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1. Objective

The Policy, together with the supporting documentation describes the commitment of the organisation including the Cheshire School, to child safety and wellbeing.

The Policy sets out how all bestchance programs and services including the Cheshire School, meet the requirements as set out in the [Victorian Child Safe Standards](#) and [Ministerial Order 1359](#).

The Policy provides a clear set of guidelines for all bestchance programs and services, the Cheshire School, Board members, staff, volunteers, visitors and contractors to demonstrate their commitment to creating and maintaining a child safe and child friendly organisation, where children are safe and feel safe.

The Policy outlines how bestchance, including the Cheshire School will:

- Provide an environment for all children which ensures their safety, health and wellbeing;
- Promote the cultural safety of all children including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children;
- Identify, reduce and remove risks of child abuse and neglect;
- Intervene when a child may be at risk of abuse or neglect;
- Involve children in the development of child safe initiatives including listening to children and incorporating their views on how to provide a safe environment;
- Make all Board members, staff, volunteers, visitors and contractors aware of their legal and duty of care obligations to report child abuse and neglect;
- Respond to requests for sharing information to promote child wellbeing or safety and/or manage the risk of family violence; and
- Implement [Ministerial Order 1359](#) which sets out how the [Victorian Child Safe Standards](#) apply in the Cheshire School environment.

The Policy informs the bestchance community including the Cheshire School community of everyone's obligations to act safely and appropriately towards children and guides the processes and practices used for the safety and wellbeing of children across all areas of the organisation.

2. Scope

The Policy applies to:

- All bestchance Board members, staff, volunteers, visitors and contractors;
- All Cheshire School staff, parents, volunteers, visitors and contractors ;
- All Cheshire School Advisory Committee members;
- All physical and online environments used by children that are provided by bestchance either directly or through a third-party provider.

This Policy covers all forms of 'child abuse' as defined in the *Education and Training Reform Act 2006* and the *Child Wellbeing and Safety Amendment (Child Safe Standards) Act 2015*.

It is important that all Board members, staff, volunteers, visitors and contractors are aware of their obligations under the Reportable Conduct Scheme, whereby allegations of misconduct involving children can be made against a Board member, staff member, volunteer, visitor or contractor, even if the conduct occurred outside of their work/volunteering activities.

3. Context and Guiding Principles

The Chief Executive Officer is responsible for monitoring organisation wide compliance with this Policy.
The Head of School is responsible for monitoring the Cheshire School's compliance with this Policy.

bestchance including the Cheshire School is committed to:

- The right of all children to feel safe and be safe at all times including:
 - Promoting the cultural safety of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children
 - Promoting the cultural safety of children from culturally and/or linguistically diverse backgrounds
 - Promoting the safety of children with a disability
 - Promoting the (right to) safety of transgender and gender diverse children and their families
 - Ensuring that LGBTQIA+ children and their families feel included
- Ensuring enrolment processes provide avenues for each family to identify their child's individual needs;
- Recognising and respecting the diverse needs of all children through understanding each child's individual needs via the enrolment processes and conversations with families and carers;
- Valuing, respecting and caring for children;
- Ensuring equity and inclusion for all children and making reasonable changes to support participation by all children;
- Responding to the individual needs of all children;
- Fostering opportunities for each child to participate, express their views and to learn and develop;
- Acting in the best interests of each child and having zero tolerance of child abuse and/or racism;
- Taking all reasonable steps to ensure the health, safety and wellbeing of children at all times, whilst promoting their learning and development;
- Providing children with an easy to understand, culturally safe and accessible complaints process via posters and/or ensuring children feel safe and supported to make verbal complaints;
- Actively managing the risks of abuse or harm to each child, including fulfilling all duty of care and legal obligations to protect children and prevent any reasonable, foreseeable risk of harm;
- Continuously improving the way we identify the risk of child abuse and the way we respond to child abuse, and encouraging reporting and improving responses to allegations of abuse;
- Proactively sharing information with relevant authorities to promote the wellbeing and/or safety of a child or a group of children, consistent with their best interests;
- Ensuring a child safe culture is championed and modelled at all levels of the organisation through the Child Safe Champion Group. This group consists of representation from across the organisation and the School.

bestchance requires all Board members, staff and volunteers to uphold these commitments and has specific policies, procedures and training to achieve these commitments.

4. Definitions

Term	Definition
Adult	Any person 18 years of age or older.
Bullying	Repeated verbal, physical, social or psychological behaviour that is harmful and involves the misuse of power by an individual or group towards one or more persons. Bullying occurs when one or more people deliberately and repeatedly upset or hurt another person including damage to their property, their reputation or their social acceptance.
Child	Any person under 18 years of age. This includes the term 'young person'.
Child Abuse	Any act or omission by an adult that endangers or impairs a child's physical and/or emotional health or development. Child abuse can be a single incident but often takes place over time. Abuse, neglect and maltreatment are generic terms used to describe situations in which a child may need protection. Child abuse includes any and all of the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bullying • Emotional and Psychological abuse • Family Violence • Neglect • Physical abuse • Racial, Cultural, Religious abuse • Sexual abuse
Child FIRST	A Victorian community-based intake and referral service linked with Family Services. Child FIRST ensures that vulnerable children, young people and their families are effectively linked to relevant services, including Child Protection.
Child Information Sharing Scheme (CISS)	Enables Information Sharing Entities (ISE) to share confidential information about any person to promote the wellbeing and/or safety for a child or group of children. The CISS works in conjunction with existing information sharing legislative provisions. All Victorian children from birth to 18 years of age are covered by the CISS. Consent is not required when sharing information under the CISS. The CISS does not affect reporting obligations created under other legislation, such as mandatory reporting obligations under the <i>Children, Youth and Families Act 2008</i> (refer to Child Information Sharing Scheme Policy and Procedures).
Child Protection	Term used to describe the whole of community approach to the prevention of harm to children. It includes strategic action for early intervention for the protection of those considered most vulnerable and for responses to all forms of abuse.
Child Protection Notification	Notification to Child Protection Services by a person who believes that a child is in need of protection.
Child Protection Services (Child Protection)	The statutory child protection service provided by the Victorian Department of Families, Fairness and Housing (DFFH) designed to help protect children at risk of abuse and neglect. This service also works closely with Family Services (including Child FIRST) to support the assessment and engagement of vulnerable children and families in community-based services.
Child Safe Standards	Promote the safety of children, prevent child abuse and ensure organisations have effective processes in place to respond to and report all allegations of child abuse.
Child Sex Offender	Someone who sexually abuses a child/ren and who may or may not have prior convictions.

Term	Definition
Code of Conduct	A set of rules or practices that establish a standard of behaviour to be followed by individuals and the organisation. A Code of Conduct defines how individuals should behave (refer to Child Safety and Wellbeing Code of Conduct and the People Principles Code of Conduct).
Contractor	A person or company that undertakes a contract to provide materials or labour to perform a service or do a job.
Disclosure	A statement that a child makes to another person that describes or reveals abuse.
Emotional and Psychological Abuse	When a child's parent or caregiver repeatedly rejects the child or uses threats to frighten the child. This may involve name calling, put downs or continual coldness from the parent or caregiver, to the extent that it significantly damages the child's physical, social, intellectual or emotional development.
Family Violence	When children witness or experience the chronic, repeated domination, coercion, intimidation and victimisation of one person by another through physical, sexual and/or emotional means within intimate relationships. Contrary to popular belief, witnessing episodes between people they love can affect children as much as if they were the victims of the violence. Children who witness regular acts of violence have greater emotional and behavioural problems than other children.
Family Violence Information Sharing Scheme (FVISS)	Enables the sharing of relevant information between authorised organisations to assess or manage the risk of family violence.
Head of Organisation	The Head of Organisation (under the Reportable Conduct Scheme) is the Chief Executive Officer. Under the Reportable Conduct Scheme the organisation is required to have systems in place to prevent reportable conduct and to enable Board members, staff and volunteers to make reportable allegations (refer to Reportable Conduct Scheme Policy and procedures).
Information Sharing Entities (ISE)	Entities authorised to share and request relevant information under the Child Information Sharing Scheme (CISS) and the Family Violence Information Sharing Scheme (FVISS) are required to respond to requests from other ISEs. All ISEs are mandated to respond to all requests for information (refer to Child Information Sharing Scheme and Family Violence Information Sharing Scheme Policies and procedures).
Maltreatment	Physical and/or emotional mistreatment and/or lack of care of a child. Examples include sexual abuse, the witnessing of family violence and any non-accidental injury to a child.
Mandatory Reporting	<p>The legal obligation of certain professionals and community members to report when they believe, on reasonable grounds, that a child is in need of protection from harm. A broad range of professional groups are identified in the <i>Children, Youth and Families Act 2005</i> as 'Mandatory Reporters' including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All educators with post-secondary qualifications in care, education or minding children and who are employed or engaged in an education and care service or a children's service; • All proprietors, nominees of a children's service, approved providers and nominated supervisors in an education and care service; • Educators/teachers registered with the Victorian Institute of Teaching (VIT); <p>Mandatory Reporters must make a report to Victorian Police and/or Child Protection as soon as it is practicable, if during the course of acting out their</p>

Term	Definition
	<p>professional roles and responsibilities they form a belief on reasonable grounds (refer to definitions) that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A child has suffered, or is likely to suffer, significant harm as a result of physical and/or sexual abuse; and • The child's parents/guardians have not protected, or are unlikely to protect the child from harm of that type. <p>Mandatory reporters must also follow processes for responding to incidents and disclosure of suspicions of child abuse to fulfil their legal obligations (refer to Mandatory Reporting Procedure).</p>
Neglect	The failure to provide a child with the basic necessities of life such as food, clothing, shelter, medical attention or supervision, to the extent that the child's health and development is or is likely to be significantly harmed.
Negligence	Doing, or failing to do something that a reasonable person would, or would not do in a certain situation, and which causes another person damage, injury or loss as a result.
Offender or Perpetrator	A person who mistreats and/or harms a child.
Physical Abuse	When a child suffers or is likely to suffer significant harm from an injury inflicted by a parent/guardian, caregiver or other adult. The injury may be inflicted intentionally, or be the consequence of physical punishment or the physically aggressive treatment of a child. Physical injury or significant harm to a child can also result from neglect by a parent/guardian, caregiver or other adult. The injury may take the form of bruises, cuts, burns or fractures, poisoning, internal injuries, shaking injuries or strangulation.
Racial, Cultural, Religious Abuse	Conduct that demonstrates contempt, ridicule, hatred or negativity towards a child because of their race, culture or religion. It may be overt, such as direct racial vilification or discrimination, or covert, such as demonstrating a lack of cultural respect (attitude and values) and awareness (knowledge and understanding) or failing to provide positive images about another culture.
Reasonable belief/ Reasonable grounds	<p>A person may form a belief on reasonable grounds that a child is in need of protection after becoming aware that the child's health, safety or wellbeing is at risk and the child's parents/guardians are unwilling or unable to protect them. There may be reasonable grounds for forming such a belief if:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A child states that they have been physically or sexually abused; • A child states that they know someone who has been physically or sexually abused (sometimes the child may be referring to themselves); • Someone who knows the child states that the child has been physically or sexually abused; • A child shows signs of being physically or sexually abused; • The person is aware of persistent family violence or parental substance misuse, psychiatric illness or intellectual disability or other factors that are impacting on the child's safety, stability or development; • The person observes signs or indicators of abuse, including non-accidental or unexplained injury, persistent neglect, poor care or lack of appropriate supervision; and • A child's actions or behaviour may place them at risk of significant harm and the parents/guardians are unwilling or unable to protect the child.
Reportable Allegation	Any allegation that an employee, volunteer or student has committed child abuse.
Reportable	Aimed to improve oversight of how organisations respond to allegations of

Term	Definition
Conduct Scheme	<p>child abuse and child-related misconduct by their workers and volunteers. There are five types of reportable conduct:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Sexual offences committed against, with or in the presence of a child; 2. Sexual misconduct committed against, with or in the presence of a child; 3. Physical violence against, with or in the presence of a child; 4. Any behaviour that causes significant emotional or psychological harm to a child; and 5. Significant neglect of a child.
Sexual Abuse	<p>When a person uses power or authority over a child, or inducements such as money or special attention to involve a child in sexual activity. This includes a wide range of sexual behaviour including inappropriate touching/fondling of a child or exposing a child to pornography, having sex with a child and/or grooming a child with the intent of committing sexual abuse.</p>
Working with Children (WWC) Check – Victoria	<p>A legal requirement under the <i>Workers Screening Act 2020</i> for those undertaking paid or volunteer child-related work in Victoria. Conducted by the Victorian Department of Justice and Community Safety.</p>
Working with Children (WWC) Clearance	<p>A WWC Clearance is the result of a successful WWC Check and is granted to a person if:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They have been assessed as suitable to work with children; • There has been no information that, if the person worked with children, they would pose a risk to those children; and • They are not prohibited from attempting to obtain, undertake or remain in child-related employment.

5. Policy

To uphold this Policy, bestchance is committed to:

5.1. Building a child safe culture

All Board members, staff and volunteers have a responsibility to support bestchance's commitment and obligation to creating a child safe environment.

5.2. Child Safety and Wellbeing Code of Conduct

All Board members, staff and volunteers must ensure that they, at all times, display appropriate standards of behaviour towards children, ensuring that children are respected, feel safe and protected and their concerns are taken seriously.

The bestchance Child Safety and Wellbeing Code of Conduct outlines the accepted behaviours of Board members, staff and volunteers towards children and mitigates opportunities for abuse or harm to occur.

5.3. Reporting all child safety concerns

This policy supports all Board members, staff and volunteers in understanding their reporting obligations including Mandatory Reporting, Serious Incident Reporting, Reportable Conduct, Racism and Compliments, Complaints and Feedback. All instances must be reported centrally to the Governance and Safety team as soon as practical via quality@bestchance.org.au.

All Board members, staff and volunteers working in the Early Childhood Education and Care sector are mandated to report the following to Victoria Police via 000:

- Suspected, alleged or disclosed sexual abuse of a child
- Suspected, alleged or disclosed physical abuse of a child

In Victoria, all persons over the age of 18 years are mandated to report the following to Victoria Police via 000:

- Suspected, alleged or disclosed sexual abuse of a child

All Board members, staff and volunteers are required to report any reportable conduct committed by another Board member, staff member and/or volunteer, to the Governance team immediately. Reportable conduct includes:

- Any sexual offence committed against, with or in the presence of a child, whether or not a criminal proceeding in relation to the offence has been commenced or concluded
- Sexual misconduct committed against, with or in the presence of a child
- Physical violence committed against, with or in the presence of a child
- Any behavior that causes significant emotional or psychological harm to a child
- Significant neglect of a child

The Governance and Safety team is responsible for:

- Conducting internal investigations
- Reporting to Victoria Police any incidents of Reportable Conduct (while awaiting approval to conduct internal investigation)
- Reporting all Serious Incidents to the Department of Education via National Quality Agenda IT Systems (NQAITS) within the specified timelines
- Reporting on child safe incidents to the Governance and Risk Committee and/or the Board at least quarterly.

Nominated Child Safe Delegates are responsible for:

- Providing information and support to all staff, volunteers, visitors, children, and their parents/guardians/carers regarding child safe/child protection matters

5.4. Managing Complaints

All persons are encouraged to provide their complaint in writing (using the Compliments, Complaints and Feedback form) and emailing this to the program directly or to quality@bestchance.org.au. Where a complaint is raised by a child, the staff member will document the details, noting the child's words as much as possible.

Complaints will be investigated by the relevant program staff member or where relevant, by the General Manager Governance and Safety (or Nominee) as soon as practicable after being received.

Note: Minor complaints are handled at the local level. Escalated complaints and complaints of a serious nature will be investigated by The General Manager Governance and Safety (or Nominee).

Processing a complaint

- Consider the nature and details of the complaint
NOTE: For complaints that allege a child is exhibiting harmful, sexual behaviours the following documents will be referred to:
 - [Age Appropriate Sexual Behaviours in Children and Young People and/or](#)
 - [Child Wise Factsheet: Normal vs Concerning Sexual Development in Children](#)
- Acknowledge the complaint and inform the complainant of the procedure for dealing with the complaint.
- Give the complainant the opportunity to provide any additional information.
- Where required, report to Child Protection and/or Victoria Police as per Mandatory Reporting responsibilities.
- Maintain appropriate records of all information and data collected.
- Respect the confidential nature of information relating to the complaint and manage any complaint in a discrete and professional manner. All written information relating to complaints will be stored in a secure place with limited access.

Investigating a complaint

The Program Manager/General Manager Governance and Safety (or Nominee) will conduct an internal investigation in line with the Integrated Quality and Risk Framework which includes:

- Identification of any relevant, policies procedures and forms.
- Meeting individually with all witnesses to any alleged incident, giving right of reply to the person(s) against whom any allegations are made.
- Reviewing relevant information and documents.
- Obtaining any information or documentation that will assist in resolution of the complaint.

Resolution of a complaint

Complaints handled at the local level will attempt to be resolved by mutual agreement via discussion with relevant parties.

Investigations conducted by the General Manager Governance and Safety (or Nominee) into escalated and/or serious complaints will identify resolution opportunities.

5.5. Robust recruitment and selection processes

bestchance has robust recruitment and selection processes for Board members, staff and volunteers.

Recruitment practices include selection criteria which clearly demonstrate commitment to child safety to assist in ensuring that the most appropriate Board members, staff and volunteers are selected.

Recruitment for positions that involve contact with children is based on selection criteria which clearly demonstrate commitment to child safety.

Selection processes include pre-screening activities to reflect an understanding of and a commitment to child safety.

All Board members, staff and volunteers are required to hold a current Working With Children (WWC) check for Victoria or an equivalent Victorian Institute of Teaching (VIT) registration and to provide evidence that the WWC check/VIT registration is valid upon request.

5.6. Ongoing training and supervision

To ensure an engendered child safe culture, all bestchance Board members, staff and volunteers are required to:

- Implement bestchance policies and procedures for:
 - Child Safety
 - Child Protection
 - Reportable Conduct Scheme
 - Recruitment and Selection
- Complete the Department of Education Mandatory Reporting e-learning module on an annual basis
- Complete internal Child Safe training which includes how to identify, assess and minimise the risk of child abuse and to detect potential signs of child abuse

6. Accountabilities

The Board and the Chief Executive Officer are responsible for ensuring all Board members, staff and volunteers comply with this Policy.

The Head of School is responsible for ensuring that all staff and volunteers within the school comply with this Policy.

The General Manager Governance and Safety is responsible for reviewing the effective implementation of this Policy via annual self-assessments across all programs and services including the Cheshire School.

The General Manager Governance and Safety is responsible for ensuring this policy is reviewed on an annual basis and/or immediately after a serious child safety and wellbeing incident.

7. Related Documents

- Child Protection Policy
- Child Protection Procedure
- Mandatory Reporting Policy
- Compliments, Complaints and Feedback Policy
- Reportable Conduct Scheme Policy
- Child Safety and Wellbeing Code of Conduct
- Code of Conduct
- Recruitment and Selection Policy
- Child Information Sharing Scheme Policy
- Family Violence Information Sharing Scheme Policy

8. Relevant Legislation

- *Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005*
- *Privacy and Data Protection Act 2014*
- *Children Legislation Amendment (Reportable Conduct) Act 2017*
- *Family Violence Protection Act 2008*
- Family Violence Protection (Information Sharing and Risk Management) Regulations 2018
- Child Wellbeing and Safety (Information Sharing) Regulations 2018

9. Document Control

Document ID	TBA		
Policy Type	Organisation Wide		
Policy Owner	General Manager Governance and Safety		
Approval Authority	Board		
Next Review	April 2026		
Document History	Version	Approved	Summary of Changes
	1.0	01/07/2022	Inaugural version
	2.0	22/02/2023	Content update in line with the Child Safe Standards 2022
	3.0	12/3/2024	Position titles update
	3.1	01/04/2025	Terminology/language update only