



ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER STUDENTS POLICY

1. RATIONALE

Standard 1 of the *Victorian Child Safe Standards* requires Billanook College to establish a culturally safe environment in which the diverse and unique identities and experiences of Aboriginal children and young people are respected and valued.

Billanook College recognises the importance of every Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student feeling that their sense of self and their identity is valued by the people and environments that surround them. Cultural identity and cultural safety are fundamental to a student's overall wellbeing and sense of safety.

The risk of abuse and other harm is heightened for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students when they do not feel culturally safe. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students may be less likely to disclose abuse or other harm due to a lack of cultural safety and fear of authorities intruding into their family and community, based on historical experiences of systemic racism and abuse.

Creating a culturally safe organisation for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students requires a willingness to learn, understand and respond to the diversity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture and to empower participation in decision-making at the College.

2. KEY DEFINITION

Culturally Safe/Cultural Safety

"Cultural safety" or a "culturally safe" environment is a concept that goes beyond cultural awareness (knowledge and understanding of cultural differences and history) and cultural competence (culturally sensitive behaviour). It is about creating an environment where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are not only treated in a culturally respectful manner but are also empowered to actively participate and supported to carry out culturally significant tasks.

3. BILLANOOK COLLEGE'S PRACTICES

Billanook College values and respects the cultural diversity of our students and is committed to ensuring that the backgrounds of all students are sensitively recognised, catered for, celebrated and valued so that cultural differences do not compromise students' safety and wellbeing.

Billanook College identifies, confronts and does not tolerate racism, and any instances of racism within the College environment are addressed with appropriate consequences.

It is our policy that:

- we identify children from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander backgrounds when they are enrolled at the College
- we employ appropriate strategies to ensure the safety of these children as required
- we encourage participation and empowerment of these children, their families and their communities in the development of these strategies



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- we consider these children when developing and implementing policies and procedures related to child safety at the College
- we educate our Staff about the strengths of Aboriginal cultures, their importance to the wellbeing and safety of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and students, cultural safety and the strategies and procedures we have employed to create a culturally safe environment
- we recognise that approaches to parenting vary considerably across culturally diverse groups, however the safety of the student should always be the main consideration.

Some of the strategies and initiatives that Billanook College may implement to ensure that the College is a cultural safety environment for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students include:

- naming of our College 'Billanook' is the name given by the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin Nation for the local area in which the College is located
- developing a Reconciliation Action Plan, and/or talking with local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and organisations with Reconciliation Action Plans or Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-inclusive policies for guidance on how the College can continue to be culturally safe (for more information, refer to Reconciliation Australia's resources on [Reconciliation Action Plans](#) and [Narraquinnawali – Reconciliation in Education](#))
- contacting and engaging with local Traditional Owner groups and/or Registered Aboriginal Party
- recognising the continuing negative impacts of past government policies and practices on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people
- seeking and considering cultural expert advice when developing and reviewing strategies for addressing child safety, child safety information and processes for students and families to raise child safety concern
- actively engaging with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and their families about how they would like to be involved by:
 - providing an environment where they feel safe and valued
 - creating opportunities for families to voice concerns and to help define solution
 - holding informal meetings or surveys to pro-actively seek and incorporate feedback on existing systems and policies
 - asking about the best way to provide information to students and their families to foster conversations around child safety
- seeking to engage a mix of Staff, Volunteers and Contractors that is reflective of the diversity in the School community by:
 - engaging Staff, Volunteers and Contractors at every level that are representative of the School community
 - acknowledging the National Government Apology to Australia's Indigenous People for the forced removal of Aboriginal children (Sorry Day)
 - co-ordinating the School's participation in National Aborigines and Islanders Day Observance Committee (NAIDOC) Week, which celebrates Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures



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- creating a physical environment that is respectful of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, including:
 - naming the College 'Billanook' a Wurundjeri word for this area which acknowledges the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin Nation as the Traditional Owners of the land the College is built on
 - the display of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander flags
 - developing information that is culturally appropriate and includes images portraying cultural diversity
 - creating multilingual resources as needed.