

Child Protection

Our Child Protection policy, along with supporting policies and procedures, applies to any student at Villa Maria College who is defined as a [child](#) under the Children's Act 2014 (Part 1, s. 5). Where this policy refers to "students" to maintain consistency with other school documentation, child protection requirements apply, with the exception of those outside the Children's Act definition. Concerns about students who are 18 years and over are directed to the Ministry of Health, Ministry of Education, Oranga Tamariki, or the New Zealand Police.

Child protection framework

As required by the Children's Act 2014 (s. 14), we have adopted this Child Protection policy as our framework for student safety at Villa Maria College. This policy contains provisions for identifying and reporting child abuse and neglect, with further detail provided in [Abuse Recognition and Reporting](#).

Guidance provided by Villa Maria College for the safety and wellbeing of students aligns with the principles of partnership/mahi tahi, protection/kaitiakitanga, and participation/whai wāhi; and the rights and responsibilities of all members of our school community as outlined by te Tiriti o Waitangi. We recognise the importance of involving family/whānau in decision-making, and we involve students in decision-making about themselves in age-appropriate ways.

Our child protection policy, along with supporting documentation, ensures we maintain student welfare as our primary concern, and keep the student at the centre of decision-making. We aim to safeguard our students from abuse and neglect by encouraging concerns to be recognised and shared, and having systems to respond when concerns are raised.

See [Student Wellbeing and Safety](#) for a list of policies and procedures supporting child protection at Villa Maria College.

Supporting student safety and responding to concerns

We support the wellbeing/hauora of our students by establishing positive learning environments, and promoting respectful relationships between students and staff. We have a designated child protection person, who is the primary point of contact for concerns about students, including concerns about abuse or neglect. At Villa Maria College, this person is the principal, supported by college counsellors and the assistant principal (pastoral care). In situations of concern, we aim to work together and intervene early to support student safety and wellbeing.

We foster a safe atmosphere for our students to speak up if they feel that something is wrong or that they are being mistreated. We may use programmes to help students identify healthy and unhealthy relationships.

- For further information about our whole-school approach to wellbeing, see [Supporting Student Wellbeing](#).
- If a wellbeing concern is raised, or staff think that a student may require extra support, we follow procedures for [Responding to Student Wellbeing Concerns](#).

- If there is a concern or disclosure of abuse or neglect, we follow procedures for [Abuse Recognition and Reporting](#).

Concern response overview

For information specific to the situations listed above, see the corresponding topic. Our response overview is provided here.

If there is immediate danger:

- Phone the police on 111.
- If possible, protect the immediate safety of the student.
- Following the incident, inform the designated child protection person.
- Record any actions taken.

If there is no immediate danger:

- Record a factual account of any concerns that have come up, or any disclosures that are made.
- For any concerns, consult the designated child protection person, who works with relevant school staff and external agencies as necessary.
- The designated child protection person may consult with the principal and board to decide whether to share information externally.
- Where a concern does not warrant notifying Oranga Tamariki, the school may partner with social service providers to identify and address the needs of the student.
- If necessary, Oranga Tamariki investigates and advises relevant staff about any action that should be taken to support students.
- Decisions about informing parents or caregivers about suspected or actual child abuse or neglect are made after consultation between the school and Oranga Tamariki.
- All decisions are recorded in writing and kept in a secure child protection file, with any decision-making processes explained.

Child protection roles and responsibilities

The Villa Maria College board is responsible for ensuring all [children's workers \(core and non-core\)](#) employed or engaged by the school are [safety checked](#) before their appointment. Existing children's workers are safety checked every three years after the last safety check was completed.

If the school employs a staff member that is not considered a children's worker, they are [police vetted](#) if their role includes unsupervised access to students.

Staff have a professional responsibility to report any concerns about student wellbeing and safety, particularly in regard to abuse, neglect, or professional misconduct of other staff to the designated child protection person. For more information about staff training, responsibilities, and conduct expectations, see [Staff Responsibilities for Child Protection](#).

Villa Maria College has designated people responsible for child protection policies. Our designated people are the principal, supported by college counsellors and the assistant principal (pastoral care), and are the primary point of contact for concerns about a child, including concerns about abuse or neglect.

Child protection partnerships

Staff members work with relevant contacts within the school to best support students, and seek guidance from external agencies as appropriate. Unless there is immediate danger, staff members do not act alone on their concerns.

Villa Maria College works with Oranga Tamariki and the New Zealand Police where appropriate, and liaises with partner agencies and community organisations to support early interventions with the goal of safe and effective abuse response. We share information if it is in the best interests of a student, as per [information sharing provisions](#). In all circumstances, Villa Maria College is carefully guided by these provisions as well as [privacy](#) considerations.

For further detail about information sharing processes, see [Sharing Information](#).

External agency interviews

If an external agency such as the police or Oranga Tamariki asks to interview a student on school grounds, the school ensures the rights of the student are upheld. If Oranga Tamariki contacts the school to interview a student, that student has the right to a support person if they wish. This support person (e.g. member of support staff, teacher, or principal) focuses on the safety and wellbeing of the student.

The police may contact the school to question a student. Students in this situation have the right to remain silent, and the right to a lawyer. If a student who is under 18 is interviewed by police, a nominated adult can support them. See [Youth Law: Rights with the Police](#).

Child protection review

We acknowledge that child protection is everyone's responsibility and we share and review our Child Protection policy and procedures with our wider school community.

Child protection topics are reviewed at least once every three years as part of the SchoolDocs [review cycle](#). Our designated child protection person and any other relevant staff are involved in reviewing policies and procedures related to child protection.

The principal assures the board that the Child Protection policy is in use, is being implemented correctly, and is publicly available. See [Self-Review and Board Assurances](#).

Acknowledgement

SchoolDocs appreciates the input of Safeguarding Children through their review of Child Protection-related policies.

Legislation

- Children's Act 2014
- Oranga Tamariki Act 1989
- Children, Young Persons, and Their Families (Oranga Tamariki) Legislation Act 2017
- Privacy Act 2020
- Health and Safety at Work Act 2015

Resources

- Oranga Tamariki | Ministry for Children: [Safer Organisations Safer Children](#)
- Ministry of Education | Te Tāhuhu o te Mātauranga:
 - [Children’s Act 2014 requirements for schools and kura](#)
 - [Vulnerable Children Act 2014 – A practical guide](#)
- Safeguarding Children: [Child Abuse and Neglect](#)
- Ministry of Health | Manatū Hauora: [Is that child OK?](#)
- Child Matters: [Insights](#)
- New Zealand Police | Nga Pirihimana o Aotearoa: [Child protection guidelines](#)
- Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet | Te Tari o te Pirimia me te Komiti Matua: [Child and Youth Wellbeing Strategy 2019](#)
- United Nations Human Rights: [Convention on the Rights of the Child](#)
- National Office for Professional Standards – Catholic Church in Aotearoa New Zealand: [A Culture of Safeguarding](#)

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