AFL PLAY

NATIONAL SCHOOL FOOTBALL COMPETITIONS HANDBOOK

2027

PURPOSE

This Handbook establishes the national framework for the administration and delivery of AFL-run school football competitions across Australia. It sets minimum standards that apply in all States and Territories, while enabling Competition Management to publish their own Competition Conditions to address local requirements.

The Handbook aims to:

- provide a consistent, national baseline for how school football competitions are structured and administered;
- make it easier for Competition Management, schools, coaches, officials and other stakeholders to understand their rights and responsibilities;
- support safe, inclusive and high-quality playing environments for all students;
- protect and promote participation opportunities for girls and students living with disability;
- ensure the appropriate handling of conduct, complaints and disciplinary matters across all States and Territories; and
- support the game to grow and connect more young people to Australian Football.

HOW TO USE THIS HANDBOOK

This Handbook applies to all Competitions nationally.

It establishes minimum standards and must be read in conjunction with the National Policy Handbook and the relevant State or Territory Competition Conditions, which outline local competition requirements and delivery arrangements.

CONTENTS

PART A – GENERAL

1. Definitions
2. Application and Governance

PART B – COMPETITION MANAGEMENT

3. Role and Responsibilities of Competition Management
4. School Responsibilities
5. Match Manager Responsibilities

PART C – NOMINATIONS, ELIGIBILITY AND REGISTRATION

6. Nominations
7. Player Eligibility
8. Player Registration
9. Coach Accreditation
10. Insurance

PART D – COMPETITION RULES

11. Laws of the Game and National Junior Rules
12. General Match Guidelines
13. Playing Uniforms
14. Forfeits
15. Umpires and Officials

PART E – SAFEGUARDING AND CHILD SAFETY

16. Child Safety

PART F – MEMBER PROTECTION AND STANDARDS OF CONDUCT

17. Responsibilities of a Person
18. General Code of Conduct
19. Coach Code of Conduct
20. Alcohol, Smoking and Vaping

PART G – COMPLAINTS AND DISCIPLINARY

21. AFL Investigation
22. Complaints Regarding Suspected Breach
23. Vilification
24. Reportable Offences

APPENDICES

Appendix One – General Match Guidelines

Appendix Two – National Community Football Policy Handbook

Appendix Three – Playing Up Approval Form

Appendix Four – Revision history

PART A – GENERAL

1. DEFINITIONS

The following definitions apply throughout this Handbook and are provided to ensure clarity, consistency and a common understanding of key terms used in the administration and delivery of AFL-run school football competitions.

AFL	means the Australian Football League (ACN 004 155 211).
AFL Child Safeguarding and Wellbeing Policy	means the AFL Child Safeguarding and Wellbeing Policy published by the AFL, as amended from time to time.
AFL Community Concussion Guidelines	means the concussion guidelines published by the AFL from time to time, available at https://play.afl/concussion.
Australian Football	means the game played pursuant to the Laws of the Game.
Coach	means a person holding Australian Football coaching responsibilities at a School, who is accredited (or required to be accredited) in accordance with section 9 of this Handbook.
Coach AFL Platform	means the AFL's online coaching platform, incorporating an accreditation portal and library of online training and resources.
Competition	means the AFL-run school football competitions administered under this Handbook.
Competition Conditions	means the document published by Competition Management that sets out local operating requirements, competition-specific rules, venue requirements, competition formats and other matters relevant to the administration of the Competition within a State or Territory, which must remain consistent with the National Policy Handbook and this Handbook, except where an Approved Local Variation has been expressly approved in accordance with section 2.5.
Competition Management	means the state or territory body formally appointed by the AFL to administer school football competitions within that state or territory.
Disciplinary Officer	means the AFL staff member or other person appointed by the AFL or Competition Management to exercise disciplinary, integrity or complaint management functions under this Handbook.
Division	refers to the categories within the Competition, determined by school year and gender.
Extended Bench	means a team having more Players listed on the interchange under Appendix One or the applicable Competition Conditions.

First Aid Provider	means a person responsible for the provision of immediate care and injury management at a match, who meets the minimum injury management, first and concussion requirements prescribed in the National Policy Handbook. Competition Management may prescribe additional requirements through Competition Conditions.
AFL Switch	means the AFL-endorsed non-contact, modified Australian Football competition format delivered in school and youth participation environments, designed to maximise accessibility, safety and participation, including for girls and first-time participants.
Handbook	means this National School Football Competition Handbook, as amended from time to time.
Incident	means any event that resulted in, or had the potential to result in, an injury to a Person that was not reported by the umpire.
Incident Report	means the form schools are required to complete following any Incident.
Laws of the Game	means the Laws of Australian Football as administered and controlled by the AFL. Available at www.afl.com.au/about-afl/laws-of-the-game.
Match Manager	means a person appointed by Competition Management to oversee the conduct of a match, venue or Competition activity and perform responsibilities under this Handbook.
National Junior Rules	means the National Junior Rules Handbook published by the AFL. Available at play.afl/junior-rules.
National Policy Handbook	means the National Community Football Policy Handbook published by the AFL. Available at play.afl/clubhelp/resources/national-community-football-policy-handbook.
Notice of Report	means the approved form used to record and notify a Reportable Offence.
Official	means an umpire, Coach, trainer, Team Manager, School Co-ordinator, water carrier, interchange steward, timekeeper, scoreboard attendant, runner or any other match day official appointed by a School.
Person	means a School, Official, Player, school staff member, parent or guardian of a Player, spectator of a match, or any other person reasonably connected to the Competition.
Player	means any student nominated by their enrolled School to play in the Competition.

PlayHQ	means the AFL's online competition management platform, used to manage registrations, fixtures, results and ladder management.
Primary Divisions	refers to the playing groups within primary schools.
Reportable Offence	means a Reportable Offence determined in accordance with the National Policy Handbook.
Review Panel	means an AFL-appointed panel or State or Territory disciplinary panel established to determine a matter under this Handbook or National Policy Handbook.
School	means any school that nominates to play in the Competition.
School Co-ordinator	means the school staff member appointed to co-ordinate all their nominated teams within the Competition.
Season	means the duration of the Competition in each calendar year.
Secondary Divisions	means the playing groups within secondary schools.
Team Manager	means the school staff member appointed to a specific team within a division.

2. APPLICATION AND GOVERNANCE

2.1 Governing Body

The AFL is the national governing body responsible for the management and development of Australian Football in Australia. This Handbook has been prepared by the AFL.

2.2 Application of This Handbook

This Handbook applies to all Competitions across all States and Territories of Australia. It establishes minimum national standards and requirements that Competition Management, schools, coaches, officials and participants must comply with.

2.3 Document Hierarchy and Interpretation

This Handbook establishes the national framework for competitions and must be read in conjunction with the National Policy Handbook.

The National Policy Handbook applies to Competitions to the extent relevant to the Competition environment, unless this Handbook expressly provides otherwise or adapts a process to reflect the school football competition environment.

State and Territory Competition Conditions may prescribe local operational requirements and competition specific rules, provided they are consistent with this Handbook and National Policy Handbook.

In the event of any inconsistency between documents, the following order of precedence applies:

1. National Policy Handbook;
2. National School Football Competition Handbook;
3. State and Territory Competition Conditions.

An Approved Local Variation made in accordance with section 2.5 applies only to the extent of the variation expressly approved by the AFL.

2.4 Relationship with Competition Conditions

Each Competition Management may publish Competition Conditions that set out rules, formats and operational requirements specific to their State or Territory.

Competition Conditions must be consistent with this Handbook and the National Policy Handbook, except where a local variation has been expressly approved in accordance with section 2.5. Where inconsistency exists, the order of precedence in section 2.3 applies unless expressly provided otherwise under section 2.5.

Competition Conditions must be provided to Schools prior to the commencement of each Season.

2.5 Approved Local Variations

(a) Competition Management may request approval from the AFL to vary a requirement of this Handbook where local competition circumstances reasonably require an alternative approach.

(b) A local variation has no effect unless it has been expressly approved by the AFL and documented in the relevant State or Territory Competition Conditions.

(c) An approved local variation must:

(i) identify the provision of this Handbook being varied;

(ii) identify the Competition, Division or circumstances to which the variation applies;

(iii) clearly state the alternative local requirement; and

(iv) be communicated to participating Schools before the commencement of the relevant Competition.

(d) An approved local variation applies only to the Competition, Division or circumstances for which approval has been granted. All other requirements of this Handbook continue to apply.

(e) Where a State or Territory Competition Condition is inconsistent with this Handbook and has not been approved as a local variation under this section, this Handbook prevails in accordance with section 2.3.

(f) The AFL may refuse, amend or withdraw approval for a local variation where the variation is inconsistent with participant safety, child safeguarding, integrity, insurance requirements or the objectives of the national school football competition framework.

2.6 Amendment

The AFL may amend this Handbook from time to time as it deems fit. Competition Management will be notified of amendments and are responsible for communicating relevant changes to Schools.

2.7 Matters Not Covered

Any matter not dealt with or provided for in this Handbook may be dealt with in such manner as the AFL determines.

PART B – COMPETITION MANAGEMENT

3. ROLE AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF COMPETITION MANAGEMENT

3.1 Purpose of Competition Management

Competition Management is the State or Territory body formally appointed by the AFL to administer school football competitions in their State or Territory in accordance with AFL policies, this Handbook and Competition Conditions.

3.2 Key Responsibilities

Competition Management is responsible for:

- the general administration of the Competition, including distribution of information to Schools, allocation of Match Managers, determination of venue availability and liaison with School Co-ordinators, AFL staff, umpires and other persons;
- promotion of the Competition;
- distribution of nomination information and acceptance of nominations from Schools;
- constructing Competition draws;
- enforcement of Competition rules, including initiation of any investigation or disciplinary process under this Handbook;
- briefing Match Managers on their responsibilities;
- contacting Schools to confirm and discuss Incident Reports;
- addressing complaints in accordance with this Handbook;
- actively promoting, planning and delivering equitable participation opportunities for girls, including equitable venue access, match times and resources; and
- working with Schools to address barriers to girls' participation and retention, including through modified or alternative formats, including AFL Switch.

LOCAL FLEXIBILITY

Competition Management may publish Competition Conditions to address matters specific to their State or Territory, including local rules, match formats, draw structures and venue requirements.

All Competition Conditions must be consistent with the National Policy Handbook and this Handbook. Where inconsistency exists, the National Policy Handbook and this Handbook prevails unless the AFL has expressly approved otherwise.

4. SCHOOL RESPONSIBILITIES

Schools are responsible for ensuring their participation in the Competition complies with this Handbook, Competition Conditions and all applicable policies.

4.1 General Responsibilities

Prior to and during the Competition, Schools must:

- ensure all Players, Coaches and Officials meet eligibility, registration and accreditation requirements;

- ensure all participants comply with this Handbook and any applicable Competition Conditions;
- ensure teams are appropriately supervised by a responsible school staff member;
- comply with all safety, injury management and concussion requirements, including those outlined in Section 5.2 and 5.3;
- cooperate with Competition Management in relation to any incident, investigation or disciplinary process; and
- ensure all Persons associated with the school act in accordance with Part F of this Handbook.

4.2 Girls' Participation

Where a girls' Competition is available, a School is expected to nominate at least one girls' team, unless an exemption is granted by Competition Management. AFL may review exemption decisions where necessary.

Competition Management will grant exemptions at its sole discretion, and only where a School can demonstrate genuine barriers to participation with a commitment and plan towards future participation in Competitions. The AFL may, at its sole discretion, review exemption decisions where necessary.

Schools must provide girls with equitable access to facilities, resources and participation opportunities, and ensure safe and inclusive environments during the Competition.

Competition Management may utilise modified or alternative formats, including AFL Switch, to address barriers to girls' participation and retention.

4.3 Coach Accreditation - School Obligations

Schools are responsible for ensuring all Coaches, including assistant coaches, hold the required accreditation before the first fixture of each Season. Competition Management may request evidence of accreditation at any time.

A school that fields a team coached by an unaccredited Coach may be subject to consequences as determined by Competition Management, including forfeiture of match results.

> ***Note:*** *Coaches returning from a previous season must ensure their accreditation points are current before the Season commences, as points reset annually on 1 November.*

5. MATCH MANAGER RESPONSIBILITIES

Match Managers are appointed by Competition Management to oversee the delivery of matches and ensure compliance with this Handbook.

5.1 General Responsibilities

Match Managers must:

- ensure all matches are conducted in accordance with this Handbook and Competition Conditions;
- confirm that required personnel, including umpires and first aid support, are present;
- oversee match operations and support umpires as required;
- manage any incidents or reports arising during the match; and
- communicate relevant match outcomes, incidents or reports to Competition Management.

5.2 Injury Management, First Aid and Medical Requirements

Minimum injury management, first aid, concussion and medical requirements for Competitions are those prescribed in Part D of the National Policy Handbook. Matches must not proceed unless those requirements

are met.

Competition Management, Match Managers and Schools share responsibility for ensuring those requirements are in place prior to each match.

Competition Management may prescribe additional requirements through Competition Conditions provided they are not inconsistent with the National Policy Handbook.

5.3 Concussion Management

All participants must comply with the AFL Community Concussion Guidelines.

A Player suspected of having sustained a concussion must be managed in accordance with those requirements and must not participate in any match or training activity unless permitted under the applicable return-to-play requirements.

Schools, Coaches, Officials and Match Managers must support the implementation of the concussion protocols and comply with any reporting requirements.

5.4 Protective Equipment

The use of protective equipment must comply with the requirements prescribed in Part D of the National Policy Handbook.

Competition Management may publish additional operational guidance regarding protective equipment through Competition Conditions, provided it is not inconsistent with the National Policy Handbook.

Schools are responsible for ensuring any protective equipment worn by a Player is safe, fit for purpose and compliant with applicable requirements.

5.5 Extreme Weather and Environmental Conditions

Competitions must be conducted in accordance with the extreme weather, lightning, air quality and sun protection requirements prescribed in Part D of the National Policy Handbook.

Match Managers are responsible for monitoring conditions and implementing any required modifications, delays, suspensions or cancellations in consultation with Competition Management.

Where conditions present an unacceptable risk to the health, safety or wellbeing of participants, Competition Management or the Match Manager may postpone, suspend, relocate or cancel a match.

5.6 Health and Safety Obligations

Competition Management, Match Managers, Schools, Coaches and Officials must take all reasonable steps to provide a safe environment for participants and comply with the health and safety requirements prescribed in this Handbook and the National Policy Handbook.

Schools remain responsible for complying with all applicable workplace health and safety, education sector and duty of care obligations in relation to participants under their supervision.

PART C – NOMINATIONS, ELIGIBILITY & REGISTRATION

6. NOMINATIONS

Each School wishing to participate in the Competition must apply by lodging the online nomination form provided by the relevant AFL State or Territory body. By submitting a nomination, Schools agree to comply with this Handbook and all relevant AFL policies.

7. PLAYER ELIGIBILITY

All players must meet eligibility requirements in this section and be registered in accordance with section 8 prior to participating in the Competition.

7.1 School of Enrolment

A Player must be enrolled with the school that nominates them. Schools cannot nominate a Player from another School.

With written consent from Competition Management, a School may nominate a Player enrolled in distance education.

If a Player changes school during the Competition, they are no longer eligible to play for their former School. They may play for their new School provided their new School nominates them accordingly.

7.2 Playing Up

Players are permitted to participate in a higher Division for their gender (or in a mixed division), subject to approval through the ***Playing Up Approval Form – School Football Competitions***.

In considering an application, the School and Competition Management may have regard to the Player's:

- physical development and capability;
- football experience and skill level;
- social and emotional maturity;
- player welfare and safety; and
- eligibility based on date of birth and school year level.

Approval may be granted where:

- written consent has been provided by the Player's parent or guardian;
- endorsement has been provided by the Head of Sport, Principal or their delegate;
- the Player is not displacing an age-eligible Player who is available to participate in the Division; and
- Competition Management is satisfied that participation is in the best interests of the Player and the Competition.

Where a Player's date of birth does not align with their year level, including where a Player has repeated a year level, Competition Management may approve participation in an alternative Division through the Playing Up Approval Form – School Football Competitions**.**

Players are not permitted to participate across multiple Divisions on the same day.

Playing up from a Primary Division to Secondary Division is not permitted unless expressly approved by Competition Management in exceptional circumstances.

7.3 Ineligible Players

For the purposes of this section, an Ineligible Player is:

- a Player who is not registered via the approved competition registration process in accordance with section 8;
- a Player who is not listed on the team sheet;
- a Player serving a suspension under this Handbook;
- a Player participating contrary to the AFL Community Concussion Guidelines;
- a Player enrolled in the incorrect school year for the specified Division, unless playing up under section 7.2;
- a Player participating as part of an Extended Bench without prior approval;
- a Player enrolled with an alternate school to the one they are playing for; or
- a Player who is not included on the approved match day team list submitted in accordance with section 8.1.

A Player is also ineligible if they are currently serving a suspension under the National Policy Handbook for:

- an Intentional Classifiable Offence;
- any other Reportable Offence resulting in a sanction of at least three (3) matches; or
- any breach of Part C of the National Policy Handbook resulting in a sanction of at least three (3) matches.

Playing an Ineligible Player may result in:

- the loss of any Competition points;
- the team being prevented from progressing to the next stage of the Competition; and/or
- such other consequences as determined by Competition Management.

8. PLAYER REGISTRATION

PlayHQ is the AFL's nationally endorsed competition management platform and the preferred system for AFL-run school football competitions.

8.1 Registration Requirements

Schools must register Team Managers and Players via PlayHQ where the competition is administered on the PlayHQ platform. Coaches, including Assistant Coaches, must be registered and accredited through the Coach AFL Platform prior to the commencement of the competition.

Coaches must nominate their School through the Coach AFL Platform and meet the accreditation requirements prescribed in Section 9 before undertaking any coaching role within the Competition.

8.2 Exemptions from PlayHQ Registration

Where a Competition is not administered via PlayHQ, or where a School is unable to use PlayHQ, Competition Management may approve an alternative process for participant registration and match day team sheet submission.

Any alternative process must ensure:

- all participants are appropriately recorded;
- player eligibility requirements are met; and
- minimum safety and compliance standards are maintained.

Competition Management will determine the appropriate alternative process, considering accessibility, participation and administrative requirements.

8.3 PlayHQ Administration

Competitions that meet the eligibility criteria will use PlayHQ as the nominated competition management platform. PlayHQ is used to manage player and team administration, participant records, fixture scheduling, results, ladders, match day operations and concussion management.

Coach accreditation is managed through the Coach AFL Platform.

Competition Management will provide Schools with onboarding support and resources at the start of each Season. Schools experiencing difficulties with PlayHQ must contact their relevant Competition Management in the first instance.

Competition Management will identify which specific competitions are to be administered via PlayHQ.

9. COACH ACCREDITATION

All Coaches involved in Competitions must be accredited as a Coach in accordance with section 6 of the National Policy Handbook prior to the commencement of the Season. This is a condition of participation; a School cannot field a team coached by an unaccredited Coach.

9.1 Accreditation Framework

The AFL's coach accreditation framework uses a points-based approach with five accreditation tiers:

- Registered - fewer than 90 points. The first step of registration. All three steps must be completed to be eligible to coach.
- Registered Accredited - 90 points. The minimum requirement to coach on game day.
- Bronze - 100 points. Entry-tier accreditation with access to additional learning modules.
- Silver - 200 points. Intermediate accreditation with access to additional learning opportunities.
- Gold - 400 points. The highest tier, requiring completion of the Advanced Coaching Course.

The minimum requirement for a Head Coach and Assistant Coach is Registered Accredited (90 points).

9.2 Maintaining Accreditation

Accreditation points reset to the minimum required for the current tier on 1 November each year. The registration window commences on 1 November each year and concludes on 31 October:

- Bronze: minimum 50 points (including 40 points from compliance modules and at least 10 points from an additional learning element).
- Silver: minimum 50 points (same requirements as Bronze).
- Gold: minimum 100 points per calendar year.

If a Coach does not achieve the required points in the registration window, their accreditation will revert to one tier below.

9.3 How to Register

Coaches register and complete accreditation via the Coach AFL Platform (afl.androgogic.com.au). Points can be earned through online modules, face-to-face workshops, practical coaching and self-directed learning.

Coaches with prior coaching experience or qualifications may be eligible for Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL). To apply, log into your coaching profile and select 'Apply for RPL' under the 'Coach Hub' tab.

Full information is available at play.afl/coach.

10. INSURANCE

Students participate in Competitions at their own risk and are responsible for their own personal injury and accident insurance.

The AFL holds Public Liability Insurance to a limit of $20,000,000 per occurrence to cover its legal liabilities in respect of third-party personal injury or property damage.

The AFL expects each School participating in Australian Football programs to procure and maintain public liability insurance to sufficiently cover its own legal liabilities.

Each School or individual may wish to consider purchasing personal accident insurance to cover non-Medicare medical expenses arising from participation.

PART D – COMPETITION RULES

11. LAWS OF THE GAME AND NATIONAL JUNIOR RULES

The Laws of the Game and the National Junior Rules apply to all Divisions unless modified pursuant to this Handbook or the relevant Competition Conditions. Where any discrepancy exists between those documents and this Handbook, this Handbook prevails.

Key references:

- Laws of the Game: play.afl/clubhelp/resources/laws-game
- National Junior Rules: play.afl/junior-rules

11.1 Competition Formats

A Competition may be delivered using:

- The traditional Australian Football format, as per the Junior Rules; or
- The modified Australian Football format, as per the AFL Switch Rules.

The approved competition format must be clearly identified for each Competition and Division.

AFL Switch competitions are played in accordance with:

- The AFL Switch rules (as published by the AFL); and
- Any additional requirements set out in this Handbook or approved Competition Conditions.

12. GENERAL MATCH GUIDELINES

General match guidelines, including game times, football sizes, field sizes and team sizes, are linked in Appendix One. Where a Competition Management has published Competition Conditions, those conditions must be read alongside rules linked in Appendix One.

12.1 Disability Inclusion

The AFL is committed to ensuring Competitions are accessible, safe and inclusive for all students living with disability or who may have additional needs. Disability participation arrangements and reasonable adjustments must be managed in accordance with Section 16 of the National Policy Handbook. Competition Management may implement approved adjustments to support participation, provided they are consistent with those requirements.

Refer to the relevant State or Territory Competition Conditions for specific inclusion arrangements.

13. PLAYING UNIFORMS

All Players within a team must wear matching guernseys, shorts and socks. Playing shorts must not have pockets of any kind.

Where required for cultural, religious or personal reasons, Schools may request approval for modifications or alternative uniform items (e.g. headwear, leggings). Requests must be submitted to Competition Management, who may approve variations provided they do not compromise player safety or competition integrity.

If a School is unable to arrange specific playing uniforms, they must contact Competition Management, who may approve alternative uniforms at their discretion.

14. FORFEITS

If a team wishes to forfeit, their School must notify Competition Management as soon as possible.

If notice of a forfeit is given within seven (7) days of the scheduled match, the school may be fined to cover administrative costs as determined by Competition Management.

Where a team forfeits, the opposing team shall progress to the next stage of the Competition where progression is an option.

Note: *If a forfeit is necessary due to circumstances beyond a school's control (such as extreme weather or traffic), this will be taken into consideration before any fine is issued.*

14.1 Match Results Following a Forfeit

Competition Management must determine the allocation of competition points, percentage calculations and any ladder impact arising from a forfeit. These arrangements must be outlined in the relevant Competition Conditions.

15. UMPIRES AND OFFICIALS

15.1 Umpire Appointments

Umpire appointments for each fixture type are outlined in the relevant Competition Conditions. Where umpires are not appointed by Competition Management, Schools may be required to provide a teacher-umpire or agree to a shared umpiring arrangement.

All umpires must always be treated with respect. Abuse or intimidation of umpires will be treated as a conduct breach or reportable offence under this Handbook.

15.2 Student Umpire Pathway

The AFL encourages Schools to identify students with an interest in umpiring. Student umpires play an important role in reducing the administrative burden of sourcing officials and provide a meaningful pathway for young people to connect to the game.

Schools are encouraged to:

- identify students who may be suitable to train as match day umpires, including those no longer playing or seeking a different form of involvement;
- nominate interested students to Competition Management at or following nominations each season; and
- support nominated students to participate in AFL-delivered umpire training and upskilling programs.

The AFL, through Competition Management, will provide training and upskilling support for nominated student umpires. The format of this support, including online modules, match day mentoring and face-to-face sessions, will be communicated to Schools at the start of each Season.

> ***Note:*** *The student umpire pathway is a developing program. Further detail on training requirements, match day eligibility and appointment processes will be communicated through Competition Conditions as the program is rolled out across States and Territories.*

15.3 Officials

Each team is entitled to the following Officials:

- Coach
- Assistant Coach
- Team Manager
- First Aid Provider (or equivalent)
- Runner
- Water Carrier

All Officials must wear appropriate school sport or staff uniform and enclosed footwear. Runners must wear an identified runner's vest or uniform supplied by the Match Manager.

All Coaches, including Assistant Coaches, must hold the required accreditation in accordance with section 9.

Runners are to deliver a Coach's message to a Player and immediately depart the field following delivery. If an umpire observes a runner in breach of this requirement, the umpire may direct the runner to leave the field for a period determined by the Match Manager.

Water carriers are permitted if they are a student enrolled, or an employee at the relevant School. Additional water carriers may be permitted where required in accordance with the extreme weather requirements prescribed in Part D of the National Policy Handbook.

PART E – SAFEGUARDING AND CHILD SAFETY

16. CHILD SAFETY

The AFL is committed to the safety and wellbeing of all children and young people involved in school football competitions.

All participants, Coaches, Officials and volunteers must comply with:

- The safeguarding children and young people requirements set out in the National Policy Handbook and the AFL Child Safeguarding and Wellbeing Policy; and
- All applicable state and territory child safety legislation and requirements.

For the avoidance of doubt, the behavioural standards and expectations outlined in the National Policy Handbook apply to all conduct within Competitions, and any breach may be managed under this Handbook or the National Policy Handbook as the AFL determines.

Competition Management, Schools and associated personnel must meet all Working with Children Check (or equivalent) requirements in accordance with applicable state and territory legislation and the National Policy Handbook.

Any concerns regarding the safety or wellbeing of a child must be reported immediately in accordance with applicable legislation and safeguarding requirements, including to the relevant School, Competition Management and, where required, the relevant government authority or AFL Integrity.

Schools are expected to comply with their own child safety policies and obligations under applicable legislation, in addition to the requirements outlined in the National Policy Handbook and AFL Child Safeguarding and Wellbeing Policy.

> ***Note:*** *Where statements or evidence are being obtained from minors, a parent/guardian or School supervisor must always be present.*

PART F – MEMBER PROTECTION AND STANDARDS OF CONDUCT

17. RESPONSIBILITIES OF A PERSON

A Person must:

- understand and comply with this Handbook and its contents;
- comply with this Handbook and any rules, regulations, by-laws, emergency protocols and policies formally adopted by the AFL or Competition Management in relation to the Competition;
- respect the spirit of fair play;
- be ethical, fair, honest and respectful in all dealings with other people;
- contribute to a safe sporting environment and respectful culture that is accepting of individual differences;
- prioritise the safety and welfare of children;
- recognise and display respect for the essential role of umpires and other Officials in Australian Football;
- comply with all relevant federal and state laws, including anti-discrimination and child protection laws;
- comply with any lawful direction, investigative process or disciplinary measure imposed in accordance with this Handbook, National Policy Handbook or any applicable Competition Conditions; and
- comply with any sanction imposed following a finding of a Reportable Offence or breach of this Handbook.

18. GENERAL CODE OF CONDUCT

In connection with the Competition, a Person must not:

- engage in conduct which brings, or is likely to bring, the interests of Australian Football or the AFL into disrepute;
- act in a manner which is, or is likely to be, prejudicial to the interests of Australian Football or the AFL;
- directly or indirectly harass or bully (including cyber bully) any Person;
- make or post inappropriate, offensive or discriminatory comments in public (including on social media) about another Person or the AFL;
- victimise a person for making a complaint under this Handbook;
- verbally or physically abuse, threaten, assault, engage in violence with or intimidate another Person, or create a hostile environment;
- disclose information related to Australian Football that is of a private, confidential or privileged nature without required consent;
- make a complaint under this Handbook that the Person knows to be untrue, vexatious, malicious or improper; or
- engage in any conduct prohibited by Part C of the National Policy Handbook, including Serious Criminal Offences, Sexual Misconduct, Abuse or Victimisation.

19. COACH CODE OF CONDUCT

In addition to the obligations under sections 17 and 18, a Coach must:

- hold and maintain the required accreditation level in accordance with section 9 of this Handbook;
- be reasonable in the demands made on the time commitment of Players outside of school hours, having regard to their health and wellbeing;
- be considerate of the varying maturity and levels of ability of Players when designing practice schedules and practice activities;
- use best endeavours to ensure that every Player plays a minimum of 50% playing time;
- always monitor and ensure the health and safety of Players;
- seek and follow the advice of appropriately qualified health specialists in relation to the participation of injured or ill Players, provided that where such advice is inconsistent with any restriction contained within the National Policy Handbook, the National Policy Handbook prevails;
- keep up to date with the principles of coaching, including skill development and accreditation requirements;
- display and foster appropriate sporting behaviour, including ensuring Players comply with their obligations under this Handbook;
- display and foster respect for Officials, opponents, parents and spectators;
- ensure Players are involved in a positive environment where skill learning and development are priorities; and
- keep up to date with and comply with all safeguarding and child safety requirements within the National Policy Handbook and AFL Child Safeguarding and Wellbeing Policy.

20. ALCOHOL, SMOKING AND VAPING

Alcohol, smoking, vaping and drug-related conduct within a Competition must be managed in accordance with the National Policy Handbook, including Section 12 of Appendix 6.

Any breach of those requirements may be managed under Part G of this Handbook, or the National Policy Handbook.

State and Territory Competition Conditions may prescribe local operational requirements, provided they remain consistent with the National Policy Handbook and applicable legislation.

PART G – COMPLAINTS AND DISCIPLINARY

This Part G must be read in conjunction with Part E of the National Policy Handbook. It adapts certain disciplinary, integrity and member protection processes to reflect the school football competition environment, including the involvement of students, schools and education authorities. Unless expressly stated otherwise in this Handbook, the National Policy Handbook applies and prevails in the event of any inconsistency.

Note: Different standards of proof apply under the National Policy Handbook:

- Policy Breaches are determined on the standard of comfortable satisfaction.
- Reportable Offences are determined on the standard of the balance of probabilities.

The applicable standard of proof prescribed by the National Policy Handbook must be applied when determining any matter under this Part.

21. AFL INVESTIGATION

If the AFL, Competition Management, Disciplinary Officer or a relevant State or Territory body becomes aware that any Person may have breached this Handbook, the National Policy Handbook or applicable Competition Conditions, the matter may be assessed and investigated in accordance with this Part G and the National Policy Handbook.

Where the matter involves a student, teacher, school staff member or community member, Competition Management may refer the matter to the relevant School, education authority, AFL Integrity, police, child protection authority or other appropriate authority.

> ***Note:*** *Where statements or evidence are obtained from a minor, a parent/guardian, School representative or other appropriate adult must be present.*

As part of the investigation, the Disciplinary Officer may obtain a statement from the alleged contravening person in accordance with the National Policy Handbook and applicable procedural requirements under this Handbook.

Where the Disciplinary Officer, relevant State or Territory body or appointed decision-maker is satisfied that a breach has occurred in accordance with the applicable standard of proof prescribed by the National Policy Handbook, they may impose such sanction as they consider appropriate, which may include education, a requirement to participate in mediation, match suspensions or expulsion from the Competition.

Competition Management will inform the relevant School of the finding and any sanction imposed.

If a School wishes to challenge the finding or sanction, it must notify Competition Management by 5:00pm on the next business day following the notification of the outcome and must substantiate at least one of the following grounds:

- the decision involved an error of law which had a material impact on the outcome;
- the decision was so unreasonable that no decision maker acting reasonably could have reached it, having regard to the evidence; or
- the sanction imposed was manifestly excessive or inadequate.

Where a finding or sanction is made under this section, the matter may be reviewed through:

- the relevant state or territory tribunal, review or appeal process; or
- an AFL-appointed panel;

No member of the review body may have been involved in the initial determination of the matter. The review body may confirm, amend or overturn the finding or sanction.

22. COMPLAINTS REGARDING SUSPECTED BREACH

This section applies to complaints regarding suspected breaches of Part F of this Handbook and must be read in conjunction with Part E of the National Policy Handbook.

Where suspected conduct involves a student, teacher, school staff member or community member, Competition Management or the Disciplinary Officer may refer the matter to the relevant School, education authority, governing body or other appropriate authority for consideration under its own policies and procedures.

22.1 Lodgement of Complaint

If a person considers that another person has breached Part F of this Handbook, that Person may submit a written complaint (or verbal complaint where permitted) to Competition Management or the Match Manager.

A complaint should be lodged:

- within seven (7) days of the suspected breach; or
- within such other timeframe permitted under the applicable State or Territory framework.

The complaint should, wherever practicable, include:

- the date of the suspected breach;
- the approximate time of the alleged breach;
- where the suspected conduct occurred;
- the identity of the affected Person (if any), including their role, School and Division;
- the identity of the suspected contravening Person, including their role, School and Division; and
- particulars of the suspected conduct, including details of any witnesses.

22.2 Initial Assessment and Evidence Gathering

Competition Management or the Match Manager will take reasonable steps to obtain available information relevant to the complaint and may seek information from:

- the complainant;
- the suspected contravening person;
- witnesses;
- relevant School representatives; and
- any other person reasonably capable of assisting the assessment of the complaint.

The complaint and any supporting material must then be referred to the Disciplinary Officer.

> ***Note:*** *When statements or evidence are obtained from a minor, a parent/guardian, School representative or other appropriate adult must be present.*

22.3 School, Integrity and External Referrals

Where suspected conduct involves a student, teacher, school staff member or community member, Competition Management or the Disciplinary Officer may refer the matter to:

- the relevant School;
- education authority;

- governing body;
- AFL Integrity;
- police;
- a child protection authority; or
- another appropriate authority.

Nothing in this Handbook limits any mandatory reporting obligations or the AFL's ability to refer a matter to another authority where required by law, AFL policy, safeguarding obligations or the National Policy Handbook.

22.4 Assessment by Disciplinary Officer

Upon receipt of a complaint, the Disciplinary Officer will assess the available information and determine the appropriate course of action.

This may include:

- investigating the complaint;
- requesting further information;
- facilitating an educational outcome;
- facilitating a conciliation, mediation or another agreed resolution outcome;
- referring the matter to the relevant School or education authority;
- referring the matter to AFL Integrity or another external authority; or
- determining that no further action is required.

22.5 Investigation and Outcome

Where the Disciplinary Officer elects to investigate the complaint and is satisfied that a breach has occurred in accordance with the applicable standard of proof prescribed by the National Policy Handbook, they may impose a sanction as they consider appropriate in accordance with this Handbook and the National Policy Handbook.

Competition Management will inform the relevant school of the finding and any sanction imposed.

22.6 Review of Decision

If a School wishes to challenge a finding or sanction made under this section, any review must be conducted in accordance with the review process outlined in Section 21.

23. VILIFICATION

Allegations of vilification or discrimination within a Competition must be managed in accordance with Section 10 of the National Policy Handbook.

Where a matter is not resolved through conciliation, mediation or another agreed resolution process, the matter must be managed in accordance with the investigation, determination and review processes contained in Sections 21 and 22 of this Handbook.

For avoidance of doubt:

- Section 10 of the National Policy Handbook applies in full to all Competitions governed by this Handbook;
- References within Section 10 of the National Policy Handbook to a club, participant or competition should be read as including a School, Official, student, spectator or any other Person participating in or connected with a Competition; and

- Where a matter is not resolved through conciliation, any reference within Section 10 of the National Policy Handbook to a Notice of Breach, tribunal, appeal or equivalent disciplinary process is taken to be a reference to the investigation, determination and review processes established under Sections 21 and 22 of this Handbook.
- Where a matter involves a student, teacher, school staff member or community member, Competition Management may additionally refer the matter to the relevant authority, AFL Integrity, police, child protection authority or other appropriate authority.

Nothing in this section limits any mandatory reporting obligations or the AFL's ability to refer a matter to another authority where required by law, AFL policy, safeguarding obligations or the National Policy Handbook.

24. REPORTABLE OFFENCES

24.1 Application

Reportable Offences within a Competition are those prescribed by the National Policy Handbook.

Where an incident may constitute a Reportable Offence, the matter must be managed in accordance with the investigation, determination and review processes contained in Sections 21 and 22 of this Handbook, with sanctions determined in accordance with the National Policy Handbook.

For avoidance of doubt:

- references within the National Policy Handbook to a club, participant or competition should be read as including a School, Official, student, spectator or any other Person participating in or connected with a Competition;
- Competition Management or the AFL may assess any incident as a potential Reportable Offence, including where no umpire report has been submitted; and
- where a matter involves a student, teacher, school staff member or community member, Competition Management may refer the matter to the relevant School, education authority, AFL Integrity, police, child protection authority or other appropriate authority; and
- any sanction imposed for a Reportable Offence must be determined in accordance with the applicable sanctioning framework contained in the National Policy Handbook, including Appendix 1 – Reportable Offences.

24.2 School Notifications

Schools must not independently issue a Notice of Charge or impose a sanction for a Reportable Offence under this Handbook.

Where a school becomes aware of an incident that may constitute a Reportable Offence and was not reported by an umpire, the school may notify Competition Management for assessment.

24.3 Recognition of Sanctions

Where a Player or Official is suspended as a result of a Reportable Offence, the AFL may determine whether that suspension is recognised across other AFL-managed competitions, having regard to the nature of the offence, the sanction imposed and the applicable provisions of the National Policy Handbook.

Recognition of sanctions between school football competitions and community football competitions remains subject to the applicable AFL, State or Territory policies and processes.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX ONE - GENERAL MATCH GUIDELINES

Creating the optimal experience for junior footballers across the country.

- play.afl/junior-rules
- play.afl/switch

Appendix One will be updated from time to time to reflect any changes to National Junior Rules. Competition Management bodies may supplement Appendix One through Competition Conditions.

APPENDIX TWO – NATIONAL COMMUNITY FOOTBALL POLICY HANDBOOK

The Handbook includes relevant community football policies across four sections: eligibility and registration; member protection & integrity; health & safety; disciplinary.

- National Community Football Policy Handbook

APPENDIX THREE – PLAYING UP APPROVAL FORM

PLAYING UP APPROVAL FORM – SCHOOL FOOTBALL COMPETITIONS

Players seeking to play in a higher Division where approval is required under Section 7.2 of the National School Football Competition Handbook, are required to complete a 'Playing Up Approval Form' (e.g. eligible to play Year 7 & 8 but wishes to play Year 9 & 10). This form must be completed and returned to Competition Management prior to the player playing their first match for the age group.

Player Name		Date of Birth
School	**Current Age Group**	**Play Up Age Group**

I, _____ (insert parent/guardian name), give permission for the above-named player to participate in the:

Requested Age Group	

Within the:

Competition Name	

For the current season.

I acknowledge that:

- I have read and understood the Competition Rules relating to Playing Up.
- The player is seeking approval to participate in an age group two (2) above their eligible age group.
- Participation is subject to approval by Competition Management.
- Approval may be reviewed or withdrawn if Competition Management believes participation is no longer appropriate.
- The player must not participate across multiple age groups on the same day unless specifically permitted under competition rules.

Parent/Guardian Signature	
Date	

SCHOOL ENDORSEMENT

The school supports this application and is satisfied the player can safely participate in the requested age group based on their physical development, maturity, football experience and wellbeing.

School Representative Name	
Position	
Signature	
Date	

COMPETITION MANAGEMENT APPROVAL

APPROVED	
NOT APPROVED	

Comments: _____

_____

Competition Management Representative	
Signature	
Date	

PLAYING UP CONDITIONS

This approval is provided in accordance with the National School Football Competition Handbook and applicable State and Territory Competition Conditions. Approval applies only to the player, age group and competition identified in this form:

- Players may only play up with written consent from parent/guardian and school representative.
- Playing up from a primary school division to secondary school division is not permitted.
- Players must not participate across multiple competition divisions on the same day.
- Competition Management may approve, decline, suspend or withdraw an approval at any time where player welfare, competition integrity or safety concerns exist.
- Competition Management may request additional information to support an application.

APPENDIX FOUR – REVISION HISTORY

DATE	VERSION	DESCRIPTION	AUTHOR
August 2026	Version 1.0	Initial Publication	National School Football Competition Lead – J. Neumann
October 2026	Version 1.1	Update of new format to AFL Switch	National School Football Competition Lead – J. Neumann
November 2026	Version 1.2	Introduced Approved Local Variations framework and updated governance provisions for State and Territory Competition Conditions.	National School Football Competition Lead – J.Neumann