



**St Mary's NS**

**Child Protection Policy**

**March 2024**

# **Child Protection Policy**

## **St Mary's National School**

### **Introductory Statement**

St Mary's National School is a Roman Catholic School with a Catholic Ethos under the patronage of the Bishop of Limerick. St Mary's National School 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 while in the school. The Board of Management recognises that child protection and welfare considerations permeates all aspects of school life and must be reflected in all of the school's policies, practices and activities. Accordingly, 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 Mary's National School has agreed the following child protection policy.

### **Rationale**

The Board of Management of St Mary's National School has adopted and will implement fully and without modification Children First: National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children (Department of Children and Youth Affairs 2011) as part of this overall child protection policy.

### **Ethos and Characteristic Spirit of the School.**

This statement reflects the overall ethos of St Mary's National School which promotes excellence in teaching and learning. It seeks to foster the intellectual, spiritual, personal and professional development of parents, pupils and all staff within a supportive and challenging environment. In particular, St Mary's National School seeks to foster in its students a spirit of justice, compassion and acceptance together with openness to the religious tradition and values of each individual. It 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 of this Statement**

1. To promote the welfare of all the pupils in our care.
2. To raise awareness of child abuse namely, emotional, physical, sexual abuse and neglect, among all members of our school community including Board of Management, staff, pupils and parents.
3. To put in place clear procedures for all school personnel dealing with suspicions and allegations of child abuse.
4. To identify curricular content and resources that contribute to the prevention of child abuse and to enable children to properly deal with abuse if it occurs.

## **BACKGROUND**

### **Child Abuse: Towards a Definition**

St Mary's National School has adopted the definition of child abuse as described in the 'Children First Guidelines'.

The 'Children First Guidelines', defines child abuse by using 4 categories: neglect, emotional abuse, physical abuse and sexual abuse. It should be noted that a child may be subject to more than one form of abuse at any given time.

### **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, medical care or attachment to and affection from adults. The threshold of

Significant harm is reached when the child's needs are neglected to the extent that their well-being and/or development are severely affected.

### **Emotional Abuse**

Emotional abuse is normally found in the relationship between a care-giver (an adult person who has responsibility for a child in the short or long term) and a child rather than in a specific event or pattern of events. It occurs when a child's needs for affection, approval, consistency and security are not met. It is rarely manifested in terms of physical symptoms. Children show signs of emotional abuse by their behaviour (for example excessive clinginess to or avoidance of the parent or carer), their emotional state (low self-esteem, unhappiness) or their development.

The threshold of significant harm is reached when abusive interactions dominate and become typical of the relationship between the child and parent or carer.

### **Physical Abuse**

Physical abuse is any form of non-accidental injury or any injury that results from wilful or neglectful failure to protect a child. Examples of physical injury include:

- shaking,
- use of excessive force in handling,
- deliberate poisoning,
- suffocation,
- Munchausen's Syndrome by proxy (where parents make up stories of illness about their child or cause physical signs of illness), or
- allowing or creating a substantial risk of significant harm to a child.

### **Sexual Abuse**

Sexual abuse occurs when a child is used by another person for their gratification or sexual arousal, or for that of others. Examples of sexual abuse include:

- exposing sexual organs or intentionally performing any sexual act in the presence of a child,
- intentional touching or molesting the body of a child, by a person or object, for the purpose of sexual arousal or gratification,
- masturbating in the presence of a child or involving the child in the act of masturbation,
- engaging in sexual intercourse with the child, whether oral, vaginal or anal,
- sexually exploiting a child, or
- consensual sexual activity between an adult and a child under 17 years.

(In relation to child sexual abuse, it should be noted that, for the purposes of criminal law, the age of consent to sexual intercourse is 17 years).

### **Aggressive/Bullying/Sexualised Behaviour:**

While bullying is not a category in itself, it is important to be aware of it in relation to child abuse. Bullying can be defined as repeated verbal, psychological or physical aggression that is conducted

by an individual or group against others. It includes behaviour such as teasing, taunting, threatening and hitting.

- In **St Mary's National School** peer to peer bullying as described above will be dealt with in accordance with the school's Code of Behaviour.
- Bullying behaviour that is perpetrated by an adult against a child will be dealt with under the provisions of this policy.

Sexualised behaviour displayed by an individual child, or occurring between children is inappropriate. Should such behaviour occur, the school:

- Will arrange meetings (separate meetings if there are children from more than one family implicated) with the parent(s)/guardian(s) of the child/children involved.
- May, if deemed appropriate, seek advice from the HSE.

In a situation where child abuse is alleged to have been carried out by another child, the child protection procedures will be adhered to for both the victim and the alleged abuser; that is, the matter will be considered a child care and protection issue for both children.

### **Designated Liaison Person (DLP)**

- The Board of Management has appointed the principal Mr. Eoghan O'Byrne, as the Designated Liaison Person (DLP) to have specific responsibility for child protection.
- Ms. Marian Kennedy will act as Deputy DLP to take the place of the DLP if he is unavailable for whatever reason.
- The DLP will continue to act as such until such time as he is replaced by the BOM for whatever reason.

### **Roles and Responsibilities**

- The Board of Management has primary responsibility for the care and welfare of the 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 every 2 years or when guidelines are changed.

Specifically, they will:

- Appoint a DLP and deputy DLP.
- Have clear procedures for dealing with allegations or suspicions of child abuse.
- Monitor the progress of children at risk.
- 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'/principal's/HSCCL's attendance at child protection meetings/case conferences and to advise same before attending such meetings/conferences.

**Procedures for Board of Management in cases of allegations or suspicions of child abuse by a school employee.**

**A. Reporting**

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

- The DLP will immediately inform the chairperson.
- S/He will seek a written statement of the allegation from the person/ agency making the allegation. Parents/ Guardians may make a statement on behalf of the child.
- The DLP will seek advice from the HSE/Tusla and will take responsibility for reporting, based on this advice.
- If the DLP, following consultation with the HSE/Tusla, decides that this matter is not for reporting, s/he must inform the Chairperson. They must then in turn 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/Tusla or the 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 s/he should inform the Chairperson, who should proceed in accordance with the procedures in the Children First Guidelines.
- 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/Tusla. (Refer 4.2-4.3, page 16 of Child Protection Guidelines and Procedures, DES 2001 the Chairperson has a duty to afford the employed 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 of Management within a week).

**B. 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 contact the HSE/Tusla/Gardaí.
- If administrative leave has been invoked, the Chairperson will inform the DES. The HSE/Tusla (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/Tusla) the Chairperson will convene and inform a meeting of the BOM as soon as possible.
- Where the alleged abuse has taken place within 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 the 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 must 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 the advice of authorities. The Chairperson will maintain close contact with the HSE/Tusla and receive reports and records from them where appropriate.

### **Role of the Designated Liaison Person (DLP)**

- The DLP acts as a liaison with outside agencies, HSE, Tusla, 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' National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children in the school. She will photocopy/circulate to all staff Chapters 2 & 3 and Appendix 1 of the Children First guidance 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/Tusla
- The DLP will report suspicions and allegations of child abuse to the HSE/Tusla 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 has 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/DDLP should make informal contact with the assigned (on duty) social worker. The DLP/DDLP in this case should be explicit that she/he is 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/DDLP in person, In the event of an emergency or the unavailability of HSE staff, the report should be made to the Gardaí. The DLP/DDLP should also report the matter to the Chairperson of the BOM. A standard reporting form is completed by the DLP/DDLP as comprehensively as possible ( See Appendix 1 Child Protection Guidelines and Procedure 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.

### **Role of Staff Members including ancillary staff:**

Staff are provided with copies of the following guidelines and it is the responsibility of all staff to familiarise themselves with the guidelines.

- Children First National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children, 2011 especially
  - Chapter 2 Definition & Recognition of Child Abuse
  - Chapter 3 Basis for Reporting & Standard Reporting Procedures
  - Appendix 1 Signs and Symptoms of Child Abuse
- Child Protection Guidelines and Procedures, DES, 2001.

### **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. The member of staff will need to reassure the child, and retain the child's trust while explaining the need for action and the possible consequences, which will involve other adults being informed. This should not be a formal interview. The welfare of the child is regarded as the first and paramount consideration.

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 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.

### **Guidelines for Staff re Child Protection Meetings/ Case conferences:**

- If a request is made by the HSE/Tusla for a member of staff or a school employee to attend, the DLP should consult with the Chairperson of the BOM. The Chairperson may seek clarification through the DLP as to why the attendance is necessary.
- The school employee will be advised if parents/ guardians/ children are going to be present. Advice may be sought from the chairperson for the meeting.
- A report may be completed for the meeting/ conference (see Appendix 3 DES guidelines).
- The school employee may keep the child's behaviour under closer observation, if requested to do so.
- 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 inquiry or investigation following on from their report.
- Teachers attending a child protection meeting/ case conference should familiarise themselves with the protocol outlined on pgs 33-37 Children First.

### **Policies and Practices that support this policy:**

#### **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. Accidents will be noted on an Accident Report Form (see Appendix) and will be addressed under our Accident policy as part of Health and Safety.

#### **Attendance**

Our school attendance will be monitored as per our Attendance policy. With regards to child protection we will pay particular attention to trends in non-attendance. We will also monitor non-attendance in correlation with signs of neglect/physical/emotional abuse.

#### **Behaviour**

Children are encouraged at all times to play co-operatively and 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 with specific toileting/intimate care needs**

In all situations where a pupil needs assistance with toileting/intimate care, a meeting will be convened before the child starts school, between parents/guardians, class teacher, SNA and principal. The purpose of this meeting will be to ascertain the specific needs of the child and to determine how and if the school can meet those needs. A written record of what is agreed will be kept. Two members of staff will be present when dealing with intimate care/toileting needs.

### **Children travelling in staff cars**

Members of the school staff will not carry children alone in their cars at any time. If it is deemed necessary that a child has to travel with a member of staff: 1. Another adult will travel in the car also or 2. Other children will accompany the child in question.

### **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. If teachers have to communicate with pupils on a one-to-one basis, they may do so in the corridor and are requested to leave the classroom door open, or alternatively use the principal's office by arrangement.

### **Induction of Staff**

The DLP will be responsible for informing all new teachers and ancillary staff of the Child Protection Guidance and Procedures, DES, 2011 and Children First Guidelines. A copy of the Child Protection Guidance and Procedures is displayed in the staffroom. All new teachers are expected to teach the designated SPHE objectives for their class. The Principal (or Designated Post Holder) 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, IY, Friends for Life and SPHE. All new parents are given a copy of the school's enrolment policy, which outlines the procedures parents and pupils 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.

### **Physical Contact**

Physical contact between school personnel and a child should always be in response to the needs of the child. Adults should avoid doing anything of a personal nature for a child that he/she could do for themselves. While physical contact may be used to comfort, reassure or assist a child, the following should be factors in determining its appropriateness:

- (a) it is acceptable to the child
- (b) it is open and not secretive
- (c) the age and developmental stage of the child.

### **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. 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 securely kept. Further details on record keeping are found in the school's Record Keeping / Data Protection policy.

### **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. See Supervision policy for agreed rules around break-times, procedures around teacher absences.

### **Swimming**

Children will walk to the swimming pool. All adults will act in 'loco parentis' and as such will act as prudent parents in overseeing that children return to school as dry as possible. Parent helpers (if necessary) will be briefed on our swimming procedures.

### **Toileting Accidents**

Clean underwear and suitable clothing will be kept in the school, so that if a pupil has an accident of this nature, he/she will be offered fresh clothing into which he/she can change. If this cannot happen for whatever reason, the parents/guardians will be contacted to come to the school to change the child or if necessary take the child home.

## Visibility

Teachers will ensure that children are visible in the school playground. Children will not be allowed to spend time in classrooms, toilets or in any area where they would not be under adult supervision. They are not to leave the school playground or to engage with adults who are outside of the school playground.

Each classroom and resource teaching room door contains a glass panel for visibility and should not be obscured. Resource and learning support teachers, who by nature of the programmes to be implemented with children are required to work with children individually, do so in shared rooms, that have glass panels in the doors and can also leave the door ajar if they wish.

## Visitors

All visitors are requested to report to reception initially and signs to that effect are on display. The playground areas are secure, self-contained areas. It would not be expected that any visitors would have need to visit these areas during playtime. If however, someone approaches the play areas, they will be readily visible to teachers on playground duty who can then interview them at the gates to ascertain their intentions.

Visitors/guest speakers in classrooms will not 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 they use/deliver is appropriate.

## Curricular Implications

In St Mary's National 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/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 are detailed in our SPHE Plan and 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 we 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 SPHE programme would be supported, using the Walk Tall resources, our Grow in Love programme, Stay Safe resources and Incredible Years.

### **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
- Assessment of these procedures by participants following a child protection case
- Feedback from all staff

### **Timeframe for Review**

At the first staff meeting of every year the DLP will remind all teachers of the guidelines and copies of Chapters 2&3 “Children First” will be given to those who require them. A review will be conducted based on the criteria above, following any and all incidents when the guidelines are used. The policy will also be reviewed by the Board of Management once in every school year. At each Board of Management meeting the Principal will report the number if any of Child Protection Reports submitted to HSE/Tusla/Gardaí.

**St Marys National School** will undertake an annual review of its Child Protection Policy and its implementation by the school. A risk assessment, to be used in undertaking the review (included at **Appendix 1**). The school will address any areas for improvement which might be identified in the annual review. The Board of Management shall make arrangements to inform school personnel that the review has been undertaken. Written notification that the review has been undertaken shall be provided to the Parent Association. A record of the review and its outcome shall be made available, if requested, to the patron and the DES.


### **Responsibility for Review**

- DLP
- All staff
- Board of Management

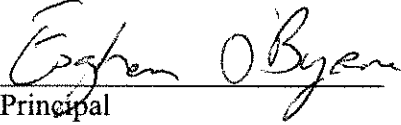
### **Ratification and Communication**

This policy has been made available to school personnel and Parents’ Association and is readily accessible to parents on request. A copy of this policy will be made available to the Department and the Patron if requested. This policy is on display and available at the main entrance and in each classroom throughout the school. The Children First Guidance is available to view and print on the websites of the HSE ([www.hse.ie](http://www.hse.ie)) and the Department of Children and Youth Affairs ([www.dcy.gov.ie](http://www.dcy.gov.ie))

Signed:

  
Chairperson of Board of Management

Signed:

  
Principal

Date:

20<sup>th</sup> March 2024