



# Tanglin Gippsland Staff and Student Professional Boundaries Policy

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Prepared By	Approved By	Reviewed & Revised	Reviewed By	Next Review
Head of Campus	Tanglin Australia Board – September 2024			September 2026

# 1 Overview

- 1.1 This policy applies to all directors, staff, volunteers, third party contractors and external education providers (together known as 'staff' for the purposes of this policy).
- 1.2 Tanglin staff members hold a unique position of influence, authority, trust and power in relation to students at the campus. As such, it is their duty to always maintain professional boundaries with students.
- 1.3 This policy and guidelines are designed to raise awareness of situations where professional boundary violations may occur and some strategies to minimise the risk of boundary violations.
- 1.4 The practicing of protective behaviours will also reduce the possibility of vexatious claims being brought against staff members.
- 1.5 If any staff member becomes concerned that such a relationship could cause a conflict of interest, they are to speak with a member of the Leadership Team.
- 1.6 All staff must be aware that the expectations expressed in the Victorian Teaching Profession's Code of Conduct and Code of Ethics will be taken into account by Tanglin's leadership when dealing with concerns or complaints about inappropriate conduct by staff, whether or not they are registered with the Victorian Institute of Teaching

# 2 Details

- 2.1 Tanglin Gippsland is committed to providing a safe physical and emotional environment where all of our students are respected and treated with dignity in an appropriate professional and caring manner where the risk of child abuse is minimised and a safe and supportive child safe environment is maintained (See also Tanglin Gippsland 's Child Safety and Wellbeing Policy).
- 2.2 It is our policy that:
  - staff members exercise their responsibilities in a way that recognises professional boundaries with regard to their relationships with students at all times
  - staff members identify, discourage and reject any advances of an intimate nature initiated by a student
  - the interaction of staff members with students is professional at all times
  - conflict of interest issues must be reported to a member of the Leadership Team as soon as practicable
  - equal learning opportunities are given to each student without discrimination
  - appropriate consequences will be applied to staff members who breach professional boundaries.

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## 2.3 Professional Boundaries

- 2.3.1 Professional boundaries are parameters that describe the limits of a relationship in circumstances where one person (a student) entrusts their welfare and safety to another person (a staff member), in circumstances where a power imbalance exists.
- 2.3.2 The fact that staff members are in a unique position of trust, care, authority and influence with students means that there is always an inherent power imbalance that exists between them. It also means that professional boundaries must be established, maintained and respected at all times.
- 2.3.3 In most cases this power imbalance is clear. However, sometimes it may be more difficult to recognise, especially for younger staff members who may only be a few years older than their students.
- 2.3.4 The following guidelines are not exhaustive, and given that sometimes 'grey areas' may occur, it is expected that all staff members (no matter their age or experience) use their own good judgment, think very carefully of the implications and potential consequences of engaging in certain behaviours with students, and always err on the side of caution.

## 2.4 Intimate Relationships

- 2.4.1 Staff members must not initiate or develop a relationship with any student that is or can be misinterpreted as having a romantic or sexual, rather than professional basis. This is regardless of whether the relationship is consensual, non-consensual or condoned by parents/carers.
- 2.4.2 Such relationships have a negative impact on the teaching and learning of students and colleagues and may carry a serious reputational risk for the staff member and, in turn, Tanglin.
- 2.4.3 The professional relationship of staff members and students may be breached by:
- flirtatious behaviour or dating
  - development of an intimate personal relationship
  - sexual relations
  - the use of sexual innuendo, inappropriate language and/or material with students
  - unwarranted and inappropriate touching
  - unwarranted and inappropriate filming or photography
  - deliberate exposure to sexual behaviour of others (e.g. pornography)
  - having intimate or personal contact without a valid context via written or electronic means (e.g. email, letters, telephone, text messages, social media sites or chat rooms)
  - going out, whether alone or in company, to social events such as the movies or dinner
  - exchanging gifts of a personal nature that encourages the formation of an intimate relationship.
- 2.4.4 Staff members should be aware that professional boundary obligations do not cease when a student graduates from Tanglin. For instance, the Victorian Teaching Profession's Code of Conduct states that a professional relationship may be compromised if a teacher has a

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sexualised relationship with a former student within two years of the student completing their senior secondary schooling or equivalent.

## 2.5 Personal Relationships

- 2.5.1 Staff members must not initiate or develop a relationship with any student that is or can be perceived or misinterpreted as having a personal rather than professional element which might compromise the teacher-student relationship. This is regardless of whether the relationship is consensual, non-consensual or condoned by parents or carers.
- 2.5.2 It is the student's perception of staff behaviour and not the intention of the staff member that is important.
- 2.5.3 An established and expected professional relationship between staff members and students may be compromised by staff members doing any of the following unless within an appropriate context (such as family, sporting or cultural activity) where there are appropriate safeguards and accountability:
- 2.6 attending parties or socialising with students outside of organised school events (without parental/carer permission)
- sharing personal details about their private lives with students
- 2.6.4 Staff members must recognise at all times that their role is not to be a 'friend' or 'parent' to a student.

## 2.7 Fair Learning Opportunities

- 2.7.1 The main focus of teaching is effective student learning and as such, teachers are expected to support their students with their professional expertise so as to offer them the best education in their individual circumstances. The quality of teaching and learning between teachers and students characterises their relationship.
- 2.7.2 Teachers should demonstrate their commitment to student learning by:
- maintaining a safe and challenging learning environment that promotes mutual respect
  - recognising and developing each student's abilities, skills and talents by catering to their individual abilities and respecting their individual differences
  - encouraging students to develop and reflect on their own values
  - interacting with students without bias
  - not engaging in preferential treatment
  - not discriminating against any student on the basis of race, sex, sexuality, disability or religious or political conviction
  - always making decisions in the best interests of students.

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## 2.8 Electronic Communications Between Staff and Students

2.8.1 This topic is covered more fully within Tanglin’s Electronic Communication & Information Technology Policy.

2.8.2 It is expected that the following guidelines will be adhered to:

- all use of technology by staff members should be for educational purposes or for the organisation of co-curricular activities
- all electronic communication between staff members and students should be via Tanglin systems (e.g. Tanglin email or learning management software) and reflect a professional staff/student relationship
- staff members should not communicate with students via text message unless it is a method of communication approved for a given context by the Head of Campus
- staff members should not give out their personal social media contact details
- staff members should only provide their personal telephone numbers to students if required in the course of carrying out their professional duties
- staff members should not exchange personal pictures with a student
- any student personal contact numbers or other personal contact details made available to Tanglin should only be used for campus communications.

## 2.9 Physical Contact with Students

2.9.1 This topic is covered more fully within Tanglin's Restraint and Seclusion Policy.

2.9.2 All staff members should be aware that situations may arise that can be perceived in a manner that was not intended.

2.9.3 In addition, all staff members at Tanglin should adhere to the following guidelines for contact with students both in and outside of school grounds:

- Avoid unnecessary physical contact with students.
- Minimal, non-lingering, non-gratuitous physical contact in the context of the situation is acceptable (e.g. congratulatory pat on the back or handshake).
- Contact for sport, drama and dance instruction is acceptable in a class situation but not in a 1:1 situation. If physical contact is required for technical instructions, it must be brief and only with the student's consent. Note that a student may withdraw consent for this contact either verbally or by gesture, and staff members must remain vigilant whilst engaging in necessary contact situations. Once consent has been withdrawn, no further contact can be or should be made.
- Physical contact may be required during first aid or medical treatment. Again, as appropriate and possible, this must be with the student's consent.

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## 2.10 Off-Campus Excursions and Camps

2.10.1 During off-campus excursions or camps, the same physical contact guidelines apply, as well as the following:

- Checking of sleeping arrangements, or supervising of students changing, should be done, whenever possible, with another staff member present and always in a manner that respects students' privacy and personal space
- Always knock and advise of presence prior to entering a bedroom, dormitory or tent
- Ensure that while in a bedroom, dormitory or tent, a strict staff/student relationship is upheld and that inappropriate behaviour is not undertaken.
- Appropriate proximity of sleeping arrangement between students and adults needs to be considered.

## 2.11 Implementation

2.11.1. These guidelines are implemented through a combination of:

- staff training and development in professional conduct
- student and parent/carer education and information
- effective management of teachers engaging in inappropriate relationships with student
- effective management of conflicts of interest
- effective communication and incident notification procedures
- effective record-keeping procedures
- initiation of corrective actions where necessary.

## 2.12 Reporting

2.12.1 All staff members are to report any concerns about breaches of this policy to a member of the Leadership Team.

2.12.2 Where a staff member breaches this policy, Tanglin may take disciplinary action including, in the case of serious breaches, summary dismissal.

## 3 Related Tanglin Gippsland Policies

- Child Safety and Wellbeing Policy
- Electronic Communication and Information Technology
- Restraint and Seclusion Policy
- Staff Code of Conduct

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## 4 Policy Review

- 4.1 This policy is approved by the Board of Tanglin Australia and will be reviewed at least every two years by Tanglin’s Leadership Team. Leadership Team consists of the Tanglin Gippsland Head of Campus, Head of Learning and Head of Pastoral Care.
- 4.2 Any significant changes to this policy must be approved by the Board.

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