

Safeguarding Officers in Tasmanian Government Schools Project

Information and Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) – July 2022



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Background

The 2021 *Independent Inquiry into the Tasmanian Department of Education's Responses to Child Sexual Abuse* (DoE Inquiry) recommended that a Safeguarding Officer be appointed in every State Government school.

The Tasmanian Government accepted all recommendations from the DoE Inquiry and is working to implement them. The Government has also committed to implementing recommendations from the 2017 *Royal Commission into Child Sexual Abuse in Institutional*

Settings (Royal Commission), which included the implementation of the National Child Safe Standards.

The Office of Safeguarding Children and Young People (Office) was established in August 2021 to ensure recommendations from the DoE Inquiry and the Royal Commission are implemented across the Department.

As part of that work, the Office has been undertaking the early planning needed to embed Safeguarding Officers in schools by the end of Term 4, 2022.

Safeguarding Officers will be responsible for coordinating a range of actions in each school, assisting the Principal to meet their school's safeguarding responsibilities under the National Child Safe Standards.

At a recent information session with School Support and Wellbeing Team Leads and Principals, a range of questions was raised. These and other queries sent by email after the session have been collated by the Office. A combined set of responses is provided below for further discussion and consultation, noting that we are still in the very early stages of mapping out the overall Safeguarding Officer project.

Which staff will undertake the role of Safeguarding Officer?

The role of Safeguarding Officer can be undertaken by a range of staff, depending on the school's needs and context. The exact scope and range of possible positions will be determined based on further consultation with schools and key stakeholders.

While we originally thought the School Support and Wellbeing Team Lead might be able to undertake the role, we are very open to being as flexible as possible, with the allocation of the role being made in consultation between the school and the Office.

The reason that the Support and Wellbeing Team Lead was initially nominated is because every school will be required to undertake preventative and proactive planning to safeguard against child sexual abuse, as well as having appropriate, timely supports for students if sexual abuse does occur.

Schools will be expected to embed differentiated primary prevention education for all students, including respectful relationships.

Your Support and Wellbeing Team will be vital in supporting this work throughout your school and we feel the Student Support and Wellbeing Lead is well placed to include and align the roles and responsibilities of the Safeguarding Officer with their existing responsibilities.

To view the Guidelines and Resources of the School Support and Wellbeing Team, including a description of the roles and responsibilities of the Team Lead, please visit the link on the DoE Intranet at [School Support and Wellbeing Team Guidelines and Resources \(sharepoint.com\)](#)

We know that we may not get the model entirely right in the first instance. We're keen to work with schools to explore all viable options – and if they don't work, we'll consult and collaborate to find better solutions and approaches.

Can a social worker undertake the role of Safeguarding Officer?

At this stage, we're in the very early part of our planning and we're considering all options in terms of who will fill the Safeguarding Officer role. Nothing is off the table; however, we do need to be careful that we don't take critical staff away from other important roles.

It's also worth noting that once the role of the Safeguarding Officer is finalised, the role description will determine the types of backgrounds and skills we'll be looking for.

How can I fill the role of Safeguarding Officer when I'm finding it difficult to recruit enough teachers/other school staff?

We understand that staffing shortages present a challenge to many schools, and that filling the Safeguarding Officer role has the potential to place an added burden on Principals.

It is not our intention to roll out the new Safeguarding Officer roles without working with schools to understand and address their collective and individual issues and concerns. We will engage with Principals to understand their needs, and with Human Resources to understand what may be planned in terms of staff recruitment and workforce planning to address current shortages.

We'll do all we can to keep the process as flexible and simple as possible, and to protect the wellbeing of staff; however, we need to note that the State Government has publicly confirmed that these roles will be operating in schools by the end of the year, and that the DoE Secretary and Executive have committed to this.

How will Principals be supported to manage the roll-out of Safeguarding Officers on top of their already heavy workload?

We understand Principals already have an incredibly heavy workload and we will be doing all we can to avoid adding to that.

A Director Safeguarding will be appointed within the Office, reporting to the Executive Director Safeguarding Children and Young People. They will provide direct support and advice to the Safeguarding Officers, will manage their ongoing needs and issues and have overall responsibility for the Safeguarding Officer component of the staff member's work.

Line management of the Safeguarding Officers will be through the Principal, much as the roles of the Support Teacher and the Student Support and Wellbeing Team Lead already operate in schools.

The Office will also develop the risk assessment template for schools and will design and prepare all training and other materials required by the Safeguarding Officer and the school.

What if several small schools in a region want to pool their FTE allocations to create a full-time (or close to full-time) role that is shared across all schools?

Nothing is off the table. We're keen to explore all options and opportunities to make sure this is a success. We need the input of schools for this to work.

What do you intend to do to assist Support Schools and other differentiated schools?

It is very important that we have representation from these schools on our Safeguarding Officer Reference Group (further information below) so that we can understand what their specific needs are. We haven't yet scoped out what is required to date, as we don't have the unique experiences or understanding that these school leaders have. We encourage Support Schools and other differentiated schools to nominate for reference group membership so we can get this aspect of the model right.

How do you intend to consult to establish the role?

Safeguarding Officer Reference Group

A reference group of key stakeholders will be established early in Term 3. We're hoping that a range of Principals and school leaders will nominate to be part of this group so that we can consider different contexts for different schools. This means we'll be looking for as broad a variety of schools to be represented as possible.

The Terms of Reference and Expression of Interest information will be distributed in Principal Matters on Wednesday, 27 July 2022, with the expectation that membership will be finalised by the middle of Term 3.

We expect the Safeguarding Officer Reference Group to then meet before the end of Term 3 to discuss and consider potential models for rollout of the Safeguarding Officer positions before the end of the year.

Other key stakeholders

We've already commenced a program of information sharing and consultation with key stakeholders such as the Australian Education Union, the Community and Public Sector Union, the Tasmanian Principals Association, the Principals Advisory Group and Support Staff. This will continue throughout and beyond the process of establishing Safeguarding Officers in each school.

What will the Safeguarding Officers be expected to do?

Safeguarding Officers will act as a point of contact for students, families and staff, helping to support and educate them, while working with schools to help ensure that children are at the centre of all decisions that affect them.

The immediate focus of the role will see Safeguarding Officers working with the Office to develop risk assessments for their school, so that they can put in place risk management plans that focus on preventing, identifying and mitigating risks associated with child sexual abuse. These would then be signed off by the Principal. The Office is currently working on the development of risk management training and risk assessment templates to ensure Safeguarding Officers have the support they need to do this work.

It is important to note that Safeguarding Officers **will not** be solely responsible for coordinating child safety systems and practices in their school. Child safety is everyone's responsibility.

The Safeguarding Officers will complement the role that all staff must play and, with support from the Office, they will work to ensure every staff member knows their responsibilities in relation to protecting children and young people in their care.

Safeguarding Officers **will not** be responsible for investigating instances of child sexual abuse. Their roles will be forward facing, providing support and guidance to children, families, carers and staff. They will form part of a network of Safeguarding Officers around the state, working within a school context. Safeguarding Officers **will not** replace other roles in child protection or child safety that sit outside the educational context.

What support and training will Safeguarding Officers have?

Safeguarding Officers **will not** be expected to fulfil their functions without adequate training. They will be equipped with the skills and understanding they need to plan and implement strategies to support the wellbeing of all students, including developing risk management plans and conducting safeguarding risk assessments.

The Safeguarding Officer role will have time allocated as part of their FTE component for professional learning. This will commence before other components of the role must be fulfilled.

Who will the Safeguarding Officers report to?

A Director Safeguarding will be appointed within the Office, reporting to the Executive Director Safeguarding Children and Young People. The Director Safeguarding will be responsible for providing support and leadership to all Safeguarding Officers, as well as Principals and school leaders, for the safeguarding component of their roles.

Each Safeguarding Officer will continue to be managed by their Principal, in much the same way as Support Teachers and the Support and Wellbeing Team Leads currently operate.

How will school allocations for Safeguarding Officers be made?

The FTE for Safeguarding Officers will be rolled out to schools over three years, with schools having access to 50 per cent of their allocated FTE amount until the end of 2023¹. This will increase to 75 per cent in 2024 and 100 per cent in 2025.

The FTE allocation has been calculated as follows:

Enrolments		FTE
Minimum	Maximum	
-	50	0.20
51	200	0.20
201	300	0.30
301	400	0.40
401	500	0.50
501	600	0.60
601	700	0.70
701	800	0.80
801	900	0.90
901	1,000	1.00
1,001	2,000	1.00

¹ It should be noted that schools with an allocation of 0.20 FTE will receive their full allocation in 2022.

Why aren't you factoring in the complexity, context or demographics of a school population in determining FTE allocations?

Child sexual abuse can occur anywhere, to anyone. While we understand vulnerable students are at slightly higher risk, we also know that child sexual abuse has no boundaries – and we cannot predict where a case of child sexual abuse might occur. For that reason, we have based our allocation on school enrolments only, so that each school is treated equitably.

What level does the FTE allocation equate to?

This is broadly allocated at an AST level; however, we are working with Finance and Budget Services to understand how we can find a flexible way to manage the model. We will update schools as we get further information and will engage the Safeguarding Officer Reference Group in further discussions about the options we might have to make this work.

Why is there a cut-off for FTE after a school reaches 901 students? Why doesn't it increase again when numbers get to 1 001? Why is my allocation so small for a relatively large school? Can I have more FTE at my school if I have other resourcing issues?

At this point, we have a limited allocation of funding and, therefore, FTE resources. We will monitor the way the allocations are working across schools and if it appears changes are needed, we'll discuss this with the Safeguarding Officer Reference Group to establish other viable options.

Does the Office liaise with other parts of DoE to ensure alignment of priorities, workloads and resources?

Yes. The Office regularly engages with other parts of DoE to make sure we take into consideration other priorities and overall workloads. That is why we held back on consultation with schools on the recently released Flowcharts. At the time we were conscious of the focus schools had on COVID-19 related issues, so we elected to consult broadly across the rest of DoE, noting that the Flowcharts are now in 'test and try' mode, with feedback hopefully coming to us from schools on how we can amend them to make them more helpful and user friendly.

Where do I go if I have other questions?

If you have any questions or ideas at all, please feel free to contact us by email at safeguarding@education.tas.gov.au. We'll do our best to get back to you within one or two weekdays.