



Jesuit European Committee for
Primary & Secondary Education

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Rue des Trévires 3, 1040 Brussels (Belgium) | office@jecse.org | www.jecse.org



A LIVING TRADITION CALLS FOR A BEATING HEART

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‘One would be enough’

If our hearts stop beating, we’re most likely dead. While this may not be the first thought that greets us each morning, it quietly lingers in our minds and influences the way we understand ourselves. Our hearts ‘stop’ when we’re shocked, and ‘drop’ when we’re sad. We ‘have them in our mouths’ when anxious, and ‘in our hands’ when feeling vulnerable. Our hearts ‘race’ when we’re in love. They beat to the rhythm of our lives – and we listen to them, or at least, we should.

Just last month, **Pope Leo XIV urged educational communities to ‘safeguard the heart’**, emphasizing that **‘relationships come before opinions, people before programmes’**. The Holy Father reminds us that while academic excellence is important, we must care for the children themselves, not just their outcomes. His apostolic letter calls us back to the core of our mission: safeguarding.

The Society of Jesus is known for many things, and Jesuit schools are often the first that come to mind. Yet, some key aspects of Jesuit charism can easily fade into the background. Subtly embedded in the formula of the Jesuits’ final vows – between the traditional vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience, and the famous ‘fourth vow’ of obedience to the Pope – there is still another significant promise: **‘and, in conformity with it, special care for the instruction of children’**.

Saint Ignatius's commitment to children preceded Jesuit schools. He aspired to reach many, but **'one would be enough'** to make him consider that teaching was time well spent.¹ The Ignatian tradition of education remains deeply rooted in the movements that his heart once experienced. To this day, we continue his legacy by striving to provide a pedagogy that cares deeply for every child who walks through our school gates.



This means that to make Jesuit schools exemplary in their mission, we must nurture all children and young people in environments that protect their well-being. Indeed, if we are to call ourselves Ignatian, then pedagogy must be synonymous with safeguarding: a pedagogy of the heart, shaped by the Spiritual Exercises, with **cura personalis** as a guiding principle, placing the student and his heart at the centre of all concerns.

Towards a Stronger Culture of Protection

Safeguarding and child protection are thus essential to the educational mission of the Jesuit Global Network of Schools. As outlined in the **Living Tradition (2019)**, the second global identifier of a Jesuit School is that we are **'committed to creating a Safe and Healthy Environment for all'**.² The expectation that **'educators and administrators in Jesuit schools create safe and healthy environments free of any form of abuse: sexual, physical, psychological, or emotional'** becomes more than a task, or another item in a long checklist. It means that **'environments free from any form of abuse'** must be a key element of our own identity. It shouldn't be something we do, but rather something we are.

For Jesuit and companion schools in Europe and the Middle East, a shared commitment to strengthen a safeguarding culture has emerged through dialogue, training, and collaboration among provinces. These discussions are not easy – what about child abuse ever is? Topics range from the role of teachers to the behaviour of children's peers and families, as well as the dangers of the virtually unknown. How do we apply best practices to everyday challenges? How do we improve our school environments? How do we ensure we're creating joyful, heart-lifting memories that shape men and women into a hope-filled future?

[1] The Autobiography of St. Ignatius Loyola, p. 88: *'As soon as he arrived, he decided to teach Christian doctrine every day to children, but his brother strongly objected to this, saying no one would come. He replied that one would be enough. But after he began to do it, many came continually to hear him; and even his brother'*.

[2] (2019) Jesuit Schools: a Living Tradition in the 21st Century – An Ongoing Exercise of Discernment.



A Shared Mission

JECSE³ schools first gathered to discuss safeguarding in 2022, in Ludwigshafen, Germany. The conference, **Protecting Minors in Our Schools: Preventing and Responding to (Sexualised) Violence**, marked the beginning of a strong collaboration with the ZIP Centre.⁴ This momentum led to tangible actions also at the local level: to name just a few examples, France implemented a **Student Care and Protection Charter**, Lithuania developed stronger safeguarding guidelines, and Albania held training sessions for teachers and parents.

[3] [Jesuit European Committee for Primary and Secondary Education](#), the network of Jesuit and companion schools in Europe, central Asia and the Middle East

[4] ZIP - [Zentrum für Ignatianische Pädagogik](#) (Centre for Ignatian Pedagogy)



But there was also a different set of experiences to be shared. Fr Martin Löwenstein SJ (Aloisiuskolleg, Germany), reflected:

'Our school's strong motivation to achieve a high standard of Safeguarding arose thirteen years ago when we had to recognise that there had been serious abuse here in the past. I think we were able to contribute a lot from our own experience. The internal training of the staff at our school will continue to be important. However, the integration into the network and the exchange with schools from other countries is very important for the continuation and quality assurance of this process.'

Schools scattered across the JECSE network operate in diverse cultural, social, and political contexts and forging a common path toward a strong culture of protection can be challenging. In some provinces, child protection has long been a priority, with robust legal frameworks in place. In others, both legislation and public dialogue are still developing. Mr Damon McCaul (Gonzaga College SJ, Ireland) noted:

'It has become obvious during our recent conversations that different schools in the various jurisdictions covered by the JECSE network are at different stages of Development in relation to Child Protection. We believe that it is important that best practice is shared and effectively disseminated so that Children in all our schools enjoy the safest possible environment where they can flourish and thrive.'

Throughout this process, schools expressed a desire for more practical tools, such as policy templates, training guides, and expert advice, as well as spaces to share best practices and discuss implementation challenges. In response, a new joint JECSE-ZIP project was launched:

Safeguarding – From Awareness to Action: Strengthening and Evaluating a Culture of Protection in JECSE Schools (2024-2025).

Together, we have established an international **Safeguarding Advisory Group**, and launched an online forum titled **'Let's Talk About Safeguarding'**, both in English and in German. A **'Safeguarding Toolkit'** for schools is also now in its final stage of development. It includes a **'Safeguarding Road Map'** a **'Child Safeguarding Self-Audit'** and several other meaningful resources and contributions generously shared across our network. The toolkit will soon be available to help schools professionalize their efforts in developing a culture of protection. Over time, a system of mutual support emerged, enabling schools at various stages of implementation to learn from and support one another



For Mr Manuel Fariñas de Alba (Colegio San Ignacio de Loyola, Spain), the challenge is clear:

'We will not be able to carry out this huge task only with wise documents but spreading and sharing all around a sense of enthusiasm, hope and commitment.'



If seen as an integral part of our education mission, safeguarding then becomes an apostolic act – something that we can't do on writing, and that we can't do alone.



In close collaboration with the Society of Jesus' ministry for the **Promotion of a Consistent Culture of Protection (PCCP)**, and the Safeguarding Coordinator of the Jesuit Conference of European Provincials, we have worked to provide educators with resources and a shared framework for understanding and promoting child protection within the Ignatian tradition. This effort has taken shape through a blended learning course titled '**Safeguarding from an Ignatian Perspective: Theology Meets the Science of Abuse Prevention to Protect All**'. Additionally, the creation of an **Educate Magis** group for safeguarding coordinators has offered a digital space for connection, resource-sharing, and mutual support.

From Awareness to Action

From September 15th to 18th, 2025, we gathered once again in Ludwigshafen for the international conference **Safeguarding: From Awareness to Action – Strengthening and Evaluating a Culture of Protection in JECSE Schools**. Held both in person and online, the event brought together over 50 educators and other key stakeholders committed to safeguarding and the prevention of sexualised violence.



Coming together to discuss our struggles is never easy. Yet, it is also hope-filling. We are reminded of a well-known secret to shaping men and women for others: their well-being – to **'safeguard the heart'** – is our most important mission. We explored the Ignatian foundations of safeguarding, emphasizing once again that it is not merely about policies and procedures, but deeply rooted in our worldview, our anthropology, and the mission of our schools.

The opening remarks and keynote address by Fr José Mesa SJ, Secretary for Education, set the tone: **'Learning is more a matter of the heart than a matter of the mind'**, he said. **'Safeguarding is not just another task for the school; rather is the condition for a true learning to happen'**. Fr John Guiney SJ expanded on the Ignatian roots of safeguarding, leading into the presentation of the PCCP project by Dr Sandra Racionero-Plaza.

Offering valuable insights from outside our network, Ms Noeline Blackwell of the **Children's Rights Alliance** presented a **Human Rights Lens on Children's Online Safety**, drawing on civil society's advocacy experience in Ireland. Through workshops and plenary sessions, participants also reflected on emerging challenges related to children's cyber safety and artificial intelligence, and discussed practical ways to address these issues in everyday school life.

A Grace to be Lived

The more we engage with this topic, the more we return to the same conclusion, time and time again: promoting a culture of protection goes far beyond enforcing rules and procedures. Fr José Mesa SJ put it clearly:

'It is very important to connect any efforts of safeguarding with our educational tradition so that people do not perceive it as an add-on but rather a condition and necessary framework for our education to happen. This will also help to integrate safeguarding within the larger framework of Jesuit Education and guarantees that it is not just a campaign for a few years to come. I'm glad to see that we have passed from just reacting to the scandals to really implementing a culture of prevention and safeguarding.'





Ultimately, safeguarding in Jesuit education is not defined by documents, protocols, or even conferences. It is defined by relationships – heart-to-heart dialogues between teachers and students, parents and schools, institutions and the communities they serve. Safeguarding, then, is not a burden to be managed, but a grace to be lived.

We arrive still to another conclusion. It is obvious yet subtle, and for that reason often overlooked: to build a true culture of protection, we need support, shared experiences, and collective wisdom. We need each other. **'The Society of Jesus is not a federation of provinces, or institutions but an apostolic body with the same mission'**, said Fr José Mesa SJ. **'This is the basic apostolic intuition of Ignatius of Loyola'**.

At JECSE, we take on this mission with humility, fully aware of the immense responsibility it entails. Nonetheless, we know we are not working alone, neither in the void: our commitment to the **'special care for the instruction of children'** is a universal 500-year-old tradition.

This tradition is not static; it lives and breathes. It has a heart that beats to the rhythm of our lives. As Jesuit and companion schools, we believe this heart belongs to Jesus himself. It stops, drops, and races every time one of our children cries or shouts with joy.

We believe safeguarding is the rhythm of our educational communities, their hearts beating as one. It is indeed a living tradition, whose heart we can feel racing, while carrying it dutifully in our hands.



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