

Child Safety – Human Resources Practices

Standard 4



Robust recruitment processes help ensure the best applicants are employed. From advertising through to conducting interviews and checking the background of applicants, it is important that each step is done consistently and thoroughly.

Selection criteria

Using DET approved criteria is a valuable first step to reducing the risk of appointing someone who poses a child safety risk. It will also ensure that applicants have the specific knowledge and skills required for the position.

Our applicants will have the opportunity to indicate their understanding of, or any experience they have in working with children with diverse needs and/or backgrounds.

Advertising

Advertisement placement provides a good opportunity to demonstrate our commitment to safeguarding children and deter would-be offenders.

Positions vacant are advertised on the DET Recruitment online to ensure suitable candidates apply.

The school summary in the advertisement includes a statement which shows our commitment to promoting the safety, participation and empowerment of all children, including those with a disability ie.

‘Clarinda Primary School promotes the safety, wellbeing and inclusion of all children, including those with a disability. Applicants are welcome to elaborate on experience they may have working with children with a disability.’

‘Clarinda Primary School promotes the safety and wellbeing of Aboriginal children, and encourages applications from Aboriginal peoples. Applicants are welcome to elaborate on experience they may have working with Aboriginal children and/or communities.’

‘Clarinda Primary School promotes the safety and wellbeing of children from culturally and/or linguistically diverse backgrounds, and encourages applications from people from culturally and/or linguistically diverse background. Applicants are welcome to elaborate on experience they may have working with children from a culturally and/or linguistically diverse background.’

Interviews

The interview process is a very important step in selecting the right people for our school and in identifying any people who may pose a risk to children.

Sufficient time to plan and prepare for the interview process, and form an interview panel with the right mix of experience and skills to carry out the interview is required. Where possible / necessary, consideration of including Aboriginal peoples, people from a culturally and/or linguistically diverse background and people with a disability on the interview panel.

We use open-ended style behavioural-based questions, which give us insight into the applicant’s values, attitudes and understanding of professional boundaries and accountability i.e.

‘Tell us about why you want to work with children?’

‘Describe a time when you had to manage a child whose behaviour you found challenging?’

‘Tell us about a time when you had to comfort a distressed child?’

Consideration of panel member’s thoughts and feelings when interacting with the applicant are important. We ask for more information if the applicant does not provide sufficient information in his or her responses.

We need to take note in –

- Unexplained lengthy gaps in employment history
- The applicant says they do not value or ‘need’ supervision
- The applicant is evasive or inconsistent in his or her answers

Pre-employment screening

Applicants are screened (including for paid and volunteer positions) as per DET Guidelines and VIT expectations.

Checks take the form of -

- Police checks
- Working with Children Check
- Referee checks

When speaking with the referees, we seek to establish the referee’s relationship with the applicant, including:

- how long the applicant and referee worked together
- the specifics of the position
- the applicant’s perceived strengths and weaknesses
- whether the referee would hire the person again, particularly in a role working with children, and whether they have any concerns about the applicant working with children.

Ask behaviour-based questions like:

- What did the applicant do when, [for example, they had to comfort a distressed child]?’
- ‘Do you have any concerns about the applicant’s attitude towards Aboriginal peoples / people from culturally and/or linguistically diverse backgrounds / people with a disability?’
- ‘Do you have any concerns about the applicant working with children?’
- ‘Would you employ this person again?’

Probation periods

Probation periods can help you assess a new staff member’s performance and suitability for the job before confirming their permanent employment. If you have any concerns about the person working with children, you should seriously consider whether you want them to remain in the job and your organisation.

The probation period of 3 months is in line with DET regulations.

Consideration should be given as to whether the person should receive closer supervision and additional training throughout the probation period. A probation period can offer an opportunity to set goals with new staff members and identify training, supervision and other support needs

Overview

It is important for schools to have strong human resources practices to help protect children from abuse.

Clarinda Primary School will foster a culture of openness and inclusiveness, as well as be aware that people who may wish to harm children could target specific schools. Robust human resources practices are a good way of reducing these risks. Human resources practices include the recruitment, training and supervision of all personnel.

To achieve this, Clarinda Primary School will provide opportunities for employees and volunteers to develop and maintain skills to ensure child safety. This will support staff and volunteers to understand the importance of child safety and wellbeing, and enable them to consistently follow child safety policies and procedures.

Child safety officer

Employees and volunteers will be supported through the Principal and / or Assistant Principal, who are the designated persons to hear or be informed about all allegations or concerns, and provide support to other personnel. This will assist Clarinda Primary School in ensuring that child safety is prioritised, and that any allegations of abuse or safety concerns are recorded and responded to consistently and in line with legal requirements, school policies / statements and procedures.

The designated persons also provide contact for children, parents and employees/volunteers to seek advice and support regarding the safety and wellbeing of children associated with Clarinda Primary School.

Training and induction

Training and education is an important tool to help people understand that child safety is everyone's responsibility. Employees and volunteers (in addition to parents/guardians and children) need to be supported to discuss child protection issues and to detect signs of potential child abuse.

Staff will receive induction and ongoing training. New staff will be supported and informed when they begin their new role, and existing staff might need to develop new skills and knowledge to meet the requirements of their positions and expand their career options.

Training and support also promotes an awareness of the appropriate standards of care required to be met by employees and volunteers to ensure that the school meets its duty of care when providing services to children.

It is essential that our staff commit to promoting the safety and wellbeing of children by acknowledging our school's code of conduct. Training should enhance the skills and knowledge of our employees and volunteers, and reduce exposure to risks.

Employees and volunteers working with children will receive training in the following areas:

- identifying, assessing and reducing or removing child abuse risks
- understanding our policies and procedures (including the code of conduct and child safe policy)
- knowledge of legislative requirements, such as obligations to report child abuse¹, reduce and remove known risks of child abuse², and to hold Working with Children Checks³ where required
- how to handle a disclosure or suspicion of abuse, including your organisation's reporting guidelines
- cultural awareness training.

Training can be formal such as:

- higher education training and accreditation
- training offered by external organisations
- training developed and delivered internally
- online 'Mandatory Reporting' unit

Training can also be informal such as:

- inviting other professionals to speak at meetings or functions
- inviting local Aboriginal Elders, Aboriginal community controlled organisations and community members to speak at meetings and events
- inviting local culturally and/or linguistically diverse community members to speak at meetings and events
- internal mentoring and coaching.

Supervision

Supervision of employees and volunteers will be managed in a way that protects children from abuse and improves accountability and performance, without being onerous or heavy-handed. For instance, where practical, two staff members should be present during activities with children. In particular, children with a disability may require additional supervision.

As a matter of good practice, new employees and volunteers will be supervised regularly to ensure they understand their role and learn skills, as well as to check that their behaviour towards children is appropriate. Any warning signs should be reported through appropriate channels, including the school's internal reporting procedures (such as the Principal and / or Assistant Principal, the Department of Health and Human Services (Child Protection), or police if a child is believed to be at imminent risk.

¹ *The failure to disclose criminal offence requires adults in Victoria to report to police a reasonable belief that a sexual offence has been committed against a child (unless they have a reasonable excuse for not doing so). More information about failure to disclose is available on the Department of Justice and Regulation website*

<https://www.justice.vic.gov.au/safer-communities/protecting-children-and-families/failure-to-disclose-offence>

Failure to disclose does not change mandatory reporting obligations. Certain professionals are mandatory reporters, meaning they are required to report to the Department of Health and Human Services if they believe on reasonable grounds that a child is in need of protection from physical and sexual abuse. More information about mandatory reporting is available in the Child protection manual

www.dhs.vic.gov.au/cpmanual/intake/overview-of-intake-of-reports-under-the-children,-youth-and-families-act/1122-mandatory-and-other-required-reporting

² *The failure to protect criminal offence applies to people within organisations who knew of a substantial risk of child sexual abuse by someone in the organisation and had the authority to reduce or remove the risk, but negligently failed to do so. More information about failure to protect is available on the Department of Justice and Regulation website*

<https://www.justice.vic.gov.au/safer-communities/protecting-children-and-families/failure-to-protect-a-new-criminal-offence-to>

³ For more information about Working with Children checks visit the working with children website

www.workingwithchildren.vic.gov.au

Performance and development review

A proactive performance development strategy will be used to improve employees and volunteers skills and knowledge on child safety. This is also an opportunity to improve knowledge and skills in working with children, as well as recognising and responding to suspected abuse.

Performance will be measured against the school's standards of conduct and care to ensure that employees and volunteers meet expected outcomes. These standards will align with those of the code of conduct and child safe policy / statement, so everyone can be aware of the expectations of our school and appropriate behaviour.

Code of conduct and disciplinary procedures

Clarinda Primary School has a code of conduct and student Engagement Policy that provide services for children can use which outlines expected standards of appropriate behaviour with and in the company of children.

Disciplinary procedures will occur if an allegation of child abuse is made, or a breach of the code of conduct is known or suspected.

Disciplinary procedures will be accessible and transparent, and clearly demonstrate the consequences of breaches of the code of conduct.

Employees and volunteers should be aware of reporting and disciplinary procedures and how to communicate concerns regarding the improper behaviour of any person within the school.

Members of our school community should also be made aware (via the school fortnightly newsletter) of their duty to raise concerns about the behaviour of any person who may present a risk of child abuse, without fear of repercussions.

Clarinda Primary School's code of conduct and Student Engagement and Inclusion Policy will be publicly available via our school website. Children and their families will be encouraged to raise any concerns about the behaviour of any person, and can expect to be listened to and supported.

Our disciplinary procedures will clearly outline what employees or volunteers should do if they are concerned that their actions or words have been misunderstood, or they believe their concerns are not investigated in a timely manner.