

Implementing the National Principles for Child Safe Organisations

Case Study: Christian Brother's College Fremantle



Christian Brother's College Fremantle (CBC Fremantle) is a Catholic secondary school for boys with approximately 900 students and 100 staff.

The safety and wellbeing of our students is paramount – we are committed to ensuring students are empowered to speak up to protect themselves and others.

Every boy commences at CBC Fremantle by visiting our Apology Wall, which is a memorial to the victims and survivors of child sexual abuse and addresses [Edmund Rice Education Australia's \(EREA\) apology](#) acknowledging a tragic reality of our history.

Establishing and developing a Student Safety Council is a step we are taking to put EREA's commitment to address past harms into action by creating a child safe culture in our school that prioritises the safety, protection and care of our students.

Project in brief

CBC Fremantle has recently focused on National Principle 2 and established a **Student Safety Council** that meets regularly to raise concerns impacting students' safety and wellbeing. The Student Safety Council (Council) is made up of representatives from each year group, the Principal, Vice

Principal and College Psychologist who meet twice per term. The Council engages students in decisions that affect them, allows them to express their views, raise concerns and make recommendations to enhance student safety.

What inspired you to focus on this National Principle?

Improving student agency and voice was important to us. The biggest take away from the Royal Commission into Child Sexual Abuse is that young people need to be listened to. This is where we wanted to start at CBC Fremantle.



Image 1: The 10 National Principles for Child Safe Organisations (National Principles)

The journey

What was in place to begin with?

CBC Fremantle is implementing all National Principles. To become a child safe school, the College has implemented the EREA and Catholic Education Western Australia's child safety frameworks, which guide schools to implement the National Principles through action areas and expected outcomes.

Our statement of commitment to being a child safe organisation provides a strong reference point for this work:

“CBC Fremantle is committed to embedding a culture where the safety, wellbeing, and participation of all children and young people under our care is paramount. Particular attention is given to the needs of vulnerable children and young people. We have zero tolerance of child abuse, and all allegations and safety concerns are treated very seriously and consistent with our robust safeguarding policies and procedures. CBC Fremantle is committed to nurturing the wellbeing of all children and young people, respecting their dignity, ensuring their safety, and protecting them from abuse and other harm.

CBC Fremantle acknowledges the ongoing pain, trauma and suffering endured by the victims and survivors of child sexual abuse. We are committed to ensuring all children and young people in our care are kept safe from harm and free from abuse, in a safe and caring environment for all.”

We recognised that there wasn't much in place to promote student voice and participation in decisions. The College had



some leadership structures where students met with staff, but there was nothing specifically focused on child safety and students having a formal way to raise concerns or express ideas on issues, practices, and decisions.

What barriers did you encounter (what were the toughest parts) and what helped you get past them?

Initially it was difficult to recruit students. Our students were possibly not used to being active voices so when we sought students to join the new Student Safety Council there was not much interest. Once we had approached a few students, more joined up. Now there is a Council of nine students and three staff members.

How did you involve young people in the project?

Students were invited to join the Student Safety Council. Students helped to design the role and scope of the Council in giving suggestions about how the group would operate, what the role of the group would be, types of items to be discussed and types of actions to be taken.

Outcomes

CBC Fremantle now has several ways students are supported to understand their rights and participate in decision making processes.

At a Council meeting, students raised concerns about homophobic and racist terms that were being used in two particular year groups and discussed the impact on individuals in it. They provided opinions and advice on how the matter could be tackled, including raising it at year level assemblies and applying consistent consequences to individuals using harmful language. Their concerns and ideas were taken to the Pastoral Board who held assemblies to raise awareness of the issue and set expectations for safe and inclusive behaviour. Teaching staff were asked to be vigilant for any language that was not safe and inclusive, and

worked closely with several students whose behaviour wasn't consistent with the expectations set for a safe school culture. At a later Council meeting, students reported that the situation had improved.

Sharing the learning

If we were to begin again, we wouldn't change our focus on student voice, but we would seek to engage more broadly with students. We would seek to engage a more diverse range of students by possibly promoting the group differently so that it is more representative of the entire student body.

We would also consider different student leadership groups around the College sending representatives to the meetings or including student safety as a standing agenda item in their respective meetings. These are things we will continue to focus on.

What key messages you would like to share with others who may be at the start of their project?

- Child safety should be student-centred.
- Well evidenced policies, procedures and training of staff are important, but there is much more to consider.
- Child safety is about fostering healthy relationships, promoting student agency and voice, and engaging young people in education and action. It is about listening to students so that we can understand their perspectives and experiences, and make informed decisions based on this listening.
- It is also important to celebrate the great work that's been happening and all you have learnt along the way.

Next steps

The next logical step for us is to focus on National Principle 9 where we review and continuously improve our practices so that we can be sure they are effective and responsive to our community. This will include engaging the Student Safety Council to undertake self-audits and develop action plans that build on the existing practices.

We will continue to work on National Principle 2 with a view to consulting our Student Safety Council on our whole school Pastoral Program so that we can be more proactive and dynamic with areas of concern that students are experiencing. We can use their feedback to inform the content of the Program.

Other initiatives undertaken

National Principle 1: Child Safety and wellbeing is embedded in organisational leadership and culture

CBC Fremantle has published its **Statement of Commitment to Child Safety** explaining the approach to embedding child safe culture and practices within the school on the CBC website, publicly demonstrating its adoption of principles of child safety and wellbeing, child safe practices and approach to child safety and wellbeing.

CBC Fremantle applies EREA's **Code of Conduct** to guide the behaviour of staff in relation to professional boundaries, relationships with students, physical contact, use of electronic communication, fostering safety, participation and empowerment of students and reporting conduct that falls below the standards outlined in the Code of Conduct.

The College also has an orientation program that includes the Edmund Rice Walk, where the **Apology Wall** is discussed with students. The Apology Wall is a visual representation of the EREA Apology to victims and survivors of sexual abuse. Discussion is centred around child safety, including what a child safe environment is, learning from the past so that it is never repeated, and each student's right to be safe.

National Principle 6: Processes to respond to complaints and concerns are child focused

CBC Fremantle introduced **Stymie, an anonymous online reporting tool**, to promote and nurture a child safe environment where everyone is encouraged to speak up and



advocate for themselves and others in the interests of safety and wellbeing. Stymie prompts students to report concerns for themselves or their peers on a variety of issues from friendships, bullying, cyber concerns, abuse, self-harm, suicidal ideation or simply alerting staff that a peer might need someone to talk to. Students are empowered and feel safe to speak up for themselves and their friends.

CBC Fremantle also surveys all students once per term to monitor and track student wellbeing. This survey is an easy means of students checking in and reporting concerns. It allows them to reflect on and raise concerns regarding their social and emotional health. They are familiar with the process, and they know that their Pastoral Leaders will meet with them if they raise any concerns in the survey. We have adapted the survey to collect qualitative as well as quantitative data and have added the question: Would you like to speak to your Head of House?

These improvements have allowed for greater scope for students to raise concerns and provides another way to let students know that we are listening to them and that there is someone to talk to.

National Principle 9 and 10: Policies and procedures document how the organisation is safe for children and young people

CBC Fremantle has a **Child Protection Policy** that outlines the role and responsibilities for child safety for the Principal, the College Board, Child Safety Officers, staff, all volunteers, contractors and external education providers.

The Principal and Child Safety Officers at CBC Fremantle take a direct role in promoting child safety throughout the school by championing child safety and ensuring staff are equipped with the knowledge, skills and awareness to keep children and young people safe and are supported to reflect child safety and wellbeing values in their duties.

Our Child Protection Policy outlines the principles that underpin child safety and strategies of the school. The Policy

references other key documents related to child safety and wellbeing, including the school's Statement of Commitment to Child Safety, Child Safeguarding Policy and incident notification and management framework.

In line with National Principle 9, the Child Protection Policy outlines previous review dates and future review dates to ensure implementation of child safety is regularly reviewed and improved.

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