Child Protection Policy.

Introduction

St. John the Baptist Girls’ School aims to provide it’s pupils with the highest standards of care and protection in order to promote each child’s wellbeing and safeguard them from harm while in the school. The Board of Management has adopted the “Children First” Guidelines of the Department of Health and Children 1999 and the “Child Protection Procedures of the Department of Education and Science 2001.

The Child Protection Policy was developed by the Principal and staff in consultation with the Board of Management and parents following inservice in 2005. The Policy was approved by the Board of Management in 2005 and reviewed in 2010.

Relationship to Characteristic Spirit of the School

 St. John the Baptist Girls’ School seeks to help the children to grow and develop into healthy, confident, mature adults, capable of realising their full potential as human beings. We strive to create a happy, safe environment for the children where they feel secure, knowing that if they have concerns, they will be listened to with understanding and respect and their concerns will be addressed.

Aims:

This policy aims to

* Create a safe, trusting responsive and caring environment
* Provide a personal safety skills education which specifically addresses abuse prevention for all children in the school
* Develop awareness and responsibility in the area of child protection amongst the whole school community
* Put in place procedures for good practice to protect all children and staff.
* Ensure that all staff members are aware of and familiar with the “Children First” and the DES guidelines and procedures in relation to reporting concerns and/or disclosures of child abuse
* Provide for ongoing training in this and related areas for all school staff.

Roles and Responsibilities

* The Board of Management has primary responsibility for the care and welfare of their pupils in the school.
* The DLP has specific responsibility for child protection in the school.
* All staff have a general duty of care to ensure that arrangements are in place to protect children from harm.

# Role of the Board of Management

* To arrange for the planning, development and implementation of an effective child protection programme.
* To monitor and evaluate its effectiveness.
* To provide appropriate staff development and training

Specifically they will:

* Appoint a DLP and deputy DLP.
* Have clear procedures for dealing with allegations or suspicions of child abuse (See below)
* Monitor the progress of children at risk – child protection will be included on the agenda of every Board meeting.
* Ensure that curricular provision is in place for the prevention of child abuse.
* Investigate and respond to allegations of child abuse against one of the school’s employees which have been reported to the Health Service Executive (HSE) or Gardaí.
* To decide on teachers’ attendance at child protection meetings/case conferences and to advise teachers before attending such meetings/conferences.

Appointment of a Designated Liaison Person (DLP)

* The Board of Management has appointed Mary Andrews as the Designated Liaison Person (DLP) in St. John the Baptist Girls’ School to have specific responsibility for child protection.
* Gayle Noonan has been appointed as Deputy DLP to take the place of the DLP if she is unavailable for whatever reason.
* The position of DLP will be addressed at the first meeting of each new Board of Management. The DLP will continue to act as such until such time as she is replaced by the BOM for whatever reason.

Role of the Staff Members (Teachers, SNAs, Caretaker, Secretary …)

* Staff are aware of the following guidelines and it is the responsibility of all staff to familiarise themselves with the guidelines.
* *Child Protection Guidelines and Procedures, DES, 2001*
* *Children First National Guidelines for the Protection and Welfare of Children,1999, especially*
	+ *Chapter 3 Definition & Recognition of Child Abuse*
	+ *Chapter 4 Basis for Reporting & Standard Reporting Procedures*
	+ *Appendix 1 Signs and Symptoms Of Child Abuse*

##### Guidelines for teachers and staff members in handling disclosures from children:

Where a child discloses alleged abuse to a staff member, the person receiving that information should listen carefully and supportively. Great care must be taken not to abuse the child’s trust. This should not be a formal interview.

##### The following advice is offered:

* Listen to the child.
* 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.
* Confidentiality should not be assured - explain that further help may have to be sought.
* Record the discussion accurately noting
* *What, where and when?*
* *Descriptions and possible sketches of physical injuries.*
* *Explanations of injuries using direct quotations using child’s own words if appropriate.*
* Retain the record securely.
* The staff member should obtain only necessary relevant facts. It is not the responsibility of school personnel to investigate allegations of abuse.
* The DLP should then be informed and given relevant records.
* If the suspected abuser is the DLP then the suspicion and any records will be passed on to the Chairperson who will proceed as per guidelines.

##### Suspicions of Abuse

* Staff members who suspect abuse should refer to Children First National Guidelines for the Protection and Welfare of Children,1999, especially
* *Chapter 3 :Definition & Recognition of Child Abuse*
* *Chapter 4: Basis for Reporting and Standard Reporting Procedures*
* *Appendix 1:Signs and Symptoms Of Child Abuse*
* Staff members should observe and record over time the dates, signs, symptoms, behaviour causing them concern.
* They should inform the DLP and pass on all records.

 Role of the Designated Liaison Person (DLP)

* The DLP acts as a liaison with outside agencies, HSE, Gardaí and other parties with child protection concerns
* The DLP will inform all school personnel of the availability of the Child Protection Guidelines and Procedures, DES and Children First Guidelines in the school. S/he will circulate the DES guidelines and photocopy/circulate to all staff Chapters 3 & 4 & Appendix 1 of the Children First guidelines and advise on good practice
* The DLP will be available to staff for consultation regarding suspicions or disclosures of abuse. She will keep records of these consultations.
* The DLP will seek advice from the HSE.
* The DLP will report suspicions and allegations of child abuse to the HSE or/and An Garda Síochána based on this advice.
* The DLP will maintain proper records in a secure, confidential manner and in a secure location.
* The DLP will keep up to date on current developments regarding child protection.

##### Guidelines for the DLP in handling reported concerns and disclosures

* Where the DLP/Deputy DLP have concerns about a child, but are not sure whether to report the matter to the HSE, they should seek appropriate advice. To do this the DLP/Deputy should make informal contact with the assigned (on duty) Social Worker. The DLP/Deputy in this case, should be explicit that she is requesting advice and not making a report. If advised to report the matter, the DLP will act on that advice.
* A report will then be made to the HSE by the DLP/Deputy in person, by telephone or in writing. In the event of an emergency or non-availability of HSE staff, the report should be made to the Gardaí. The DLP should also report the matter to the Chairperson of the BOM, who should then follow the procedures as outlined in Chapter 4 (Section 4.3) of Children First National Guidelines for the Protection and Welfare of Children, 1999.
* A standard reporting form is completed by the DLP/Deputy as comprehensively as possible (See Appendix 1, Child Protection Guidelines and Procedures, DES).
* Parents/guardians will normally be informed that a report is being made. It may be decided that informing the parent/carer is likely to endanger the child or place the child at further risk. The decision not to inform the parent/carer should be briefly recorded together with the reasons for not doing so.
* When the allegation is against the DLP, the chairperson then assumes responsibility for reporting the matter to the HSE and filling in the standard reporting form.
* Where there are allegations or suspicions of Peer Abuse the DLP will follow the same procedures.
* Parents of all parties will be notified and the DLP will inform the Chairperson.
* Principal and class teachers will make arrangements to meet separately with all parents, to resolve the matter.
* The school will make arrangements to minimise the possibility of the abusive behaviour recurring.

Child Protection Meetings / Case Conferences

* A request is made from the HSE through the DLP who should consult with the Chairperson of the B.O.M. of the school. The Chairperson may seek clarification through the DLP as to why the attendance of the school employee is necessary and ascertain who else will be present.
* The school employee may complete a report for the meeting/conference. (See Appendix 3, Child Protection Guidelines and Procedures, DES).
* The school employee will be advised if children/parents/guardians are going to be present. The school employee may contact the Chairperson of the Child Protection Meeting for advice.
* The school employee may keep a child’s behaviour under closer observation, if requested to do so. This may include observing the child’s behaviour, peer interactions, school progress or informal conversations.
* In all cases, individuals who refer or discuss their concerns about the care and protection of children with HSE staff, should be informed of the likely steps to be taken by the professionals involved. Where appropriate and within the normal limits of confidentiality, reporting staff will be kept informed about the outcomes of any enquiry or investigation following on from their report
* Teachers attending a child protection meeting/case conference should familiarise themselves with the protocol outlined on pgs. 149 – 155 of Children First Guidelines, 1999; pgs. 13-14 Child Protection Guidelines and Procedures, DES.

##### Procedures for BOM in cases of allegations or suspicions of child abuse by a school employee:

#### Reporting

In the event of receiving a complaint or suspicion re an employee:

* The DLP will immediately inform the chairperson.
* She will seek a written statement of the allegation from the person/agency making the allegation. Parents/Guardians may make a statement on behalf of a child.
* The DLP will seek advice from the relevant HSE and will take responsibility for reporting, based on this advice.
* If the DLP, following consultation with the HSE, decides that this matter is not for reporting, she must inform the Chairperson. They must then inform, in writing, the person or agency making the allegation, of the reasons for this decision. If this person or agency still has concerns, they are free to consult with or report to the relevant HSE or Gardaí on an individual basis. The provisions of the Protection for Persons reporting Child Abuse Act 1998 apply, once they report reasonably and in good faith.
* If the DLP, following consultation with the HSE, decides that this matter is for reporting she should inform the Chairperson, who should proceed in accordance with the procedures in the Child Protection Guidelines and Procedures, DES, 2001.
* The DLP/Deputy DLP completes a standard reporting form as comprehensively as is possible.
* When the Chairperson becomes aware of an allegation of abuse s/he will always seek legal advice and base his/her response on this advice.
* S/he will privately inform the employee of the fact and nature of the allegation and whether or not it has been reported by the DLP to the HSE. (Refer to 4.2 – 4.3, p.16 of Child Protection Guidelines and Procedures, DES, 2001. The chairperson has a duty to afford the employee fairness and due process – s/he is entitled to details and a copy of the written allegation, to advice and representation and an opportunity to respond to the Board within a week.

#### Responding

* When the Chairperson becomes aware of an allegation of abuse s/he will always seek legal advice and base his/her response on this advice.
* The Chairperson will consider whether there is any risk to pupils’ safety. If the Chairperson considers that there is a risk – s/he may require the employee to take immediate administrative leave. If unsure the chairperson will consult with the HSE/Gardaí.
* If administrative leave has been invoked, the chairperson will inform the DES. The HSE (in some cases the Gardaí) may also be notified in accordance with legal advice received.
* Once it is deemed necessary by the DLP and Chairperson to make a report (after receiving advice from the HSE) the Chairperson will convene and inform a meeting of the BOM as soon as possible.
* Where the alleged abuse has taken place within the school, or relates to the abuse of pupils of the school, by school employees outside of school time, the BOM will investigate the matter. They will convene a further meeting, once the relevant information has been gathered. At this meeting the BOM will consider in detail
* the allegations made and their source
* the advice given by relevant authorities
* the written responses of the employee.

At this meeting also

* The person/agency who is alleging abuse by the school employee should be offered an opportunity to present his/her case to the BOM and may be accompanied by another person
* Parents/guardians may act on behalf of child
* The employee should also be afforded an opportunity to present his/her case and may also be accompanied.
* The BOM must deal with the matter sensitively and the employee must be fairly treated.
* The BOM will make a decision on action, if any, based on their investigation and will inform the employee of this in writing. They will also inform the DES of the outcome, if the employee has been absent on administrative leave.
* Where it is not possible for the BOM to conduct an enquiry into allegations (e.g. where abuse has occurred in past employment, or where the employee is undergoing investigation by relevant authorities), the Chairperson will act on advice of authorities. The Chairperson will maintain close contact with the HSE and receive reports and records from them where appropriate.

**Organisational Implications:**

Accidents

While every precaution will be taken under our Health and Safety Statement to ensure the safety of children, we realise that accidents will happen. The more serious accidents will be recorded on the accident report sheets, handed to the principal, signed by the principal and stored in the office.

Attendance

School attendance is monitored carefully. With regard to child protection particular attention is paid to trends in non attendance. We will also monitor non-attendance in correlation with signs of neglect/physical abuse/emotional abuse. The NEWB will be informed of any concerns relating to a child’s attendance. A letter will issue to parents when their child has missed 10 days/20 days etc. Children who miss 20 days or more will be reported to the NEWB in accordance with current legislation. Good attendance is encouraged and full attendance is acknowledged and rewarded monthly, termly and annually.

Behaviour

Children are encouraged at all times to play co-operatively and to show respect for themselves and others. Inappropriate behaviour will be addressed under our Code of Behaviour. If an incident occurs which we consider to be of a sexualised nature we will notify the DLP who will record it and respond to it appropriately.

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.

Children Travelling in Staff Cars:

On the occasional instances where a staff car must be used to transport a child, children must never be taken alone.

Communication

Every effort will be made to enhance pupil-teacher communication. 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. When teachers have to communicate with pupils on a one-to-one basis, they should leave the classroom door open.

Induction of Staff

The DLP will be responsible for informing all new teachers and ancillary staff of the Child Protection Guidelines and Procedures, DES, 2001 and Children First Guidelines, 1999. The DLP will give a copy of the Child Protection Guidelines and Procedures, Chapters 3 & 4 and Appendix 1 of Children First and this Child Protection Policy to all new staff. All teachers are expected to teach the designated SPHE objectives for their class. The Principal is responsible for the mentoring of new teachers and will be responsible for supporting new teachers as they implement the SPHE objectives. The Principal is also responsible for ensuring that new teachers know how to fill in the roll book correctly and informing the teacher of record keeping procedures within the school.

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 are given a copy of the school’s information pack, 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 are given a copy of the school’s Code of Behaviour and Anti-Bullying policies.

Intimate Care Needs:

In all cases 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 those 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.

One to One Teaching

 It is the policy of this school that one to one teaching is often in the best interest of the child. Parents/guardians of children who are involved in one to one teaching will be informed and their agreement sought.

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 it’s 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.

Record Keeping

Teachers will keep each child’s file updated with results of assessments carried out, dates and details of meetings with parents and notes from parents. Children’s files are stored in locked filing cabinets. Notes of a sensitive nature will be stored by teachers in their locked locker in the staff room.

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 locked filing cabinets in the school until such time as the pupil reached the age of 21 years.

Supervision

The school’s supervision policy will be followed by all staff to ensure that there is comprehensive supervision of children at all breaks and before and after school. Principal/deputy principal will be involved before/after school supervision. The school building is open to receive pupils from 9:00a.m. Parents are regularly reminded that the school authorities can accept no responsibility for pupils arriving before that time.

A roster of staff on duty for the morning and lunch-time breaks is drawn up and displayed in the staff room. Teachers will ensure that children are visible in the school yard. Children will not be allowed to remain in classrooms without supervision. Children needing to use the toilet during break/lunch must seek the permission of the teacher before leaving the yard.

Swimming

Pupils will be expected to dress and undress themselves for swimming.

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 parent/guardian cannot be contacted the child will be assisted by members of staff familiar to the child. In such situations, if possible, two members of staff should be present.

Visitors/Guest Speakers/Coaches:

Visitors/Guest Speakers/Coaches 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 by guests is appropriate. All guest speakers/visitors/coaches etc must have the prior approval of the Principal.

**Curriculum Implications**

In St. John the Baptist Girls’ School all children will be cherished and in fulfilling the general aims of the Primary Curriculum we will

* *Enable the child to live a full life as a child and to realise his or her potential*
* *Enable the child to develop as a social being through living and co-operating with others and so contribute to the good of society*
* *Prepare the child for further education and lifelong learning.*

In endeavouring to realise these aims we will create a positive school climate which is open, inclusive, respectful, fair, democratic and tolerant and which seeks to support the holistic development of all children and all adults working with our children. The strategies we will use to create this environment will involve:

* Creating a health-promoting physical environment
* Enhancing self-esteem
* Fostering respect for diversity
* Building effective communication within the school
* Developing appropriate home-school communication
* Catering for individual needs
* Developing democratic process
* Fostering inclusive and respectful language.

We strive to ensure that our school will be physically and emotionally safe and we will deliver the curricular content of our SPHE programme with a view to giving our children the protective skills of self-esteem and assertiveness. The circle time methodologies will be used on a whole school basis. The *No-Blame* approach will be adopted in our Anti-Bullying policy. Co-operative interpersonal skills will be developed through working in pairs and working in groups. Older children will be encouraged to work positively and skills in negotiation, building consensus and managing conflict will be developed.

The Stay Safe Programme is the primary resource used in this school to provide education for children on abuse prevention. The programme is taught as part of the schools’ SPHE curriculum under the strand unit Safety and Protection.

On enrolment of their child parents/guardians will be informed that the Stay Safe programme is in use in the school and a copy of the Stay Safe “A Parent’s Guide” provided.

The formal lessons of the programme will be taught in their entirety every year to Senior Infants, Second, Fourth and Sixth Classes. Staff will make every effort to ensure that the messages of the programme are reinforced whenever possible.

The Stay Safe Programme is taught by all class teachers. The accompanying worksheets are sent home, thus ensuring that the parents/guardians fully understand the content being delivered and so that they can discuss the relevant issues at home.

Where children are identified as having special needs, the teacher will adapt the programme accordingly. Where it is warranted “Personal Safety Skills for Children with Learning Difficulties” will be taught. During the course of the year, the learning support teacher will facilitate Circle Time as the need arises. Should parents/guardians have any queries/concerns regarding the programme content they are welcome to come in and discuss these with the Principal or are asked to refer to their Parents/Guardians Handbook.

Success Criteria

We will evaluate the success of this policy using the following criteria:

* Delivery and participation by all staff in training
* Delivery of the SPHE curriculum
* Resources to support the delivery of SPHE
* Delivery and participation by children in the Stay Safe Programme
* Assessment of these procedures by participants following a child protection case
* Feedback from all staff

Timeframe for Implementation

These procedures will be implemented following ratification by the BOM.

Timeframe for Review

At the first staff meeting of every year the DLP will remind all teachers of the guidelines and copies of Chapter 3 & 4 & Appendix 1 of “The Children First Guidelines” and “Child Protection Guidelines and Procedures”, will be given to new staff members.

A review will be conducted based on the criteria above, following any and all incidents when the guidelines are used.

Responsibility for Review

* DLP/ principal
* All Staff

Ratification and Communication

This policy was ratified by the Board of Management on 28th September, 2010.

Copies of the policy will be circulated to all parents as part of the information pack given on enrolment of their child. A letter will be distributed to all parents in September each year reminding them of the policy. A copy of the policy will be accessible on a notice board in the administrative area. Copies of the policy will be made available to parents at any time on request.

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Chairperson, Date.

Board of Management.

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Mary Andrews, Date.

Principal.