



# DEBNEY MEADOWS PRIMARY SCHOOL

## Duty of Care

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:

Whenever a student-teacher relationship exists, the teacher has a special duty of care. This is defined as: "A teacher is to take such measures as are reasonable in the circumstances to protect a student under the teacher's charge from risks of injury that the teacher should reasonably have foreseen." (Richards v State of Victoria (1969) VR 136 at p. 141) As part of that duty, teachers are required to supervise students adequately.

This requires not only protection from known hazards, but also protection from those that could arise (that is, those that the teacher should reasonably have foreseen) and against which preventive measures could be taken. School authorities in breach of the duty of care may be liable for injuries inflicted by one student on another, as well as for injuries sustained by a student. Schools normally satisfy the duty of care by allocating responsible staff. Debney Meadows Primary School has a zero tolerance for any form of child abuse and has a legal obligation to respond.

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 class or leaving a class early
  - 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 or incursion
- Staff members are also cautioned against giving advice on matters that they are not professionally competent to give (negligent advice).

Advice is to be limited to areas within a teacher's own professional competence and given in situations arising from a role (such as careers teacher, year level coordinator or subject teacher) specified for them by the principal. Teachers must ensure that the advice they give is correct and, where appropriate, in line with the most recent available statements from institutions or employers. Teachers should not give advice in areas outside those related to their role where they may lack expertise. 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. At our school students enjoy an open plan, learning environment. While students are generally free to move around the learning neighbourhood and work independently in break out spaces they must be under 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 Staff must not leave the classroom unattended at any time during a lesson. 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 a phone to contact the Principal or curriculum leader 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 curriculum leader or Principal. This should be accompanied by documentation and appropriate follow up. The teacher, Principal or curriculum leader is to be contacted first to alert them that the student is on their way.

### **Movement of Students**

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 curriculum leader Yard supervision Yard supervision is an essential element in teachers' duty of care. It is now clearly established that in supervising students, teacher's duty of care is one of positive action. Be aware that students 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 Department of Education & Training (DET) 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 other school policies 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 curriculum leader or Principal.

Be alert and vigilant -intervene immediately if potentially dangerous behaviour is observed in the yard - enforce behaviour standards and logical consequences for breaches of safety rules. You should always be on the move, highly visible and wearing a high-visibility vest.

#### Excursions, Incursions and Camps

- Be aware that an incursion with an external provider does, or at swimming sessions, 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 DET 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 DET 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 DET 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 Informing Staff of the legislative liability of Duty of Care All staff 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, and will be placed on the intranet.
- 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 staff meetings and staff will be directed to familiarize themselves with section Student Safety of the Victorian Government Schools Policy Advisory Guide.
- 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 Engagement and Wellbeing policy annually.

#### **Evaluation:**

This policy will be reviewed as part of the school's Annual review cycle. This policy was last ratified by School Council on May 2019

#### **References:**

<http://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/principals/spag/safety/Pages/dutyofcare.aspx>

#### **School Policy and Advisory Guide:**

Attendance Review cycle and evaluation This policy was last updated on May 2019 and is due to be reviewed every 3-4 years.