



# Protecting students' welfare and wellbeing in Australian independent schools



# Introduction

All Australian schools – both public and private – have a serious duty of care when it comes to student safety. This includes everything from providing quality supervision on campus, to ensuring a safe environment free from bullying, abuse and assault, facilitating access to support services, meeting requirements for excursions and activities, and even ensuring the appropriate use of private cars for school activities.

Following the recommendations made by the recent Royal Commission into Child Sexual Abuse, many schools are also taking additional precautions and providing additional monitoring to protect students' welfare.

Yet for most schools, sufficiently monitoring and tracking student safety – and meeting regulatory and reporting requirements – can be a serious administrative overhead. Without the right systems in place, many schools are still using manual and time-consuming methods for documenting and reporting on school safety, and for communicating with parents and students. As a result, both teachers and administrative staff are burdened with unnecessary admin, and there's a risk that behavioural trends or ongoing safety risks are overlooked.

Today, technology is playing an increasingly important role in student safety – helping schools monitor, manage and control students' wellbeing in smart, new ways. With a modern technology solution in place, schools of all sizes can more actively protect students, as well as meet all-important regulatory and reporting requirements.



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## In this whitepaper...

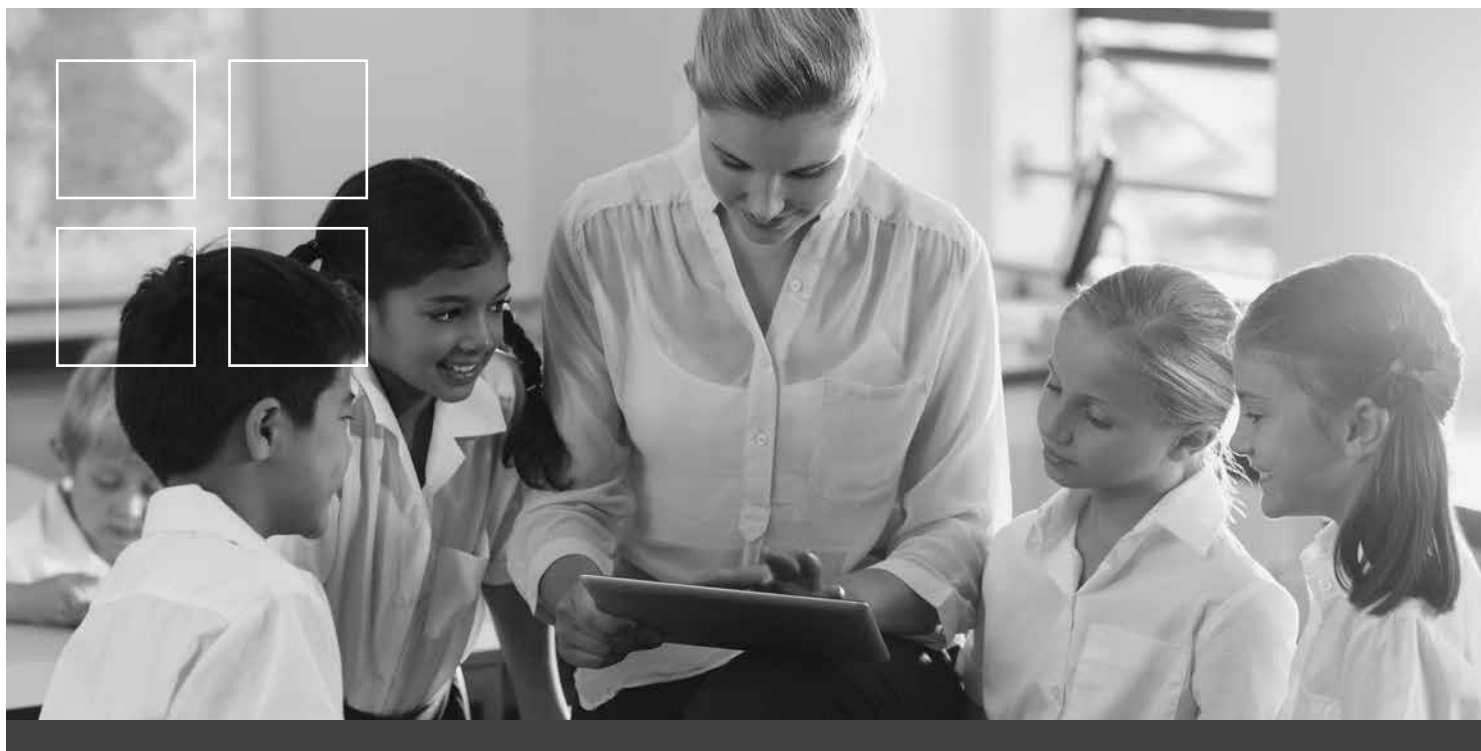
At SSW, we are focused on providing Australia's independent school sector with reliable, secure and proven technology solutions to streamline, simplify and enhance the processes for protecting students' welfare. In this whitepaper, we discuss this duty of care in the context of recent investigations. More specifically, we include examples of how a customised technology solution could help schools meet the ten Child Safe Standards<sup>1</sup> as recommended by 2017 Royal Commission into Child Sexual Abuse.

### Find out how:

- Recent investigations have evolved the concept of duty of care
- Technology can help K-12 schools meet new Child Safe Standards
- SSW can help your school

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1. [https://www.childabuseroyalcommission.gov.au/sites/default/files/final\\_report\\_-\\_recommendations.pdf](https://www.childabuseroyalcommission.gov.au/sites/default/files/final_report_-_recommendations.pdf)



## Duty of care: the responsibility for Australian educators

The 2017 Royal Commission into Child Sexual Abuse recommended that all schools should adopt its Child Safe Standards<sup>2</sup>. These include:

1. Child safety is embedded in institutional leadership, governance and culture
2. Children participate in decisions affecting them and are taken seriously
3. Families and communities are informed and involved
4. Equity is upheld and diverse needs are taken into account
5. People working with children are suitable and supported
6. Processes to respond to complaints of child sexual abuse are child focused
7. Staff are equipped with the knowledge, skills and awareness to keep children safe through continual education and training
8. Physical and online environments minimise the opportunity for abuse to occur
9. Implementation of the Child Safe Standards is continuously reviewed and improved
10. Policies and procedures document how the institution is child safe.

### How technology can help meet these standards

There is enormous potential for technology to help improve student safety and wellbeing in Australian schools. As no two schools are the same, solutions can be completely customised to suit the school's specific requirements – filling existing gaps and meeting specific priorities.

Following is an outline of how technology could assist with each of these 10 Child Safe Standards.

2. [https://www.childabuseroyalcommission.gov.au/sites/default/files/final\\_report\\_-\\_recommendations.pdf](https://www.childabuseroyalcommission.gov.au/sites/default/files/final_report_-_recommendations.pdf)



Standard		Potential technology applications
Standard 1	<p><b>Child safety is embedded in institutional leadership, governance and culture:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>a. The institution publicly commits to child safety and leaders champion a child safe culture.</li><li>b. Child safety is a shared responsibility at all levels of the institution.</li><li>c. Risk management strategies focus on preventing, identifying and mitigating risks to children.</li><li>d. Staff and volunteers comply with a code of conduct that sets clear behavioural standards towards children.</li><li>e. Staff and volunteers understand their obligations on information sharing and recordkeeping.</li></ul>	<p><b>Child safety resource app</b></p> <p>Create a secure, searchable app where a summary of your school's key safety policies could reside. There could be different versions of the app for students, teachers and school staff, and parents/carers.</p> <p><b>School chatbots</b></p> <p>To remove the administrative burden on your office staff and teachers, chatbots could be used to answer questions from parents/carers and direct them to the information they need regarding child safety policies.</p> <p><b>Online safety checks</b></p> <p>If a parent/carer volunteers, they could complete a quick online "check" to show they understand their obligations regarding information sharing and record keeping. The school would then have all of the checks stored securely.</p>
Standard 2	<p><b>Children participate in decisions affecting them and are taken seriously</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>a. Children are able to express their views and are provided opportunities to participate in decisions that affect their lives.</li><li>b. The importance of friendships is recognised and support from peers is encouraged, helping children feel safe and be less isolated.</li><li>c. Children can access sexual abuse prevention programs and information.</li><li>d. Staff and volunteers are attuned to signs of harm and facilitate child-friendly ways for children to communicate and raise their concerns.</li></ul>	<p><b>More secure chatrooms</b></p> <p>While many schools already use chatroom style tools to connect students with each other – and with teaching staff – several tools could be implemented to improve the safety and quality of these spaces. This could include content moderation to check for online bullying.</p> <p>Your school could also develop a secure space for students and teachers to chat about potential issues or concerns in a non-threatening way.</p> <p><b>Child safety resource app – for students</b></p> <p>Create an app where students can proactively find out about child safety prevention programs and what to do if they have been abused or feel they could be abused.</p> <p><b>Chatbot counselling services</b></p> <p>To encourage students to speak up, a chatbot service could be beneficial – through which students could have a "chat" with a bot and ask questions about their rights, where to find out information, who to talk to, and what they should do next.</p>



Standard		Potential technology applications
Standard 3	<p><b>Families and communities are informed and involved</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>a. Families have the primary responsibility for the upbringing and development of their child and participate in decisions affecting their child.</li><li>b. The institution engages in open, two-way communication with families and communities about its child safety approach and relevant information is accessible.</li><li>c. Families and communities have a say in the institution's policies and practices.</li><li>d. Families and communities are informed about the institution's operations and governance.</li></ul>	<p><b>Child safety resource app</b> An app that provides families and communities with the information they need regarding your school's child safety policies could be very beneficial.</p> <p><b>Sophisticated student /parent management system</b> While most schools have some kind of basic CRM solution in place, a more comprehensive and robust solution – such as Microsoft Dynamics CRM – could help take engagement much deeper, and ensure parents and carers feel connected and involved.</p> <p><b>SMS /email communication</b> As well as providing families and communities with information via the school's website or broader app, the above CRM solution could enable interested parties to register for SMS or email updates regarding particularly relevant issues – such as updates to the school's bullying plan, or when a particular training session relating to child safety will be held at the school.</p> <p><b>Online surveys/polls</b> Smart, easy to use online surveys/polls/tools could also be used to help capture feedback from the community.</p>
Standard 4	<p><b>Equity is upheld and diverse needs are taken into account</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>a. The institution actively anticipates children's diverse circumstances and responds effectively to those with additional vulnerabilities.</li><li>b. All children have access to information, support and complaints processes.</li><li>c. The institution pays particular attention to the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, children with disability, and children from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.</li></ul>	<p><b>Multi-lingual chatbots</b> Multi-lingual chatbots could be used to ensure both students and the entire schooling community can get answers to the questions they have, in their native language.</p> <p><b>Multi-lingual content management</b> A sophisticated CMS with multi-lingual capabilities could also be used to ensure schools are publishing content that can be understood and interpreted by the entire school community.</p>

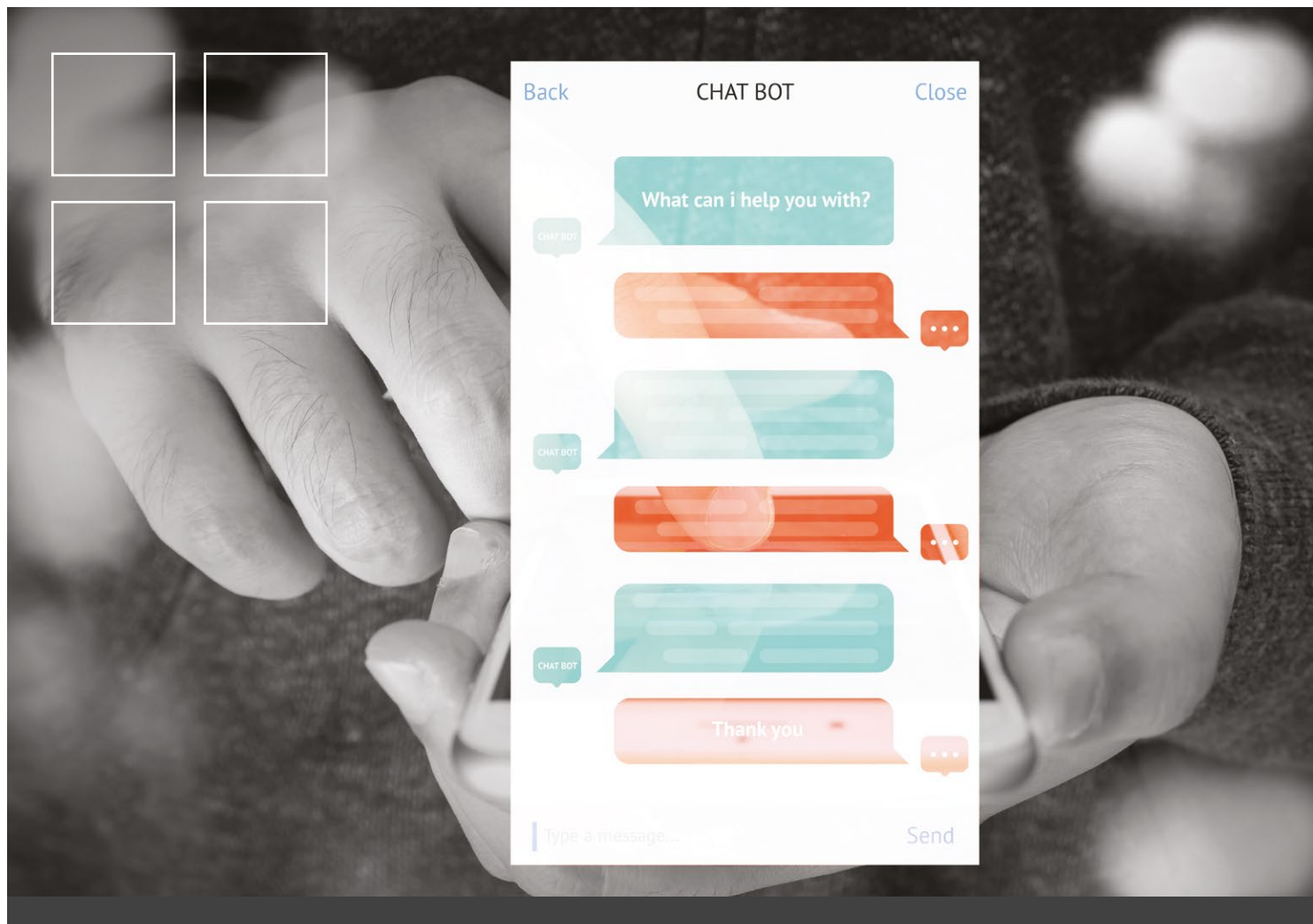


Standard		Potential technology applications
<b>Standard 5</b>	<b>People working with children are suitable and supported</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>a. Recruitment, including advertising and screening, emphasises child safety.</li><li>b. Relevant staff and volunteers have Working With Children Checks.</li><li>c. All staff and volunteers receive an appropriate induction and are aware of their child safety responsibilities, including reporting obligations.</li><li>d. Supervision and people management have a child safety focus.</li></ul>	<b>Online safety checks</b> <p>If a parent/carer volunteers, they could complete a quick online “check” to show they understand their obligations regarding information sharing and record keeping. The school would then have all of the checks stored securely and remind volunteers when their five-year approval has finished and it is time to renew it.</p> <b>Online training facilities</b> <p>Training can be completed online to ensure all staff and volunteers are fully aware of child safety responsibilities and their reporting obligations.</p> <b>Improved security: online and offline</b> <p>Facial tracking software could be used for security purposes – e.g. CCTV systems could be taught to recognise (and provide alerts) if there is an adult who isn't a teacher or visitor showing up on the campus. Throughout all the technology used across the school, online images could also be scanned and checked automatically for inappropriate content, with alerts provided if anything looks suspicious.</p>
<b>Standard 6</b>	<b>Processes to respond to complaints of child sexual abuse are child focused</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>a. The institution has a child-focused complaint handling system that is understood by children, staff, volunteers and families.</li><li>b. The institution has an effective complaint handling policy and procedure which clearly outline roles and responsibilities, approaches to dealing with different types of complaints and obligations to act and report.</li><li>c. Complaints are taken seriously, responded to promptly and thoroughly, and reporting, privacy and employment law obligations are met.</li></ul>	<b>Sophisticated student /parent management system</b> <p>With a sophisticated student/parent management system, complaints can be securely captured and logged – even if it's via the parent submitting details online or via a bot.</p> <b>SMS confirmation</b> <p>If a complaint is lodged with the school, SMS follow ups can be sent to inform the parent/carer of where the complaint is at and what action is being taken at every step.</p>
<b>Standard 7</b>	<b>Staff are equipped with the knowledge, skills and awareness to keep children safe through continual education and training</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>a. Relevant staff and volunteers receive training on the nature and indicators of child maltreatment, particularly institutional child sexual abuse.</li><li>b. Staff and volunteers receive training on the institution's child safe practices and child protection.</li><li>c. Relevant staff and volunteers are supported to develop practical skills in protecting children and responding to disclosures.</li></ul>	<b>Online training facilities for teachers</b> <p>Training can be completed online to ensure all teachers are fully aware of child safety responsibilities and their reporting obligations.</p>





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<b>Standard 8</b>	<p><b>Physical and online environments minimise the opportunity for abuse to occur</b></p> <p>a. Risks in the online and physical environments are identified and mitigated without compromising a child's right to privacy and healthy development.</p> <p>b. The online environment is used in accordance with the institution's code of conduct and relevant policies.</p>	<p><b>Improved online security</b></p> <p>Facial tracking software could be used for security purposes – e.g. CCTV systems could be taught to recognise (and provide alerts) if there is an adult who isn't a teacher or visitor showing up on the campus. Throughout all the technology used across the school, online images could also be scanned and checked automatically for inappropriate content, with alerts provided if anything looks suspicious.</p> <p><b>More secure chatrooms</b></p> <p>While many schools already use chatroom style tools to connect students with each other – and with teaching staff – several tools could be implemented to improve the safety and quality of these spaces. This could include content moderation to check for online bullying. A school in the US recently implemented a content moderator to boost online safety: <a href="https://azure.microsoft.com/en-us/blog/microsoft-cognitive-services-how-content-moderator-helps-to-boost-online-safety/">https://azure.microsoft.com/en-us/blog/microsoft-cognitive-services-how-content-moderator-helps-to-boost-online-safety/</a>.</p>
<b>Standard 9</b>	<p><b>Implementation of the Child Safe Standards is continuously reviewed and improved</b></p> <p>a. The institution regularly reviews and improves child safe practices.</p> <p>b. The institution analyses complaints to identify causes and systemic failures to inform continuous improvement</p>	<p><b>Automated reporting</b></p> <p>An online reporting system could be created – using a system such as Power BI - that periodically provides the school with reports on a range of factors to do with child safety – such as the number of incidents reported, how the school managed these, who was involved, etc.</p>
<b>Standard 10</b>	<p><b>Policies and procedures document how the institution is child safe</b></p> <p>a. Policies and procedures address all Child Safe Standards.</p> <p>b. Policies and procedures are accessible and easy to understand.</p> <p>c. Best practice models and stakeholder consultation inform the development of policies and procedures.</p> <p>d. Leaders champion and model compliance with policies and procedures. e. Staff understand and implement the policies and procedures.</p>	<p><b>Online surveys/polls</b></p> <p>Smart, easy to use online surveys/polls/tools could also be used to help capture feedback from the community – ensuring policies are understood.</p>




## Why SSW?

SSW is an Australian-based technology firm with expertise in the education sector. We listen carefully to our clients' requirements, and we create customised solutions to help businesses resolve their technology challenges and implement best-practice systems.

We are also a Microsoft Gold Level partner, and specialise in building applications on the Microsoft stack. We have 25 years' experience consulting to organisations, building bespoke software apps and teaching, supporting and influencing the global developer community. Our Chief Architect is one of only three Microsoft Regional Directors in Australia who educate developer communities and help Microsoft evolve their products based on feedback.

Call us today to discuss your school's technology needs and find out how we can help.

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