policy and program documentation is published on the School's public website as well as on Nexus. It is provided to new staff, volunteers and contractors as part of their induction and onboarding process, prior to commencement of work at the School.



Office Use Only

Document Control / History	
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Original Approval Date	
Current Version Date	March 2025
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History	March 2025 – Review – addition of Boarding section and Early Childhood physical contact

Supporting Documents	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> SSS-001 Student Safety & Support Policy (overarching policy - in development) SSS-002 Student Safety Program Reference Guide SSS -003 Student Safety Definitions and Additional References SSS-004 Student Safety and Wellbeing SSS-005 Student Safety Code of Conduct SSS-006 Student Duty of Care SSS-007 Student Safety and Risk Management Procedure SSS-008 Professional Boundaries Guidelines SSS-009 Responding to and Reporting Allegations of Abuse SSS-010 Our Student Safeguarding Officers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> SSS-011 Student Safety Report form – Incident, Disclosure, Suspicion SSS-012 Student Safety Report form – Student Sexual Offending SSS-013 Student Safety Report Form – Early Childhood SSS-014 Student Version – Student Safety & Wellbeing SSS-025 Restraint Guidelines SSS-026 Discipline Policy IDG-003 Privacy Policy ICT-XXX ICT Acceptable Use

Student Lifecycle / Pillars / Values / IDEALS / IB PYP Attributes					
Student Lifecycle	Student Lifecycle Subsection	Pillars	Values	IDEALS	IB PYP Attributes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Student Recruitment Delivery of Education Programs Graduation & Community 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Marketing & Advertising Enrolments & Offers Finance Teaching & Learning Assessment Experiences Careers / Work Experience Graduation Old Grammarians / Alumni 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Governance & Leadership Legislative & Regulatory Compliance Complaints & Compliments People & Culture Finance Community Engagement / Foundation Property & Maintenance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Integrity Aspiration Courage Compassion Responsibility Hope 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Internationalism Democracy Environmentalism Adventure Leadership Service 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Inquirers Knowledgeable Thinkers Communicators Principled Open Minded Caring Risk Takers Balanced Reflective

Legislative Context
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Betrayal of Trust Report - Betrayal of Trust Child Safe Standards CCYP The 11 Child Safe Standards Children Youth & Families Act 2005 (Vic) Children, Youth and Families Act 2005 legislation.vic.gov.au Child Wellbeing & Safety Act 2005 (Vic) Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005 legislation.vic.gov.au Crimes Act 1958 (Vic) Crimes Act 1958 legislation.vic.gov.au Education & Training Reform Act 2006 (Vic) Education and Training Reform Act 2006 legislation.vic.gov.au Education & Training Reform Regulations 2017 (Vic) Education and Training Reform Regulations 2017 legislation.vic.gov.au Education Services for Overseas Students (ESOS) Act 2000 Federal Register of Legislation - Education Services for Overseas Students Act 2000 Education & Care Service National Law Act 2010 Education and Care Services National Law Act 2010 legislation.vic.gov.au Family Violence Protection Act 2008 Family Violence Protection Act 2008 legislation.vic.gov.au Ministerial Order 1359 ministerial-order-1359-975 National Code of Practice for Providers of Education & Training to Overseas Students 2018 (National Code 2018) Federal Register of Legislation - National Code of Practice for Providers of Education and Training to Overseas Students 2018 National Quality Standard (NQS) National Quality Standard ACECQA Notifiable Data Breaches Scheme About the Notifiable Data Breaches scheme OAIC Privacy Act 1988 (Cth) Federal Register of Legislation - Privacy Act 1988 Worker Screening Act 2020 Worker Screening Act 2020 legislation.vic.gov.au





Regulatory Context				
VRQA	CRICOS / National Code / ESOS Act	ACECQA / Department of Education	International Baccalaureate	Other
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ministerial Order No 1359 Victorian Child Safe Standards Child, Youth & Families Act 2005 (Vic) Education & Training Reform Act 2006 (Vic) Education & Training reform regulations 2017 (Vic) Worker Screening Act 2020 (Vic) VRQA Minimum Standards for School Registration 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Education Services for Overseas Students (ESOS) Act 2000 National Code of Practice for Providers of Education & Training to Overseas Students 2018 (National Code 2018) – Standards 5, 6, 11 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> National Quality Framework (NQF) Education & Care Service National Law Act 2010 Education & Care Services National Regulations 2011 National Quality Standard (NQS) – Quality Area 2 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> International Baccalaureate Programme Standards – Standard A 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Child Wellbeing & Safety Act 2005 (Vic) Crimes Act 1958 (Vic) – Section 49M Privacy Act 1988 (Cth) Notifiable Data Breaches Scheme Family Violence Protection Act 2008 (Vic)