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Effective child safety includes the voices of young people

‘The care, safety and wellbeing of children and young people is a central and fundamental responsibility of Catholic education,’ Jim Miles, Executive Director, Catholic Education Melbourne, said today in recognising the start of [National Child Protection Week 2020](#).

‘This commitment to young people is, and must be, at the heart of Catholic schools, inspired by the gospel message of love and justice and the Church’s core teaching on the inherent dignity of all people,’ he said.

‘Catholic education has done much to strengthen its environment of wellbeing and protection and remains committed to continuous improvement and review of its policies and procedures.

‘Child Protection Week provides an important opportunity for Catholic schools to re-affirm their commitment to cultures that not only keep children safe and nurture their wellbeing, but also foster their agency and development.

‘There is no single prescription for the creation of child-safe schools. It’s about having an integrated framework of standards that underpin everyday thinking, policies and practice, and sustain cultural and behavioural change.’

Mr Miles said a vital feature of the child safety standards framework in Catholic education are organisational strategies that prioritise the participation and empowerment of young people, enabling them to contribute to important conversations and decisions regarding their individual and collective safety.

‘While the concepts of student voice and student agency are not new, there is growing momentum regarding the importance of listening to and collaborating with students that is being implemented by Catholic schools.

‘This approach resonates with this year’s Child Protection Week theme of ‘Putting children first’, emphasising the prioritising of the safety of children and young people, as well as giving them a voice.

‘Importantly, research shows that young people want to have a voice in identifying and dealing with safety issues and believe that, in partnership with adults in organisations, they can make a positive difference.

‘When part of regular practice, protective participation leads to benefits for young people and school communities as a whole.’

Mr Miles said Catholic schools have a moral, legal and mission-driven responsibility to create nurturing school environments where children and young people are respected, their voices are heard, and where they are safe and feel safe.

‘We highlight and renew our commitment to this responsibility during Child Protection Week and encourage all organisations in our community to do the same,’ he said.

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