

Theme Four: Maintaining and Enhancing Student Safety

Recommendation No.5: Undertake continuing reviews of child protection and complaints policies and practices.

“We recommend that the Dilworth Trust Board, on an ongoing basis, maintains and continues to review and implement the suite of child protection and complaints policies in place to ensure their maximum effectiveness.”

Progress to date

As acknowledged by the Inquiry Report, this has been a major focus for the Dilworth Trust Board and the School since it became aware of the extent and seriousness of historical abuse. Since 2018, the School has implemented a range of measures within the School aimed at upholding the highest standards of child safety. These measures are audited and certified by external expert consultants, Child Wise, an Australian firm which for 30 years has supported organisations to build environments and cultures that are child safe.

Key safeguarding related policies include the Student Safety Policy, Code of Conduct for Staff, Student Protection Policy, and the Dilworth Complaints Policy, all of which serve as guiding principles across the organisation. The findings of the Child Wise report and review undertaken in 2022 confirmed that all key markers of a child safe school are embedded within Dilworth, noting amongst other things that Principle 10 “Policies and Procedures” exceeded accreditation expectations. The framework for all safeguarding and wellbeing initiatives, policies, and practices at the School is guided by Child Wise’s 10 Child Safe Principles.

Student-friendly versions of key policies have been created with student input, such as the School’s updated Supporting Positive Relationship and Addressing Bullying Policy and a newly created Student Empowerment Policy. There are multiple student-led committees and councils that provide students with the opportunity to voice concerns or raise areas for improvement, as well as drive student-led programmes and experiences.

The School has a team of highly trained professionals, including a Safeguarding Officer, a registered psychologist, and a guidance counsellor, with plans to add an additional staff member with expertise to this team, as well as provide additional administration support. The School engages external consultants as needed, alongside the Safeguarding Committee and the Protection and Response Committee, which convene regularly to proactively address any issues and concerns that might arise.

The Dilworth Trust Board receives monthly reports structured around the 10 Child Safe Principles, with these discussed as part of a regular monthly Board agenda item. On occasion, the Trust Board will receive formal submissions for its consideration in relation to safeguarding. In addition, the senior leader responsible for safeguarding in the School reports to the Trust Board in person annually, and at any other time as requested by the Trust Board.

The suite of child safeguarding policies undergoes regular review at least every two years in accordance with the established policy review schedule. These reviews are conducted collaboratively by School safeguarding staff and external experts.

Next steps

The Trust Board recognises that this process is ongoing and iterative. Further to the Inquiry's recommendation, the School will maintain this programme and continually seek to improve good practice. In a number of areas, work is underway to improve easy-access public visibility of all policies, including for parents and whānau. Work is also underway to ensure these policies, practices and culture are maintained beyond current leadership of the School, including through appropriate succession planning.

All staff members already undergo mandatory child safeguarding training and are required to complete training modules at induction, as well as undertake ongoing development and refreshers. A new online training tool is currently in development to help ensure all staff members complete the training, and to enable their progress to be tracked and followed up if necessary.

Recommendation No.6: Update the Protected Disclosure/ Whistleblower Policy.

“We recommend that the Dilworth Trust Board updates the Protected Disclosure/ Whistleblower Policy.”

Progress to date

The School has instigated a programme of regular review of its policies, as is good practice, and as is part of its embedding of the Child Wise principles. As part of this process, the School reviewed its Protected Disclosure/ Whistleblower Policy in the first half of 2023. This new policy was benchmarked against best practice and confirmed to meet the requirements of the 2020 Privacy Act. The Board received and adopted this new policy in May 2023. The updated Protected Disclosure/Whistleblower Policy replaced the previous document on the School website and on the staff intranet page in early June 2023. This policy is posted on the school website (see: <https://www.dilworth.school.nz/student-safety/policies>) and the staff intranet page.

Next steps

The Dilworth Trust Board and the School will continue to regularly review and update its Protected Disclosure/ Whistleblower Policy. This will include expert external review, in light of the Inquiry's recommendation. The School will instigate mandatory training in the use of this policy and will encourage a culture of reporting.

Recommendation No.7: Supplement the student safety programme reviews.

“We recommend that the Dilworth Trust Board supplements the student safety programme’s three-yearly review with a parallel review of the school’s processes and procedures to ensure cultural safety and to reflect the needs of the school community, and that it engage an external provider with the appropriate cultural background and expertise to undertake the review.”

Progress to date

Cultural safety is a significant component of Child Wise safeguarding measures, which Dilworth School has adopted. The School has undertaken significant work on cultural safety issues and Te Tiriti o Waitangi, including with its Pasifika community.

An Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Policy has been developed, which takes a zero-tolerance approach to discrimination and aims to increase understanding of diverse perspectives. Compulsory professional learning and development for all teaching staff, centred around improving understanding and appreciation of cultural diversity and developing cultural competency, has been run in 2021, 2022 and 2023. These sessions have a focus on improving knowledge and practice of tikanga Māori and the promotion of te reo Māori. The School has also focused on diversity with respect to recruitment and team building, including boarding staff.

Dilworth established a whānau Māori group in 2020 which is currently being formed into a rūnanga to advise the Headmaster and the Trust Board in matters pertaining to Te Ao Māori and how that might relate in a School context. The whānau Māori group worked with School leadership and students to co-construct a Māori Plan to assist in achieving the aspirations of the School’s Māori rangatahi. Representatives of the whānau Māori group met with the Trust Board in May 2023.

Dilworth established a Pasifika Advisory Group (PAG) in 2020. This group has worked with the Dilworth Pasifika community and students to create a Pasifika Plan. Representatives from the PAG are scheduled to meet and report to the Trust Board on an annual basis. The first meeting took place in September 2023.

The School’s curriculum was reviewed over a two year period (2021 and 2022) and in conjunction with feedback from its Māori and Pasifika communities the School has adapted its curriculum to integrate cultural considerations and aspirations, for example:

- New Zealand languages and histories curriculum teaching Samoan and Tongan language and culture. Sign language and Mandarin are also included.
- Te reo Māori is compulsory for all students between Years 7-10, and dance through Te Whare Tapere (Māori dance).
- A junior school (Year 7 and 8) Pasifika group which trains each week has been a new addition.
- The Samoan and Tongan groups now compete annually at Polyfest after that preference was expressed by the School’s Pasifika community.

The importance of student voice has been acknowledged with the formation of student-led groups in a range of areas. One such group is the student culture group. This group drives cultural practice and events in and through the School including programmes such as Samoan, Chinese, Tongan and Cook Island Māori language weeks.

Next steps

Compulsory professional learning for all teaching staff on cultural diversity and cultural competency will continue. The rūnanga will review the existing Māori plan so that any agreed changes to the current direction are ready for implementation in 2024.

Representatives from the whānau Māori group and PAG will meet and report to the Trust Board on an annual basis.

Continued liaison, direction and strengthening of the relationship between the PAG, Rūnanga, School leadership and the Dilworth Trust Board will ensure the cultural safety and the needs of Dilworth's diverse student body are being met.

The School will continue to consult with its communities on what more can be done.

Recommendation No.8: Ensure a safeguarding leadership succession plan.

“We recommend that the Dilworth Trust Board, in consultation with the headmaster and senior staff continue to ensure that a safeguarding leadership succession plan is in place to maintain the continuity of the school’s commitment to its child protective measures.”

Progress to date

Policy review processes ensure that safeguarding policies are continually renewed and refreshed.

Next steps

A succession planning document will be developed by the Headmaster and the Director of Human Resources by early 2024. This plan will outline succession planning identification and strategies for the School's senior leadership team and key safeguarding roles (e.g. Director of Student Services, Safeguarding Officer, Isabella Dilworth Lodge parents, School psychologist and counsellor).

The succession planning document will be presented to the Trust Board and, pending its approval, will be ready for immediate implementation. This will ensure a clear plan for safeguarding leadership succession is in place.

The School will also develop key skills and competencies beyond existing safeguarding staff, and ensure this planning is visible and well-articulated to the Trust Board, staff, students, and the wider School community.

Recommendation No.9: Continue to improve the relationship with parents.

“We recommend that:

- a. The Dilworth Trust Board and school further develops its relationship with parents, guardians, and family and whānau of students by continuing to support the parent groups.**
- b. The Dilworth Trust Board and school continues to ensure there is an effective parent contact system where parents and whānau are confident they are closely in touch with the school on all important matters affecting their children, such as medical and mental health matters as they arise, treatment options, homesickness, discipline, and student achievement and performance.”**

Progress to date

The Dilworth Family Connect (DFC) has been in operation for many years and is the equivalent to the Parents' Association in other schools.

A number of other groups involving parents have also been established at Dilworth, including a Safeguarding Whānau Group, a Pasifika Advisory Group, and a whānau Māori Group. The Dilworth Trust Board resources the effective operation of these groups, including strategic planning, and receives regular meeting minutes from each parent group. Since 2019, the School has conducted an anonymous annual parents survey, seeking feedback from parents and whānau.

Parents are provided with an annual parent calendar, circulated at the start of the year, outlining events and other opportunities to attend School events and celebrations. Having trialled a full School chapel in 2023, with more than 1100 people in attendance, the School intends to conduct at least another one of these chapels in 2024. The whānau/ākonga handbook, a new initiative in 2023, will be updated annually and shared with parents. A range of initiatives such as House dinners, parent/teacher interviews, and parent education classes are already well established.

Complaints processes have been completely overhauled and can be made in multiple ways via the Stymie app (see below), phone, face-to-face, email, a physical complaint form or feedback box, and a range of child-friendly tools, simplifying the process for students and families with a simple reporting process, and upgraded internal investigation and record-keeping policies.

In 2021, the School implemented Stymie, a web-based anonymous reporting tool for students and the wider School community. Stymie allows students to notify a staff member about anything from bullying and harmful behaviour to feelings of depression and anxiety and has proven to be a successful tool not just at Dilworth, but in schools all over the world.

Whānau have easy access to key policies and complaint and feedback forms which are outlined on the website, in hard copies in boarding houses, and in student and caregiver handbooks, as well as in a short video outlining the complaints process.

Following a review of the student services structure in 2021, a new Deaning structure was designed in 2022 and introduced in 2023. This involved feedback from students and staff and was based on research that identified best practice. The new Year Level Deans became the primary point of contact for parents to keep in touch with a student's learning journey, while House Leaders became parents' primary contact for a student's living experience within the Boarding House. This has provided parents with a far more effective communication structure.

In 2020 the School trialled weekly notes at the Junior Campus, where parents receive an email with grades attached every Friday. The trial was extended to the Senior Campus in 2021 and was so successful that weekly notes were extended across the entire School in 2022. Based on parent feedback, the weekly notes have been reconfigured in 2023.

From April 2023, all boarding houses use Seesaw as a communication tool with parents, in order to share some of the activities that students are engaging in while boarding. This mechanism also allows for parent/staff comment and interaction.

Dilworth School also has a full-time registered psychologist onsite as well as a resident counsellor. These professionals communicate with parents as required. There is full time provision of an on-site nursing service, and access to a doctor and dental care through visiting professionals. Parents are included in discussions about care for students whether that relates to their physical, emotional, or mental wellbeing.

Next steps

Consideration will be given to undertaking an anonymised parent survey run through an independent external provider. This will be determined in consultation with the parent community. This consultation will be incorporated in the parents' 2023 end of year survey.

As noted above, the School intends to conduct at least one full school chapel in 2024.

In March 2023, a review of assessment and reporting practices was commenced. Refreshed assessment and reporting practices will be designed in 2024 and implemented in 2025. Parents will receive reporting on a range of areas of Dilworth life.

A parent and student intranet page will be launched in 2024. This will provide parents and students with access to all the information they should need in one place.

Parents can currently access a range of student information from the parent portal. In 2024, a review of the information currently accessible on the portal will be undertaken with a view to giving parents access to more information, ensuring it is both meaningful and relevant.

The School will also undertake annual assessments of engagement and measure the impact of improved relations.

The Trust Board will review twice yearly assessment of the programmes.

Recommendation No.10: Whānau and senior student representation on the safeguarding committee.

“We recommend that the Dilworth Board ensures parents, whānau and senior student representation on the school’s safeguarding committee.”

Progress to date

Following reforms since 2019, parents, whānau and students are integral to decision-making processes, policy design, and implementation, and are actively encouraged to express their concerns and provide feedback through dedicated forums and opportunities.

In addition to the School’s internal Safeguarding Committee, a separate parent safeguarding group (Whānau Engagement Advisory Group) has been operational since November 2021. This ensures that the voices of parents and whānau are appropriately represented within the safeguarding committee.

Similarly, a number of mechanisms gather student feedback regarding safeguarding matters. These include the involvement of students in the nine student-led committees, the student councils at both senior and junior campuses, workshops conducted by the Safeguarding Officer within the boarding houses, and weekly meetings with the prefect team.

Next steps

In March 2024, the School will engage in further consultation with parents, students and whānau to assess and recommend to the Dilworth Trust Board how the Safeguarding Committee can evolve and operate in the future.

Consideration will be given to direct student representation on the Safeguarding Committee, although it is noted that currently, this does not reflect best practice in New Zealand or internationally. The School’s approach will also be informed by expert opinion as to the merits of senior student representation.

Taking account of consultation with parents, whānau and students, the Trust Board may consider splitting the Safeguarding Committee into two groups: a policy and procedure development committee and a school monitoring and management committee.