

# POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

## Staff and Student Professional Boundaries Policy



**Date**            **October 2024**

**Review**        **October 2026**

### Statement of Commitment to Child Safety

- Lauriston Girls' School ("School") is a child safe organisation which welcomes children, young people and their families. The School is committed to providing a safe physical, virtual and emotional environment where all 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 safe and supportive child safe environment is maintained.
- Staff hold a unique position of trust, care, authority and influence relation to students at the School. As such, it is within the duty of care to always maintain professional boundaries with students. This will also reduce the possibility of vexatious claims brought against Staff or the School.
- Further, 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.

### Purpose

- The purpose of this Staff and Student Professional Boundaries Policy and the associated guidelines in Appendix A: Professional Boundaries - Guidelines ("*Policy*") is to raise awareness of situations where professional boundary violations may occur and some strategies to minimise the risk of boundary violations.
- This Policy aims to promote child safety and wellbeing within the School environment and safeguard children and students from child abuse and harm. This Policy aligns with the School's stance on zero tolerance against child abuse.

### Scope

- The Policy applies to:
  - School Council Members and sub-committee members.
  - All teaching and non-teaching staff (*including temporary and casual staff*).
  - All volunteers.
  - All contractors (including external education providers).

Collectively, the above members are referred to as "Staff" for the purpose of this Policy

- This Policy applies regardless of:
  - The location of the interaction (*i.e. within or outside the School premise*).
  - The time of the interaction (*i.e. during or outside School hours*).
  - The student's age.

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- The student's consent.
- The consent of parents/carers and families.
- The type(s) of communication medium used in the interaction.
- Any circumstance in which a student initiates an interaction or relationship with a Staff member.

### Responsibilities

- All Staff must:
  - Comply with the requirements and associated guidelines of this Policy. For detailed guidelines, please see *Appendix A: Professional Boundaries – Guidelines*.
  - Immediately report any possible or actual conflict of interests to the Principal, or the Chair of the School Council if it involves the Principal.
  - Remove themselves from decision making where a conflict has been identified.

### Disclosure of Staff and Student Interactions

- All Staff are encouraged to declare any interactions with students outside school hours. These interactions may include instances where the Staff is: -
  - Related to the student.
  - Friends with the student's parents or family.
  - A parent or carer of children who are friends with students at the school.
  - Given parental consent to interact with the student for academic purposes outside of school hours and has notified the School.
  - Belong to the same club/association as a student.
- The School collects and retains 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.

### What are Professional Boundaries

- Professional boundaries describe the parameters and limit of interactions between Staff and students.
- Professional boundaries must be established and maintained at all times. This is due to the power imbalance between Staff and students, due to Staffs' unique position of trust, care, authority and influence.
- The School acknowledges that if professional boundaries are breached, it may: -
  - Attract vexatious claims against Staff and/or the School.
  - Bring Staff and/or the School into disrepute.
  - Create negative implications on students' learning and colleagues' teaching.

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### Policies

- When interacting with students, Staff must always: -
  - Be aware of the professional boundaries, regardless of the location or time.
  - Identify, discourage and reject any advances of a sexual nature initiated by a student.
  - Report any instance of conflict of interest to the Principal (*or the Chair of the School Council if the conflict involves the Principal*) as soon as practicable.
  - Be aware and acknowledge that appropriate consequences will be applied consistently on all Staff who breaches professional boundaries.

### Conflict of Interest

- Staff must adhere to requirements in the Conflict of Interest Policy when managing a situation where conflict of interest may arise.
- If Staff feels that a conflict of interest may exist, they should notify the Principal, or the Chair of the School Council if the conflict involves the Principal, and arrangements should be implemented to avoid the conflict situation if possible.

### Review Date

This policy will be reviewed every two years with the next review due in October 2026. An interim review may take place following any changes in legislation.

### Revision History

Version	Date	Author	Description of changes
1	October 2024	Susan Just	New policy.

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### Appendix A: Professional Boundaries – Guidelines

- The following guidelines are not exhaustive. In certain circumstance, “grey areas” may occur and Staff must always use their own good judgment; and consider the implication and potential consequence of interactions with students. Staff must always err on the side of caution.

#### Guiding Questions

- Staff should ask themselves the following key questions when unsure about whether professional boundaries are being, or have been crossed: -
  - 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 others in similar circumstances?
  - Is my language or demeanour different from normal when dealing with this student?

#### Intimate & Sexual Relationships with Current Students

- Staff must not initiate or develop a relationship with any student that is or may be perceived as intimate or sexual.
- The following conduct will breach the professional boundaries between Staff and students: -
  - Flirtatious behaviour or dating.
  - Develop an intimate and/or sexual relationship.
  - Use of sexual innuendo, inappropriate language and/or material with students.
  - Unwarranted and inappropriate touching.
  - Unwarranted and inappropriate filming or photography.
  - Deliberate exposure to explicit sexual content via any forms of media. (*note: any educational information with sexual content must be authorised by the Principal before it is distributed to students via any forms of media*)
  - Going out, whether alone or in company, to social events such as the movies or for a meal.
  - Exchanging gifts of a personal nature that encourages the formation of an intimate relationship.

#### Intimate & Sexual Relationships with Former Students

- Staff must not initiate or develop a relationship with a former student that is or may be perceived as intimate or sexual: -
  - Within two years of the former student completing their senior schooling or equivalent; and
  - The former student must be at least 18 years old before a relationship commences.

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- 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 may be perceived as personal. It is the student's perception of staff behaviour and not the intention of the staff member that is important.
- Staff must not conduct in the following manner to avoid breaching professional boundaries: -
  - Attend parties or socialise with students outside of organised School events (*with or without parent/carer approval*), unless the Principal has given prior approval.
  - Share personal and private details with students.
  - Meet students outside of school hours unless in the case of an emergency. In this instance, Staff must notify and obtain permission from the Principal before meeting the student. Staff must never be alone and must be accompanied by at least one other Staff when meeting students outside of School hours in the case of an emergency.
- Staff must always recognise that their role is not to be a '*friend*' or '*parent*' to a student.

### Appropriate use of Information and Communication Technologies ("ICT")

- Staff must comply with the following when using ICT to communicate with students: -
  - Guidelines in the Child Safety Code of Conduct;
  - Requirements in the [Information and Communication Technologies Policy](#); and
  - Requirements in the [Social Media Policy for Staff](#).

### Physical contact with students

- Staff must comply with the relevant guidelines in the Child Safety Code of Conduct with regards to any physical contact with students.