

INCLUSION AND EQUITY POLICY

Best Practice – Quality Areas 1-7

Sandhurst Catholic Early Childhood Education and Care Ltd. (SCECE&C) is an incorporated company constituted by the Bishop of Sandhurst and is a subsidiary company of Catholic Education Sandhurst (CES) Limited, who is its Member, and it is governed by an independent Board of Directors.

SCECE&C Ltd.'s Vision is to create high quality environments which are authentically Catholic, where each child and family is accompanied on their journey of development, supported by the pastoral ministry of our Church as embodied in our Sandhurst communities.

St Mel's Kindergarten is an Early Childhood Education and Care service within the Diocese of Sandhurst which is operated by SCECE&C as the Approved Provider.

PURPOSE

This policy will provide guidelines to:

- ensure all adults and children at St Mel's Kindergarten are treated equitably and with respect, regardless of their background, ethnicity, culture, language, beliefs, gender, age, socioeconomic status, level of ability, additional needs, family structure or lifestyle
- promote inclusive practices and ensure the successful participation of all children at St Mel's Kindergarten
- create a positive mental health and wellbeing environment for children, educators, staff and families at St Mel's Kindergarten.

POLICY STATEMENT

1. Values

St Mel's Kindergarten is committed to:

- the principles of the dignity of the human person made in the image and likeness of God, the common good and subsidiarity.
- children experiencing being part of God's family, and awe at the mystery and wonder of creation.
- a holistic approach for the development of each child.

- acknowledging and respecting the rights of all children to be provided with and participate in a quality early childhood education and care program.
- creating an environment that supports, reflects and promotes equitable and inclusive behaviours and practices.
- creating a sense of belonging for all children, families and staff, where diverse identities, backgrounds, experiences, skills and interests are respected, valued and given opportunities to be expressed/developed.
- ensuring that programs are reflective of, and responsive to, the values and cultural beliefs of families using the service, and of those within the local community and broader society working to ensure children are not discriminated against on the basis of background, ethnicity, culture, language, beliefs, gender, age, socioeconomic status, health status, level of ability or additional needs, family structure or lifestyle.
- considering the mental health and wellbeing needs of all children, families and staff.

2. Scope

This policy applies to the Approved Provider, Persons with Management or Control, Nominated Supervisor, Person in day-to-day Charge, staff, students on placement, volunteers, parents/guardians, children and others attending the programs and activities of St Mel's Kindergarten.

3. Background and legislation

BACKGROUND

The Vatican II Council's *Declaration on Christian Education* states that each child, because of their inherent dignity, has an inalienable right to education that is appropriate to their needs, background and level of development. The role of parents and families as primary and principal educators of children is affirmed along with the contribution of education to the common good and the building of a world that is more human.

The National Quality Framework (NQF) recognises the capacity and right of every child to succeed regardless of diverse circumstances, cultural background and abilities. Education and care services must hold high expectations for the learning and development of all children, and at the same time recognise that each child follows an individual learning path and will progress in different and equally meaningful ways. Inclusion involves taking into account the social, cultural and linguistic diversity of each child (including learning styles, abilities, disabilities, gender, family circumstances and geographic location) in curriculum decision-making processes. Early childhood education and care services must implement responsive, equitable, individualised opportunities and additional support whenever barriers are identified.

The NQF is underpinned by a commitment to 'Closing the Gap' and acknowledges Australia is a nation of great diversity, and an ancient land that has been cared for by Indigenous Australians for many thousands of years. Education and care services have a shared responsibility to support children, families, colleagues and the local community to understand, respect and value diversity.

State and Commonwealth laws prohibit discrimination based on personal characteristics, including race, age, gender, religious belief, disability or illness and parental status.

Under the Child Safe Standards, services are expected to provide environments and activities that encourage all children to participate in and celebrate their identity. The standards are underpinned by three overarching principles which require services to take into consideration the increased vulnerability of Aboriginal children, children from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds and children with disabilities.

The Victorian Government requires funded organisations to ensure that their policies and procedures promote equality of opportunity for all children to enable their full participation in kindergarten. A service's philosophy should reflect the values of inclusion and equity which are supported by developing and implementing an inclusion and equity policy. Developing professional knowledge and skills and using family-centred practice (refer to *Definitions*) to work in partnership with children, families, communities, and other services and agencies, will assist services to identify, include and support children with additional needs and their families.

LEGISLATION AND STANDARDS

Relevant legislation and standards include but are not limited to:

- *Age Discrimination Act 2004*
- *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006* (Vic)
- Charter for Children in Out-of-home Care (Vic)
- *Children, Youth and Families Act 2005* (Vic)
- *Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005* (Vic)
- Child Safe Standards (Vic)
- Dardee Boorai: the Victorian Charter of Safety and Wellbeing for Aboriginal Children and Young People (Vic)
- *Disability Act 2006* (Vic)
- *Disability Discrimination Act 1992* (Cth)
- *Education and Care Services National Law Act 2010*
- *Education and Care Services National Regulations 2011*
- *Equal Opportunity Act 2010* (Vic)
- *Fair Work Act 2009* (Cth)
- *Health Records Act 2001* (Vic)
- *Privacy and Data Protection Act 2014* (Vic)
- *National Quality Standards Quality Areas 1-7*
- *Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004*
- *Privacy Act 1988* (Cth)
- *Racial and Religious Tolerance Act 2001* (Vic)
- *Racial Discrimination Act 1975* (Cth)
- *Sex Discrimination Act 1984* (Cth)

4. DEFINITIONS

The terms defined in this section relate specifically to this policy. For commonly used terms e.g. Approved Provider, Nominated Supervisor, Regulatory Authority etc. refer to the *General Definitions* section of this manual.

Additional needs: A broad term relating to challenges experienced across a number of areas including physical health, mental health, disability, developmental concern, or emotional need (resulting from trauma, abuse or grief), family displacement (due to war or refugee status), domestic violence, mental illness, family separation or divorce, which affects a person's ability to participate or learn.

Common Good: 'true community', when people work together to improve the wellbeing of all people in our society and wider world. By their nature people are sacred and social.

Culture: The values and traditions of groups of people that are passed from one generation to another.

Culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD): Refers to individuals and groups who are from diverse racial, religious, linguistic and/or ethnic backgrounds.

Developmental delay: A delay in the development of a child under the age of 6 years that:

- a) is attributable to a mental or physical impairment, or a combination of mental and physical impairments, and
- b) is manifested before the child attains the age of 6 years, and
- c) results in substantial functional limitations in one or more of the following areas of major life activity:
 - i) self-care
 - ii) receptive and expressive language
 - iii) cognitive development
 - iv) motor development, and
- d) reflects the child's need for a combination and sequence of special interdisciplinary or generic care, treatment or other services that are of extended duration and are individually planned and coordinated (*Disability Act 2006 (Vic)*).

Dignity of the human person: The inalienable value of each human person, independent of ethnicity, creed, gender, sexuality, age or ability. Each person is made in the image and likeness of God and is entitled to freedom and respect

Disability: In relation to a person, refers to:

- a sensory, physical or neurological impairment or acquired brain injury, or any combination thereof, that:
 - i) is, or is likely to be, permanent, and
 - ii) causes a substantially reduced capacity in at least one of the areas of self-care, self-management, mobility or communication, and

- iii) requires significant ongoing or long-term episodic support, and
- iv) is not related to ageing, or
- an intellectual disability, or
- a developmental delay (Disability Act 2006 (Vic)).

Diversity: Refers to all characteristics that make individuals different from one another, including race, religion, language, ethnicity, beliefs, age, gender, sexual orientation, level of ability, additional needs, socioeconomic status, educational attainment, personality, marital and/or parental status, family structure, lifestyle and general life/work experience.

Early Start Kindergarten: A funding program that enables three-year-old Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, and children known to Child Protection, to attend a free kindergarten program that is planned and delivered by an early childhood teacher for a specific number of hours.

Equity: (In the context of human rights) is behaving and acting in a fair and just manner towards others.

Family-centred practice: Practice which:

- uses families' understanding of their children to support shared decision-making about each child's learning and development
- creates a welcoming and culturally-inclusive environment, where all families are encouraged to participate in and contribute to children's learning and development
- actively engages families and children in planning children's learning and development
- provides feedback to families on each child's learning, and provide information about how families can further advance children's learning and development at home and in the community.

Inclusion: The engagement and involvement of children and families to ensure that all individuals have an equal opportunity to participate and achieve their maximum potential.

Kindergarten Fee Subsidy (KFS): A state government subsidy paid directly to the funded service to enable eligible families to attend a funded kindergarten program or funded three-year-old place at no cost (or minimal cost) to promote participation. Details are available in *The Kindergarten Guide* (refer to *Sources*).

Kindergarten Inclusion Support Packages: A package of support for children with a disability and high support needs and/or with complex medical needs.

Mental health in early childhood can be understood as a young child's ability to experience, regulate and express emotions; form close and secure interpersonal relationships; and explore the environment and learn – all in the context of family, community and cultural expectations for young children. Infant mental health is synonymous with healthy social and emotional development (from *Be You* – refer to *Sources*).

Out-of-Home Care: Is the term used in Victoria when a child or young person is placed in care away from their parents. It includes placement in kinship care, home-based care such as foster care and residential care. For these children, the State of Victoria is their legal parent, and with this comes the responsibilities of a parent to care for and protect them, and to ensure that they have access to all the services they need for their immediate and longer-term benefit (*Early Childhood Agreement on Out-of-Home Care* – refer to *Sources*).

Subsidiarity: All people, including children and their parents and carers, have the right to participate in decisions that affect their lives. Subsidiarity requires that decisions are made by the people closest and most affected by the issues and concerns of the community.

5. Sources and related policies

SOURCES

- *Early Childhood Agreement for Children in Out-of-Home Care* (January 2019). Endorsed by the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, the Department of Human Services, Municipal Association of Victoria, Early Learning Association Australia, Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency, Victorian Aboriginal Children and Young People's Alliance, Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare, Community Child Care Association, Vic Tas Primary Health Network Alliance, Victorian Healthcare Association and Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Incorporated. www.education.vic.gov.au
- Early Childhood Australia (ECA) and Early Childhood Intervention Australia's (ECIA) *Position Statement on the Inclusion of Children with a Disability in Early Childhood Education and Care* – available at: Search 'statement on inclusion of children with disability' at: www.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au/our-work/inclusion-resources/
- fka Children's Services www.fka.com.au
- *Guide to the National Quality Framework*: www.acecqa.gov.au
- *Guide to the National Quality Standard*: www.acecqa.gov.au
- Be You: <https://beyou.edu.au/>
- *The Kindergarten Funding Guide* (DET): www.education.vic.gov.au
- Vatican II Council, *Declaration on Christian Education (Gravissimum Educationis)* https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decl_19651028_gravissimum-educationis_en.html
- *Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework Principle Practice Guide 1: Family-centred and Practice Guide Four: Equity and Diversity*: www.education.vic.gov.au

SERVICE POLICIES

- *Anaphylaxis Policy*
- *Asthma Policy*
- *Child Safe Environment Policy*
- *Code of Conduct Policy*
- *Complaints and Grievances Policy*
- *Curriculum Development Policy*
- *Dealing with Infectious Diseases Policy*
- *Dealing with Medical Conditions Policy*
- *Diabetes Policy*
- *Enrolment and Orientation Policy*

- *Epilepsy Policy*
- *Excursions and Service Events Policy*
- *Fees Policy*
- *Interactions with Children Policy*
- *Nutrition, Oral Health and Active Play Policy*
- *Privacy and Confidentiality Policy*
- *Staffing Policy*

Volunteers and students, while at the service, are responsible for following this policy.

EVALUATION

In order to assess whether the values and purposes of the policy have been achieved, the Approved Provider will:

- regularly seek feedback from everyone affected by the policy regarding its effectiveness
- monitor the implementation, compliance, complaints and incidents in relation to this policy
- keep the policy up to date with current legislation, research, policy and best practice
- revise the policy and procedures as part of the service's policy review cycle, or as required
- notify parents/guardians at least 14 days before making any changes to this policy or its procedures unless a lesser period is necessary because of a risk.

ATTACHMENTS

Nil

AUTHORISATION

This policy was adopted by the Approved Provider of St Mel's Kindergarten on 27 April 2022

REVIEW DATE

March 2025