



The Paradigm Shift Required to Achieve Safety in Schools

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Due to the relational nature of the teaching and learning dynamic, we assert that despite the regulatory frameworks now governing schools, human behaviour poses the greatest risk to the safety of children and young people as they engage in the world of school.

Child protection legislative frameworks have been developed in Australia over the last 20 years which have mitigated some risks to which children and young people are exposed in institutional settings.

The absence of a national child protection legal framework continues to pose risks for two main reasons:

1. The legislative framework in each state varies in terms of stage of implementation, scope and effectiveness;
2. The very existence of legislation creates a compliance paradigm that fails to promote a more sophisticated approach to child safety that focuses on culture, community education, risk management, accountability and governance

Recently, through the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, Australian society has articulated new standards that define child-safety in school contexts.

The implementation of these standards demands two fundamental shifts in the governance and management of Australian schools:

1. The establishment of robust processes to evaluate and advance the level of entrenchment of child-safety systems, practices and policies.
2. The fostering of a culture that places child-safety at the centre of service delivery.

Acknowledging the limitations of legal compliance, this paper identifies some strategies designed to meet contemporary child-safety standards in our current age including the following:

A peer-based Principal Mentoring program has proven to support and challenge school leaders to meet the increasing expectations and demands of their role in our current context. The collegial environment of the mentoring program challenges education leaders to address child-safety within the context of culture and accountability which brings about a shift from compliance to proactive prevention.

More robust and accountable governance and accountability structures have been implemented in some schools which affords these school communities greater assurance in the oversight of the operations of the education setting.

Comprehensive safety audit processes have been developed to provide education leaders with an objective measure of the adequacy and effectiveness of the child safety systems operating within their school context. Evaluated against agreed child-safety standards, the audit outcome may include the development of an implementation program to stage enhancement of existing child-safety arrangements.