



ST AUGUSTINE'S COLLEGE - SYDNEY

A Catholic school for boys in Years 5 to 12, teaching the Augustinian values of
'Truth, Love & Community'

Staff and Student Professional Boundaries Policy

Status	CURRENT
Classification	Child Safeguarding
Established	2022
Last Review	2025
Next Review	2027
Responsibility	Deputy Principal

Purpose

St Augustine's College - Sydney 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.

A breach of the Staff and Student Professional Boundaries Policy may in some circumstances be a criminal offence. The Crimes Act 1900 (NSW) includes certain offences for persons, including teachers, Direct Contact Volunteers and Direct Contact Contractors, whose position places them in a position of authority, with a child or young person. For more information, refer to [Offences Under the Crimes Act 1900 \(NSW\)](#).

The following policy and guidelines are designed to raise awareness of situations where professional boundary violations may occur and provide strategies to minimise the risk of boundary violations.

The practice of protective behaviours at all times will also reduce the possibility of vexatious claims being brought against Staff.

This policy is informed by the Children's Guardian Act 2019 (NSW), which outlines the responsibilities of relevant entities, including schools, to prevent and respond to reportable conduct. Staff must comply with the NSW Child Safe Standards as issued by the Office of the Children's Guardian.

Scope

This Policy applies to:

- College Board Directors
- All Staff, including the Principal and Leadership Team, teaching and non-teaching Staff
- All Volunteers
- All Contractors



together referred to as 'Staff' or 'staff members' (regardless of age) for the purposes of this Policy.

Staff and Student Professional Boundaries apply in all College environments. College environments include both physical and online environments, as well as any environment (including those outside the College's grounds) where College-related activities are occurring.

St Augustine's College - Sydney Policy

St Augustine's College - Sydney 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, 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 and reject any advances of a sexual nature initiated by a student
- Staff interactions with students are professional at all times, including inside and outside of school hours
- Staff report conflict of interest issues to the Principal, or the Chair of the College Board, as soon as practicable
- equal learning opportunities are given to each student without discrimination
- we apply appropriate consequences to Staff who breach professional boundaries.

It is the College's policy that any breach of Staff and Student Professional Boundaries is a child safety incident that must be reported internally. Any breach that meets the threshold for external reporting must also be reported to the relevant external authority.

For more information, refer to our *Procedures for Responding to and Reporting Child Safety Incidents or Concerns At or Involving St Augustine's College*.

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 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 judgement, think very carefully about the implications and potential consequences of engaging in certain behaviours with students, and always err on the side of caution.

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

- Would I modify my behaviour if a colleague was present?
- Should I discuss this matter with another colleague?
- How would I feel about explaining my actions at a staff meeting, to the Principal, or to parents/carers?
- 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 demeanour different from usual when dealing with this particular student?

Intimate Relationships

Staff must not initiate or develop a relationship with any student that has or can be interpreted as having a romantic or sexual, rather than professional, basis. It is not relevant that the relationship is consensual, non-consensual, or condoned by parents/carers.

Such relationships have a negative impact on the teaching and learning of students and colleagues and may carry a serious reputational risk for the staff member and, in turn, the College.

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
- exchanging gifts of a personal nature that encourages the formation of an intimate relationship.

Relationships with Former Students

Staff should also be aware that developing or encouraging romantic or sexual relationships with recent former students (over 18 years of age) may violate professional boundaries and are therefore strongly discouraged from doing so.

The imbalance of power and authority that exists in the Staff/student relationship does not suddenly disappear after the student finishes their schooling. Staff should not assume that they will be protected from disciplinary action by claiming that a relationship began only after the student left the College as there may be a reasonable belief that the emotional intimacy of the relationship developed while the Staff/student relationship existed.

If **any** staff member engages in a romantic/sexual relationship with a person who was previously a student at the College, this may generate concerns that the staff member previously crossed professional boundaries while the former student was under the care of the staff member. In particular, concerns may arise that the staff member engaged in grooming behaviour while the person was still a student.

The College will investigate any complaint that a staff member has abused their position and acted unprofessionally by engaging in a relationship with a former student. In considering whether there has been a breach of professional boundaries, the College may take the following factors into account:

- the nature of the relationship, including its closeness, dependence and significance
- the length of the relationship while the former student was attending the College
- any conduct that the staff member undertook which gives cause for concern
- the length of time that has passed between when the person was a student at the College and the commencement of the relationship.

By ensuring that their relationships with students do not breach Staff and Student Professional Boundaries, a staff member who subsequently forms a relationship with a former student will be less likely to be considered to have breached professional boundaries in relation to that former student.

Staff must be aware that grooming behaviours—such as favouritism, gift-giving, or private communication—may constitute reportable conduct under the Children’s Guardian Act 2019 and must be reported.

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 basis. This is regardless of whether the relationship is consensual, non-consensual, or condoned by parents/carers.

It is the **student's perception** of Staff behaviour and not the intention of the staff member that is important.

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

- attending parties or socialising with students outside of organised College events (without parental/carer permission)
- sharing personal details about their private lives with students
- 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 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
- always making decisions in students' best interests.

Electronic Communications between Staff and Students

It is expected that all Staff at the 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 **Direct Message 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 must not engage with students via personal social media platforms under any circumstances. All digital communication must occur through College-approved channels
- 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 the College
- Staff should not exchange personal pictures with a student
- Teachers are not expected or encouraged to respond to concerns of parents/carers or students on holidays, weekends or in the evening
- any student personal contact numbers or other personal contact details made available to the College should only be used for College communications.

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 the College should adhere to the following guidelines for contact with students both **inside** and outside of College 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 1:1 situation. 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 while engaging in necessary contact situations. Once consent has been withdrawn no further contact can be or should be made.

Off-Campus Excursions and Camps

During off-campus excursions or camps, the same physical contact guidelines apply as well as the following:

- checking of sleeping arrangements, or supervising of students changing should be done, where possible, with another staff member present and always in a manner that respects students' privacy and personal space
- Staff should always knock and advise of their presence prior to entering a bedroom or dormitory

- ensure that while in a bedroom or dormitory a strict Staff/student relationship is upheld and that Staff do not engage in inappropriate behaviour, such as sitting on a student's bed.

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.

This may be more prevalent in close or rural communities where professional boundaries may be tested due to the nature and size of the community. In these circumstances, Staff need to be far more diligent in developing and maintaining these boundaries.

Where a staff member feels that a conflict of interest may exist, they should notify the Principal, or the Chair of the College 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 the College (such as the appointment of classes or selection in sports teams) should be referred to another staff member and endorsed by a supervisor.

Declarations of Staff/Student Interactions

To enable the College to be aware of appropriate and inappropriate interactions between Staff and students, it is St Augustine's College - Sydney policy that all Staff are encouraged to declare any interactions with students outside school hours.

These interactions may include instances where the staff member is:

- related to the student
- friends with the student's parents or family
- given parental consent to interact with the student for academic purposes outside of school hours and the parent/carer has notified the College.

The parent/carer of the student must verify declarations by Staff about a relationship with the student and their family outside of the College context or about interactions that occur with the consent of the parent/carer.

St Augustine's College - Sydney maintains records of all declarations made by staff members related to their interactions with students, or relationships with students, that exist outside of school hours or College premises. These records are made available to the parents/carers of a student on request.

Staff Responsibilities

All Staff must:

- follow the guidelines as set out in this Policy
- immediately report any conflicts of interest

- remove themselves from decision-making where a conflict of interest has been identified.

Consequences for Breaching the Staff and Student Professional Boundaries Policy

Where a staff member breaches this Policy, St Augustine's College - Sydney may take disciplinary action that may include (depending on the severity of the breach):

- remedial education
- counselling
- increased supervision
- the restriction of duties
- suspension
- in the case of serious breaches, termination of employment, contract or engagement.

NSW Child Safe Standards

St Augustine's College implements the NSW Child Safe Standards, which include:

- Embedding child safety in leadership and governance
- Involving children in decisions affecting them
- Creating a culturally safe environment
- Ensuring staff are suitable and supported
- Responding to complaints and concerns appropriately
- Maintaining child-safe physical and online environments
- Regularly reviewing child safety practices.

Implementation

These guidelines are implemented through a combination of:

- staff training and development in professional conduct
- student and parent/carer education and information
- effective management of teachers engaging in inappropriate relationships with students
- effective management of conflicts of interest
- effective communication and incident notification procedures
- effective record keeping procedures
- initiation of corrective actions where necessary

Report Any Concerns

Whenever there are concerns that a child or young person is in immediate danger, the Police should be contacted on 000.

All staff are considered mandatory reporters under the Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998 (NSW) and must report any reasonable suspicion that a child is at risk of significant harm to the Department of Communities and Justice (DCJ) using the Mandatory Reporter Guide.

Staff

It is the College's policy that any breach of this Staff and Student Professional Boundaries Policy is a child safety incident. Therefore, all Staff, Direct Contact and Regular Volunteers, and Direct Contact and Regular Contractors who witness, or suspect, any breach of professional boundaries must report their concern internally and, if required, also externally.

Our Child Safeguarding Program includes information for Staff, Volunteers and Contractors as to how to identify key indicators of child abuse or other harm and how to report child safety concerns internally. It also contains detailed procedures with respect to the reporting of child safety incidents or concerns to relevant authorities. For more information, refer to *Procedures for Responding to and Reporting Child Safety Incidents or Concerns At or Involving St Augustine's College*.

Students

The College provides students with information about and encourages them to use multiple pathways to raise child safety concerns about or at the College, including breaches of this Policy. These include informal and formal ways, and through external child advocacy or child safety organisations. For more information refer to *Child Safeguarding Complaints Management Policy*.

Parents/Carers, Family Members or Other Community Members

Parents/carers, family members or other community members who witness or suspect that there has been a breach of professional boundaries, or have concerns that a child or young person associated with the College may be subject to abuse or harm from a member of Staff, a Volunteer or a Contractor, should contact:

- the College's Senior Child Safety Officer by phoning the College or emailing childsafety@saintaug.nsw.edu.au or the Principal principalsoffice@saintaug.nsw.edu.au.
- if the concern relates to the Principal, the Chair of the College Board by email at chairman@saintaug.nsw.edu.au.

Communications will be treated confidentially on a 'need to know basis'.