



*St. Helen's S.N.S.  
Portmarnock*



# **Child Protection Policy**

Reviewed by Board of Management  
**2015**

## **St Helen's Senior National School Child Protection Policy**

This document has been drawn up by the staff of the school as a response to recent changes in legislation

We as a school community have adopted the Department of Education and Science Guidelines and Procedures for schools in relation to Child Protection and Welfare. This policy is an outline of how our school proposes to implement these guidelines in order to ensure the protection and welfare of all children attending St. Helen's.

In St. Helen's school, we seek to help the children 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 that their concerns will be acted on.

### **Aims**

1. To raise awareness of child abuse among all school staff (including teachers, special needs assistants, secretaries, caretaker etc.)
2. To put in place clear procedures for all school personnel dealing with suspicions and allegations of child abuse.
3. To identify other policy areas which need to be amended in light of the Child Protection Guidelines.
4. To identify curricular content and resources which contribute to the prevention of child abuse and to enable children deal correctly with abuse if it occurs.

### **Guidelines**

#### **Appointment of a Designated Liaison Person (DLP)**

The BOM has appointed the Principal (Ms. M. O'Leary) as DLP with specific responsibility for child protection. The BOM has also appointed the Deputy Principal Ms Berna Furlong, as deputy DLP should circumstances warrant it. Each new BOM will be informed as it takes office and this opportunity will be taken to review the appointments of DLP and deputy DLP.

#### **Roles and Responsibilities:**

The Board of Management has primary responsibility for the care and welfare of their pupils.

The DLP has specific responsibility for child protection in the school.

All staff have a duty of care to ensure that arrangements are in place to protect children from harm.

### **Specifically the BOM 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
- 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 Board or Gardaí.
- Decide on teachers attendance at child protection meetings/case conferences and advise teachers before attending such meetings/conferences.

### **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.
- The chairperson 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 Health Board and will take responsibility for reporting, based on this advice.
- If the DLP, following consultation with the Health Board, 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 Health Board 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 Health Board, 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 (Appendix 2)
- The DLP/Deputy DLP completes a standard reporting form (Appendix 1) as comprehensively as is possible.
- When the Chairperson becomes aware of an allegation of abuse he/she will always seek legal advice and base his/her response on this advice.
- The chairperson 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 Health Board. (Appendix 2)
- The chairperson has a duty to afford the employee fairness and due process – the employee 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 he/she will always seek legal advice and base 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 – he/she may require the employee to take immediate administrative leave. If the chairperson is unsure he/she will consult with the Health Board/Gardaí.
- If administrative leave has been invoked, the chairperson will inform the DES. The Health Board (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 Health Board) 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
  1. the allegations made and their source,
  2. the advice given by relevant authorities
  3. the written responses of the employee.

## Also at this meeting

1. 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
  2. parents/guardians may act on behalf of child.
  3. the employee should also be afforded an opportunity to present their 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 Health Board and receive reports and records from them where appropriate.

## **Role of the Staff Member (to include Teachers, SNA's, Caretaker, Secretary etc)**

It is the responsibility of all teachers and staff members to familiarise themselves with the 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? Also -
  - 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.

### **Suspicious 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, Health Boards, Gardaí and other parties with child protection concerns
- The DLP will inform all school personnel of the availability of the Children First Guidelines and Child Protection Guidelines in the school.
- The DLP will be available to staff for consultation regarding suspicions or disclosures of abuse. Records of these consultations will be kept.
- The DLP will seek advice from the Health Board.
- The DLP will report suspicions and allegations of child abuse to the Health Board or/ and 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 Health Board, 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 he/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 Health Board by the DLP/Deputy in person, by telephone or in writing. In the event of an emergency or non-availability of Health Board 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 (Appendix 1).
- 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 Health Board 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 Health Board through the DLP who should consult with the Chairperson of the BOM 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. (Appendix 3).
- 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 Health Board 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 National Guidelines for the Protection and Welfare of Children (1999)

### **Organisational Implications**

School procedures already in place and new procedures being put in place will be examined with reference to the Children First Guidelines and any Child Protection issues that may arise will be addressed.

### **Supervision**

School supervision policy will be followed by all staff to ensure that there is comprehensive supervision of children at all breaks and after school activities organised by the staff.

Children are at all times visible in the school yard and they are forbidden to leave the school yard without permission.

Teachers on yard duty will be aware of visitors entering the schoolyard and will ascertain their intentions. They will be supervised in the discharge of their business.

### **Behaviour**

Children are to be 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.

### **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. These will be recorded in our Incident Book and the appropriate action taken.

### **Record Keeping**

Teachers will keep each child's file updated with results of assessments carried out, copies of report cards and details of meetings as necessary. These records are kept in the principal's office. Special Education Teachers will keep their records in locked filing cabinets in their own rooms. Roll books will be updated daily. Sensitive information regarding children will be shared on a need-to-know basis.

### **Curriculum Implications**

St. Helen's promotes a positive school climate which is open, inclusive, respectful, fair, democratic and tolerant and which seeks to support the holistic development of all children. The strategies we will use to create this environment are detailed in our SPHE Plan and 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.



### **3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> classes**

Our SPHE programme will be implemented according to the 10 strand units. Knowledge, skills and attitudes developed in previous classes will be built on. Children will be enabled to develop intra-personal skills and inter-personal skills. As children mature they will be challenged to develop their decision-making skills. They will be encouraged to develop self-protection skills pertaining to smoking and alcohol. Peer pressure and the influence of the media will also be examined. The development of self-esteem, esteem for others, assertiveness, awareness of feelings, and skills around self-protection and disclosure will underpin our teaching.

### **5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> classes**

Our SPHE programme will again be implemented according to the curricular objectives as laid out under the 10 strands in the SPHE Revised Primary Curriculum. Skills, knowledge and attitudes developed in earlier classes will be enhanced. Children will continue to develop self-awareness and positive attitudes to themselves, others, their environment and wider world in which they live. Self protection and respect for others will be fostered, decision-making skills developed, peer influence and media bias examined. Knowledge of drugs and positive attitudes to drug use will be further developed. Children will be enabled to develop good group-building skills, anti-bullying awareness and conflict resolution skills. Self-protection will be emphasised as will the protection of younger, less able people. Positive attitudes to sexuality will be developed and respect for self and others fostered.

### **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 Chapter 3 & 4 & Appendix 1 of The Children First Guidelines will be made available.

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