



Sacred Heart  
College  
GEELONG

# STUDENT EXCHANGE POLICY

## Rationale

Sacred Heart College is a Catholic, learning faith community in the Mercy tradition that has at its centre the dignity of each person. The Mercy values of hospitality and compassion compel our community to always be outward facing and welcoming. It is for this reason that the College actively promotes international student exchanges.

## Policy Statement

The purpose of the College's student exchange program is to provide a broad educational experience for students and to further international and intercultural understanding.

## Definitions

**Exchange:** A period of time spent abroad by a Sacred Heart College student (or student of a sister school), living and studying under the care of the sister school. These programs are regulated by the VRQA.

**Study tour:** An interstate or international tour, organised by the College, where students travel under the direct supervision of College staff. These tours are undertaken to enhance the language skills of students. These tours are not regulated by the VRQA.

**Immersion:** An interstate or international tour, organised by the College, where students travel under the direct supervision of College staff. These tours are undertaken to develop intercultural understanding and are conducted in line with the College's Catholic values. These tours are not regulated by the VRQA.

## Undertakings as a VRQA registered Student Exchange Organisation

As a VRQA registered Student Exchange Organisation, Sacred Heart College commits to the following undertakings:

- That all inbound exchange students will enter on subclass 500 student visas, issued via an AASES form
- That the College's student exchange program will be operated on a reciprocal basis, balancing the number of inbound and outbound exchange students
- That the College will maintain and provide a register of all outbound students to the VRQA before those students have departed from Australia
- **All** officers, employees and volunteers working with children as part of the College's student exchange program, or who will have access to exchange students' personal records or information, will have a Working With Children Clearance (WWCC) or hold current registration with the Victorian Institute of

Teaching (VIT). For the purposes of consistency across the organisation, the procedures for managing these requirements are found within the College's Child Safety and Wellbeing Policy

- That the College's exchange program will be subject to all terms of the College's Conflict of Interest policy
- A register of all third-party organisations and parties involved in the student exchange program will be kept
- That relationships with overseas sister-schools will only be established if the schools are appropriately registered in that country
- That reciprocal Memorandums of Understanding will be put in place with sister schools overseas. These Memorandums of Understanding will be reviewed annually and adjusted as required as part of monitoring of the operations of sister schools
- That all students engaging in a student exchange program will be required to review and evaluate the exchange at the end of the program
- **That all students participating in a student exchange program engage in pre-departure cultural sensitivity training. This could include the host country's customs, language basics, and expected behaviour to avoid cultural misunderstandings**
- **That all students engaging in a student exchange program have adequate travel insurance, including comprehensive health insurance, cancellation fees, refunds, or compensation for non-emergency cancellations**
- **That the College will manage the student exchange program effectively, minimising changes to program dates, duration and host family/families**
- **All inbound and outbound students will be screened prior to being accepted into the student exchange program. This includes an interview process, as well as appropriate language proficiency and appropriate maturity to benefit from the experience should the student be selected to take part in the exchange program**
- The Memorandums of Understanding established with each school will include procedures for selecting and screening host families. These Memorandums of Understanding will demonstrate procedures for placing more than one student with a host family where required
- Sacred Heart College will not place inbound or outbound exchange students in single-adult host families without children
- The placement of inbound exchange students is guided by the Mercy value of hospitality and overall principle of reciprocity. As such, the College will not charge the inbound student for the placement, and will not involve a payment of board to the host family
- In the event of changes to ownership, control, executive management or operation, principal employer organisation, or Principal Class Officer overseeing the student exchange program, the College will notify the VRQA within 14 days of the change
- If the College enters into a new sister-school arrangement, it will notify the VRQA within 14 days of the change. This notification will also include details of the new arrangements and any supporting documents, including the Memorandum of Understanding
- To ensure clarity of support for all exchange participants, the College will maintain an 'Inbound and Outbound Delegation Register'. A student-friendly version of this document will be provided to inbound and outbound exchange students so that they know who to contact when support is required.

## **Agreements and Undertakings for each individual student exchange**

Prior to a new inbound or outbound commencing, the College commits to ensuring that the following occur:

- That the VRQA is notified of the details of all outbound students prior to their departure from Australia

- The College will have arranged sufficient numbers of host families will be available prior to applying for AASES Forms from the VRQA.
- As part of the initial student application process, the College will assess if the student has special needs which will require support in a host family setting. In these instances, the College will apply to the VRQA directly for approval to provision a subsidy for host families to support the student.
- An outbound student policy and procedure that provides for:
  - A parent written agreement or student exchange contract with the College giving consent to:
    - The College having responsibility for the student's accommodation, support and general welfare for the duration of the exchange program, and
    - The College having the authority to cancel the student's exchange program and arrange the prompt safe return of the student to Australia, due to:
      - Global, national or regional emergency circumstances
      - Australian national, state or territory government directives
      - The student's physical or mental health circumstances, and/or
      - The student's serious breaches of the College's code of conduct
    - That require the College to exercise its responsibilities for the student's welfare information be provided to parents about child protection laws in the destination country
    - That in the event that a student is placed with more than one host family, the College will include this information in the parent written agreement so that this information is available to the student's parent/s prior to the first placement
    - Students be registered with the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade Smartraveller website prior to departure (where available)
    - Outbound exchange students to only travel to the host country with international airlines that provide full transfer facilities and have age-appropriate procedures in the event of flight delays or interruptions
    - Maintaining up-to-date emergency contact information for airlines, Australian embassies or high commissions and other relevant agencies for host and transit countries
    - Students to be met on arrival in the destination country by **their host family** and a **Sacred Heart College staff member**
    - Parents or guardians of all outbound exchange students to receive confirmation of the student's safe arrival at the host family as soon as practicable.
    - An example of the information provided to parents about child protection laws in the destination country
    - All students will travel with a school-issued Student Safety Card. For inbound students, this card will be provided either prior to departure from their home country, or immediately upon entry to Australia. For outbound students, this card will be provided prior to departure from Australia.

## Screening of host families

The philosophy of care that underpins the College's memorandums of understanding with sister schools is that host families care for inbound and outbound students as if they were their own children. To ensure suitability of host families, the following measures are taken for each hosting arrangement.

### **For an inbound student**

- Conduct an in-person interview with each person aged 18 years and over residing in the home
- Conduct a home inspection prior to the placement of an exchange student to ensure that the host family is capable of providing a safe, comfortable and nurturing home environment
- Ensure the family declares all adults and children who live in the home, including those who may reside temporarily
- Ensure that the host family understands and agrees to meet the financial obligations of hosting
- Verify and sight that every person aged 18 years and over residing in the home holds a Working with Children clearance prior to the placement commencing.

### **For an outbound student**

Sacred Heart College works closely with its sister schools to ensure that the following measures have been completed prior to a student commencing an outbound placement. Our sister schools will:

- Conduct an in-person interview with each person aged 18 years and over residing in the home
- Conduct a home inspection prior to the placement of an exchange student to ensure that the host family is capable of providing a safe, comfortable and nurturing home environment
- Ensure the host family declares all adults and children who live in the home, including those who may reside temporarily
- Ensure that the host family understands and agrees to meet the financial obligations of hosting
- Verify that each person aged 18 years and over residing in the home has undergone a criminal record check (or equivalent)
- Where the country does not have a process in place to complete criminal records check, the parent/s of exchange students will be informed to allow for informed consent

## **Avoiding conflicts of interest**

In addition to the screening measures outlined above, the College will also ensure that a person who is an employee, volunteer or involved in the management of the College's exchange program must not be a host family for an exchange student, except in emergencies and only with prior VRQA approval.

## **Monitoring and changes**

- The College will maintain a monthly schedule of personal contact with all exchange students and host families. For inbound students, this will occur at school. For outbound students, this will include regular personal contact by sister school staff, as well as regular video conferences with Sacred Heart College staff
- In the event of changes to start or departure dates, or changes to host families:
  - The College will notify the VRQA prior to implementing any changes to a student exchange program, unless there are exceptional circumstances that require an immediate change
  - If a change is made to a student's program due to exceptional circumstances, the school must notify the VRQA as soon as practical, and within five working days of the change
  - The student and their parent/s must consent to the change
- The Deputy Principal - Student Engagement, Development and Empowerment will be the 24 hour contact for all exchange participants to contact in the event of an emergency

## Reporting to the VRQA

The College commits to protecting outbound exchange students by ensuring that the information below is provided to the VRQA. The College will:

- Submit an SEO Outbound Student form to the VRQA for each outbound student at least 14 days prior to their departure from Australia, confirming that the SEO has accepted responsibility for the accommodation, support and general welfare of the student for the duration of the exchange program
- Confirm to the VRQA that the parent(s) or legal guardian(s) of the student have signed a written agreement or student exchange contract with the College giving consent to:
  - The College having responsibility for the student's accommodation, support and general welfare for the duration of the exchange program, and
  - The College having the authority to cancel the student's exchange program and arrange the prompt safe return of the student to Australia, due to:
    - global, national or regional emergency circumstances
    - Australian national, state or territory government directives
    - the student's physical or mental health circumstances, and/or
    - the student's serious breaches of the College's Student Code of Conduct
    - that require the College to exercise its responsibilities for the student's welfare.
- Provide the VRQA with the details of the student's exchange program prior to their departure from Australia, including the:
  - Student's full name, nationality and passport number
  - Student's home and email address
  - Student's date of birth
  - Student's home school
  - Host country
  - Host school
  - Host family address
  - Host school commencement and cessation dates
  - Departure and return dates and flight details
  - Name and contact details of any third-party organisation contracted to support the exchange program in the destination country.

## Quality control and review of exchange program

The exchange coordination team will conduct an annual review meeting in November of each school year.

The purpose of this meeting is to ensure the integrity of the program, and to make necessary adjustments and changes to the program to improve the experience of all exchange participants as part of ongoing evaluation of the program.

This review process will include analysis of post-program feedback from the stakeholders outlined below with a goal of implementing improvements in response to evaluation outcomes.

- Students
- Parents/guardians
- Host families
- Host schools
- Third party providers

# Student Exchange Program interaction with other Sacred Heart College policies

## **Ministerial Order 1359**

All student exchanges offered and facilitated by the College are bound by the College's PROTECT policy. Any concerns relating to child safety should be managed as per the PROTECT policy.

As part of compliance with Ministerial Order 1359, the College keeps and regularly reviews a Child Safety Risk Register for each of the eleven Child Safe Standards.

## **Complaints and Appeals**

All inbound and outbound exchange students and other participants are subject to the College's Grievance Policy. For specific information about grievances related to the exchange program, a section is included in the Student Friendly Grievance Policy.

## **Privacy**

All inbound and outbound exchange students and other participants are subject to the College's Privacy Policy.

## **Information and Communications Technology**

All inbound and outbound exchange students and other participants are subject to the College's **Student Digital Technologies** Policy.

## Related Documents and Policies

### **SHC**

- [Grievance Management Policy](#)
- [Grievance Management Policy - Student Friendly](#)
- [Student Digital Technologies Policy](#)
- [PROTECT Policy: Identifying and Responding to Abuse Policy](#)
- [Working with Children Check Policy](#)
- [Student Positive Behaviour Policy](#)
- Critical Incident Procedure

### **Mercy Education Limited**

- [MEL Privacy Policy](#)
- [MEL Child Safe Policy](#)
- [MEL Code of Conduct](#)
- [MEL Conflict of Interest Policy](#)

### **VRQA**

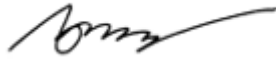
- [Guidelines for student exchange programs](#)

## Document Control

**Date Approved:** 13 November 2024

**Name:** Anna Negro, Principal

**Signature:**



**Sponsor:** Deputy Principal - Student Engagement, Development and Empowerment

**Date presented at Advisory Council Meeting:** 13 November 2024

**Reviewed by**

School Committee

Sub-committee of the College Council

Student

Leadership

House

Focus

Team

**Person responsible for implementation:** Deputy Principal - Student Engagement, Development and Empowerment

Location checklist:

The Hub

Student Space

Parent Portal

Website

Uploaded to MEL Compliance folder

**VERSION HISTORY**

Version	Date approved	Next review
1.0	13 November 2024	2025
2.0		
3.0		
3.1		
4.0		
5.0		