

## **Safeguarding by design: building a safe school from its very first day**

*Cultura Inglesa Bilingual School, São Paulo, Brazil*

Most schools review their safeguarding policies after years of operation. Cultura Inglesa Bilingual School (CIBS) has a different opportunity: we are writing ours before our first student walks through the door.

CIBS is a new bilingual school in São Paulo, with two units in different neighborhoods: Mooca and Vila Mariana. It is part of Cultura Inglesa, an institution with over 9 decades of experience in English language education in Brazil. As we designed our pedagogical project, it became clear that child safeguarding could not be a document we added at the end. It had to be part of the school's foundations, as basic as the curriculum, the timetable or the classroom layout.

### **Starting from a blank page**

When we began, there was no safeguarding policy to inherit. This was a challenge, but also an opportunity. We could build a policy designed from the start for a full-time bilingual school, where children spend most of their day in our care. As we wrote each section, we asked: *what does this mean for a child in our school, on an ordinary day?*

To answer it well, we drew on both Brazilian legislation and international practice. In Brazil, our foundation is the Statute of the Child and Adolescent (ECA, Law 8.069/1990), together with the laws on the protected hearing of children who are victims or witnesses of violence (Law 13.431/2017), on bullying and cyberbullying (Laws 13.185/2015 and 14.811/2024), and on the protection of children's personal data (LGPD, Law 13.709/2018). Internationally, we looked to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Keeping Children Safe Child Safeguarding Standards, and the UK's *Keeping Children Safe in Education* guidance, which reflects the practice of the British schools we work with. Bringing these sources together helped us write a policy that is legally sound in Brazil and in line with international expectations for a bilingual school.

This is still a first version, and we are revising it now. We share this openly because we believe it matters. A safeguarding policy is not finished when it is approved. It improves as the school community questions it, tests it and learns from it.

### **Structures that protect**

Some of our most important safeguarding decisions are built into how the school works. For example, every CIBS classroom has two adults: a lead teacher and a pedagogical assistant. We chose this model for pedagogical reasons, to allow continuous observation and personalised feedback. It also means children are

never alone with a single adult, and there are always two people who know each child well and can notice changes in behaviour, mood or wellbeing.

Safeguarding also starts before anyone joins our team. Our recruitment process has several stages: interviews with pedagogical coordination, the unit director and the pedagogical director, as well as a trial class with the leadership team. All new staff also go through background and reference checks before they are hired. To keep decisions impartial, a staff member who refers a candidate does not take part in that candidate's interviews or hiring decision.

Once hired, every new member of staff, whether teacher, assistant or specialist, completes mandatory safeguarding training during onboarding, before our first school day in January 2027. Safeguarding is not a separate topic for a few specialists. It is part of what every adult at CIBS is expected to know and practise from day one.

### **Safeguarding as a shared responsibility**

A safe school is not the work of one department. Our onboarding programme for teachers, assistants and specialists includes safeguarding training from the first days, because every adult in the school is part of the safety net. We also see families and the children themselves as partners. Children need to know that they will be listened to, and families need to know how to raise a concern and what will happen when they do.

### **Why we joined Keeping Children Safe**

Joining the Keeping Children Safe network is part of this commitment. It connects a new school in Brazil with organisations around the world that have built strong safeguarding practices over many years. We want to measure our work against international standards, learn from others and be accountable for what we promise.

We are only at the beginning, and we have a lot to learn. We are grateful to be part of a network where we can learn from so many of you. Thank you.

Learn more: <https://www.culturainglesa.com.br/bilingual-school>

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