

# staff and student professional boundaries

This policy applies to all teaching staff, non-teaching staff, Board members, volunteers, Third Party Contractors and External Education Providers (together, known as "staff" for the purposes of this policy only).

Ballarat Clarendon College staff hold a unique position of influence, authority, trust and power in relation to students at the College. As such, it is their duty, at all times, to maintain professional boundaries with students. Ballarat Clarendon College is committed to the ensuring that a culture of Child Safety and upholding its legal, ethical and moral responsibilities with respect to protection of children.

The following policy and guidelines are designed to provide clarity around expected boundaries to be adhered to by staff in their interactions with students and should be read in conjunctions with the schools Child Safety Framework and Child Safety Code of Conduct.

## ballarat clarendon college's policy

Ballarat Clarendon College is committed to providing a safe physical and emotional environment where all of 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.

### It is our policy that:

- staff exercise their responsibilities in a way that recognises professional boundaries with regard to their relationships with students at all times;
- staff identify, discourage, reject and report any advances of an inappropriate nature initiated by a student;
- staff interaction with students is professional at all times, including inside and outside of school hours;
- conflict of interest issues must be reported to the Principal as soon as practicable;
- equal learning opportunities are given to each student without discrimination; and
- staff have a clear obligation to report concerns that they become aware of relating to the behavioral breaches of any colleague, subcontractor or volunteer working within the school.

## what are professional boundaries?

Professional boundaries are parameters that describe the limits of a relationship in circumstances where one person (a student) entrusts their welfare and safety to another person (a staff member), in circumstances where a power imbalance exists.

The fact that Ballarat Clarendon College staff are in a unique position of trust, care, authority and influence with students means that there is always an inherent power imbalance that exists between them. It also means that professional boundaries must be established, maintained and respected at all times.

In most cases this power imbalance is clear; however, sometimes it may be more difficult to recognise, especially for younger staff members who may only be a few years older than their students.

The following guidelines are not exhaustive and, given that sometimes "grey areas" may occur, it is expected that all staff (no matter their age or experience) use their own good judgment, think very carefully about the implications and potential consequences of engaging in certain behaviours with students and always err on the side of caution.



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When unsure about whether professional boundaries are being, or have been, breached, ask yourself:

- Would I modify my behaviour if a colleague were 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 demeanor different from normal when dealing with this particular student?

## intimate relationships

Staff must not initiate or develop a relationship with any student that is, or can be, misinterpreted as having a romantic, personal or sexual, rather than professional, basis. This is regardless of whether the relationship is consensual, non-consensual or condoned by parents/carers. Such relationships have a negative impact on the development of students and carry great risks and consequences.

The professional relationship of staff and students may be breached by:

- flirtatious behaviour or dating;
- development of an intimate personal relationship;
- sexual relations;
- the use of sexual innuendo, inappropriate language and/or material with students;
- unwarranted and inappropriate touching;
- unwarranted and inappropriate filming or photography;
- deliberate exposure to sexual behaviour of others (e.g. pornography);
- having intimate contact without a valid context via written or electronic means (e.g. email, letters, telephone, text messages, social media sites or chatrooms);
- going out, whether alone or in company, to social events such as the movies or dinner;
- generally engaging in a social rather than a professional capacity; or
- exchanging gifts of a personal nature that encourages the formation of an intimate relationship.

Staff should understand that the above can relate to perception as much as any specific action undertaken. Staff should also be aware that developing or encouraging romantic, sexual or intimately personal relationships with recent former students (over 18 years of age) is a violation of the school's policy. The imbalance of power and authority that exists in the staff/student relationship does not suddenly disappear after the student finishes their schooling.

## personal relationships

Staff must not initiate or develop a relationship with any student that is, or can be, perceived or misinterpreted as having a personal, rather than professional, element. This is regardless of whether the relationship is consensual, non-consensual or condoned by parents or carers. It is the student's perception of staff behaviour and not the intention of the staff member that is important.

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An established and expected professional relationship between staff and students may be compromised by staff:

- attending parties or socialising with students outside of organised Clarendon events (without parental/carer permission);
- sharing personal details about their private lives with students including through social media; or
- meeting with students outside of school hours without permission from the College.

Staff must recognise at all times that their role is not to be a “friend” or “parent” to a student.

## fair learning opportunities

The main focus of teaching is effective student learning and as such, teachers are expected to support their students with their professional expertise so as to offer them the best education in their individual circumstances. The quality of teaching and learning between teachers and students characterises their relationship.

Teachers should demonstrate their commitment to student learning by:

- maintaining a safe and challenging learning environment that promotes mutual respect;
- recognising and developing each student’s abilities, skills and talents by catering to their individual abilities and respecting their individual differences;
- encouraging students to develop and reflect on their own values;
- interacting with students without bias;
- not engaging in preferential treatment;
- not discriminating against any student on the basis of race, sex, sexuality, disability or religious or political conviction; and
- always making decisions in students’ best interests.

## electronic communications between staff and students

It is expected that all staff at Ballarat Clarendon College will adhere to the following guidelines:

- all use of technology should be for educational purposes or for the organisation of co-curricular activities;
- all email communication between staff and students should be via the Clarendon email system and reflect a professional staff/student relationship;
- staff should not communicate with students via text message where it is not in a professional context;
- staff should not give out their personal telephone numbers or social media contact details;
- staff are not to accept or request students as 'friends' on social media or otherwise use social media to communicate in any way that is not condoned or approved by Clarendon;
- staff should not exchange personal pictures with a student; and
- any student personal contact numbers or other personal contact details made available to the school should only be used for Clarendon communications.

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## physical contact with students

All staff should be aware that situations may arise that can be perceived in a manner that was not intended. For this reason, all staff at Ballarat Clarendon College should adhere to the following guidelines for contact with students both in and outside of school grounds:

- Staff should avoid unnecessary physical contact with students;
- Minimal, non-lingering, non-gratuitous physical contact in the context of the situation is acceptable (e.g. congratulatory pat on the back or handshake);
- Contact for sport, drama and dance instruction is acceptable in a class situation but not in a one-on-one situation; and
- If physical contact is required for specific technical instructions, it must be brief and only with the consent of the student. Note that a student may withdraw consent for this contact either verbally or gesturally and staff must remain vigilant whilst engaging in necessary contact situations. Once consent has been withdrawn no further contact can be or should be made.

## one-on-one situations

Staff should avoid one-on-one situations where this is not absolutely necessary. Staff should adhere to the following guidelines in all individual interactions with students:

- Arrange contact in public spaces or shared offices;
- Keep doors open and remain in the line of sight of passers-by;
- Include another adult in sensitive conversations;
- Ensure formal interactions occur within normal school operational hours where there are other staff and students around;
- Avoid physical contact, keep appropriate distance and adhere to professional language at all times; and
- Report any concern arising from interactions immediately.

## camps, boarding houses and king island program

These settings provide specific challenges for staff and in addition to the measures outlined above, staff should also:

- ensure that while in a bedroom or dormitory a strict staff/student relationship is upheld and that inappropriate behaviour, such as sitting on a student's bed, is not undertaken;
- alert students to their intention to enter rooms where students may be compromised (bedrooms, bathroom areas etc.);
- maintain the normal expectations around language and interactions as outlined previously in this document; and
- vacate private areas as soon as it is practical to do so after professional interactions have taken place.

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## managing conflicts of interest

Where personal relationships with students such as family relationships and close friendship networks exist, questions of conflicts of interest may arise both in practice and perception. Where a staff member feels that a conflict of interest may exist, they should notify the Principal, or the Chair of the Board if the conflict involves the Principal, and arrangements should be implemented to avoid the conflict situation if possible. For example, the teaching of students by a staff member with a conflict should be avoided.

Any significant decisions relating to these students in Ballarat Clarendon College (such as the appointment of classes or selection in sports teams) should be referred to another staff member and endorsed by a senior member of staff.

## disclosure of staff/student interactions

All staff should disclose any interaction which has the potential to conflict with this policy in the interest of both student safety and transparency. This includes proactively informing where situations might reasonably be foreseen to arise that may lead to a breach of this policy such as contact at sporting clubs, external productions and other community events where students may have contact with staff. Information can be provided to the Child Safety Officers, line manager or Principal

## staff responsibilities

All staff are to:

- follow the guidelines as set out in this policy;
- immediately report any conflicts of interest and remove themselves from the decision making process where this is the case or could be perceived to be; and
- immediately report any concern that relates to any member of the school community that may be in breach of this policy.

Where a staff member breaches this policy Ballarat Clarendon College may take disciplinary action, including in the case of serious breaches, summary dismissal (where relevant).

### Related Policies

Child Safety Framework  
Child Safety Code of Conduct  
Child Safety Reporting Policy



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