

Choosing a Safe Boarding School

**There are many considerations when evaluating the merits of a school. Academic considerations may center on curriculum, class size and the educational philosophy of the school leadership. The school climate could range from structured and traditional to non-conformist and inclusive or any combination in between. Of singular consideration, however, is the school's child protection policy.*

The child protection policy along with a Code of Conduct and procedures for helping to prevent and respond to child sexual abuse should be the minimum standard met by the school, in accordance with local authorities and international accreditation agencies. These policies should be visible in the fabric of school life and culture and it should be evident that the school aspires to excellence in child protection and abuse prevention.

What should the school's child protection policy cover?*

- Staff hiring should include reference and background checks for all employees with access to students (this includes non-teaching staff, such as drivers and janitors). <https://www.icmec.org/education-portal/background-checks/>
- Procedures should be in place to report, monitor and document policy breaches and inappropriate behavior between students, and between adults and students. A code of conduct should guide behavior and interactions between individuals and includes staff, volunteers, and students. <https://www.icmec.org/education-portal/school-policies/>
- Regular professional development and intake child protection training should be provided to all staff and new hires, including how to respond to disclosures of abuse. <https://www.icmec.org/education-portal/training/>
- Student abuse prevention education should be present in curriculum and include online safety education and acceptable use guidance. <https://www.icmec.org/education-portal/abuse-prevention-education/>

*This list is not exhaustive.

What evidence is there that the school promotes a climate of protection and abuse prevention?

- Protection policies are posted on school website, and may be on bulletin boards where school visitors to school can see them.
- Policies are translated into local language for staff such as guards and janitors, if applicable.
- All members of staff can identify multiple reporting pathways and the child protection designate or the staff member who documents boundary violations.

- Volunteers and wider school community know and adhere to child protection policies.
- School leadership and child protection designates know and follow local and national laws related to child protection. They may also have an internal response team plan and external multi-disciplinary team in place for cases referred outside school.
- School may designate ‘adults only’ or visitor bathrooms.
- Supervision policies exist for school trips, home stays and other activities requiring sleeping or bathing.
- Classroom doors are open or have unblocked windows for a clear line of sight. School may do annual audits of physical space from child protection perspective.
- Computer rooms may have device screens visible to supervising teacher.
- School may designate places for individual staff/student interaction, such as one-on-one tutoring or meetings in observable, interruptible location.
- Students know their right to refuse unwanted touch and how to report boundary violations.
- Students can identify inappropriate online behavior and appropriate use of technology.
- School has committee/s for child protection issues and abuse prevention curriculum. Students and members of wider community may be included on committees.
- School has programs in support of vulnerable students, including new students or those with language or learning difficulties.
- Students appear happy and relaxed with each other and members of staff. The observance of professional boundaries should not diminish engagement or warmth of adults interacting with students.
- Surveys of student opinion are a regular occurrence and students are provided means to report their safety concerns.