

Child Protection Policy of St. Francis Special School

Schools have an obligation to provide students with the highest possible standard of care in order to promote their well-being and protect them from harm. School personnel are especially well placed to observe changes in behaviour, failure to develop or outward signs of abuse in children.

- Mindful of this primary duty of care, the Board of Management of St. Francis Special School fully endorses “Children First”, the designated guidelines for the protection and welfare of children as issued by the Department of Health and Children, September 1999 and “Child Protection Guidelines and Procedures” from the Department of Education & Science, April 2001. These guidelines have been superseded in 2011 and the BOM has consequently adopted “Children First 2011 – National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children” as school policy. These guidelines promote the protection of children from abuse and neglect.
 - The Board nominates Liam Twomey, School Principal as the Designated Liaison Person (DLP) to act as a liaison with outside agencies such as health board and as a resource person to any staff having child protection concerns.
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- In the absence of Liam Twomey, Brenda Flaherty, Deputy Principal will act as Deputy Designated Liaison Person (DDLPL).
 - The Board will ensure that appropriate and on going training as necessary will be available for DLP and the DDLPL.
 - The Board fully endorses arrangements for the vetting of teaching and non-teaching staff as outlined in Circular 0094/2006, June 2006, for the Department of Education & Science.
 - The Board will ensure that all school staff, teaching and non-teaching are aware of their obligations under the guidelines detailed in *Children First* as well as *Child Protection Guidelines and Procedures*, and the procedures to be followed in the event of concern.
 - The Board recognises that it has two duties of care. The primary duty is the protection, safety and welfare of the children attending St. Francis Special School. The Board as an employer also has duties and responsibilities towards its employees.
 - As an employer, the Board will seek legal advice if an allegation of abuse is made against a school employee.
 - The Board will adhere to the protocol outlined in Ch. 4. Allegations or Suspicions of Child Abuse of School Employees, in “Child Protection Guidelines and Procedures” from the Department of Education & Science 2001, to authorise any actions required to protect the children in its care. The Board notes that school employees may be subject to erroneous or malicious allegations. Any allegation of abuse should be dealt with sensitively. The employee should be treated fairly which includes the right not to be judged in advance of a full and fair enquiry. The Board accepts that the principles of natural justice and fair procedures must be adhered to.
 - The Board believes that the academic, personal and social development of children flourishes in a culture where good relationships are encouraged,

people feel valued and respected and appropriate support is available for those in difficulty.

- The Board is committed to the maintenance of the environment where children feel secure, are encouraged to express themselves and are listened to. All children in the school will be made aware that there are adults in the school whom they can approach if they are worried. In addition, opportunities will be included in the curriculum for children to develop the skills they need to keep them safe.
- The Board undertakes to circulate this Child Protection Policy statement to Parents' representatives on the Board of Management and to any Parents who request a copy of this policy. All parents and Guardians will be notified in September of each year that St. Francis Special School has adopted the guidelines "Children First", the designated guidelines for the protection and welfare of children as issued by the Department of Health and Children, September 1999 as well as "Child Protection Guidelines and Procedures" from the Department of Education & Science, April 2001 and **Children First 2011** as school policy. Parents / Guardians are advised: 'If there is a matter of serious concern about a child's welfare or protection, we are required to report this to the local HSE. They will assess the case and provide the necessary support for the Child and Family concerned'.
- School Staff and multi-disciplinary Staff will have regard to issues of confidentiality in dealing with concerns of neglect / abuse and Staff will only be informed on a 'need to know' basis.
- This policy statement regarding Child Protection at St. Francis Special School applies to all staff, members of the Board of Management, volunteers and contractors working in the school.
- St. Francis Special School also has an 'Intimate Care Policy' which also promotes Child Protection.

This policy has been approved by the Board of Management of St. Francis Special School.

Appendix 1

Children First 2011 Excerpts re: Schools

4.8 Roles and responsibilities of Schools

4.8.1 School authorities have primary responsibility for the care and welfare of their pupils. The Department of Education and Skills is responsible for developing and implementing child protection procedures for schools based on the Children First: National Guidance. The aim of such procedures is to give direction to school management and staff regarding the identification of and response to child protection concerns and the continued support of the child. It is the responsibility of the Department of Education and Skills to inspect and evaluate the implementation of these procedures for education staff.

Responsibilities of school management

4.8.2 It is the responsibility of the Board of Management of each school:

(i) to have clear procedures, which teachers and other school staff must follow where they suspect, or are alerted to, possible child abuse or neglect, including where a child discloses abuse or neglect;

(ii) to designate a senior member of staff to have specific responsibility for child protection (see Chapter 3, Section 3.3 for role of designated liaison persons). In larger schools, it may be necessary that the role be designated to other staff to ensure timely sharing of concerns, in which case organisational accountability must be kept;²³

Chapter 4: Interagency cooperation

(iii) to monitor the progress of children considered to be at risk;

(iv) to contribute to the prevention of child abuse or neglect through curricular provision;

(v) to provide or access in-service training for teachers and members of the Board of Management to ensure that they have a good working knowledge of child protection issues and procedures;

(vi) to have clear written procedures in place concerning action to be taken where allegations are received against school employees.

4.8.3 Teachers are particularly well placed to observe and monitor children for signs of abuse and neglect. They are the main care-givers to children outside the family context and have regular contact with children in the school setting.

4.8.4 Teachers have a general duty of care to ensure that arrangements are in place to protect children and young people from harm. In this regard, children need to be facilitated to develop their self-esteem, confidence, independence of thought and the necessary skills to cope with possible threats to their personal safety, both within and outside the school. Management arrangements within primary and post-primary schools should provide for the following:

(i) the planning, development and implementation of an effective child protection programme;

(ii) continuous monitoring and evaluation of the effectiveness of such a programme;

(iii) the effective implementation of agreed reporting procedures;

(iv) the planning and implementation of appropriate staff development and training programmes.

Responsibilities of school staff

4.8.5 If a child discloses to a teacher or to other school staff that he or she is being harmed by a parent/carer or any other person, including another child, the person who receives that information should listen carefully and supportively. This applies equally where the child implies that he or she is at risk of being harmed by a parent/carer or any other person. It also applies equally if a parent/carer or any other person discloses that he or she has harmed, or is at risk of harming, a child. The child should not be interviewed formally; the teacher or other staff member should obtain only necessary relevant facts if and when clarification is needed.

Confidentiality must never be promised to a person making a disclosure subject to the provisions of the Data Protection Acts and the requirement to report to the HSE Children and Family Services must be explained in a supportive manner. The discussion should be recorded accurately and the record retained securely. The teacher or other staff member should then inform the designated liaison person who is responsible for reporting the matter to the HSE Children and Family Services, or in the event of an emergency and the unavailability of the HSE, to An Garda Síochána.