

LITTLE FLOWER NATIONAL SCHOOL, BALLYTARSNA, CASHEL.

CHILD PROTECTION POLICY

ADOPTED BY BOARD OF MANAGEMENT:

1.0 **Introduction**

1.1 All pupils in the school have a right to be educated in a secure and safe environment. The Board of Management of the school embraces this right and is dedicated to promoting and ensuring the protection of children and young people. This Child Protection Policy has been developed for the school, based upon the following guidelines and legislation:

- Updated Children First guidelines – Department of Health and Youth Affairs 2010
- Child Protection for Primary Schools – Department of Education and Science 2010
- The Education Act 1998
- The Childcare Act 1991
- Domestic Violence Act 1996
- The Non-Fatal Offences Against the Persons Act 1997
- Protection for Persons Reporting Abuse Act 1998
- Welfare Acts 2000-2003
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2.0 **Principles of good practice**

2.1 The school strives to:

- Acknowledge the rights of children to be protected, treated with respect, listened to and have their own views taken into consideration;
- Recognise that the welfare of children must always come first, regardless of all other considerations;
- Develop a child protection policy that raises awareness about the possibility of child abuse occurring and outlines the steps to be taken if it is suspected;
- Adopt the safest possible practices to minimise the possibility of harm or accidents happening to children and protect workers from the necessity to take risks and leave themselves open to accusations of abuse or neglect;

- Adopt and consistently apply clearly defined methods of recruiting staff and volunteers
- Develop procedures for responding to accidents and complaints
- Remember that early intervention with children who are vulnerable or at risk may prevent serious harm from happening to them at a later stage
- Remember that a child's age, gender and background affect the way they experience and understand what is happening to them
- Provide child protection training for workers. This should clarify the responsibilities of both the school and individuals, and clearly show the procedures to be followed if child abuse is suspected
- Develop a policy of openness with parents/guardians that involves consulting them about everything that concerns their children, and encouraging them to get involved with the organisation wherever possible
- Co-operate with any other child care and protection agencies and professionals by sharing information when necessary and working together towards the best possible outcome for the children concerned;
- Make links with other relevant organisations in order to promote child protection and welfare policies and practices

3.0 **Background**

3.1 Definitions

3.2 Child Abuse

Child abuse may be suspected, witnessed or disclosed. It is complicated and can take different forms, but it usually consists of one or more of the following:

3.3 Neglect

Neglect is 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

3.4 Emotional Abuse

Emotional abuse is normally to be found in the relationship between an adult and a child rather than in a specific event or pattern of events. It occurs when a child's need for affection, approval, consistency and security is not met.

3.5 Physical Abuse

Physical Abuse is any form of non-accidental injury or injury which results from wilful or neglectful failure to protect a child.

3.6 Sexual Abuse

Sexual Abuse is when a child is used by another person for his or her gratification of sexual arousal, or that of others. It also includes the grooming of children for the purpose of sexual abuse.

3.7 Worker

For the purposes of this policy, a worker is anyone who is engaged in work or voluntary activity in the school Premises or for the school. It includes the Principal, teachers, SNAs, Cleaners. It also includes all adults and work experience students who are involved in providing voluntary services, such as coaching and supervision, through the school.

3.8 Child

The terms child and children are used throughout this policy. These terms are defined in the Child Care Act 1991 and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child as a person under aged 18 years of age. For the purpose of this policy child or children is defined as any person who is being educated in the school.

4.0 **Protecting and Promoting Children's Rights**

4.1 The school believes that protecting and promoting children's rights means:

- Creating an environment in which children are valued, encouraged and affirmed, have their rights respected and are treated as individuals.
- Taking steps to ensure that children know their rights and responsibilities.
- Accepting that the welfare of the child is the most important consideration of any organisation providing services to children.
- Eliminating as far as possible any threatening, violent or degrading behaviour.
- Adopting a child protection policy to keep children as safe as possible.

5.0 **Roles and Responsibilities**

5.1 For the purposes of the implementation and maintenance of this policy, the following roles and responsibilities have been defined

5.2 **Board of Management**

As the employer of the staff of the school, the Board of Management through the Chairperson will be responsible for all employment-related issues.

5.3 **Designated Liaison Person**

Mrs Siobhan McGrath Byrne, Principal of the school will be the Designated Liaison Person

The general responsibilities of the Designated Liaison Person will include:

- Being responsible for the implementation and maintenance of this policy and will ensure that the policy is reviewed annually, and revised as appropriate
- Acting as a resource for any person involved in the School (worker, child, parent or guardian) who has concerns about any aspect of child protection;
- Acting as a liaison person with the statutory agencies responsible for child issues;

The specific responsibilities of the Designated Person, in relation to dealing with child protection concerns and complaints, are covered in Section 5 of this Document.

5.4 **Deputy Liaison Person**

Mrs Julianne Ryan, Vice Principal, will act as the Deputy Designated Person.

The responsibilities of the Deputy Liaison Person will include:

- Supporting the Designated Liaison Person in the implementation and maintenance of this policy;
- Dealing with child protection issues in the absence of the Designated Liaison Person.

6.0 **Policy Statement**

6.1 We in the school value and encourage the participation of children and young people in all school activities that enhance their educational, spiritual, physical, emotional and social development. We recognise the dignity and rights of all children and are committed to ensuring their protection and support.

6.2 In keeping with this, we will do all in our power to create safe environments for children and young people, in order to ensure their protection and to enable their full participation in the life of the school.

6.3 It is the policy of the school to continually monitor any behavioural changes in children as these can be indicators of abuse.

7.0 **Ensuring Effective Child Protection**

7.1 The following management principles and practices have been adopted to help ensure effective child protection in the school

7.2 **Record Keeping**

7.3 Written records of the following will be kept:

7.4 Children

- Student records, including medical information;
- Signed copies of codes of behaviour and discipline;
- Contact details for parents and guardians;

7.5 Workers

- Staff records for all members of staff, including proof of identity, a Declaration Form, references and certification of clearance by the Garda Síochána; in the case of new personnel to school

7.6 Activities and Events

- Records of organisers and supervisors of activities and events;
- A Parental Consent Form will be completed and signed by a parent or guardian of each child involved in activities and events as required;

7.7 Incidents

- An Incident Report form will be completed and signed by a worker, in the event of any incident relating to a child;

7.8 Child Protection Concerns and Complaints

- Detailed records will be maintained and secured in relation to all concerns and complaints regarding child protection.

8.0 **Recruitment**

8.1 The following recruitment principles will apply:

- Job descriptions will be maintained for all roles, including voluntary roles. These will identify minimum levels of qualification and skills, along with desirable personal qualities;
- Application forms will be used for recruitment;
- Applications will include the following, which will be retained on file in the school:
 - Proof of identity (e.g. a copy of a long birth certificate, driving licence or passport)
 - A signed Declaration Form (See Appendix 1)
 - A written reference from two referees who can attest to the suitability of the applicant for working with children and young people (See Appendix 2)
- Information on application forms will be verified and cross-checked, as appropriate

9.0 **Responsibilities of workers**

9.1 Individual workers in the school have a responsibility to protect and promote children's rights by:

- Treating them with dignity, sensitivity and respect
- Making time to listen, talk to and get to know the children
- Making sure that children know the organisation's rules about behaviour
- Encouraging children to have an input into how things are run
- Helping children to be safe, happy and having as much fun as possible
- Never favouring one child or children over others
- Enabling children to regard their bodies as their own property
- Encouraging them to express feelings, fears and experiences openly

- Giving written information about the school to children and their parents/carers
- Knowing about the principles and practices of child protection including their legal duties
- Never engaging in sexually provocative games or make suggestive comments, even in fun
- Respecting children's privacy in bathrooms or changing rooms
- Sensitively ensuring that children know about the child protection policy
- Always responding to complaints or allegations
- Helping children realise the difference between confidentiality and secrecy
- Being sensitive to the fact that some children are more vulnerable and have special needs
- Never using physical punishment with children

10.0 **Supervision**

10.1 All workers will ensure children will be appropriately supervised to ensure that the principles of this policy are applied properly and consistently. Appropriate supervision will also help to ensure that issues of concern are dealt with promptly, as they arise.

10.2 **Supervision of Children**

10.3 The school recognises the need to provide appropriate supervision of children when they are under its care. As such, the following principles will apply:

- An appropriate ratio will be maintained between the number of workers and the number of children who are under their supervision. These ratios will be governed by the following:
 - The nature of the activity or event;
 - The age and experience of the children being supervised;
 - The role and experience of the worker(s);
 - Particular requirements of the Designated Liaison Person;

11.0 **Codes of Behaviour**

11.1 In line with the school Policy Statement (See Section 3) codes of behaviour and discipline for all involved in the school community have been formulated. The respective codes ensure that a policy is in place that reflects the values and educational philosophy for the school. Also, by having written codes in place, the school is adhering to the requirements set by the Department of Education and Skills.

11.2 Clear objectives are included in the codes which will ensure that:

- Teaching and learning can take place without disruption;
- Parents/Guardians and pupils are aware of the standards of behaviour to be observed by each pupil attending the school;
- All staff will have guidelines of what is expected, and what is not accepted, with respect to their behaviour;
- The school will have regard for any medical or other reason which may affect a pupil's behaviour.

11.3 Code of Behaviour for Workers (See Appendix 3)

11.4 Every worker who is associated with the school will be required to read, understand and sign a copy of the *Code of Behaviour for Workers*, a copy of which will be retained on file.

11.5 **Code of Behaviour for Children**

11.6 Students of the school are expected to be kind, courteous, trustworthy and respectful to each other, to all members of staff and to the wider School community, and to all those with whom they come into contact with.

11.7 Every student's parent/guardian of the school will be given a copy of the code of Behaviour and will have sign an undertaking that they will adhere to the policy. This will be retained on file in the school. All workers will be expected to be fully conversant with this code and its application.

12.0 **School Activities and Outings**

12.1 **Information for Parents**

12.2 Appropriate information will be provided to parents and guardians in advance of The school activities and events.

12.3 Parental Consent

12.4 A signed parental/guardian consent form must be submitted to the school for each child involved in activities.

12.5 Supervision

Appropriate supervision will be provided for children who are under the care of the school while they are involved in school activities or events

12.6 Health and Safety

The school wishes to ensure the health and safety of children who are under its care while participating in school activities and events

The following principles will apply:

- Contact details will be maintained for parents and guardians. These will be available to supervising staff, as appropriate;
- Contact details of supervising staff will be made available to parents and guardians, as appropriate;

13.0 Insurance

13.1 The school will ensure that appropriate insurance is maintained to cover children while engaged in school events and activities.

This will include the following:

- Employer's liability insurance;
- Public liability insurance;

14.0 Related Policies

14.1 This document should be read in conjunction with the following School Policies:

- The Anti-Bullying Policy
- Safety Statement
- Code of Behaviour
- Classroom Rules

15.0 **Dealing with Child Protection Concerns and Complaints**

15.1 **Principles**

The following principles will apply in relation to child protection concerns and complaints :

15.2 **Duty to Report Child Abuse**

A worker who knows or suspects that a child has been abused, or is at risk of being abused, has a duty to convey this concern to the Designated Liaison Person.

15.3 **Confidentiality**

Information regarding concerns of possible child abuse will only be shared on a need-to-know basis, in the interests of the child. Giving information to those who need to have that information, for the protection of a child who may have been abused, is not a breach of confidentiality.

15.4 **Protection for Persons Reporting Child Abuse**

Protection for Persons Reporting Child Abuse Act 1998 provides legal protection for those who report alleged child abuse, provided that they do so 'reasonably and in good faith'. Those reporting a child's disclosure are not regarded as making an allegation, but simply carrying out their duty in good faith. They are not accusing or bringing a charge.

15.5 **Responsibilities**

15.6 **Responsibilities of the Designated Liaison Person**

The responsibilities of the Designated Liaison Person, in relation to dealing with child protection concerns and complaints, are as follows:

To receive concerns and complaints regarding child abuse;

- To refrain from investigating any concern or complaint regarding child protection;
- To report concerns and complaints to statutory authorities, as per the official guidelines:
 - Our Duty to Care (Updated) – The Principles of Good Practice for the Protection of Children and Young People [Department of Health & Children, 2010]

- Child Protection –Guidelines and Procedures [Department of Education & Science 2001]

- To maintain ongoing contact with statutory authorities;
- To ensure that a complete written record is kept in relation to all concerns and complaints, including subsequent action taken, all communication with statutory authorities and the outcome of the referral;
- To inform parents or guardians that a report has been made, unless doing so places the child at further risk. A decision not to inform parents or guardians should be briefly recorded, together with the reason for not doing so.

15.7 Responsibilities of Workers/Staff

The responsibilities of workers, in response to a disclosure by a child of an alleged incidence of child abuse, are as follows:

- To advise the child that the matter will be handled sensitively and professionally and that other adults may be informed to ensure that the child's welfare is protected;
- To refrain from investigating the matter;
- To record all the information whether observed or reported;
- To report the disclosure to the Designated Liaison Person

15.8 Responsibilities of the school

15.9 The school recognises that it has two duties of care. The primary duty is the protection, safety and welfare of the children attending. The school as an employer, also has duties and responsibilities towards its employees.

- As an employer, The school will seek legal advice if an allegation is made against a school employee;
- The school will adhere to the protocol outlined in Section 7 'Our Duty to Care – The principles of good practice for the protection of children and young people 2010 - Action to be taken when an allegation is made against a worker within the organisation, to authorise any actions required to protect the children in its care.
- The school notes that school employees may be subject to erroneous or malicious allegations. Any allegation should be dealt with sensitively. The employee should be

treated fairly which includes the right not to be judged in advance of a full and fair enquiry. The school accepts that the principles of natural justice and fair procedures must be adhered to.

16.0 **Procedures for dealing with employees and employer's duty of care to children:**

16.1 When an allegation is made against an employee of the school, the following steps will be taken:

- The agreed procedures, the applicable employment contract and the rules of natural justice will be followed
- The Chairperson of the Board of Management will be informed as soon as possible
- The first priority will be to ensure that no child is exposed to unnecessary risk. The school will as a matter of urgency, take any necessary protective measures. If the Board of Management feel that the employee should absent themselves from the school, such absence would be regarded as administrative leave of absence with pay and would not imply any degree of guilt. The DES will be informed immediately.

17.0 **Policy Review and Evaluation**

17.1 This policy will be reviewed annually and changes made in the light of changing circumstances, legislation and time.

CHILD PROTECTION STRATEGY STATEMENT

If there is a suspicion of abuse:

- Do not place pressure on the child to disclose. The child should be kept in a calm and secure environment which will create a sense of normality.
- Write down any of your suspicions and facts and report them to the Designated Liaison Person. It is of the utmost importance that this is done in a confidential manner and that you do not chat about this with other members of staff, friends or family.
- One should understand that they only report what they see and they are not the judge and jury. Everyone is entitled to the principle of natural justice that you are innocent until you are proven guilty.
- Do not be scared to report any suspicion of abuse. Under the "Protection for Persons Reporting Child Abuse Act 1998" it provides 'immunity from civil liability to person who report child abuse reasonably and in good faith'.

SHORT TERM ACTIONS

- A sense of normality for the child should exist. Routine is of paramount importance. Observations should then be carried out during a stress free day.
- Further visual and written observations should be carried out in the short term.
- The Designated Liaison Person should then be reported to in both verbal and written form. It is important to note that as the first person who becomes aware of suspected abuse, that person is not responsible for deciding whether or not abuse has occurred. This is up to the HSE and the Gardaí.
- It is then up to the Designated Liaison person to assess the situation and to ascertain where there are reasonable grounds to involve the HSE and/or the Gardaí. Always remember that there are a wide range of possibilities that can result in behavioural change.
- Confidentiality should be maintained at all times.

MEDIUM TERM ACTIONS

- If there are suspicions of abuse, then the child should continue to be monitored and written reports of all observations should be made daily.
- With the supplemental information the Designated Liaison Person may then make a written report to the HSE. This can be sent to the Childcare Manager or the Social Worker on duty.
- If it is appropriate, the Social Worker may wish to speak to the first person who reported the concerns.
- It is then up to the HSE to investigate the case with the Garda Síochána. The school may be contacted but it will be the Designated Liaison person who usually would liaise with the HSE and Gardaí.

LONG TERM ACTIONS

- Continued reporting of all observations on behaviour and participation in school activities. These reports should be given to the school principal.
- It is up to the Designated Liaison Person to decide if the first person who reported the alleged abuse is kept up to date of the situation. This will usually only be done to implement changes in the child's needs.
- It is the designated person who will continue to liaise with the HSE and Gardaí until the situation is satisfactorily resolved.
- All staff should be fully trained and updated of all child protection needs.
- All staff should ensure that the school's policy on Child Protection be maintained at all times.

- It is not recommended that workers transport children in their car by themselves. Best practice is to have at least one other staff present.
- Carry identification when on journeys or trips with children or young people.
- Do not encourage visits to, or conduct meetings in private homes or quarters. When the need for a visit to the home of a child or young person arises, professional boundaries must be observed at all times.