



**CHILD PROTECTION POLICY March 2017**

Newport N.S. aims to provide its pupils with the highest standards of care and protection, in order to promote each child's well-being and safeguard him/ her from harm.

Aim of this Policy: This document has been drawn up to give direction and guidance to our school management authority and personnel in dealing with allegations and suspicions of child abuse. It has been developed as a response to recent changes in legislation. It develops previous policy in this area, and takes account of the following pieces of legislation;

- (i) The Education Act 1998,
- (ii) The Child Welfare Act 2000.
- (iii) Circular 0046/2007.
- (ii) 'Children First' 2011.

Note: When a disclosure is made to a staff member:

- a. It is recorded accurately
- b. is brought to the notice of the school's Designated Liaison Person (DLP) Bríd Chambers or Deputy DLP Bríd McAuley, who will take the appropriate action – contact HSE Social Work Department or Gardaí.

**Responsibilities of School Management:**

To plan, develop, and implement an effective Child Protection Programme;

To monitor the effectiveness of the programme;



To implement agreed reporting procedures;

To provide staff with policy document and Chapters 3 and 4 of 'Children First'

To plan and implement appropriate staff development and training programmes.

The Board of Management is responsible for:

1. Having clear procedures which teachers and other school staff must follow where they suspect, or are alerted to, possible child abuse, including where a child discloses abuse;
2. Designating a senior member of staff to have specific responsibility for child protection;
3. Monitoring the progress of children considered to be at risk;
4. Promoting in-service training for teachers and members of Board to ensure they have a good working knowledge of Child Protection issues and procedures;
5. Having clear written procedures in place concerning action to be taken where allegations are made against school employees.

#### School Personnel: Responsibilities

Teachers in this school are aware that there is an obligation on schools to aim to provide pupils with the highest possible standard of care in order to promote their well-being and protect them from harm. All school personnel are especially well-placed to observe changes in behaviour, failure to develop, or outward signs of abuse in children. In situations where school personnel suspect abuse, they should ensure that such concerns are reported in accordance with the procedures outlined in Chapter 3 of 'Child Protection—Guidelines and Procedures' (DES 2011, page 14 Standard Reporting Procedure).



### 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 type of abuse are detailed in 'Children First' (DES Chapter 2).

### Guidelines for Recognition of Child Abuse

A list of child abuse indicators is contained in Appendix 1 'Children First'—page 70. 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' Section 2.2.



### Handling Disclosures from Children

DES procedures Section 3.5 comprehensive details of how disclosures should be approached.

### School Procedures

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

- Listen to the child
- 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.

This information should then be passed on to the school Designated Liaison Person (DLP).

The D L P (or nominated replacement) will immediately inform the Chairperson of the Board of Management of our school when a report involving a pupil in the school has been submitted to the Health Service Executive, under the Child Protection Guidelines and Procedures.

Standardised reporting forms may be photocopied from 'Children First' Appendix 4.



Any professional who suspects child abuse should inform parents/carers if a report is to be submitted to the HSE or the Gardaí Síochána, unless 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, the Gardaí should be contacted. Under no circumstances should a child be left in a dangerous situation pending HSE intervention.

### Training

Both DLP Bríd Chambers and Deputy DLP Bríd McAuley attend all approved training sessions to keep themselves informed as to current best practice.

Staff attend training on Stay Safe and Walk Tall programmes when available.

### Confidentiality

All information regarding concerns of possible child abuse will be shared on a need-to-know basis in the interests of the child. The criterion 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 information for the protection of a child who may have been abused is not a breach of confidentiality.

### Protection for Persons Reporting Child Abuse

School personnel are aware of the main provisions of 'Protection for Persons Reporting Child Abuse Act, 1998'.

### Allegations or Suspicions re. School Employees

The most important consideration for the Chairperson, Board of Management, or the DLP is the safety and protection of the pupil. 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 HSE. The Chairperson of the Board of Management has responsibility, acting in consultation with his/her board, for addressing the employment issues.

If the allegation is against the DLP, the Deputy DLP 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 immediately act in accordance with the agreed procedures. 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.

The Chairperson and DLP should make the employee aware privately

- a) an allegation has been made against him/her
- b) the nature of the allegation
- c) whether or not the HSE or Gardaí has 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 on to the Gardaí, HSE, and legal advisors.

The priority in all cases is that no child be exposed to unnecessary risk. Therefore, as a matter of urgency, the Chairman 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 warrants 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 HSE, 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 HSE and the legal advisors to the Board of Management, and regard be given to this advice.



### Administrative Leave

Should the Board of Management direct that the employee absent him/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.

### Contacts

Castlebar Social Work Team                      094 9022283

Westport Garda Station                              098 25555

### Freedom of Information Act 1997

Reports made to HSE 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 (e.g. schools) may refuse access to information obtained by them in confidence.