

Child Protection Policy

This document is a response to recent changes in legislation and takes account of the provisions of each of the following pieces of legislation

- Freedom of Information Act 1997
- The Education Act 1998
- The Child Welfare Act 2000
- Children First – National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children 2011.

The new procedures are based on the recently published Children First – National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children 2011, and Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools (Dept of Education & Skills, 2011)

References

- Children First (Dept of Children and Youth Affairs 2011)
- Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post Primary Schools (Dept of Education & Skills, 2011).

The Board of Management recognises that child protection and welfare considerations permeate all aspects of school life and must be reflected in all of the school's policies, practices and activities. Therefore, in accordance with the requirements of the Department of Education and Skills, Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post Primary Schools, the Board of Management of St Oliver Post Primary School has agreed the following child protection policy.

The Board of Management has adopted and will implement fully and without modification the Department's Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post Primary Schools as part of this overall child protection policy. It was ratified at a meeting of the Board of Management on **February 7th 2012**.

The Designated Liaison Person (DLP) is Brendan Corcoran (Principal).

The Deputy Designated Liaison Person (Deputy DLP) is Micheal McCafferty (Deputy Principal).

In its policies, practices and activities, St Oliver Post Primary School will adhere to the following principles of best practice in child protection and welfare. The school will recognise that the protection and welfare of children is of paramount importance, regardless of all other considerations: We will:

- Fully co-operate with the relevant statutory authorities in relation to child protection and welfare matters.

- Adopt safe practices to minimise the possibility of harm or accidents happening to children and protect workers from the necessity to take unnecessary risks that may leave themselves open to accusations of abuse or neglect.
- Develop a practice of openness with parents and encourage parental involvement in the education of their children.
- Fully respect confidentiality requirements in dealing with child protection matters.

Certain policies such as our Code of Behaviour, Anti-bullying Policy, Attendance and Participation Policy will take particular account of this Child Protection Policy. This policy will also be considered with reference to the participation by pupils in sporting activities, other extra-curricular activities and school outings. Other practices and activities, where child protection might have particular relevance, will take due consideration of the procedures outlined within this policy. The Board has ensured that the necessary policies, protocols or practices as appropriate are in place in respect of each of the above listed items.

This policy has been made available to school personnel and is readily accessible to parents on request. It is available on our school website (www.stoliverpps.ie). A copy of this policy will be made available to the DES and the patron if requested.

Designated Liaison Person (DLP)

The DLP in St Oliver Post Primary School is the Principal, Brendan Corcoran; this appointment has been ratified by the Board of Management. The Deputy DLP is Micheal McCafferty; this appointment has also been ratified by the Board of Management. Both members of staff have undertaken training.

The DLP has specific responsibility for child protection and will represent the school in all correspondence with the HSE, An Garda Síochána 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 DLP (DES Procedures 3:2).

The DLP acts in cases where there are reasonable grounds for suspicion or where an allegation has been made.

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. The giving of information to those who need to have that information is not a breach of confidentiality. This procedure exists for the protection of a child who may have been or has been abused. The DLP who is submitting a report to the HSE or An Garda Síochána 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.

In emergency situations, where the HSE 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 HSE 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 the HSE or any member of an Garda Síochána (DES Procedures 1:10).

Qualified Privilege

People making a report to the DLP in good faith have 'qualified privilege' under common law. Reports made to the HSE may be subject to provisions of the Freedom of Information Act, 1997. This act 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 (DES Procedures 1:11).

Definition and Recognition of Child Abuse

Child abuse can be categorised into four different types:

- Neglect
- Emotional abuse
- Physical abuse
- Sexual abuse

Each of these categories is defined in full in Children First but for the purpose of this policy attention is drawn to the stated definition of 'neglect'.

Neglect can be defined in terms of an omission, where the child suffers significant harm or impairment of development by being deprived of food, clothing, warmth, hygiene, intellectual stimulation, supervision and safety, attachment to and affection from adults, medical care.

Guidelines for Recognition of Child Abuse

A list of child abuse indicators is contained in Children First, Chapter 2. This policy draws particular attention to 'persistent evidence' of neglect, including indicators such as no lunch, lack of uniform, no homework, poor attendance, persistent health problems, lack of sleep, inappropriate television viewing late at night and other

evidence that would indicate lack of supervision in the home. 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:

1. Considering the possibility
2. Looking out for signs of abuse
3. Recording of information

Each of these stages is developed in Children First 2:2.

Handling Disclosures from Children

DES Procedures 3:5 gives comprehensive details of how disclosures should be approached. Staffs are advised to deal with each situation sensitively, reassure the child but not to make promises that cannot be fulfilled.

The adult should not ask leading questions or make suggestions. They should explain that further help may have to be sought. The discussion should then be recorded accurately.

The record should include reference to what was observed with sketches of physical injury where necessary. It should also record when the alleged incident took place. Records should be kept in a secure place. The information should then be conveyed to the school DLP.

If the reporting person and the DLP are satisfied that there are reasonable grounds for the suspicion/allegation, the procedures outlined in Children First must be adhered to. Standardised reporting forms should be used (DES Procedures, Appendix 4). The content of the report should follow the guidance in Children First.

Allegations or Suspicions in relation to School Employees (DES Procedures, Chapter 5)

The Chairperson and the DLP are primarily concerned with the protection of the children in their care. However, employees must be protected against false and malicious claims.

Legal advice should be sought by the board in relation to the employee. If the allegation is against the DLP, the Chairperson of the BOM will assume the responsibility for reporting the matter to the HSE.

Reporting

When an allegation of abuse is made against a school employee, the DLP should act in accordance with the procedures outlined in Children First. A written statement of the allegation should be sought from the person/agency making the report. A

parent/guardian may make a statement on behalf of a child. The DLP should always inform the Chairperson of the BOM and is responsible for liaising with the HSE. The Chairperson assumes responsibility for communicating with the employee.

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 employee should be informed by the Chairperson (ie: the Employer):

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

The Chairperson must take the necessary steps to protect the child and may consult the BOM in this matter. The BOM may direct that the employee take administrative leave with pay and avoid suspension, thus removing any implication of guilt. The DES should be immediately informed.

School Measures Taken to Protect the Children in Our Care

There are a number of areas where common sense in our school should prevail in order to protect the children in the school and the staff who care for them. In relation to this, certain points should be noted:

- i. A copy of the school's child protection policy, which includes the names of the Designated Liaison Person (DLP) and Deputy DLP, will be made available to all school personnel and is readily accessible to parents on our website.
- ii. The name of the DLP and other relevant support services are displayed in a prominent position near the main entrance to the school.
- iii. In addition to informing the school authority of those cases where a report involving a child in the school has been submitted to the HSE, the DLP shall also inform the school authority of cases where the DLP sought advice from the HSE and as a result of this advice, no report was made. At each meeting of the Board of Management, the agenda includes an item on Child Protection; the Principal shall inform the Board of the number of all such cases and this shall be recorded in the minutes of the board meeting.
- iv. St Oliver Post Primary School will undertake an annual review of its Child Protection Policy and its implementation by the school. A checklist, to be used in

undertaking the review (included at Appendix 1). The school has put in place an action plan to address any areas for improvement which might be identified in the annual review.

- v. Staff who take classes swimming should make sure that there are two adults in attendance at all times. The dressing rooms and pool area should be well supervised.
- vi. Staff should not be alone in a classroom with one child or detain a child on their own after school. Some pupils with special educational needs are sanctioned resource hours and assistance on an individual basis; staff are mindful of this child protection policy when teaching these pupils and our support rooms have glass panels in the doors thus rendering the occupants visible at all times.
- vii. When possible children should work in groups.
- viii. Children with physical disabilities who may require assistance in toiletry matters will be aided by a Special Needs Assistant (if allocated by NCSE) who has met the necessary screening requirements when being employed by the school. It should be noted that children with disabilities may be more at risk of abuse due to a number of reasons (DES Procedures 2:3). Parents, teachers and all staff involved in services for children with disabilities need to be familiar with the indicators of abuse and to be alert for signs of abuse.