



ST. MARY'S *Catholic High School, Dubai*

CHILD PROTECTION & SAFEGUARDING POLICY

2025-2026

1. Purpose & Scope

Purpose:

St. Mary's Catholic High School is committed to upholding the Marian Promise by fostering a school community grounded in dignity, compassion, integrity and mutual respect. The purpose of this policy is to safeguard and promote the welfare of all students, ensuring that every child is protected from harm and supported to thrive academically, socially and emotionally in alignment with the school's vision and mission.

The school recognises that safeguarding is fundamental to student wellbeing and learning. We are committed to providing equal protection and support to all students, regardless of age, culture, ability, disability, gender, language, racial origin or religious belief. As a culturally diverse community a "melting pot" of backgrounds and experiences, we celebrate diversity while ensuring that every student feels safe, valued and protected.

This policy outlines the school's commitment to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of every student by:

- Creating and maintaining a safe, secure and inclusive learning environment.
- Raising awareness of safeguarding responsibilities among staff, students and parents.
- Establishing clear expectations of conduct and professional behaviour.
- Ensuring accountability, transparency and responsibility in safeguarding practice.
- Complying fully with UAE legal and regulatory requirements.
- A practice of listening and interacting in dialogue with children.
- Seeking children's views in ways that are appropriate to their age.
- Understanding and taking account of children's views in every individual decision

Scope:

This policy applies to:

- All students enrolled at the school
- All teaching and non-teaching staff
- Senior Leadership Team members
- The Child Protection Officer (CPO)
- Visitors and external professionals working with students
(Parent funded LSAs) Parents and carers, as partners in safeguarding.



Safeguarding Policy Statement:

Safeguarding is a shared responsibility. All members of the school community are expected to contribute to maintaining a safe environment and to report concerns promptly and appropriately in accordance with this policy.

2. Legal and Regulatory Framework

St. Mary's Catholic High School recognises that safeguarding and child protection are governed by national and local legislation, as well as sector-specific regulatory requirements. This policy is informed by and aligned with relevant laws of the United Arab Emirates, Dubai regulations, and the safeguarding expectations issued by the Knowledge and Human Development Authority (KHDA) and the Ministry of Education (MOE).

The school's safeguarding procedures are grounded in the provisions of UAE Federal Law No. (3) of 2016 on Child Rights (Wadeema's Law) and its Implementing Regulation under Cabinet Resolution No. (52) of 2018, including subsequent amendments. These laws establish the rights of children to protection from all forms of abuse, neglect, exploitation and harm, and outline responsibilities for prevention, reporting and intervention.

The policy is also aligned with Federal Decree-Law No. (33) of 2024, which amends provisions of the Child Rights Law to strengthen protection for children in the UAE and reinforce institutional accountability.

In addition, the school adheres to UAE Federal Law No. (29) of 2006 concerning the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (People of Determination) and Dubai Law No. (2) of 2014 concerning the Protection of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in the Emirate of Dubai, ensuring that students of determination are afforded equal protection, dignity, reasonable adjustments and inclusive safeguarding measures.

As a private school operating in the Emirate of Dubai, St. Mary's Catholic High School complies with the safeguarding and child protection requirements set forth by the Knowledge and Human Development Authority (KHDA). The school also aligns its procedures with the Ministry of Education (MOE) National Child Protection Policy in Educational Institutions (2022) and related guidance applicable to educational settings.



The school acknowledges its obligation to remain informed of legislative updates and regulatory developments. This policy will be reviewed annually or sooner where required, to ensure continued compliance with UAE law, KHDA requirements and MOE guidance.

3. Key Definitions

For the purpose of this policy, the following definitions apply:

Child

- A child refers to any individual under the age of 18 years, in accordance with UAE Federal Law No. (3) of 2016 (Wadeema's Law).

Adolescent

- An adolescent refers to a young person typically between the ages of 12 and 18 years who is undergoing developmental transition into adulthood. For safeguarding purposes, adolescents remain protected under child protection legislation until the age of 18.

Vulnerable Individual

- A vulnerable individual refers to a child who may be at increased risk of harm due to personal, social, emotional, medical, developmental or environmental factors. This may include students of determination, students experiencing mental health difficulties, or those facing challenging family or social circumstances.



Child Protection Officer (CPO)

- The Child Protection Officer (CPO) is the designated senior member of staff, responsible for leading, safeguarding and child protection procedures within the school. The CPO oversees the reporting, recording and management of safeguarding concerns, liaises with relevant authorities and ensures that appropriate action is taken in the best interests of the child.

Safeguarding

- Safeguarding refers to the actions taken to promote the welfare of children and protect them from harm. It includes prevention, early identification of concerns, and appropriate response to risks affecting a child's wellbeing.

Child Protection

- Child protection is a specific aspect of safeguarding that refers to the procedures and actions taken to protect children who are at risk of, or are experiencing, abuse, neglect or exploitation.

Abuse

- Abuse is any action or failure to act that results in harm, potential harm, or significant risk of harm to a child's physical, emotional, psychological or developmental wellbeing.

Neglect

- Neglect is the persistent failure to meet a child's basic physical and/or emotional needs, which may result in serious impairment of the child's health, safety or development.

4. Types and Indictors of Abuse

Type of Abuse	Possible Indicators
Physical Abuse	• Unexplained injuries or bruises • Injuries inconsistent with explanation • Fear of physical contact • Wearing clothing to conceal injuries • Aggressive or withdrawn behaviour
Emotional Abuse	• Withdrawal, anxiety or depression • Low self-esteem • Extreme behaviour • Fear of making mistakes • Sudden behavioural changes
Sexual Abuse	• Age-inappropriate sexual knowledge • Sudden mood changes • Avoidance of certain individuals • Emotional distress • Unexplained discomfort or injury
Neglect	• Persistent hunger • Poor hygiene • Frequent absence/lateness • Untreated medical needs • Lack of supervision

Peer-on-Peer Abuse	• Unexplained injuries • Reluctance to attend school • Social isolation • Changes in friendships • Emotional distress
Online & Digital Abuse	• Secrecy around device use • Emotional distress linked to online activity • Inappropriate messages • Withdrawal from online platforms • Sleep disruption
Self-Harm / Emotional Risk	• Visible self-inflicted injuries • Expressions of hopelessness • Sudden mood changes • Risk-taking behaviour • Talking about self-harm
Substance Misuse / Substance Abuse	• Smell of alcohol or smoke on breath or clothing • Possession of vaping devices, tobacco products or suspicious substances • Sudden behavioural changes (aggression, secrecy, mood swings) • Unexplained decline in academic performance • Red or glazed eyes, frequent drowsiness • Tremors or unsteady movement • Repeated requests to leave class • Association with peers known for substance use • Unexplained need for money • Possession or misuse of prescription medication

Actions Taken

Report immediately to the School Counsellor and/or CPO. Maintain confidentiality and do not question the child in depth.

Important Safeguarding Statement

All staff must remain vigilant to patterns of concern. Staff must not attempt to investigate allegations or interview students independently. Any suspicion, disclosure or safeguarding concern must be reported immediately to the School Counsellor and/or the Child Protection Officer (CPO) in accordance with established school safeguarding procedures. Timely reporting is essential to ensure that appropriate action is taken in the best interest of the child.

5. Roles and Responsibilities

Safeguarding is a shared responsibility. All members of the school community are expected to act in the best interest of the child and uphold the safeguarding principles outlined in this policy. The Principal, staff and students understand and implement the policy to safeguard students.

The Principal

- Holds overall accountability for safeguarding and child protection within the school.
- Ensures safeguarding policies and procedures are implemented effectively.
- Ensures compliance with UAE legislation, MOE guidance and KHDA requirements.
- Oversees safer recruitment and staff suitability processes.
- Manages allegations against staff in accordance with safeguarding protocols.
- Ensures appropriate communication with relevant authorities where required.

Child Protection Officer (CPO)

- Serves as the designated lead for safeguarding and child protection within the school.
- Receives and manages all safeguarding concerns and disclosures.
- Maintains secure and confidential safeguarding records.
- Assesses risk and determines appropriate action, including external referral where necessary.
- Liaises with parents, external agencies and relevant authorities in the best interests of the child.
- Provides safeguarding guidance and advice to staff.
- Ensures appropriate monitoring and follow-up of safeguarding cases.

In the absence of the CPO, safeguarding concerns must be reported directly to the Senior Counsellor and Principal.

School Counsellor

- Provides pastoral and emotional support to students where appropriate.
- Supports early identification of safeguarding concerns.
- Works collaboratively with the CPO in managing safeguarding cases.
- Liaises with staff and parents regarding student wellbeing where appropriate.
- Contributes to preventative safeguarding education and awareness initiatives.

SENCO / Inclusion Team

- Ensures safeguarding measures, appropriately supports students of determination and other vulnerable learners.
- Advises staff on reasonable adjustments and protective strategies.
- Works collaboratively with the CPO when safeguarding concerns involve vulnerable students.

Teaching and Non-Teaching Staff

- Maintain vigilance for signs of abuse, neglect or harm.
- Create and maintain a safe and respectful learning environment.
- Report all safeguarding concerns immediately to the School Counsellor and/or CPO.
- Do not investigate allegations independently.
- Maintain professional boundaries at all times.
- Participate in safeguarding training and awareness programmes.

Parents and Carers

- Work in partnership with the school to safeguard students.
- Inform the school of relevant concerns affecting their child's welfare.
- Support safeguarding and behaviour expectations.

Students

- Contribute to maintaining a safe and respectful school environment.
- Report concerns about their own safety or the safety of others to a trusted adult.
- Engage responsibly in both physical and digital environments.



6. Reporting and Escalation Procedures

Safeguarding concerns may arise through observation, disclosure, behavioural indicators or third-party reports. All members of the school community including students, parents, teaching staff, non-teaching staff, volunteers and visitors, have the right and responsibility to raise safeguarding concerns.

Concerns may be reported directly to the School Counsellor and/or the Child Protection Officer (CPO). Students may report concerns to any trusted adult, who must then immediately escalate the concern to the School Counsellor and/or CPO without delay.

Immediate Reporting Expectations:

Any member of staff who:

- Observes signs of abuse, neglect and exploitation
- Receives a disclosure from a student
- Suspects a child may be at risk of harm
- Is informed of a safeguarding concern by a parent or third party
- Must report the concern immediately to the School Counsellor and/or the CPO.

Staff must not:

- Attempt to investigate the concern independently
- Question the child in detail beyond clarifying immediate safety
- Delay reporting while gathering additional information

Referral Process

Safeguarding referrals may originate from:

- Students (self-referral or peer concern)
- Parents or carers
- Teaching or non-teaching staff
- The School Counsellor
- External agencies

Upon receiving a concern, the School Counsellor and/or CPO will:

- Acknowledge receipt of the concern.
- Record the information accurately and factually.
- Conduct a preliminary risk assessment.
- Determine the appropriate course of action.

Where the concern is pastoral or well-being-related but does not meet the threshold for external safeguarding intervention, appropriate internal support will be implemented and monitored.

Escalation Procedures

Where there is reasonable cause to believe that a child is at risk of significant harm, the CPO will escalate the matter in accordance with UAE law and KHDA requirements.

This may include:

- Informing the Principal
- Contacting relevant child protection authorities
- Liaising with Ministry-approved agencies
- Seeking guidance from regulatory bodies where required
- Parents will generally be informed of safeguarding concerns unless doing so may place the child at further risk or compromise the safety of the student.
- In situations where the allegation involves a member of staff, the matter will be reported immediately to the Principal and managed in line with safeguarding and professional conduct procedures.

Disclosures

If a child discloses that he or she has been abused in some way, the member of staff should:

- Listen to what is being said without displaying shock or disbelief
- Accept what is being said
- Allow the child to talk freely
- Reassure the child, but not make promises which it might not be possible to keep
- Not promise confidentiality-it might be necessary to refer to the relevant CPO or the Counsellor
- Reassure that what has happened is not the child's fault
- Reiterate the point that it was the right thing to report to a staff member.
- Only ask questions when necessary for the purpose of clarification in terms of safety
- Do not criticise the alleged perpetrator
- Explain what must be done next and who must be told
- Record the disclosure factually, using the child's exact words. The form must be passed to the CPO or Counsellor immediately via email or appropriately documented in person meetings.

Fairness, Confidentiality and Due Process

Where an allegation is made:

- Appropriate protective measures will be implemented where necessary.
- The matter will be reviewed objectively and without prejudice.
- Confidentiality will be maintained to protect all parties involved.
- Relevant authorities will be notified where required under UAE law.
- The school is committed to ensuring that safeguarding procedures are applied fairly and consistently.

Documentation and Record Keeping

All safeguarding concerns must be documented promptly, clearly and objectively.

Records will include:

- Date and time of concern
- Factual description of observation or disclosure
- Actions taken
- Individuals involved
- Outcome and follow-up actions

Safeguarding records are maintained securely and separately from academic records. Access is restricted to authorised safeguarding personnel. Confidentiality will be maintained on a need-to-know basis, in line with legal and regulatory expectations.

Communication and Collaborative Support

Safeguarding requires coordinated communication. The School Counsellor and CPO will ensure appropriate communication between:

- Senior Leadership Team
- Relevant teaching staff
- Parents or carers
- External professionals (where applicable)

Communication will remain professional, factual and guided by the best interests of the child. Sensitive information will only be shared where necessary to protect the child and support appropriate intervention.

The school is committed to a holistic approach to safeguarding, ensuring that academic, emotional, behavioural and social needs are considered when planning support and monitoring outcomes.

Ongoing Monitoring and Review

All safeguarding cases will be monitored regularly. Where internal support plans are implemented, progress will be reviewed and documented. If new information emerges or risk levels change, the case will be reassessed and escalated accordingly.

Safeguarding concerns remain active until formally closed by the CPO following careful review.

7. Protective measures involving school staff

St. Mary's Catholic High School is committed to maintaining the highest standards of professional conduct and safeguarding practice. The school recognises that effective safeguarding systems must protect students while ensuring accountability, fairness and transparency in all professional relationships.

All staff members, including teaching and non-teaching personnel, as well as Learning Support Assistants (external LSAs) working within the school environment, are required to uphold the school's Code of Conduct and maintain appropriate professional boundaries at all times.

Safer Recruitment and Staff Suitability

The school implements safer recruitment procedures to ensure that all individuals working within the school environment are suitable to work with children.

These measures include:

- Verification of identity and qualifications
- Professional reference checks
- Background and suitability screening in line with UAE regulations
- Mandatory police clearance certificates for all staff and all external LSAs prior to engagement
- Ongoing monitoring of professional conduct
- Safeguarding is a key consideration in all recruitment and engagement decisions.



Professional Conduct and Boundaries

All staff and external LSAs are expected to:

- Maintain appropriate professional boundaries with students.
- Avoid situations that may give rise to safeguarding concerns.
- Communicate with students and parents only through approved school channels.
- Act in a manner consistent with the school's values of dignity, respect and integrity.

- Any behaviour that compromises the safety, dignity or wellbeing of a student will be addressed promptly in accordance with safeguarding procedures.
- The document should help staff monitor their own standards and practice and reduce the risk of allegations being made against them.

Reporting Concerns Involving Staff

Any concern, allegation or suspicion regarding the conduct of a member of staff or an external LSA must be reported immediately to the Principal.

If the concern involves the Principal, it must be escalated to the appropriate governing authority in accordance with regulatory requirements.

Concerns may be raised by:

- Students
- Parents or carers
- Staff members

The welfare of the child will always remain the primary consideration. Staff must not investigate allegations independently or confront colleagues directly.

Whistleblowing and Raising Professional Concerns

Whistleblowing is when someone reports concerns about wrong doings or dangers at work because they believe that it is in the public's best interest. The school promotes a culture of openness and professional accountability. Any member of staff who has concerns regarding safeguarding practices or the conduct of another adult within the school has a professional duty to report those concerns in good faith.



Individuals who raise concerns responsibly will be protected from victimisation or unfair treatment. All reports will be handled sensitively, confidentially and in accordance with UAE law and KHDA requirements.

Open-Door and Transparent Communication

St. Mary's Catholic High School maintains an open-door approach that encourages students, parents and staff to raise concerns in a safe and supportive environment.

Parents are encouraged to communicate concerns directly with the School Counsellor, CPO or Principal. Students are supported in speaking to trusted adults. Staff members are expected to escalate concerns promptly and professionally.

Transparent communication strengthens trust, accountability and the effectiveness of the school's safeguarding framework.

8. Attendance / Attendance Monitoring and Early Warning Indicators

St. Mary's Catholic High School recognises that persistent or unexplained absence may be an early indicator of safeguarding concerns. The school monitors student attendance regularly to identify patterns that may suggest neglect, emotional distress, peer-related concerns, family difficulties or other safeguarding risks.

Frequent absences, repeated late arrivals, sudden changes in attendance patterns or prolonged unexplained absence are reviewed promptly by the relevant pastoral and safeguarding staff. Where concerns arise, the matter is discussed with parents and, where necessary, referred to the School Counsellor and/or Child Protection Officer (CPO) for further assessment.

Attendance monitoring forms part of the school's early identification framework. The school adopts a proactive approach to ensure that students at risk of disengagement or harm are identified, supported and monitored appropriately. Where safeguarding thresholds are met, escalation procedures will be followed in accordance with UAE law and KHDA requirements.

Attendance records are maintained securely and reviewed systematically to support timely intervention and holistic safeguarding practice.



9. Creating a Safe Learning Environment

St. Mary's Catholic High School is committed to providing a safe, respectful and inclusive learning environment where all students feel secure and valued. Safeguarding extends beyond responding to incidents and includes preventative measures that reduce risk and promote positive behaviour.

The school ensures that:

- Clear behaviour expectations are communicated to students.
- Anti-bullying procedures are implemented consistently.
- Staff supervision is appropriate during lessons, transitions and school activities.
- Safe physical spaces are maintained within the school premises.
- Students are encouraged to report concerns in a supportive environment.
- A culture of respect, inclusion and accountability underpins all safeguarding practices.

10. Student Wellbeing and Pastoral Support

The school recognises that safeguarding includes supporting students' emotional, social and psychological wellbeing.

The School Counsellor, in collaboration with staff and the CPO, provides pastoral support where concerns arise. Early identification of emotional distress, behavioural changes or risk indicators is prioritised.

Support may include:

- Individual counselling sessions
- Targeted behavioural support
- Parent consultations
- Referral to external professionals where appropriate

The school adopts a holistic approach, ensuring that academic, emotional and social factors are considered when supporting students.



11. Medical and Health-Related Safeguarding

The school acknowledges its responsibility to safeguard students' physical health and wellbeing during school hours.

Students Who Become Unwell During School Hours

Students who become unwell are referred to the designated medical room or nurse (where applicable). Parents are informed promptly, and students remain supervised until collected or medically cleared.

Medication Administration

Medication may only be administered with prior written parental consent. Medication is stored securely, and administration is recorded in accordance with school procedures.

Chronic Medical Conditions

Students with chronic or ongoing medical needs may have Individual Healthcare Plans where required. Relevant staff are informed on a need-to-know basis to ensure appropriate supervision and emergency response.

Emergency Procedures

In medical emergencies, appropriate first aid procedures are followed, and emergency services are contacted where necessary. Parents are notified immediately.

Medical safeguarding procedures operate in alignment with UAE health and safety regulations.

12. Online Safety and Digital Safeguarding

The school recognises that safeguarding extends to digital environments.

Students are educated on responsible technology use, online behaviour and digital citizenship. Staff supervise digital engagement within school systems and ensure that online communication occurs only through approved platforms.

The school addresses concerns related to:

- Cyberbullying
- Online harassment
- Inappropriate digital content
- Unsafe online interactions



Any digital safeguarding concerns must be reported immediately to the School Counsellor and/or CPO.

The school promotes awareness among students and parents regarding safe digital practices.

13. Student of Determination & Additional Vulnerabilities

The school recognises that some students may be at increased risk of harm due to additional vulnerabilities.

This may include:

- Students of determination
- Students with medical conditions
- Students experiencing emotional or behavioural challenges
- Students facing social or family stressors

Reasonable adjustments and appropriate supervision measures are implemented where required. The Inclusion Team and CPO work collaboratively to ensure that safeguarding responses are sensitive to individual needs.

Safeguarding support remains consistent with principles of dignity, inclusion and equal protection.

14. Safeguarding Training and Awareness

Safeguarding awareness is essential to maintaining a safe school environment.

The school ensures that:

- All staff receives safeguarding training upon appointment.
- Safeguarding updates are provided regularly.
- Staff members understand reporting procedures and professional boundaries.
- Students receive age-appropriate guidance on personal safety and responsible behaviour.
- Training supports a culture of vigilance, accountability and proactive safeguarding practice.

15. Links with Other Policies

This policy links to the following policies and procedures:

- IT acceptable use policy
- Health and safety policy
- Cyber-Bullying Policy
- Anti-bullying Policy
- Behaviour for Learning Policy
- Anti-Vaping and Anti-Tobacco Policy
- Inclusion Policy
- Counselling Policy
- Wellbeing Policy



September 2025

Date for Review: June 2026