

CHILD PROTECTION INFORMATION FOR PARENTS

The Catholic Schools Office promotes an absolute commitment to the safety, welfare and well being of all children, particularly those attending the Catholic schools of the Diocese of Maitland-Newcastle.

*“Protecting children is one of our most sacred trusts.”
(Bishop Bill Wright, 2012)*

Diocesan schools comply with a range of state legislation designed to protect children, including:

- The Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998
- The Ombudsman Act 1974 (Part 3A)
- The Child Protection (Working with Children) Act 2012
- The Crimes Act 1900

There are also key Church guidelines that promote the protection of children, including:

- Integrity in the Service of the Church: A Resource Document of Principles and Standards for Lay Workers in the Catholic Church in Australia (2011)

The Catholic Schools Office has specific policies and standards to heighten the protection of children, including:

- Reporting Concerns for Children (Version 3.0) a package of policy, procedures and guidelines
- The Diocese of Maitland-Newcastle Investigations Policy No. 1.4
- Child Protection Code of Professional Standards for Catholic School Employees

In 2005 the Diocese established a centralised, expert child protection team, now known as Zimmerman Services, which oversees child protection practices across the whole Diocese, including the Catholic Schools Office and all our Catholic schools. The Diocese’s child protection practices include a range of *preventative* services as well as *responding* to allegations of abuse.

You can find out more about Zimmerman Services and its roles and functions on line at:

<http://www.mn.catholic.org.au/agencies-services/child-protection>

1. PREVENTING CHILD ABUSE IN CATHOLIC SCHOOLS

1.1 Screening

The Catholic Schools Office is working with the Office of the Children’s Guardian to implement the new Working with Children Check Clearance (‘Clearance’). Before anybody is engaged in ‘child-related work’ (as a paid employee, self-employed contractor or volunteer) they must provide the Diocese with a valid Clearance number. Catholic Schools Office or Zimmerman Services verifies the person’s status through an online service provided by the Children’s Guardian before they are allowed to commence work.

The Office of the Children’s Guardian determines whether a potential or current employee poses a risk to children. Anybody who is considered to pose a ‘*real and appreciable risk*’ to children will be the subject of an interim or final bar from the Office of the Children’s Guardian. People who are the subject of an interim or final bar are not allowed to work in or attend a Catholic school or work in other child-related roles across the Diocese of Maitland-Newcastle.

There is a staged roll out of the new Clearance for existing employees, schools will be completed by 31 March 2018.

1.2 Training

The Catholic Schools Office requires that all employed staff complete a full day of child protection training presented by Zimmerman Services. Further, principals and assistant principals provide regular child protection updates and reminders as part of the schools in-service training and professional development. In July 2016 the Catholic Schools Office and Zimmerman Services commenced on line training for all school personnel, which will be refreshed annually. Face-to-face training will also continue.

If you are interested in arranging child protection training or an information night for your school community, please enquire with Zimmerman Services (Ph. 4979 1390 during office hours). Information about training is available online at:

<http://www.mn.catholic.org.au/agencies-services/child-protection/child-protection-training>

2. RESPONDING TO ALLEGATIONS OF CHILD ABUSE IN DIOCESAN SCHOOLS

2.1 Reporting

Staff in Diocesan schools are mandatory reporters. This means they are lawfully required to report to the Community Services Helpline if they have *reasonable grounds* to suspect a child is at risk of significant harm from abuse or neglect and those grounds are identified in the course of, or from the person's work. Also the *Reporting Concerns for Children* package of policies and procedures obliges all school personnel to report any child protection concerns to their supervisor or Principal to be assessed as possible risk of significant harm reports to the Helpline.

Zimmerman Services or School Principals will contact NSW Police if they believe a criminal act has occurred.

As parents of children attending a Diocesan school you are encouraged to discuss any child protection concerns you have with your school's principal, assistant principal, year advisor or the Parent Liaison Officer. If you believe your concerns are not being addressed appropriately, you have the right to contact Zimmerman Services directly (Ph. 4979 1390 during office hours).

As parents you also have the right to report your concerns to the Community Services Helpline or NSW Police at any time you believe it appropriate.

2.2 Investigating

All allegations of child abuse or neglect are taken seriously by the Diocese.

Where the alleged conduct involves a person working for the Catholic Schools Office or was alleged to have occurred in a diocesan school, the allegations are investigated at a level commensurate with the seriousness of the allegations. When an allegation is made, a thorough risk assessment is conducted and appropriate interim safety measures may be put in place.

The Diocese will provide all cooperation to Police or Community Services if the allegation is investigated by statutory authorities. The Diocese will not commence an investigation till the statutory authority advises us that we are able to do so.

Where the alleged misconduct is deemed minor, the Principal of the school, oversighted by Zimmerman Services, may undertake a local investigation. Where the alleged conduct is more serious, a specialist investigator from Zimmerman Services will conduct the investigation. Investigations of 'more serious' matters are oversighted by the NSW Ombudsman.

If your child is a witness or otherwise involved in such an investigation, Zimmerman Services will contact you as the parent, explain what is happening and request your permission to interview your child. Zimmerman Services prefers to interview your child at home, with you present.

Child protection investigations are confidential. Unless your child is involved in the investigation, it is unlikely that you will be aware that an investigation has occurred. If you are aware of an investigation you are asked to uphold strict confidentiality.