SUBSTANCE MISUSE POLICY

FEBRUARY 2026

St. Brendan's Community School

St. Brendan's Community School Mission Statement

"Our aim is to create a caring community of learning where each individual is valued as a unique human being"

Scope

This policy applies to St. Brendan's Community School, which is a health-promoting school committed to addressing the needs of the whole school community in relation to substance misuse.
We believe that students, teachers, parents/guardians and the Board of Management must work together, and that cooperation is essential to the acceptance and effective implementation of this policy.

This policy applies to students, staff, parents/guardians, the Board of Management and all visitors to the school.

Rationale

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Definition of a Drug and an Illegal/Harmful Substance

For the purposes of this policy, a *drug* or *illegal/harmful substance* is defined as:

1. Any chemical that alters how the body functions or how a person behaves or feels.
2. Any drug or substance whose use by school-aged children is prohibited by law.

School Policy on Drugs and Illegal/Harmful Substances

St. Brendan's Community School does not permit the possession, use or supply of alcohol, cigarettes, vapes, snus, prescription drugs or illegal drugs on school premises or grounds, on school trips, tours, sporting activities or any school-related activity by any member of the school community or visitors. Any attempt to encourage or involve others in such activities while in school uniform is strictly prohibited.

The misuse of aerosols and other hazardous substances is also prohibited.

The only exception to the above relates to prescription or over-the-counter medication required for legitimate medical use. Parents/guardians must inform the school in writing of any such requirement.

The school does not administer medication except where prior agreement has been made with parents/guardians in exceptional circumstances.

St. Brendan's Community School does not accept the possession, use or supply of alcohol, cigarettes, vapes, snus, prescription drugs or illegal drugs on the school premises or grounds, on school day trips, school tours, sporting activities or any other extracurricular activity by any member of the school community, visitors or otherwise. Any attempt to encourage or involve others in such activities while in school uniform is strictly forbidden.

Illegitimate use of aerosols and other hazardous substances is also prohibited.

The only exception to the above is prescription /over the counter drugs for legitimate medicinal use and the onus is on the parents/guardians to inform the school in writing.

The school does not dispense any medication to students except in the exceptional case where this has been agreed in advance with parents.

List of Harmful and Illegal Substances

- Tobacco / cigarettes / vapes / snus
- Alcohol
- Chemical substances / solvents
- Prescription and over-the-counter medicines (misuse)
- Illegal drugs[i]

This list is not exhaustive.

Alcohol, Tobacco, Vape, Drugs and Harmful Substance Education Programmes

St. Brendan's Community School is committed to providing a comprehensive substance misuse education programme for all students, primarily through SPHE and the Wellbeing programme. Relevant aspects may also be addressed through Religious Education, CSPE, Science, Biology and Physical Education.

The aims of substance misuse education are to:

- Enhance students' self-esteem and confidence.
- Equip students with personal and social skills.
- Enable students to make informed, healthy and responsible choices.
- Provide honest, accurate and age-appropriate information on substance misuse.
- Minimise harm by offering appropriate supports and interventions.

These aims will be supported through:

- Training opportunities for SPHE teachers in facilitation skills and personal development.
- Ongoing professional development for staff delivering substance misuse programmes, aligned with the SPHE curriculum and the Wellbeing Framework.

Guest Speakers

While trained teachers are best placed to deliver substance misuse education, guest speakers may be invited where appropriate to supplement classroom teaching and reinforce key messages, in line with Department of Education guidance.

Parents and Guardians

Parents and Guardians have the most influence on the lives of children and are therefore crucial in any prevention issues which arise.

Parents and Guardians are expected to:

Parents and guardians play a central role in the education and wellbeing of young people and are therefore key partners in prevention and support.

Parents/guardians are expected to:

- Acknowledge the importance of substance misuse education programmes.
- Recognise their role as primary educators in relation to substance use awareness.
- Cooperate fully with the school in addressing any substance misuse concerns.

The school will support parents/guardians by:

- Providing information on education programmes.
- Encouraging consultation regarding the use of community-based supports.

Drug Incidents

The following are examples of drug incidents:

- Emergencies when the person may be unconscious.
- Intoxication / unusual behaviour.
- Suspicion / rumour of drug use, possession or dealing.
- Disclosure by another person.
- Possession of a legal/illegal drug on the school premises or on a school related activity.
- Selling / Supplying legal / illegal drugs.
- School grounds being used for drug activity.
- Drug paraphernalia found on school property.

Procedures for Managing Alcohol, Tobacco, Prescription, Illegal Drug and Harmful Substance Related Abuse Incidents

The school will seek to balance the welfare of the student(s) involved with the wellbeing of the wider school community.

A summary of procedures includes:

1. Where there is an immediate risk to health or safety, the school may temporarily remove or suspend a student pending investigation.
2. All incidents or concerns will be recorded using the Substance Use Incident Report Form.
3. The school may liaise with appropriate external agencies for advice or assistance.
4. Any prohibited substances or paraphernalia will be secured and recorded pending advice from relevant authorities.
5. Following investigation, disciplinary procedures may be applied in line with the Code of Behaviour and Department of Education guidelines.
6. Pastoral support will be offered to students and parents/guardians as appropriate.

Student Blood and Urine Testing

The Board of Management or Principal shall have the right to require any student(s) to provide a Medical Report from a Doctor which should include the results from recent blood or urine tests. These tests must be carried out by a Doctor (not a home test kit) and be negative before any student would be reinstated to school. On reinstatement to school the Board of Management or Principal shall have the right to require the parents, of the student involved, have the student undertake a series of blood or urine tests in the event of:

1) A student found in the possession of any substance listed in this policy and/or
2) The student has been before the courts in any matter relating to substance listed in this policy and/or
3) Where two teachers, who are Mandated Persons, have reasonable grounds for concern regarding a student's behaviour (e.g. erratic behaviour, loss of bodily function, smell of alcohol or drugs, unusual interaction with staff or students, or where a disclosure of drug use has been made to staff), these concerns should be reported to the DLP (Principal).A positive blood or urine test constitutes a breach of this policy.

Banned Substance Search

Powers of Search

In the interest of the general student body the school/centre retains the right to search any part of school/centre property if there is any reasonable cause to believe a substance in breach of this policy is present.

- Search of a student's locker.
- Search of a student's school bag.
- An instruction to a student to empty his/her school bag or pockets or locker.

The following conditions will apply:

- Any such search will be authorised by the principal/deputy.
- Consent and/or the presence of the parent/guardian should be sought where possible.

- Any search will be undertaken in the presence of two members of staff.

Where there is reasonable belief that a student or person is in possession of a substance listed in this policy and refuses to voluntarily surrender the substance, the Gardai may be contacted and asked to conduct the search. Two staff members are required to be present during any form of search. Every effort will be made to notify the parents/guardians of any student prior to a search being conducted.

Procedures for dealing with students found in breach of school policy regarding harmful or illegal substances:

- The incident will be reported to school management using the Substance Use Incident Report Form, and a record will be made on Compass.
- The student will be spoken to by the Year Head, Deputy Principal, or Principal.
- The student's parents/guardians will be contacted and informed of the incident, including any relevant health, wellbeing, and legal considerations.
- In the event of a repeat incident, parents/guardians may be required to attend a meeting with school management.
- Appropriate sanctions may be applied in line with the school's Code of Behaviour. Any suspension will be imposed in accordance with Department of Education guidelines, with suspensions in excess of three days requiring the approval of the Board of Management.
- Where testing is deemed necessary and agreed in line with school procedures, the student may return to school once results have been received and are negative.
- The student may be asked to give an undertaking not to repeat the behaviour.
- Where appropriate, the possibility of reporting a breach of state legislation to the relevant authorities may be considered.
- All documentation relating to the incident will be retained on the student's file in line with data protection requirements.

Emergency Response

Drug use can have serious and potentially dangerous consequences. It is therefore essential that appropriate action is taken in the event of an emergency.

- Staff should respond promptly by contacting the school's trained first aider (where available), calling the emergency services where necessary, notifying the Principal, and making contact with the student's parents/guardians as soon as practicable.
- The school will ensure that contact has been established in advance with local medical services, with clear procedures in place for accessing emergency support and understanding the level of assistance available.
- Ongoing liaison with relevant external support services is essential, both to support students and to facilitate staff training in this area.

Where an illegal substance is found on school premises, it must be stored securely by school management while awaiting collection by An Garda Síochána, who will arrange for its disposal. The substance should be handled as little as possible, and no attempt should be made to taste or analyse it.

- Two members of staff should be present during any procedures involving the handling of illegal substances.

The involvement and roles of various parties in an incident investigation.

- The Principal or his delegate is the person responsible for all matters relating to this area. He may nominate the Deputy Principal or Year Head or other nominated staff to act on his behalf in the investigation of a substance abuse incident.
- The duties and responsibilities of the Principal (hereafter to be understood as meaning the Principal or his nominee) in this regard include the following:
- The Principal is responsible for dealing with abuse incidents arising at the school.
- All reports of abuse incidents or suspected incidents must be reported to the Principal.
- The Principal makes all decisions regarding investigation of an incident; communication with, liaison with, and reporting to relevant parties; and disclosure of information regarding an investigation.
- The Principal is responsible for keeping all relevant parties properly informed regarding investigation developments.
- The Principal is responsible for the secure and confidential storage of any written documentation and records associated with an incident.
- The Principal is responsible for taking possession of any banned or prohibited substances or drug paraphernalia and deciding what should be done with same upon appropriate advice.
- The Principal may seek the assistance of the Deputy Principal, Year Head, and/or Guidance Counsellor in conducting an incident investigation.

In the event of an abuse incident, the school will immediately inform parents, particularly where there is a concern regarding the health and welfare of a child and share any available information that may help parents in attending to their child's health and wellbeing and will keep students informed about what is happening and why. Such actions will be undertaken without prejudice to the school's separate and independent obligation to investigate and manage any abuse incident.

Links to Other Policies and Curriculum Delivery

Links to Related School Policies

School policies need to be consistent with one another, within the framework of the overall School Plan. Relevant school policies already in place, being developed or reviewed, will be examined with reference to the Substance Misuse Policy and any implications which may impact upon them will be addressed. Similarly, the implications of other college policies and guidelines/plans for the Misuse Policy also need to be considered. The relevant school policies that are already in place, which compliment the aims of our Substance Misuse Policy are:

- Child Protection Safeguarding Statement
- Positive Code of Behaviour
- Bí Cineálta Policy
- Digital Citizenship Policy
- Health and Safety Policy

- Data Protection Policy
- Critical Incident Management Plan

Curriculum Delivery

Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) plays a key role in promoting the health and wellbeing of students in St. Brendan's Community School. This occurs within the context of students' emotional, moral, social and spiritual development, as well as their intellectual, physical and creative growth. Within SPHE, students are provided with age-appropriate education on substance misuse, focusing on health awareness, risk reduction, decision-making, and personal responsibility.

SPHE addresses key areas such as self-esteem, communication skills, managing peer pressure, decision-making, and expressing feelings in an appropriate manner. These skills are central to supporting students in making informed and responsible choices in relation to substance use. Elements of substance misuse education are also supported, where appropriate, across the curriculum through subjects such as Religious Education, Science, Biology and Home Economics.

In St. Brendan's Community School, our aim is to ensure that all students receive a comprehensive and balanced substance misuse education programme from 1st Year through to 6th Year, delivered primarily through SPHE and aligned with the Wellbeing Framework.

Implementation, Arrangements, Roles and Responsibilities

A Substance Misuse Policy team or a designated school team, may be assigned responsibility for coordinating the implementation and review of this policy. Teaching staff, together with relevant external support agencies where appropriate, have responsibility for the delivery of substance misuse education at both Junior Cycle and Senior Cycle, primarily through SPHE and the Wellbeing programme.

A range of other school personnel who work directly with students and liaise with parents/guardians also play an important role in supporting student wellbeing in relation to substance misuse. These may include the Additional Educational Needs (AEN) Coordinator, Chaplain, Guidance Counsellor, HSCL Coordinator and other relevant staff.

The Principal, or their nominee, has overall responsibility for all matters relating to substance misuse within the school. The Principal may delegate responsibility, where appropriate, to the Deputy Principal, Year Head, or other nominated staff member.

The duties and responsibilities of the Principal (or nominee) in this regard include the following:

1. Responsibility for managing and responding to substance misuse incidents.
2. Receiving all reports of substance misuse incidents or suspected incidents.
3. Making decisions in relation to the investigation of substance misuse incidents.
4. Ensuring that all relevant parties are kept appropriately informed and up to date in relation to the progress of any investigation.
5. Ensuring the secure storage of any substances, related paraphernalia, and written documentation associated with an incident.
6. Seeking the assistance of the Deputy Principal, Year Head, Guidance Counsellor, or other relevant staff, where appropriate.

7. Acting as the designated point of contact in relation to any media enquiries.

The Involvement and Roles of Teachers in an Incident/Investigation

1. Responsible for making every effort to recognise or identify suspected breaches of this policy.
2. Referring any suspected breaches of this policy to the Principal.

The Involvement and Roles of Parents in an Incident/Investigation

1. The school may wish to contact the parents of a student for a variety of reasons regarding a suspected substance use incident.
2. The school will immediately inform parents should there be a concern regarding the health and welfare of a students.
3. The school will keep parents and students informed, where appropriate, about what is happening and why.
4. Parents and students should recognise and appreciate that teachers and staff cannot offer total confidentiality when they come into contact with substance use incidents or suspected substance use incidents.
5. Parents will be provided with the name and number of an appropriate external agency should they wish to seek further support for themselves.

The Involvement and Roles of Gardaí in an Incident/Investigation

In incidents involving the supply of prescription or illegal drugs, the school will inform the local Gardai. The Gardai may also be approached for advice about other incident on a case by case basis.

The Involvement and Roles of Media in an Incident/Investigation

1. The Principal is the point of contact in relation to all media enquiries.
2. The school will not comment on individuals or individual cases whilst an investigation is underway other than to outline the schools policy in relation to managing such incidents.
3. The Board of Management may clarify the school's position regarding an incident when the investigation has concluded and its findings have been viewed.

Ratification, Implementation and Review

- This policy was ratified by the Board of Management on 28/5/26
- This policy has been made available to School Personnel and the Parents' Association. It is also published on the School Website and the School App. A copy of this policy will be made available to the Department of Education and the patron upon request.
- This policy and its implementation will be reviewed by the Board of Management once every two years. Written notification that the review has been completed will be made available to School Personnel and the Parents' Association. The review will also be published on the School Website and the School App. A record of the review and its outcome will be made available, if requested, to the patron and the Department of Education.

Signed: Mary Loughnane

Joan Hogan

Chairperson of Board of Management

Date: 28/5/26

Signed:

John Kennedy

Principal/Secretary of Board of Management

Date: 28/5/26

Date of next review: _____

St. Brendan's Community School

Substance Use Report Form

This form should be used when recording any incident of illegal/harmful substance use

Date	

Student(s) engaged in Illegal/Harmful Substance Use			
Name		**Year**	
Name		**Year**	
Name		**Year**	
Name		**Year**	

Person(s) who Reported the Incident	
Name	
Name	
Name	

Date of Referral to Principal	
Date	

Nature of the Incident

Name(s) of Parents/Guardian's Contacted	
Name	
Name	

Referral to Guidance Counsellor			
Date		**Name**	

Any Further Details

Signed: _____ **(Relevant Teacher)**

Date: _____