

# OUR DIOCESAN COMMITMENT TO SAFEGUARDING

All policies cited in this document can be found on our website: [mn.catholic.edu.au/policies](https://mn.catholic.edu.au/policies)

## Understanding safeguarding in our Catholic schools

Safeguarding refers to the actions, structures and cultural practices that protect children from abuse or neglect, prevent harm to their health or development, and ensure they grow up with safe, effective care and the best possible life outcomes.

In the Diocese of Maitland-Newcastle, safeguarding is grounded in a zero-tolerance approach to abuse and a commitment to uphold the dignity, rights and safety of every child.

The Diocese's safeguarding practices are guided by the **Diocesan Safeguarding Framework Policy**, which outlines the mandatory requirements for all diocesan ministries, including Catholic schools, to create safe, accountable and child-centred environments.

## Our commitment to student safety and wellbeing

Catholic Schools Maitland-Newcastle adopts a whole school approach to wellbeing, recognising that students learn best when they feel safe, connected and supported.

This commitment is reinforced by diocesan safeguarding principles that emphasise care, respect, children's rights and the importance of early identification and response to safeguarding concerns. Accordingly, all staff working in Catholic schools must complete safeguarding training relevant to their role and follow strict procedures for responding to disclosures, reporting obligations, record-keeping, and e-safety.

## How safeguarding is embedded in our schools

The Diocesan Safeguarding Framework Policy guides schools in:

- **Promoting safe environments**  
Schools must establish conditions that reduce the likelihood of harm, increase the likelihood of identifying and reporting concerns, and ensure appropriate responses to disclosures.
- **Following clear policies and procedures**  
These include processes for reporting concerns, managing complaints, and maintaining safe practices for all people involved in school life.

## Upholding children's rights

The Diocese supports the Convention on the Rights of the Child, reinforcing every child's right to safety, participation and protection.

## How is safeguarding promoted to students

Our schools actively help students understand safety, respectful relationships and their right to be heard by:

- using wellbeing and behavioural frameworks such as Positive Behaviour for Learning
- reinforcing student voice, connection and inclusion as core elements of wellbeing
- teaching students using the National Respectful Relationship Education Framework, which includes advice on how to seek help if they feel unsafe.

These practices align with diocesan expectations that children be empowered to have their say and be listened to.

## How students are supported to speak up

Students are encouraged and supported to speak up through:

- safe, trusted adult relationships within the school
- access to qualified school counsellors skilled in mental health and child development
- opportunities for participation and feedback within school communities, consistent with diocesan expectations for inclusion and student voice
- teaching students using the curriculum and National Respectful Relationship Education Framework, which includes advice on how to seek help if they feel unsafe.

The Safeguarding Framework emphasises that disclosures must be handled supportively, respectfully and in a way that protects student wellbeing.

## Who students and families can speak to

If a student or parent has a concern, they can contact:

- their child's classroom teacher (primary school) or Leader of Wellbeing and Engagement (secondary school)
- wellbeing staff or school counsellors
- school leadership.

The Safeguarding Framework requires that staff discuss concerns only with authorised leaders, statutory agencies and the Office of Safeguarding to protect confidentiality.

### How families are informed about concerns

When a safeguarding concern arises, schools follow diocesan processes that ensure:

- prompt communication with parents or carers where appropriate
- accurate documentation and reporting
- escalation to the Office of Safeguarding when required.

Schools must respond to concerns with transparency and in accordance with legislative and diocesan obligations.

### How parents and carers can contribute to safeguarding

Parents and carers play an essential role in school safety by:

- sharing concerns early with school staff
- modelling respectful behaviour and positive communication
- participating in school activities and engagement opportunities
- reinforcing help-seeking behaviours at home
- partnering with the school on wellbeing or safety plans as needed.

The Diocese emphasises the importance of open communication with families and informed communities in decisions relating to children's safety.

## Student Wellbeing in Catholic Schools Maitland-Newcastle

At Catholic Schools Maitland-Newcastle, your child's wellbeing is at the heart of everything we do.

Our schools are communities built on faith, respect and genuine care; places where every young person is known, valued and supported to thrive.

Our approach is guided by Catholic identity and shaped by clear policies and practices that nurture student wellbeing, positive relationships and safe behaviour in every school day.

As parents in the Diocese of Maitland-Newcastle, by enrolling your child in one of our schools, you can expect the following:

- A school community for your child that is explicitly

Catholic and unambiguously student-centred, where wellbeing and learning are woven together each day.

- Consistent use of Positive Behaviours for Learning and transparent responses to bullying and unsafe behaviour.
- Safe behaviour planning that restores safety and relationships when harm occurs.
- Authentic avenues for student voice and leadership that build confidence and responsibility.
- A safeguarding culture that meets diocesan, state, and national standards, with prompt reporting and rigorous processes.
- A home-school partnership in which you are respected as the primary carer of your child.