

Policy on Child Protection Guidelines

Introduction

The Board of Management of Scoil Bhríde, Clane has adopted the Department of Education and Science Guidelines and Procedures in relation to Child Protection and Welfare. These Guidelines are laid out in the “Children First” document. This policy clarifies how our school proposes to implement these guidelines, in order to ensure the protection and welfare of all children attending our school.

This document has been drawn up as a response to recent changes in legislation. It further develops previous policy in this area and takes account of the provisions of the following pieces of legislation.

The Education Act 1998

The Child Welfare Act 2000

Relationship to the Characteristic Spirit of the School

Children in Scoil Bhríde will be supported in reaching their full potential: mentally, physically, spiritually, emotionally and socially. This support will be differentiated in an atmosphere and environment in which children feel safe, valued and secure and in which respect for self and others is the norm.

Aims

- To raise awareness of the importance of child protection (emotional, physical, sexual and neglect) among all school staff (including all teachers, SNAS secretary, caretaker etc).
- To put in place clear procedures for all school personnel dealing with suspicions and allegations of child abuse.
- To identify curricular content and resources, that contribute to the prevention of child abuse and to enable children to properly deal with abuse if it occurs.
- To promote the welfare of all the pupils in our care.

Content of Policy

It is the policy of our school to follow the procedures as laid down in Children First National Guidelines for the Protection and Welfare of Children, September 1999 and Child Protection Guidelines and Procedures DES 2001 in any case where we suspect, or are alerted to, child abuse, including where a child discloses abuse. All disclosures will be documented, dated and kept on file by the DLP. All disclosures will be treated in a highly confidential manner.

The Board of Management has appointed the Principal Teacher, Eimear Hennessy, as the Designated Liaison Person (DLP) in our school to have specific responsibility for child protection.

The Deputy Principal, Mary Rose Maybury, has been appointed as Deputy DLP to take the place of the DLP if unavailable.

The DLP has specific responsibility for child protection and will represent the school in all dealings with Health Boards, An Garda Síochana and other parties in connection with allegations of abuse. All matters pertaining to the processing or investigation of child abuse should be processed through the D.L.P.

Further information on the responsibilities of the D.L.P is included in 'Child Protection DES pg. 8 – section 2.2. Action to be taken by the D.L.P in cases where there are reasonable grounds for suspicion or where an allegation has been made are in ' Child Protection DES' – Chapter 3- section 3.2 pg. 11 –12

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, depending on 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 Health Board or to An Garda Síochána should inform a parent/guardian unless the D.L.P is of the opinion that 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 immediately.

A child should not be left in a dangerous situation pending Health Board intervention.

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 child abuse 'reasonably and in good faith' to designated officers of Health Boards or any member of An Garda Síochána.

This means that even if a reported suspicion of child abuse proves unfounded, a plaintiff who took an action would have to prove that the reporter had not acted reasonably and in good faith making the report.

The act provides significant protection for employees who report child abuse. These protections cover all employees and all forms of discrimination up to and including dismissal. (Child Protection DES Book page 6.)

Qualified Privilege

While the legal protection outlined above only applies to reports made to the appropriate authorities (i.e. The Health Boards and An Garda Síochána), Common Law qualified privilege continues to apply as heretofore. Consequently, should a Board of Management member or school personnel furnish information with regard to suspicions of child abuse to the DLP or the Board of Management Chairman, such communication would be regarded under common law as having qualified privilege.

A further definition of qualified privilege is outlined in Section 1.4.2 and 1.4.3, page 6 of Child Protection – Guidelines & Procedures.

Freedom of Information Act 1997

Reports made to Health Boards may be subject to provisions of the Freedom of Information Act 1997, which 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.

Definition and Recognition of Child Abuse

Child abuse can be categorised into four different types.

- neglect
- emotional abuse
- physical abuse
- sexual abuse

A child may be subjected to more than one form of abuse at any given time.

Definitions for each form of abuse are detailed in 'Children First' – (Dept of Health & Children) Chapter 3 Sections 3.2 – 3.5 pgs 31 – 33.

** See Appendix B**

Guidelines for Recognition of Child Abuse

A list of child abuse indicators is contained in Appendix 1 'Children First' – Pg 125 – 131. It is important to stress that, no one indicator should be seen as conclusive in itself of abuse; it may indicate conditions other than child abuse. 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.

These are: -

- i. Considering the possibility
- ii. Looking out for signs of abuse
- iii. Recording of information

Each of these stages is developed in 'Children First' Pg 34 – 35 Section 3.9.

Procedures

The procedures for dealing with allegations /suspicions/disclosures of Child Abuse are set down in the Children First Guidelines and will be followed.

Handling Disclosures from Children

When information is offered in confidence the member of staff will need to act with sensitivity in responding to the disclosure. The member of staff will need to reassure the child, and retain her trust, while explaining the need for action and the possible consequences, which will necessarily involve other adults being informed. It is important to tell the child that everything possible will be done to protect and support her but not to make promises that cannot be kept e.g. promising not to tell anyone else. The welfare of the child is regarded as the first and paramount consideration. In so far as is practicable, due consideration will be given, having regard to age and understanding, to the wishes of the child.

The following advice is offered to school personnel to whom a child makes a disclosure of abuse.

- Remain calm.
- Listen to the child with sensitivity and openness.
- Take all disclosures seriously
- Do not ask leading questions or make suggestions to the child
- Offer reassurance but do not make promises.
- Do not stop a child recalling significant events
- Do not over react
- Explain that further help may have to be sought
- Record the discussion accurately and retain the record of dates, times, names, locations, context and factual details of conversation.

This information should then be passed onto the DLP and a record will be retained in the school.

If the reporting person or member of the school staff and the DLP are satisfied that there are reasonable grounds for the suspicion/allegation, the procedures for reporting as laid out in 'Children First' – Section 4.4 pg 38 (Appendix 10) will be adhered to.

The Chairperson of the Board of Management will be informed before the DLP makes contact with the relevant authorities unless the situation demands that more immediate action be taken for the safety of the child in which case the Chairman may be informed after the report has been submitted.

Any Professional who suspects child abuse should inform parents/carers if a report is to be submitted to the Health Board or An Garda Síochána unless the D.L.P is of the opinion that doing so is likely to endanger the child.

In cases of emergency, where a child appears to be at immediate and serious risk, and a duty social worker is unavailable, an Garda Síochána should be contacted. Under no circumstances should a child be left in a dangerous situation pending Health Board intervention.

Allegations Against School Employees

The most important consideration for the Chairperson, Board of Management or the DLP is the safety and protection of the child. However, employees also have a right to protection against claims which are false or malicious.

As employers, the Board of Management should always seek legal advice as the circumstances can vary from one case to another.

There are two procedures to be followed:

- i. The reporting Procedure
- ii. The Procedure for dealing with the Employee.

The DLP has responsibility for reporting the matter to the Health Board. The Chairperson, Board of Management has responsibility, acting in consultation with the Board, for addressing the employment issues. If the allegation is against the DLP, the Chairperson of the Board of Management 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 immediately act in accordance with the procedures outlined in “Child Protection” DES Guidelines and Procedures 2001.

A written statement of the allegation should be sought from the person/agency making the report. The DLP should always inform the Chairperson of the Board of Management.

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 procedures outlined will then be followed.

The chairperson of the Board and DLP should make the employee aware privately

- a) That an allegation has been made against him/her
- b) The nature of the allegation
- c) Whether or not the Health Board or Gardaí have been/will be/must be/should be 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 Board of Management, within a specified period and told that this may be passed to the Gardaí, Health Board, and legal advisers.

The priority in all cases is that no child be exposed to unnecessary risk. Therefore, as a matter of urgency, the Chairperson should take any necessary protective measures. These measures should be proportionate to the level of risk and should not unreasonably penalise the employee in any way unless to protect the child.

If the nature of the allegations warrant immediate action in the Chairperson’s opinion, the Board of Management should be convened to consider the matter. The Board will consider feedback if any has been received from the Health Board, Gardai or relevant source. This may result in the Board of Management directing that the employee

absent him/herself from the school forthwith while the matter is being investigated (Administrative Leave). When the Board of Management is unsure as to whether this should occur, advice should be sought from the Gardaí and/or the Child Care Manager of the Health Board and the legal advisers to the Board of Management.

Administrative Leave

Should the Board of Management direct that the employee absent himself/ herself as above, such absence of the employee would be regarded as administrative leave of absence with pay and not suspension and would not imply any degree of guilt. The DES should be immediately informed.

Board of Management

The Chairperson should inform the Board of Management of all the details and remind the members of their serious responsibility to maintain strict confidentiality on all matters relating to the issue and the principles of due process and natural justice.

Organisational Implications

Supervision

Every effort will be made to ensure that there is comprehensive supervision of children throughout the school day. A roster of staff on duty will be drawn up and displayed in the administration area/staff room. Teachers will ensure that the children are visible in the schoolyard. Children will not leave the schoolyard or engage with adults outside of the schoolyard. Children are not permitted to spend break times in the classrooms except on wet days when full supervision procedures are in place.

Visitors

All unscheduled visitors to the school are required to report to the office on arrival. Staff on yard duty will be aware of visitors entering the schoolyard and direct them to the school office. The drop-off/pick-up of children throughout the teaching day will be processed through the school office.

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, the matter will be referred to the DLP.

Behaviour

Children are to be encouraged at all times to play co-operatively and to show respect for themselves and others.

Toilets

It is school policy that only one child is permitted to enter the toilet cubicle at a time. Children who need to use the toilet during yard time must seek the permission of the teacher on yard. During yard time the toilet area closest to the yard will be used.

- If a child has a wetting accident during the school day, a staff member will assist them change into dry clothes. Before assisting the child the staff member will inform a second staff member and the second person will be present.
- It is school policy to call a Parent/Guardian if a child soils themselves in school and requires intimate care. In the unlikely event of failing to make contact staff will follow the procedures as for (1) above. All accidents of this nature will be reported to Parents/Guardians.

Staff Cars

In rare instances where a staff car must be used to transport a child, children will never be taken alone.

School Tours/Trips

School staff accompanying children on school tours/trips (including after school sporting events) will deliver a duty of care commensurate with the trip/venue. The higher the risk factor the higher the number of teachers/responsible adults involved. As per School Tour Policy, hired buses/vehicles must provide safe transportation and a functioning seatbelt for every child/adult.

Prior to school tours or trips there will be a discussion and exchange of Child Protection Policies with the host venue. The following issues will be addressed:

Insurance

Suitability of Accommodation

Staffing Issues

Programme of events

Expectation of Leaders, Teachers, Parents and Children

Health and Safety Issues

Accident and emergency procedures.

Consent forms are required for every tour or trip away.

Induction of Teachers and Ancillary Staff

It is the responsibility of the D.L.P/ D.D.L.P to inform all new teachers and ancillary staff of the Children First Guidelines.

Attendance

School attendance is monitored carefully. Attendance Certificates are awarded annually to children who achieve full attendance. The NEWB will be informed of any concerns relating to a child's attendance. Children who miss 20 days or more will be reported to the NEWB in accordance with legislation.

One-to One Teaching

Parents will be made aware when one-to-one teaching is in the best interests of the child. Written consent is required for all one-to-one teaching. Where possible, children in Special Education and Language Support will be taught in small groups. The door to the room will be left open if a teacher is alone with a child. No member of school staff will ever be alone with a child where the room door is closed.

Intimate Care

If any child in our school requires intimate care the procedures involved with such care will be agreed in consultation with the pupil, their Parents/Guardians and any other personnel involved in the care of the pupil. This is in keeping with best practice, keeps the best interests of the child to the fore and maintains the child's personal dignity. Such procedures, when agreed will be communicated to all parties involved and recorded.

Curricular Implications

- The Stay Safe Programme will be taught in Senior Infants, Second Class and Fifth Class.
- The SPHE programme will be supported by the Walk Tall Programme and the RSE Programme.

Roles and Responsibilities

- The Board of Management has primary responsibility for the care and welfare of all pupils.
- The DLP has specific responsibility for Child Protection in the school.
- All staff have a duty of care to ensure that arrangements are in place to protect children from harm.

Record Keeping.

The records of concerns, allegations or disclosures of child abuse will be stored securely in the Principal's Office, in a safe and confidential manner.

The DLP and the Deputy DLP will have access to these records.

Review

On enrolment parents are informed that the Board of Management of Scoil Bhríde has approved and adopted the "Children First" Child Protection Guidelines. Parents are asked to familiarise themselves with our child protection policy which can be accessed on our website www.scoilbhríde.ie

This policy statement will be subject to review at the start of each academic year forthwith.

Signed :

Mr. Christopher Grogan (Chairperson Board of Management) 19th December, 2016

Mrs. Eimear Hennessy (DLP)

Mrs. Mary Rose Maybury (Deputy DLP)