



Saint Patrick's Nursery & Primary School

Dream. Believe. Achieve.

CHILD PROTECTION POLICY

(June 2023)

Rationale

The school is a key front-line player, working in partnership with other children services, and staff should always be mindful of local policies and procedures, that must be followed, and which are under the direction of both the SELB's Education Welfare Service and the CCMS Child Protection Procedures.

Everyone employed at St. Patrick's PS has a responsibility in relation to child protection. In most cases this will be the referral of concerns to the Designated Teacher for Child Protection, Mrs. Doyle or to The Deputy Designated Teachers Mr Damian Ruddy, Ms Martina Rooney and Mrs Sinead McShane. In day-to-day contact with children, we may have opportunity to note concerns and to meet with parents and other associated adults, where this is appropriate.

Increasingly, schools are expected to work with, and support different agencies to enable the most appropriate form of intervention to take place. This policy aims to outline the role that school will have, the procedures that staff should follow and guidance on issues related to child protection generally. It is not exhaustive. All staff should use as a rule of thumb the needs and safety of the child as being at the centre of any decision they may need to take.

Aims

- to raise awareness of individual responsibilities in identifying and reporting possible cases of abuse
- to provide a systematic means of monitoring, recording and reporting of concerns and case
- to provide guidance on recognising and reporting suspected child abuse

Responsibilities:-

Our Safeguarding Team comprises of:-

Mrs Lisa Doyle - the Designated Teacher for Child Protection

Mrs Orla Gorman - Principal

Mr Damian Ruddy - Deputy Designated Teacher and Vice Principal

Ms Martina Rooney - Deputy Designated Teacher (Nursery)

Mrs Sinead McShane - Deputy Designated Teacher

Mr Ciaran Mackin - Governor Responsible for Child Protection

The Designated and Deputy Designated Teachers are responsible for:

- coordinating action within the school and liaising with Social Services (Southern Area Child Protection Committee) and other agencies over cases of abuse and suspected abuse
- acting as a source of advice within the school
- ensuring that staff are familiar with the policy and procedures
- referral of individual cases of suspected abuse
- liaising with agencies about individual cases
- organising training on child protection within school

Where verbal referrals are made to social care, the referral should be confirmed in writing within 24 hours.

Where there is uncertainty about making a full referral, advice can still be sought from the social care department without giving the child's details.

Operation Encompass

We are an Operation Encompass school. Operation Encompass is an early intervention partnership between local Police and our school, aimed at supporting children who are victims of domestic violence and abuse. As a school, we recognise that children's exposure to domestic violence is a traumatic event for them. When the police have attended a domestic incident and one of our pupils is present, they will make contact with the school at the start of the next working day, to share this information with a member of the safeguarding team. This will allow the school safeguarding team to provide direct or indirect support to this child and family.

This information will be treated like any other child protection information as per DE Circular 2020/07. It will only be shared outside of the safeguarding team on a proportionate and need to know basis. All members of the safeguarding team have completed the online Operation Encompass training, so they are able to take these calls. Any staff responsible for answering the phone will be made aware of Operation Encompass and the need to pass these calls on with urgency.

Teaching staff and support staff

New teachers and supply staff are informed of the main points of this child protection policy through the Pastoral Care handbook and Child Protection pamphlet.

All staff needs to be alert to the signs of abuse as detailed in this policy. They should report any concerns immediately, where possible to the designated teacher or her deputies. If in any doubt they should consult with the designated teacher.

Apply the procedures detailed below for responding to a suspected case remembering that:

- you cannot promise confidentiality
- information should only be shared with those who need to know information
- it is important to stay calm and reassuring
- the needs and safety of the child must always come first
- when in doubt - ask

Non-teaching staff

Non-teaching staff may also be approached by children or have concerns.

They should follow the same procedure as teaching staff in seeking referral at the earliest opportunity to the class or designated teacher or their deputy where appropriate.

Guidance on recognising suspected abuse

Child abuse is a term used to describe ways in which someone often in a position of power harms children. It may not be our responsibility to decide whether child abuse is occurring, but we are required to act on any concerns and report it to the appropriate party. **The health, safety and protection of a child is paramount.**

PHYSICAL ABUSE

Can include hitting, shaking, throwing, poisoning, burning, scalding, suffocating or causing any form of physical harm to a child.

Possible signs include:

Unexplained injuries or burns
Refusal to discuss injuries
Improbable explanations of injuries
Untreated injuries or lingering illness
Admission of punishment which appears excessive
Shrinking from physical contact
Fear of returning home or parents being contacted
Fear of undressing
Fear of medical help
Aggression/ bullying
Over compliant behaviour
Running away
Significant changes in behaviour
Deterioration in work
Unexplained pattern of absences

EMOTIONAL ABUSE

This is persistent emotional ill treatment of a child such as to cause severe and persistent adverse effects on a child's emotional development. It can include:

- conveying to a child that they are worthless or unloved
- placing inappropriate age-related expectations on children
- making children feel frightened or in danger on a frequent basis.

Possible signs of emotional abuse include:

Continual self-deprecation

Fear of new situations

Inappropriate emotional responses to painful situations

Self-harm or mutilation

Compulsive stealing/ scrounging

Drug/ solvent abuse

'Neurotic' behaviour - obsessive rocking, thumb-sucking

Air of detachment 'don't care' attitude

Social isolation

Attention-seeking behaviour

Eating problems

Depression, withdrawal

SEXUAL ABUSE

Sexual abuse involves forcing or enticing a child or young person to take part in sexual activities, whether or not the child is aware of what is happening.

They can include non-contact activities such as involving children looking at, or in the production of, pornographic material or watching sexual activities, or encouraging children to behave in sexually inappropriate ways.

Possible signs include:

Bruises, scratches, burns or bite marks

Scratches abrasions or persistent infection in the anal or genital regions

Pregnancy

Sexual awareness inappropriate to the child's age

Frequent public masturbation

Attempts to teach other children about sexual activity

Refusing to stay with certain people or go to certain places

Aggressiveness, anger, anxiety, tearfulness

Withdrawal from friends

Child Sexual Exploitation is a form of sexual abuse in which a person(s) exploits, coerces and/or manipulates a child or young person into engaging in some form of sexual activity in return for something the child needs or desires and/or for the gain of the person(s) perpetrating or facilitating the abuse

NEGLECT

Neglect is also a form of abuse. It is the persistent failure to meet a child's basic physical and/ or psychological needs and can affect the child's health and development. It might include failure to provide adequate food, shelter and clothing .Failure to protect a child from physical harm or danger for any reason including parents being under the influence of drugs or alcohol, failure to ensure appropriate access to medical care and treatment.

Possible signs include:

Constant hunger
Poor personal hygiene
Inappropriate clothing
Frequent lateness or non-attendance
Untreated medical problems
Low self-esteem
Poor social relationships
Compulsive stealing or scrounging
Constant tiredness

BULLYING

Bullying can be defined as using deliberately hurtful behaviour, usually over a period of time, where it is difficult for those bullied to defend themselves. The three main types of bullying are:

- physical
- verbal
- emotional

The class teacher should deal with all incidents of bullying in the first instance followed by Principal as appropriate. A more detailed guide can be found in the school's anti-bullying policy.

SELF HARM

Self harm is defined as the act of deliberately causing harm to oneself either by causing a physical injury, by putting oneself in dangerous situations and/or self neglect.

If it comes to the attention of a teacher/ member of staff that a child is self-harming they should alert the designated teacher for child protection, Mrs.Doyle. Actions by the designated teacher, might include:

- contacting parents
- contacting SELB Education Welfare Services
- contacting Social Care if the child meets the referral criteria

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

It is now recognised that children who live in an atmosphere of domestic violence may be at risk. Domestic violence includes psychological, physical, verbal, sexual, financial and isolation abuse. Symptoms which young people may display and which are indicators only, include:-

Nervousness
Low self worth
Disturbed sleep patterns
Nightmares/ flashbacks
Physiological - stress/ nerves
Stomach pain
Bed wetting
Immature/ needy behaviour
Temper tantrums
Aggression
Internalising distress or withdrawal
Truancy

These symptoms can lead to a young person being misdiagnosed as having learning difficulties, being naughty or disruptive, or having an illness.

If school staff become aware of a child living in a home where Domestic Abuse is evident this must be passed to the Designated Teacher, who has an obligation to pass this information on to Social Services.

Guidance on dealing with suspected abuse

All staff should refer concerns to the designated teacher as soon as possible.

In the meantime, they should:

- listen to the pupil, keeping calm and offering reassurance
- observe bruises but should not ask a child to remove or adjust their clothing to observe them
- observe the general well-being of the child
- if a disclosure is made the child should lead the discussion. Do not press for details by asking questions "what did they do next?"
- Listen - don't investigate using questions such as "is there anything else you'd like to tell me?"
- Accept what the pupil says without challenge - reassure them that they are doing the right thing and that you recognise how hard it is for them
- Don't lay blame or criticise either the child or the perpetrator
- Don't promise confidentiality - explain that they have done the right thing and who you will need to tell and why

Procedures for monitoring, recording and reporting

At the time

Brief notes at the time or immediately after when you are able. These notes only identify the pupil by their initials and date of birth. You should note:

- Date and time of disclosure/incident observed
- Place and context of disclosure or concern
- Facts you need to report

These notes should then be passed to the designated person.

Remember to keep to factual information and not assumption or interpretation. Use the child's own language to quote rather than translating into your own terms. Be aware that these sheets may be used at a later date to support a referral to an external agency.

Designated Teacher

The designated teacher will:

- Follow-up the referral before action
- Make additional records of discussions and any investigation that takes place.
- Make a decision in collaboration with the Principal whether to continue to monitor the situation or take the referral further. This decision should be communicated to the individual making the initial referral

- Where a child is referred to social care a referral form should be completed and sent within 24 hours.

All records, information and confidential notes are stored in separate files in secure cabinets in the Principal's office. Any documents for inclusion in this folder should be given directly to the Principal/ Designated Teacher.

Allegations against staff

This is an extremely difficult and sensitive area to address. All allegations should be dealt with according to guidance set out by the CCMS.

The Principal or Mrs Doyle should contact the CCMS Child Protection Officer, Mr Stephen Walsh, immediately with any concern. In his absence Mr. Ciaran McKenna is the Deputy Child Protection Officer.

Allegations against a Member of Staff

If a complaint about possible child abuse is made against a member of staff, the Principal (or the designated member of staff, Mrs Lisa Doyle, if she is not available) must be informed immediately. The above procedures will apply unless the complaint is about the designated member of staff or the Principal. The Chairman of the Board of Governors will be informed immediately.

Allegations against the Principal

If a complaint is made against the Principal, the designated member of staff, Mrs Lisa Doyle, must be informed immediately. She will inform the Chairman of the Board of Governors and together they will ensure that the necessary action is taken.

Allegations against the designated member of staff

Any complaints must be referred to the Principal.

Inter-agency liaison

Social care meetings

At times school staff will be called to participate in meetings organised and chaired by social care. These might be:-

- Strategy discussions
- the child protection review conference
- Child protection conferences
- family group conferences - for children in need, in a range of circumstances where a plan is required for the child's future welfare
- professionals' meetings - in which representative professionals from different agencies are asked to meet to discuss children and their families with a view to providing support or making recommendations in terms of next stages of involvement
- core group meetings - meeting in which a 'core' group of professional associated with the family are asked to meet

to review the progress of actions decided at case conferences and register reviews

At these meetings, representatives from the school should be ready to report providing information about:-

- attendance and punctuality
- academic achievement
- the child's behaviour and attitude
- relationships with peer group and social skills generally
- child's appearance and readiness for school
- contact with parents/ carers
- any specific incidents that need reporting

Prior to the meeting, class teachers and other adults working closely with the child should be asked for their comments. Following the meeting, feedback should be given, and staff brought up - to- date with any actions that are needed.

The Child Protection Register

Children placed on the register will require additional support and monitoring. The social care department will inform a school receiving a child on the register and accompanying records should follow from the child's previous school.

Confidentiality

Where children are on the child protection register and leave one school for another the designated teacher must inform the receiving school and the key worker at the social care department. If the child leaves the school with no receiving school, details should be passed to the Principal ESW.

Education staff has a professional responsibility to share relevant information about the protection of children with the investigative agencies. Members of staff should not promise confidentiality but can let the child know that only those who need to know will be informed and that that will be for the child's own sake.

Time should be taken to reassure the child and confirm that information given will be treated sensitively. Reassurance should be given and the adult involved listen sympathetically and non-judgmentally.

Staff should be careful and ensure that information is only given to the appropriate person. All staff should be kept aware of issues relating to confidentiality and the status of information they may hold.

Members of staff, other than the designated member and those involve closely, should only have enough details in order to help them to act sensitively and appropriately to a pupil. Sensitive information regarding pastoral issues and for children on the child protection register is kept separately in a folder in the closed section of the office.

Discretion should be used when talking about the personal, and changing circumstances of children e.g. when a child goes into care. Care is particularly necessary after attending child protection meetings. Information received should be treated sensitively and discretion will be needed as issues emerge on a formal and informal basis.

Supporting children at risk

For children at risk, school may be the one stable place from which they can expect security and reassurance. It is not only being alert to potential abuse but providing the support to help children through difficult times. Providing them with the coping skills that can help avoid situations arising and deal with the emotional difficulties afterwards if they do.

The pastoral support programme

Children who are 'looked after' should have their own pastoral support programme which will be drawn up in discussion with social care, the class teacher, foster parents and the child themselves.

Support in school – pastoral care

All class teachers are responsible, in conjunction with other school staff, for the pastoral needs of the children in their care. This includes maintaining opportunity for children to share their concerns and following the guidance in this document. Our curriculum includes 'circle time' during which children may be presented with issues included in our PD&MU programme. In addition, circle time can be used to raise issues spontaneously that are particularly relevant to the class at that time.

Care should always be taken in regard to the discussion of sensitive issues and advice should be sought where there are concerns.

Support in school – the curriculum

Within our curriculum there will also be opportunities to discuss issues which some children might find sensitive and disturbing. Care should be taken particularly in relation to discussion about families and their make up.

Assumptions about member of families and the presence of both parents should be avoided both in discussion and the presentation of materials. During health and safety discussion staff should be alert to the fact that some children will have very different experiences and may find content 'sensitive' within their own histories. Staff should make themselves familiar with the background of the children in their care in order to avoid children becoming distressed.

Physical contact with pupils

A Code of Conduct for Employees within the Education Sector whose work brings them in contact with children/young people.

Introduction

This Code of Conduct is not intended to detract from the enriching experiences children and young people gain from positive interaction with staff within the education sector. It is intended to assist staff in respect of the complex issue of child abuse, by drawing attention to the areas of risk for staff and by offering guidance on prudent conduct.

Code of Conduct

1. Private meeting with pupils

- a. Staff should be aware of the dangers, which may arise from private interviews with individual pupils. It is recognised that there will be occasions when confidential interviews must take place. As far as possible, staff should conduct such interviews in a room with visual access, or with the door open.
- b. Where such conditions cannot apply, staff are advised to ensure that another adult knows that the interview is taking place. It may be necessary to use a sign indicating that the room is in use, but it is not advisable to use signs prohibiting entry to the room.

- c. Where possible, another pupil or (preferably) another adult should be present or nearby during the interview, and the school should take active measures to facilitate this.

2. Private Contact with Pupils

- a. As a general principle, staff are advised not to make unnecessary physical contact with their pupils.
- b. It is unrealistic and unnecessary, however, to suggest that staff should touch pupils only in emergencies. In particular, a distressed child, especially a younger child, may need reassurance involving physical comforting, as a caring parent would provide. Staff should not feel inhibited from providing this.
- c. Staff should never touch a child who has clearly indicated that he/she is, or would be, uncomfortable with such contact, unless it is necessary to protect the child, others or property from harm. (DENI Circular 1999/9, on the use of reasonable force, gives guidance on Article 4 of the Education (Northern Ireland) Order 1998 (*Power of member of staff to restrain pupils*)).
- d. Physical punishment is illegal, as is any form of physical response to misbehaviour, unless it is by way of necessary restraint.
- e. Educational establishments should, in particular circumstance, such as use of certain areas like the photographic darkroom, draw up their own guidelines for these circumstances.

- f. Staff who have to administer first-aid to a pupil should ensure wherever possible that this is done in the presence of other children or another adult. *However, no member of staff should hesitate to provide first-aid in an emergency simply because another person is not present.*
- g. Any physical contact, which would be likely to be misinterpreted, by the pupil, parent or other casual observer should be avoided.
- h. Following any incident where a member of staff feels that his/her actions have been, or may be, misconstrued, a written report of the incident should be submitted immediately to his/her line manager.
- i. Staff should be particularly careful when supervising pupils in a residential setting, or in approved out of school activities, where more informal relationships tend to be usual and where staff may be in proximity to pupils in circumstances very different from the normal school/work environment.

3. Choice and Use of Teaching Materials

- a. Teachers should avoid teaching materials, the choice of which might be misinterpreted and reflect upon the motives for the choice.
- b. When using teaching materials of a sensitive nature a teacher should be aware of the danger that their application, either by pupils or by the teacher, might

after the event be criticised. Educational establishments have already received advice on the value of consulting parents and Governors when proposing to use materials such as the AIDS education for schools and in connection with sex education programmes.

- c. If in doubt about the appropriateness of a particular teaching material, the teacher should consult with the principal before using it.

4. Relationships and Attitudes

Within the Pastoral Care Policies of the educational establishment and the employing authority, staff should ensure that their relationships with children are appropriate to the age, maturity and sex of the young people, taking care that their conduct does not give rise to comment or speculation. Attitudes, demeanour and language all require care and thought, particularly when staff are dealing with adolescent boys and girls.

Working with parents

It is important that school has an established approach to working with parents. Parents' and children's need for privacy should be respected. Attitudes to and contact with parents should be non-judgemental in order to obtain the most conducive working relationship. The priority is the needs of the child and effective liaison is crucial for this.

It should be recognised that families from different backgrounds and cultures will have different approaches to child rearing.

These differences should be acknowledged and respected provided they do not place the child at risk as defined earlier in the document. We do have access to support for parents here it is felt that this would be useful. This includes:

Review and monitoring of the policy

This policy will be reviewed on an annual basis or earlier if legislation should change.

Key contacts include:

Child Protection Officer: Mrs Lisa Doyle

Deputy Child Protection Officers: Mr Damian Ruddy, Ms Martina Rooney and Mrs Sinead McShane