

## Title

### *Child Protection Policy*

## Introductory Statement

This document is formulated in response to recent changes in Guidance and Procedures in relation to Child Protection matters and takes account of the provisions of each of the following important pieces of legislation:

- Freedom of Information Act 1997
- The Education Act 1998
- The Child Welfare Act 2000
- Children First – National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children 2011.

The new procedures are based on the recently published *Children First – National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children 2011*

### 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)

The Board of Management (BOM) of St. John's National School recognizes that child protection and welfare considerations permeate all aspects of school life and must be reflected in each school policy, school practices and activities. So, in accordance with the requirements of the Department of Education and Skills, Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post Primary Schools, the BOM of St. John's N.S. has approved this Child Protection Policy.

The BOM has adopted and will fully implement without modification the Department of Education and Skills Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools 2011. These procedures will therefore underpin the content of this policy.

The following key personnel have been identified and ratified by the BOM:

The Designated Liaison Person (DLP) is David Dillon

The Deputy Designated Liaison Person (Deputy DLP) is Freda McDonnell

In its policies, practices and activities, St. John's N.S. will adhere to the following principles of best practice in Child Protection and Welfare. Our school recognizes 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 to protect staff from taking 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 pupil with a special vulnerability.

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

- Attendance
- Enrolment
- Code of Behaviour
- Bullying
- Health & Safety
- Record Keeping
- ICT
- Supervision
- Special Ed.
- Induction of Staff
- Tours/Trips
- Critical Incidents

This policy will also be considered with reference to the participation by pupils in sporting activities, other extra-curricular activities and school outings. Other practice and activities, where child protection might have particular relevance, will consider the procedures outlined within this policy. 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.

This policy is available to our whole school community via our website and is readily accessible to parents on request. It is also available in hard copy in each classroom. A copy of this policy is available for the attention of the DES and the patron if requested.

### Designated Liaison Person (DLP)

In St. John's N.S., the Principal, appointed by the BOM, is the DLP. Freda McDonnell acts as Deputy DLP. Both teachers will undertake training from the Child Abuse Prevention Programme (CAPP) at the earliest opportunity. CAPP provides training to the whole school community (staff, parents and Boards of Management) on the Stay Safe Programme.

The DLP has specific responsibility for Child Protection Procedures and will represent the school in all correspondence with Health Boards, An Garda Siochana 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 interest of the child. The sharing of such 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 Siochana 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 Siochana 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 Siochana (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

To maintain a secure and safe environment for all children in their care, all school personnel need to be fully aware of the main forms of abuse.

Child abuse can be categorized 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, and or 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 neglect or 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 decision 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'.

### **Allegations or Suspicions in relation to School Employees (DES Procedures Chapter 5)**

The Chairperson and the DLP are concerned with the protection of the children in their care in the first instance. However, employees must be protected against false and malicious claims. Due process must be observed in relation to allegations against employees. Legal Advice should be sought by the BOM in relation to an allegation in relation to an employee. If the allegation is against the DLP, the BOM Chairperson will assume the responsibility for reporting the matter to the Health Board.

### **Reporting**

When an allegation of abuse is made against a school employee, the DLP should act in accordance with the procedures outlined in Children First. A written statement of the allegation should be sought from the person/agency making the report. A parent/guardian may make a statement on behalf of a child. The DLP should always inform the Chairperson of the BOM and is responsible for liaising with the HSE. The Chairperson assumes responsibility for liaising with the HSE. The Chairperson assumes responsibility for dealing with the employee.

School employees, other than the DLP, who receive allegations against another school employee, should immediately report the matter to the DLP. School employees who form suspicions regarding conduct of another school employee should consult with the DLP.

The employee should be informed by the Chairperson (Employer) that:

- (a) An allegation has been made against him/her

- (b) The nature of the allegation
- (c) Whether or not the Health Board or Gardai has been informed.

The employee should be given a copy of the written allegation and any other relevant documentation. The employee should be requested to respond to the allegation in writing to the BOM within a specific period and told that this may be passed to the Gardai, Health Board and legal advisers.

The Chairperson must take the necessary steps to protect the child and may consult the BOM in this matter. The BOM may direct that the employee take administrative leave with pay and avoid suspension, thus removing any implication of guilt. The DES should be immediately informed.

### **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. John's N.S. 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 BOM meeting, the Principal's Report shall include the number of all such cases and this shall be recorded in the minutes of the BOM meeting.
5. St. John's N.S. 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 is 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 that the review has been undertaken. Written notification that the review has been undertaken shall be provided to the Parents Association. A record of the review and its outcome shall be made available, if requested, to the patron and the DES.
  - Staff who bring pupils to swimming classes should make sure that there are two adults in attendance at all times. The dressing rooms and pool area should be well supervised.

- Staff should make every effort not to be alone in a classroom with one child or detain a child on their own after school. In the case of special needs pupils where resource hours and assistance are sanctioned or on an individual basis, it is school policy that staff in such a situation should work with the classroom door open, thus rendering the occupants visible at all times.
- Where possible children should work in groups.
- Children with physical disabilities who may require assistance in toileting will be aided by a Special Needs Assistant who has met the necessary screening requirements when being employed by the school.

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.

This policy was adopted by the Board of Management on \_\_\_\_\_

Signed \_\_\_\_\_ Signed \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Date of next review: September 2016

The Board further endorses the Principal, David Dillon as the school DLP and Freda McDonnell as Deputy DLP.

On behalf of the Board of Management

\_\_\_\_\_ (Chairperson) Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix A

### Child Protection Practices

The staff and BOM of this school have identified the following as areas of specific concern in relation to Child Protection. Following discussion and consultation, the staff and BOM have agreed that the following practices be adopted:

- Physical contact between school personnel and the child should always be in response to the needs of the child and not the needs of the adult.

While physical contact may be used to comfort, reassure or assist a child, the following should be factors in determining its appropriateness:

- It is acceptable to the child
- It is open and not secretive
- The age and development stage of the child

School personnel should avoid doing anything of a personal nature for children that they can do for themselves.

School personnel should never engage in or allow:

- The use of inappropriate language or behaviours
- Physical punishment of any kind
- Sexually provocative games or suggestive comments about or to a child
- The use of sexually explicit or pornographic material

All media products (CDs, DVDs etc.) should be checked for their appropriateness with regard to age and suitability.

### Visitors/Guest Speakers

Appropriately appointed and screened visiting teachers of varying disciplines, engaged by the BOM of St. John's N.S to perform specific duties, will be left work with a class alone at the Principal's discretion.

Visitors/Guest speakers should never be left alone with pupils. The School (Principal/Teachers) has a responsibility to check out the credentials of the visitor/guest speaker and to ensure that the material in use is appropriate.

### Children with specific toileting/intimate care needs

- In all situations where a pupil needs assistance with toileting/intimate care, a meeting will be convened, after enrolment and before the child starts school, between parents/guardians, class teacher, special needs assistant, Principal and if appropriate the pupil. The purpose of the meeting will be to ascertain the specific needs of the child and to determine how the school can best meet those needs.
- The staff to be involved in this care will be identified and provision will be made for occasions when the particular staff involved are absent. A written copy of what has been agreed will be made and kept in the child's file.
- Where possible two members of staff will be present when dealing with intimate care/toileting needs. Any deviation from the agreed procedure will be recorded and notified to the DLP and the parents/guardians.

### **Toileting accidents:**

Clean underwear and suitable clothing will be kept in the school so that if a pupil has an 'accident' of this nature, they will in the first instance be offered fresh clothing into which they can change.

If the pupil for whatever reason cannot clean or change themselves and the parents/guardians cannot be contacted, the child will be assisted by members of staff familiar to the child. In all such situations, two members of staff should be present. A record of all such incidents will be kept and Principal and parents will be notified.

### **Accidents**

While every precaution will be taken under our Health and Safety Statement to ensure the safety of children, we realize that accidents will happen. Accidents will be noted in our Incident book and will be addressed under our Accident Policy as part of Health and Safety.

### **One-to-one teaching**

- It is the policy in this school that one-to-one teaching can sometimes be in the best interest of the child.
- Every effort will be made to ensure that this teaching takes place in an open environment.
- Parents of children who are to be involved in one-to-one teaching will be informed and their agreement sought.
- Work being carried out by Special Needs Assistants will be carried out under the direction of the class teacher in an open environment.

### **Changing for games/PE/Swimming**

Pupils will be expected to dress and undress themselves for Games/PE/Swimming. Where assistance is needed, this will be done in the communal area and with the consent of parents. Under no circumstances will members of staff/volunteers be expected to or allowed to dress/undress a child unsupervised in a cubicle/private area. In such situations where privacy is required, the parents/guardians of the child will be asked to

assist the child. St. John's N.S. will endeavour to have two male volunteers/member of staff in the male changing area and two female members of staff/volunteers in the female changing area.

The BOM of St. John's N.S. has requested that swimming volunteers are not left alone with any pupil. At all times there must be adequate supervision of pupils. While every effort will be made to adhere to best practice as agreed and outlined above, in the event of an emergency where this is not possible or practicable, a full record of the incident should be made and reported to the Principal and parents.

### **Attendance**

Our school attendance will be monitored as per our attendance policy. With regards to child protection, we will pay particular attention to trends in non-attendance. We will also monitor non-attendance in correlation with signs of neglect/physical/emotional abuse.

### **Behaviour**

Children are encouraged at all times to play co-operatively and inappropriate behavior will be addressed under our Code of Behaviour. If an incident occurs which we consider to be of a sexualized nature, we will notify the DLP who will record it and respond to it appropriately.

### **Bullying**

Bullying behavior will be addressed under our Anti-Bullying policy. If the behavior involved is of a sexualised nature or regarded as being particularly abusive, then the matter will be referred to the DLP.

### **Children travelling in staff cars.**

Members of the school staff will not carry children alone in their cars at any time.

### **Communication**

Every effort will be made to enhance pupil-teacher communications. If pupils have concerns they will be listened to sympathetically. The SPHE/Oral Language/RE programmes allow for open pupil-teacher communication, which is hoped will aid the pupil-teacher relationship. If teachers have to communicate with pupils on a one-to-one basis, they are requested to leave the classroom door open or request a colleague to attend. Further details on communications are found in the school's Communication Policy.

### **Induction of Staff**

The DLP will be responsible for informing all new teachers and ancillary staff of the Child Protection Procedures (DES, 2011) and Children First Guidelines (2011), but particularly the recently published Children First – National Guidance for the Protection

and Welfare of Children (2011). All new teachers are expected to teach the appropriate SPHE objectives for their class. A member of staff, once trained, will be responsible for the mentoring of new teachers and will be responsible for supporting new teachers as they implement the SPHE objectives.

### **Induction of Pupils**

All parents and children will be made aware of attendance rules and their implications as laid down in the Education Welfare Act (2000). All parents will be informed of the programmes in place in the school that deal with personal development e.g. RSE, Walk Tall, Stay Safe and SPHE. All new parents will be given a copy of the school's enrolment policy, which outlines the procedures parents and children should use when contacting the school if there are absences or concerns of an educational/personal/family matter. Parents are encouraged to make an appointment with the class teacher/principal if they wish to discuss their child's progress. All parents will be given a copy of the school's Code of Behaviour and Anti-Bullying policies.

### **Internet Safety**

It is the intention of the Principal and Staff at St. John's N.S. to ensure that child protection concerns will be addressed in the school's Acceptable Use Policy as part of its Information and Communication Technology policy. The Stay Safe lessons in each classroom may be supplemented with appropriate resources. There will also be annual meetings during which parents will be invited to attend a session with an invited speaker to stay abreast of the ever-changing situation regarding internet access.

### **Record Keeping**

Teachers will keep records on each child's reports using St. John's N.S. Record Keeping Report cards. These records are kept in the drawer of each teacher's desk. Roll books will be updated daily. Sensitive information regarding children will be shared on a need-to-know basis. All educational files of pupils who no longer attend this school are kept in the filing cabinet in the office. Further details on record keeping will be found in the school's Record Keeping Policy.

### **Supervision**

The school's supervision policy will be followed by all staff to ensure that there is comprehensive supervision of children at all breaks. A rota will be displayed to cover 11 o'clock and lunchtime breaks. See Supervision Policy for agreed rules around break-times and procedures around teacher absences.

### **Visability**

Teachers will ensure that children are visible in the school playground. Children will not be allowed to spend time in classrooms, toilets or sheds where they would not be under adult supervision. They are not to leave the school playground or to engage with adults who are outside of the school playground.

## Appendix B

Dear Parents/Guardians,

In recent years, as a society, we have become very aware of the problem of child abuse through neglect, emotional, physical or sexual abuse.

Each one of us has a duty to protect children and Children First, the National Guidelines, for the Protection and Welfare of Children noted that teachers, who are the main care givers to children outside the family, are particularly well placed to observe and monitor children for signs of abuse.

In response to this, the Department of Education and Skills published procedures for all schools in relation to child protection and welfare. These guidelines promote the safety and welfare of all children and are to be welcomed.

The Board of Management of St. John's N.S. has adopted these guidelines as school policy. Consequently, if school staff suspect or are alerted to possible child abuse, they are obliged to refer this matter to the Health Service Executive (HSE). The HSE will then assess the situation and provide support for the child concerned.

Children First, the National Guidelines for the Protection of Children may be assessed on the website of the Department of Children and Youth Affairs. ([www.dcyia.ie](http://www.dcyia.ie)) and the Department of Education and Skills Child Protection Procedures can be read on the Department's website ([www.education.ie](http://www.education.ie)) Parents/Guardians are also welcome to look through the guidelines here at the school.

Yours sincerely,

.....

David Dillon.

Principal.

## Appendix C

### Child Protection Contacts

#### Designated Liaison Person (DLP)

David Dillon

#### Deputy DLP

Freda McDonnell

#### Garda Station

Collooney

Telephone: (071) 9167122

#### Local Contact For

#### 'The Children and Family Social Services of the HSE'

Telephone: (071) 9155133

Address: Markievicz House,  
Barrack Street,  
Sligo.