

St. Catherine's Special School

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CHILD PROTECTION POLICY

The Board of Management of St. Catherine's Special School recognises that child protection and welfare considerations permeate all aspects of school life and must be reflected in all of the school's policies, practices and activities. Accordingly, in accordance with the requirements of the Department of Education and Skills' Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post Primary Schools, the Board of Management of St. Catherine's Special School has agreed the following child protection policy:

The Board of Management has adopted and will implement fully and without modification The Department's Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post Primary Schools as part of this overall child protection policy.

Designated Liaison Person

The Designated Liaison Person (DLP) is Clare Carr (Principal)

The Deputy Designated Liaison Person (Deputy DLP) is Eileen Greene (Deputy Principal)

Principles which underpin the School's Policy

In its policies, practices, and activities, St. Catherine's Special School will adhere to the following principles of best practice in child protection and welfare. Our school recognises that the protection and welfare of children is of paramount importance, regardless of all other considerations and will therefore;

- Fully co-operate with the relevant statutory authorities in relation to child protection and welfare matters
- Adopt safe practices to minimize the possibility of harm or accidents happening to children and protect workers from the necessity to take unnecessary risks that may leave themselves open to accusations of abuse or neglect;
- Develop a practice of openness with parents and encourage parental involvement in the education of their children
- Fully respect confidentiality requirements in dealing with child protection matters.
- Adhere to the above principles in relation to any adult or pupil with a special vulnerability.

Other Relevant Policies

Specific policies named hereunder are key elements of this overall document and must be referred to in the context of this policy:

- Code of Behaviour
- Anti-bullying Policy
- Attendance Policy
- Enrolment Policy
- Health and Safety Statement
- SPHE Policy
- RSE Policy
- Supervision Policy
- Intimate Care Policy

This list is not exhaustive. The Board has ensured that the necessary policies, protocols or practices as appropriate are in place in respect of each of the above listed items.

Dissemination of Policy

This policy has been made available to school personnel and The Parents' Association and is readily accessible to parents on request. A copy of this policy will be made available to the Department of Education and the Patron if requested.

Designated Liaison Person (DLP)

In St Catherine's Special School, the Principal, Clare Carr, appointed by the Board of Management, is the DLP. Eileen Greene acts as Deputy DLP. Both have undertaken training from the Child Abuse Prevention Programme.

The DLP has specific responsibility for Child Protection Procedures and will represent the school in all correspondence with Health Boards, An Garda Síochána and other parties in connection with allegations of abuse. All matters pertaining to child abuse concerns should be processed through the DLP (DES Procedures 3:2)

The DLP acts appropriately where there are reasonable grounds for suspicion or where an allegation has been made.

Confidentiality

All information regarding concerns of possible child abuse should only be shared on a 'need to know' basis in the interests of the child. The giving of information to those who need to have that information is not a breach of confidentiality. This procedure exists for the protection of a child *who may have been or has been* abused. The DLP who is submitting a report to the Health Board or An Garda Síochána should inform a parent/guardian, unless doing so is likely to endanger the child or place that child at further risk. A decision not to inform a parent/guardian should be briefly recorded together with the reasons for not doing so.

In emergency situations, where the Health Board cannot be contacted and the child appears to be at immediate and serious risk, An Garda Síochána should be contacted. A child should not be left in a dangerous situation where Health Board intervention is not forthcoming.

Protection for Persons Reporting Child Abuse

The protection for persons reporting Child Abuse Act 1998 provides immunity from civil liability to any person who reports a child protection concern 'reasonably and in good faith' to designated officers of Health Boards or any member of an Garda Síochána (DES Procedures 1:10)

Qualified Privilege

People making a report to the DLP in good faith have 'qualified privilege' under common law. Reports made to Health Boards may be subject to provisions of the Freedom of Information Act, 1997. This act enables members of the public to obtain access to personal information relating to them which is in the possession of public bodies. However, the act also provides that public bodies may refuse access to information obtained by them in confidence (DES Procedures 1:11)

Definition and Recognition of Child Abuse

Child abuse can be categorised into four different types:

- Neglect
- Emotional abuse
- Physical abuse
- Sexual abuse

Each of these categories is defined in full in 'Children First' (Dept. of Children & Youth Affairs Chapter 2).

Neglect can be defined in terms of an *omission*, where the child suffers significant harm or impairment of development by being deprived of food, clothing, warmth, hygiene, intellectual stimulation, supervision and safety, attachment to and affection from adults, medical care.

Guidelines for Recognition of Child Abuse

A list of child neglect indicators is contained in Chapter 2:2 of Children First. This policy draws particular attention to 'persistent evidence' of neglect, including indicators such as no lunch, lack of uniform, no homework, poor attendance, persistent health problems, lack of sleep indicating inappropriate television viewing late at night and other evidence that would indicate lack of supervision in the home. All signs and symptoms must be examined in the total context of the child's situation and family circumstances.

There are commonly three stages in the identification of child abuse:

1. Considering the possibility
2. Looking out for signs of abuse
3. Recording of information

Each of these stages is developed in 'Children First' (2:2)

Handling Disclosures from Children

(DES Procedures 3:5) gives comprehensive details of how disclosures should be approached. Staffs are advised to deal with each situation sensitively, reassure the child but not to make promises that cannot be fulfilled.

The adult should not ask leading questions or make suggestions. They should explain that further help may have to be sought. The discussion should then be recorded accurately.

The record should include reference to what was observed with sketches of physical injury where necessary. It should also record when the alleged incident took place. Records should be kept in a secure place. The information should then be conveyed to the school DLP.

If the reporting person and the DLP are satisfied that there are reasonable grounds for the suspicion/allegation, the procedures outlined in 'Children First' must be adhered to. Standardised reporting forms should be used (DES Procedures Appendix 4). The content of the report should follow the guidelines in 'Children First'.

School Measures Taken to Protect the Children in Our Care

There are a number of areas where common sense in our school should prevail in order to protect the children in the school and the staff who care for them. In relation to this, certain points should be noted:

1. St Catherine's Special School shall fully implement the Stay Safe programme
2. A copy of the school's child protection policy, which includes the names of the Designated Liaison Person (DLP) and Deputy DLP, will be made available to all school personnel and the Parents' Association and is readily accessible to parents on request
3. The name of the DLP and other relevant support services are displayed in a prominent position near the main entrance to the school
4. In addition to informing the school authority of those cases where a report involving a child in the school has been submitted to the HSE, the DLP shall also inform the school authority of cases where the DLP sought advice from the HSE and as a result of this advice, no report was made. At each Board of Management meeting, the Principal's Report shall include the number of all such cases and this shall be recorded in the minutes of the Board of Management meeting.
5. St Catherine's Special School will undertake an annual review of its Child Protection Policy and its implementation by the school. A checklist, to be used in undertaking the review (included at Appendix 1). The school has put in place an action plan to address any areas for improvement which might be identified in the annual review. The Board of Management shall make arrangements to inform school personnel and The Parent's Association that the review has been undertaken. A record of the review and its outcome shall be made available, if requested, to the Patron and the DES.

It should be noted that children with disabilities may be more at risk of abuse due to a number of reasons (DES Procedures 2:3). Parents, teachers and all staff involved in services for children with disabilities need to be familiar with the indicators of abuse and to be alert for signs of abuse.

Ratification of Policy

This policy will be reviewed by the Board of Management once in every school year.

Signed: _____
Chairperson of Board of Management

Signed: _____
Principal

Date: _____

Date: _____

The Board further endorses the Principal, Clare Carr, as the school DLP and Eileen Greene as Deputy DLP.

On behalf of the Board of Management: _____ (Chairperson)

Date: _____

Appendix 1: Checklist for Annual Review of the Child Protection Policy

The Board of Management must undertake an annual review of its Child Protection Policy and the following checklist shall be used for this purpose.

The checklist is designed as an aid to conducting this review and is not intended as an exhaustive list. The Board of Management may wish to include other items in the checklist that are of particular relevance to St Catherine's Special School and reserves the right to do so if/when the need occurs.

As part of the overall review process, Boards of Management should also assess other school policies, practices and activities vis a vis their adherence to the principles of best practice in child protection and welfare as set out in the school's Child Protection policy

Has the Board formally adopted a child protection policy in accordance with the 'Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post Primary Schools'?	
As part of the school's child protection policy, has the Board formally adopted, without modification, the 'Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post Primary Schools'?	
Are there both a DLP and a Deputy DLP currently appointed?	
Are the relevant contact details (HSE and An Garda Síochána) to hand?	
Has the DLP attended available child protection training?	
Has the Deputy DLP attended available child protection training?	
Have any members of the Board attended child protection training?	
Has the school's child protection policy identified other school policies, practices and activities that are regarded as having particular child protection relevance?	
Has the Board ensured that the Department's 'Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post Primary Schools' are available to all school personnel?	
Does the Board have arrangements in place to communicate the school's child protection policy to new school personnel?	
Is the Board satisfied that all school personnel have been made aware of their responsibilities under the 'Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post Primary Schools'?	
Since the Board's last annual review, was the Board informed of any child protection reports made to the HSE/An Garda Síochána by the DLP?	
Since the Board's last annual review, was the Board informed of any cases where the DLP sought advice from the HSE and as a result of this advice, no report to the HSE was made?	
Is the Board satisfied that the child protection procedures in relation to the making of reports to the HSE/ An Garda Síochána were appropriately followed?	
Were child protection matters reported to the Board appropriately recorded in the Board minutes?	
Is the Board satisfied that all records relating to child protection are appropriately filed and stored securely?	

Has the Board ensured that The Parents' Association has been provided with the school's child protection policy?	
Has the Board ensured that the school's child protection policy is available to parents?	
Has the Board ensured that The Stay Safe programme is implemented in the school to meet the needs of the children in the school?	
Has the Board ensured that the SPHE curriculum is implemented in the school to meet the needs to the children in the school?	
Is the Board satisfied that the Department requirements for Garda vetting have been met in respect of all school personnel (employees and volunteers)?	
Is the Board satisfied that the Department's requirements in relation to the provision of a child protection related statutory declaration and associated form of undertaking have been met in respect of persons appointed to teaching and non-teaching positions?	
Is the Board satisfied that the 'Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post Primary Schools' are being fully and adequately implemented by the school?	
Has the Board identified any aspects of the school's child protection policy and/or its implementation that require further improvement?	
Has the Board put in place an action plan containing appropriate timelines to address those aspects of the school's child protection policy and/or its implementation that have been identified as requiring further improvement ?	
Has the Board ensured that any areas for improvement that were identified in any previous review of the school's child protection policy have been adequately addressed?	

References

- 'Children First' (Department of Children and Youth Affairs 2011)
- 'Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post Primary Schools (Department of Education and Skills 2011)