

Spring Gully Primary School

Duty of Care

POLICY

All government school staff will be made aware of their legal responsibilities. As part of the government school Principal contract, government school Principals are required to plan, implement and monitor arrangements to ensure the safety, security and wellbeing of students.

Definition:

“Duty of care” is a legal obligation that requires schools to take reasonable steps to reduce the risk of reasonably foreseeable harm, which can include personal injury (physical or psychological) or damage to property. The reasonable steps that our school may decide to take in response to a potential risk or hazard will depend on the circumstances of the risk.

Purpose:

The purpose of this policy is to explain to our school community the non-delegable duty of care obligations that all staff at Spring Gully Primary School owe to our students and members of the school community who visit and use the school premises.

Aims:

To ensure that all staff members have an understanding of their duty of care to students, and behave in a manner that does not compromise these legal obligations.

Implementation:

- Although the general duty is to take reasonable steps to protect students from reasonably foreseeable risks of injury, specific (but not exhaustive) requirements of the duty involve providing adequate supervision in the school or on school activities as well as providing safe and suitable buildings, grounds and equipment.
- A teacher’s duty of care is not confined to the geographic area of the school, or to school activities, or to activities occurring outside the school where a student is acting on a teacher’s instructions. The duty also applies to situations both before and after school where a teacher can be deemed to have ‘assumed’ the teacher pupil relationship.
- The teacher’s duty of care is greater than that of the ordinary citizen in that a teacher is obliged to protect a student from reasonably foreseeable harm or to assist an injured student, while the ordinary citizen does not have a legal obligation to respond.
- Teachers may need to apply different and sometimes greater measures when dealing with younger students or students with disabilities to discharge a duty of care.
- Whilst each case regarding a teacher’s legal duty of care will be judged on the circumstances that occurred at the time, the following common examples may be times when a teacher has failed to meet their legal duty of care responsibilities to their students:-
 - arriving late to scheduled timetabled yard duty responsibilities
 - failing to act appropriately to protect a student who claims to be bullied
 - believing that a child is being abused but failing to report the matter appropriately
 - being late to supervise the line up of students after the bell has sounded
 - leaving students unattended in the classroom
 - failing to instruct a student who is not wearing a hat to play in the shade
 - ignoring dangerous play
 - leaving the school during time release without approval
 - inadequate supervision on a school excursion
- Staff members are also cautioned against giving advice on matters that they are not professionally competent to give (negligent advice).

Taking Precautions

The important issue in all cases will be what precautions the school could reasonably be expected to have taken to prevent the injury from occurring. This will involve consideration of the following factors:

- the probability that the harm would occur if care were not taken
- the likely seriousness of the harm
- the burden of taking precautions to avoid the risk of harm
the social utility of the activity that creates the risk of harm.

Risks to students outside the school environment

Legal cases establish that a teacher's duty of care does not start nor end at precise times during the day. The approach generally taken is that a teacher's duty applies irrespective whether the risk occurs in or outside the school environment. However, the important issue in all cases will be whether the school took **reasonable steps** to protect the student from the risk.

Risks outside the school environment may sometimes call for immediate and positive steps by a school depending on the age of students, urgency and threat of injury. Consider for example, if a live power line came down outside the school, no emergency workers had arrived, and primary children are about to be dismissed to walk home. No school would allow the children to walk out to that danger unsupervised.

There will be a number of other situations where the school will be under a duty to take reasonable steps. In some instances, the school's control over the activity may require it to take more active measures to satisfy the requirement that it take reasonable steps. For example, a known bully on a school bus may require the school to suspend or refuse to transport the bully. In other instances, the school may not control the activity, and the reasonable measures available to it will be limited. For example, fights at a local train or bus stop between students from rival schools may involve informing the police, contacting the other school to implement preventative measures, and notices to parents and students.

While older students are often free to move around the buildings and work independently in break out spaces and designated study areas they must be under (indirect) adult supervision at all times. Staff are responsible for their students at all times.

The following instructions and notices **apply to all staff.**

Classroom Supervision

- It is **not** appropriate to leave students in the care of ancillary staff, parents or trainee teachers (At law, the Duty of care cannot be delegated)
- It is **not** appropriate to leave students in the care of external education providers for example incursions (At law, the Duty of care cannot be delegated)
- In **an emergency situation** use the phone for the Principal or Assistant Principal or contact the teacher in the next room. (if appropriate – send another student for assistance)
- **No student** should be left unsupervised **outside the classroom** as a withdrawal consequence for misbehaviour. Withdrawal is to be conducted by sending a student to a colleague's classroom, or to the Assistant Principal or Principal. This should be accompanied by documentation and appropriate follow up. The teacher, Principal or Assistant Principal **is to be contacted first** to alert them that the student is on their way.

Movement of Children

- Care needs to be taken in allowing students to leave the room to work in other areas of the school.
- Use of students as monitors outside the room during class time must only occur with the approval of the Principal or Assistant Principal
- Discretion is to be used when allowing students to visit the toilet during class time.

Yard supervision

- Yard supervision is an essential element in teachers' duty of care. It is now clearly established that in supervising pupils, teacher's duty of care is one of positive action.
- Be aware that children are usually less constrained and more prone to accident and injury than in a more closely supervised classroom.
- Be aware that yard duty supervision within the school requires the teacher to fully comply with DEECD guidelines and brings with it an increased duty of care. It is a teacher's responsibility to be aware of these guidelines and duty of care responsibilities. Teachers are also expected to follow School policy whilst on yard duty.
- Teachers rostered for duty are to attend the designated area at the time indicated on the roster.
- Teachers on duty are to remain in the designated area until the end of the break period or until replaced by the relieving teacher, whichever is applicable.
- The handing over of duty from one teacher to another must be quite definite and **must occur in the area of designated duty**. Where a relieving teacher does not arrive for duty, the teacher currently on duty should send a message to the office, **but not leave the area until replaced**.
- No changes to the yard duty roster are to be made without the approval of the Assistant Principal or their delegate.
- Be alert and vigilant - intervene **immediately** if potentially dangerous behaviour is observed in the yard - enforce the school's behaviour standards and logical consequences for breaches of safety rules.
- You should always be on the move and highly visible.

Excursions, Incursions and Camps

- Be aware that children are usually less constrained and more prone to accident and injury than in a more closely supervised classroom.
- Be aware that an incursion with an external provider does not absolve supervision duties of the teacher, including first aid duties. A teacher must be present at all times and remain the person designated with duty of care responsibilities.
- Be aware that camps and excursions outside the school require the teacher to fully comply with DEECD guidelines and bring with it an increased duty of care. It is a teacher's responsibility to be aware of these guidelines and remain the person designated with duty of care.
- Be aware that excursion and camp activities require the teacher to ensure that the venue and transport adhere to DEECD guidelines.
- Be aware that school policy is for students to be counted on and off transport and at other times on a regular basis whilst on excursion or camp activities.
- The teacher in charge will have copies of all confidential medical forms and permission notes with contact details. A copy of this material will also be kept at school.
- Arrangements will be made for students not attending to continue their normal program at school under supervision of another classroom teacher.
- The teacher in charge or designated teacher of an excursion or camp will carry a mobile phone and a first aid kit.
- If the return time from an excursion or camp is delayed, the teacher in charge will contact the school to inform the Principal of the new arrival time so that parents can be contacted and a senior staff member will remain at school until they arrive.
- If crossing roads, students are to use designated crossing points. Staff are to walk to the middle of the crossing to ensure visibility and orderly crossing. Other staff control the flow of students across the road.

All staff must follow the DEECD guidelines when organising an excursion, incursion or camp. All procedural steps contained in the School camping, excursions and incursions Policy and Procedure outlines must also be followed.

External Providers

Staff at our school acknowledge that, as our duty of care is non-delegable, we are also required to take reasonable steps to reduce the risk of reasonably foreseeable harm when external providers have been engaged to plan for or conduct an activity involving our students. Our *Visitors Policy* and *Camps and Excursions Policy* include information on the safety and care of our students when engaged with external providers. Our school also takes steps to ensure student safety when they are engaging in off-site workplace learning programs with external providers, such as when students are participating in work experience, school-based apprenticeships and traineeships, structured workplace learning and any other workplace learning program involving external providers. Our school will follow all applicable Department of Education and Training policy and guidelines in relation to off-site learning and will ensure that the safety and welfare of the students engaging in these activities is paramount. The Department's guidelines in relation to Workplace Learning are available at the following link:

<https://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/principals/spag/curriculum/pages/workplace.aspx>

Informing Staff of the legislative liability of Duty of Care - All staff at our school will be informed of their legal requirement via:-

- A copy of this document will be provided to each member of staff at the first staff meeting at the commencement of the school year.
- New staff will be informed of their Duty of Care as part of the school's Induction Program
- Duty of Care will be an agenda item at PLC meetings on a needs basis.
- Staff will complete a risk assessment including duty of care when completing planning for camps, excursions and incursions.
- Staff will be directed to the student wellbeing policy annually.

Evaluation:

This policy will be reviewed annually or more often if necessary due to changes in regulations or circumstances.

Date: July 2019 (amended August 2020)