

Child Protection Policy

Introduction and Rationale:

The staff of St. Bernard's NS compiled this document in December 2011 as a response to recent changes in legislation. We also sought advice from Vincent Mulvey, PDST facilitator and he met with the Principal and Deputy Principal after school on 30th November 2011.

This policy replaces the School's previous Child Protection Policy of February 2010.

It was updated in response to the publication of the following documents:

- Circular 65/2011 - 'Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post Primary Schools' (DES)
- 'Children First: National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children' (Dept of Children and Youth Affairs)

A copy of the school's child protection policy which includes the names of the Designated Liaison Person (DLP) and Deputy DLP has been made available to all school personnel and will be readily accessible to parents on request.

This policy addresses the responsibilities of the school in the following areas:

- **Prevention – curriculum provision**
- **Procedures – procedures for dealing with concerns/disclosures**
- **Practice – best practice in child protection**

Relationship to Characteristic Spirit of the School

In St. Bernard's NS we aim to create an environment where the children feel secure, where self-esteem is fostered and where the child can make progress to achieve his/her potential. This document strengthens and protects that ethos.

Aims:

- To establish and maintain an environment where children feel safe and secure, are encouraged to talk and are listened to
- To provide a personal safety skills education which specifically addresses abuse prevention for all the children in the school
- To ensure that all staff members understand their responsibilities in being alert to signs of abuse and that they know the correct procedures for reporting and recording any such incidences as laid out in DES Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post Primary Schools
- To ensure that parents have an understanding of the legal obligations placed on the school and staff to report incidences of child abuse

Confidentiality

All information regarding concerns of possible abuse should only be shared on a need to know basis in the interests of the child. The test is whether or not the person has any legitimate involvement or role in dealing with the issue.

Giving information to those who need to have that information for the protection of a child who may have been or has been abused, is not a breach of confidentiality.

The DLP who is submitting a report to the HSE 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. A record shall be made of the information communicated to the parent/carer.

In emergency situations, where the HSE cannot be contacted, and the child appears to be at immediate risk, An Garda Siochana should be contacted immediately. A child should not be left in a dangerous situation pending HSE intervention.

Prevention - Curricular Implications

The Stay Safe Programme is an integral part of the SPHE curriculum in our school which addresses personal safety. All five topics in 'Stay Safe' are covered every second year. The programme is taught as part of schools' SPHE curriculum under the strand unit Safety and Protection.

On enrolment of their child, parents will be informed that the Stay Safe programme is in use in the school. The formal lessons of the programme will be taught every second year according in accordance with the SPHE two year cycle plan.

Learning Support /Resource Teachers will be closely involved in delivery of the programme to look after the needs of the child with special needs through strategies such as social stories etc. Special Needs Assistant will be alert to the needs of these children too. The staff will make every effort to ensure that the messages of the programme are reinforced whenever possible

The RSE Programme is taught in the alternate year. Again the key rules from Stay Safe Programme will be covered in RSE too.

ICT is used on an ongoing basis in all classes. The level of filtering in use by the school is at the highest setting. This means that many sites are not accessible through the school's network. Internet safety is covered in class every year.

Procedures – for dealing with concerns and disclosures

Role of the Board of Management

The Board of Management has adopted and will implement fully and without modification the DES Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post Primary schools.

- Reporting procedures will be followed as laid out in **Chapter 4 DES Procedures**
- A copy of child Protection policy will be made available to all school personnel and will be posted on website and will be readily available to parents.
- The name of **DLP Mary Quinn** and Deputy **DLP Dervla Guckian** will be displayed in the front hall.
- The DLP will inform the Board of Management of any cases where a report involving a pupil has been submitted to the HSE or where HSE advice has been sought
- At each Board meeting the Principal's Report would include number of all such cases and this shall be recorded in the minutes.
- An annual review of the policy and its implementation using the accompanying checklist. Written notification of the annual review will be provided to the parents via the newsletter.

The following policies are particularly relevant to child protection – Code of Behaviour, Anti-Bullying policy, Attendance Policy, School Outings.

Where an allegation of suspicion of child abuse regarding school employees, procedures as outlined in **Chapter 5 pg 30-34 DES Procedures** will be followed. It is important to note that there are two procedures to be followed – the reporting procedure in respect of the allegation/suspicion and the procedure for dealing with an employee.

Role of Designated Liaison Person/Deputy designated Person

Appointment of the Designated Liaison Person/Deputy Designated Person

The Board of Management has designated the Principal, Mary Quinn, as the person who has specific responsibility for Child Protection. She will be the Designated Liaison Person for the school and all dealings with HSE, An Garda Síochána and other parties, in connection with allegations of abuse. In her absence, the Deputy Designated Liaison Person is Dervla Guckian. All employees should be advised that they should conduct all matters pertaining to the processing or investigation of alleged child abuse through the Designated Liaison Person.

See Chapter 3 Responsibilities of all School Personnel DES Procedures.

Where the Designated Liaison Person is unavailable, the Deputy Principal, Dervla Guckian, will be nominated to assume her responsibilities, as the Deputy Designated Liaison Person.

The Designated Liaison Person or her nominated replacement, shall immediately inform the Chairperson of the Board of Management of the school that a report involving a pupil in the school has been submitted to the relevant HSE or the Gardai.

Where an allegation or concern relates to the DLP, the staff member shall without delay report the matter to the Chairperson of the Board of Management who shall the role of DLP and follow procedures as outlined in Section 4.2 and Chapter 5 of DES Child Protection Procedures.

See Chapter 4 Reporting of Concerns and Role of the HSE DES Procedures pg 23-29

Dealing with Disclosures

While the basis for concern must be established as comprehensively as possible, the following advice is offered to school personnel to whom a child makes a disclosure of abuse.

- It is important to stay calm and not to show any extreme reaction to what the child is saying. Listen compassionately and take what the child is saying seriously;
- It should be understood that the child has decided to tell about something very important and has taken a risk to do so. The experience of telling should be a positive one so that the child will not mind talking to those involved;
- The child should understand that it is not possible that any information will be kept a secret;
- No judgmental statement should be made about the person against whom the allegation is made;
- The child should not be questioned unless the nature of what he/she is saying is unclear. Leading questions should be avoided. Open, non-specific questions should be used such as "Can you explain to me what you mean by that?";
- The child should be given some indication of what would happen next, such as informing the Designated Liaison Person, parents/carers, HSE or possibly An Garda Síochána. It should be kept in mind that the child may have been threatened and may feel vulnerable at this stage;
- Record the disclosure immediately afterwards using, as far as possible, the child's own words.

The duty of the recipient of such information is to report it to the Designated Liaison Person as outlined in Chapter 4 of these procedures. It must always be remembered that school personnel have a supportive, not an investigative role.

In cases where there are concerns about a child, but the Designated Liaison Person is not sure whether to report the matter to the HSE, the DLP shall seek advice from the HSE Children and Family Services. In consulting the HSE, the DLP shall be explicit that he/she is requesting advice and consultation and that he/she is not making a report. At this informal stage, the DLP need not give identifying details.

If the HSE advises that a report should not be made, the DLP shall, as soon as possible, inform the Board of Management of this fact. In the interest of protecting the anonymity of the child, no details of the case should be disclosed to the Board of Management, unless there are issues which need to be addressed directly by the Board of Management.

If the HSE advises that a report should be made, the DLP shall act on that advice. In all cases, the DLP shall retain a record of the consultation with the HSE, which will note the date, the name of the HSE Official and the advice given.

If the DLP is satisfied that there are reasonable grounds for the suspicion or allegation, he/she shall report the matter to the HSE immediately.

Record Keeping

When child abuse or neglect is suspected, it is essential to have a written record of all the information available.

School personnel shall note carefully what they have observed and when they observed it.

Signs of physical injury shall be described in detail and, if appropriate, sketched.

Any comment by the child concerned, or by any other person, about how an injury occurred shall be recorded, preferably quoting words actually used, as soon as possible after the comment has been made.

The record of the discussion shall be signed, dated and given to the DLP who shall retain it.

Role of Staff Member (teachers, caretakers, SNA's secretary)

It is the role of all staff members to be observant of all pupils in their care and to report any suspicion of abuse or disclosure immediately to the DLP or in her absence, the Deputy DLP

When recording any information in writing, it is vital that this is totally factual and quotes the child exactly

It is also a requirement that all matters pertaining to suspicions of abuse or actual abuse be treated with the strictest confidence. The child must only be identified by their number on the school register.

Recognition of Abuse: Child abuse can often be difficult to identify and may be present in many forms.

(See Appendix 3: Signs and Symptoms of Child Abuse DES Procedures)

Practice – best practice in Child Protection

Staff Cars: Where children are brought by car to an activity away from school, as far as possible, children will be brought back to the school, and should be collected promptly by the parent at pre-arranged time. Staff members will not carry a child on his/her own to their homes. If a child is ill, parents will have to provide an alternative phone number for someone who will collect the child from school.

Special Needs: The Stay Safe Programme will be taught each year. Where there are children with limited academic ability, the content and activities of the lesson will be differentiated to help them to understand the message of the lesson. Learning Support Teacher/Resource Teacher will have an input here.

Supervision: During breaks, all pupils are supervised by teachers/SNAs in the school yard.

Mass servers: Children who are serving Mass during the school day will walk to and return from the church in pairs.

Physical contact: 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 developmental stage of the child

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

Visitors/Guest Speakers: Visitors/guest speakers should never be left alone with pupils. The school (principal and teachers) have a responsibility to check out the credentials of the visitor/guest speaker and to ensure that the material in use by guests 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 member involved is absent. A written and signed copy of what has been agreed will be made and kept in the child's file.

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 or deputy 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.

One-to-One teaching: It is the policy in this school that one-to-one teaching is often in the best interest of the child. Every effort will be made to ensure that this teaching takes place in an open environment with doors ajar. 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 areas and with the consent of parents. Under no circumstances will members of staff/ volunteers be expected to or allowed to dress/undress a child in a cubicle/private area. In such situations where privacy is required the parent/guardian of the child will be asked to assist the child.

At all times there must be adequate supervision of pupils within the pool setting.

Internet Safety

Children are forbidden from accessing the Internet unless under the direction of Class Teacher. The Class Teacher should vet any material before children have access to this. The issue of internet safety is taken very seriously, and the Community Garda is invited regularly to talk to the children in Senior Classes on how best to keep safe on internet sites, online gaming sites and social media, if they chose to use these sites at home.

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 principal and parents.

Distribution of Newsletters/Literature:

Children will not be asked to deliver any literature to the public/village or neighbourhood.

Peer Abuse and Bullying

Where there are allegations or suspicions of peer abuse, the DLP will follow the procedures as outlined in **Chapter 3 and 4 of Children First**. Inappropriate sexualised behaviour between children as outline in chapter 9 of Children must be taken seriously. A meeting should be held with parents with a view to resolving the situation.

See Chapter 6: Peer Abuse and Bullying DES Procedures.

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

Implementation and Review

The guidelines outlined in this policy are implemented with immediate effect January 2011.

It will be reviewed on an annual basis, following the check-list for review as outlined in Circular 65/2011. The school shall put in place an action plan to address any areas for improvement identified by the review. The BOM shall make arrangements to inform school personnel that the review has been undertaken.

School personnel will be given an opportunity to indicate in writing that they have been provided with a copy of the policy.

Written notification, that the review has been undertaken shall be provided to all parents.

Signed : _____

Date: _____

Chairperson, Board of Management