



St Joseph's Primary School Slate Street
Child Protection Policy

Introduction

We at St Joseph's Primary School fully recognise the contribution we can make to protect children and support pupils in our school. The aim of the policy is to safeguard and promote our pupils' welfare, safety and health by fostering an honest, open, caring and supportive climate. We will carry out this duty through our Pastoral Care Policy, which aims to provide a caring, supportive and safe environment, valuing individuals for their unique talents and abilities, in which all our young people can learn and develop to their full potential. One way in which we seek to protect our pupils is by helping them to learn about the risks and possible abuse, helping them to recognise unwelcome behaviour in others and acquire the confidence and skills they need to keep themselves safe.

There are four main elements to our Child Protection Policy:

- Prevention (e.g. positive school atmosphere, teaching and pastoral support to pupils)
- Protection (by following agreed procedures, ensuring staff are trained and supported to respond appropriately and sensitively to Child protection concerns)
- Support (to pupils and school staff and to children who may have been abused)
- Working with parents (to ensure appropriate communications and actions are undertaken)

This policy applies to all staff, governors, volunteers and visitors to the school. We recognise that child protection is the responsibility of all staff within our school. We will ensure that all parents and other working partners are aware of our Child Protection Policy by mentioning it in our school prospectus, displaying appropriate information in our Visitors' Book and by raising awareness at initial meetings with parents of new pupils as well as at the beginning of each school year.

School Commitment The school adopts an open and accepting attitude towards children as part of its responsibility for pastoral care. Our staff hopes that children and parents will feel free to talk about any concerns and will see school as a safe place when there are difficulties. Children's worries and fears will be taken seriously and children are encouraged to seek help from members of staff their concerns will be responded to appropriately.

Our school will therefore:

- Establish and maintain an ethos where children feel secure and are encouraged to talk, and are listened to
- Ensure that children know there are adults in the school whom they can approach if they are worried or are in difficulty
- Include in the curriculum activities and opportunities to equip children with the skills they need to stay safe from abuse
- Ensure every effort is made to establish effective working relationships with parents
- Operate safe recruitment procedures and make sure that all appropriate checks are carried out on new staff and volunteers have been subject to appropriate background checks. Only substitute teachers who are on the Northern Ireland Substitute Register are employed

The purpose of the following procedures on Child Protection is to protect our pupils by ensuring that everyone who works in our school – teachers, non-teaching staff and volunteers – have clear guidance on the action which is required where abuse or neglect of a child is suspected. The child's welfare must always be paramount and this overrides all other considerations

What is Child Abuse? "Child abuse occurs when a child is neglected, harmed or not provided with proper care. Children may be abused in many settings by those known to them, or more rarely, by a stranger. There are many different types of abuse and a child may suffer more than one of them."

There are four categories of Child Abuse

1. Neglect

Neglect is the persistent failure to meet a child's physical, emotional and/or psychological needs, likely to cause significant harm. It may also include non-organic failure to thrive emotionally or educationally.

It may involve a parent or carer:

- Failing to provide adequate food, shelter and clothing
- Failing to protect a child from physical harm or danger
- Failing to ensure access to medical care or treatment
- Failing to provide stimulation or supervision

2. Physical

Physical abuse is the deliberate physical injury to a child, or the wilful or neglectful failure to prevent physical injury or suffering. This may include:

- Hitting
- Shaking
- Throwing
- Poisoning
- Burning or scalding
- Drowning
- Suffocation
- Confinement to a room or bed
- Inappropriately giving drugs to control behaviour

3. Sexual

Actual or likely exploitation of a child. The involvement of children and adolescents in sexual activities which they do not truly comprehend to which they are unable to give informed consent or that violate the social taboos of family roles. Possible signs or symptoms of sexual abuse include:

- Inappropriate sexualised language or behaviour
- Low self-esteem
- Personality Changes
- Fear of going home

4. Emotional

Emotional abuse is the persistent emotional ill treatment of a child such as to cause severe and persistent adverse effects on a child's emotional development. It may involve:

- Conveying to a child that he/she is worthless or unloved, inadequate or valued only insofar as he/she meets the needs of another person;
 - Causing a child to feel frightened or in danger, or the exploitation or corruption of a child
- Domestic violence, adult mental health problems and parental substance misuse may expose a child to emotional harm.

Domestic Violence

Whilst Domestic Violence is not recognised as a distinct category of abuse in itself, it is an area that would warrant direct referral to Social Services in the event of any disclosure being made with regards to this area. (*See Operation Encompass below*)

Bullying

Bullying is a highly distressing and damaging form of abuse and it is not tolerated in our school. All members of staff are vigilant at all times to the possibility of bullying occurring and will take immediate steps to stop it happening, to protect and reassure the victim and to discipline the bully. Parents of both victim and bully will be personally contacted immediately bullying behaviour is identified. Any complaints by a parent that their child is, or may be, being bullied will be fully investigated by the designated teacher for child protection, and team action will be taken to protect the victim. This will usually include ensuring that another child or small group of children befriends and supports the child being bullied during the school day. A register will be kept of official complaints of bullying. A parent making a complaint about bullying will have a personal response from the designated teacher or principal within one week of making the complaint, indicating the investigation, which has been carried out, and the action being taken

Procedures for Dealing with Cases of Suspected or Disclosed Abuse

In line with advice from E.A., the school will ensure that specific procedures are followed in the event of a member of staff becoming concerned about the abuse of a child. Emphasis will be placed on both early detection and swift intervention, but no member of the school's staff will investigate directly and signs of possible abuse will not be considered by the school as proof.

Detection/Disclosure

Members of staff may be informed by a child about abuse or become concerned as a result of observation or disclosure. If any member of staff feels unsure about being able to recognise signs or symptoms of possible child abuse, he/she should talk with the Designated Teacher, Mr J.McCann. In his absence Mrs L.McAllister will assume responsibility.

Referral to Designated Teacher

Staff will act promptly in referring the concern to the Designated Teacher. Together they will discuss the concern and complete a Child Protection Incident Report.

Action Planning

The Designated Teacher meets the Principal (or Chairperson of the Board of Governors in the absence of the Principal) and an appropriate course of action is planned. A written record of decisions should be made.

Action

One or more of the following actions will be effected, as appropriate to the specific concerns:

- The teacher and/or Designated Teacher will talk further with the child in an attempt to reassure him/her and simply to clarify and record what happened (this will not involve detailed investigation or interpretation and no promise of confidentiality will be given)
- The Designated Teacher, in consultation with the Principal, will decide whether, in the best interests of the child, the matter needs to be referred to Social Services. If there are concerns that the child may be at risk of significant harm, the school is obliged to make a referral to Social Services. Unless there are concerns that a parent may be the possible abuser, the parents will be informed immediately.
- The Designated Teacher may seek clarification or advice and consult with the Child Protection Service at the E.A. and CCMS, or a senior social worker before a referral is made. No decisions to refer a child to Social Services will be made without full consideration and on appropriate advice. The safety of the child is our first priority.
- Where there are concerns about possible abuse, the Designated Teacher will inform Child Protection at E.A. and CCMS and Social Services. (This will be done in an envelope marked 'Confidential-Child Protection'.)
- Any abuse that is ultimately confirmed will be followed up with support for the victim and an appropriate combination of discipline and support as advised by the confirming outside agency and agreed by the principal and governors.

Child Abuse Complaints Against Staff

If a complaint about possible child abuse is made against a member of staff, the Principal (or the Designated Teacher if the Principal is unavailable) must be informed immediately. The above procedures will apply (unless the complaint is about the Designated Teacher or the Principal). Where the matter is referred to social services the member of staff may be removed from duties involving direct contact with pupils, and may be suspended from duty as a precautionary measure pending investigations by social services. The Chairperson of the Board of Governors will be informed immediately. If a complaint about possible child abuse is made against the Principal, the Designated Teacher must be informed immediately. He will inform the Chairperson of the Board of Governors and together they will take appropriate advice and ensure the necessary action is taken.

Role of the Designated Teacher (DT) The Designated Teacher will:

- Promote a child protection ethos in the school
- Develop and update the school's child protection policy
- Ensure parents receive a copy of the Child Protection Policy every 2 years
- Provide written reports to the Board of Governors regarding child protection
- Be available to discuss the child protection concerns of any member of staff
- Be responsible for recordkeeping of all child protection concerns & maintain all records in a secure location
- Liaise with parents, when appropriate, over child protection issues
- Liaise with E.A. and CCMS Designated Officers for Child Protection
- Make referrals to Social Services or PSNI Public Protection Units
- Co-operate fully with any agency involved with the care of an individual child, compiling information and attending case conferences as required The Deputy Designated Teacher will

support and undertake the duties of the Designated Teacher for Child Protection as required.

Record Keeping

The rapport and positive professional relationship between teachers and children is a key factor in developing children's full potential and while teachers would not wish to damage such relationships, it will be explained to any child, about whom there is concern, that it may be necessary to pass information on to the Designated Teacher and perhaps other agencies. No promise of confidentiality can be given. Detailed records will be kept of all concerns and actions relating to suspicions of abuse. All notes will be written objectively, without speculation and immediately following any incident that they record. In accordance with guidance from DENI, governors will receive termly updates on child protection and a formal report annually, which will include the following, with anonymity maintained:

- a report on the school's maintenance of child protection records, e.g. concerns of abuse, any referrals to social services, any complaints against staff
- child protection training
- policy review/update
- safeguarding initiative

Staff Conduct

Relationships between children and all staff are developed on trust and mutual respect. The Code of Conduct is known to all staff, teaching and non-teaching, and reflects the safeguarding ethos of the school. It ensures that the recommended child protection procedures are followed with empathy and professionalism.

Parents & Child Protection

The Child Protection Policy will remain available to all parents via the school's website and will be distributed every two years. Advice will be given on procedures for reporting child abuse and a synopsis of the policy will be included in the school prospectus. Parents are asked to supply the school with the names of all persons who have permission to collect their child from school (or to confirm that their child may leave the grounds unaccompanied). They are asked to inform the school of any change in this routine. Parents are asked to brief school about arrangements following any separation or divorce. Members of staff need to be aware of legal responsibilities, agreed access or exclusion and any involvement of social services. Such information will be requested formally each September, but parents are encouraged to keep the school informed as necessary. Parents will be made aware that staff may on occasions have to help change pupils' clothes when administering first aid, after toilet accidents, for PE and on other such occasions. The school's Intimate Care Policy, available to view on the school website, applies. In the event of a parent making a complaint about a member of staff, volunteer or student, the school's complaints procedure should be followed and the complaint addressed directly to the principal. If the complaint is against the principal, it should be addressed to the chairman of the governors. If a complaint should include an accusation against another child, the accused child's parents will be informed. Discipline must remain solely in the hands of the staff.

How a Parent can raise a Child Protection Concern

If a parent has a child protection concern they can follow the guide below:

- I have a concern about my/a child's safety
- I can talk to the class teacher
- If I am still concerned I can talk to the Principal or I can talk to the Designated Teacher for Child Protection
- If I am still concerned I can talk or write to the Chairperson of the Board of Governors
- At any time, I can write or talk to a Social Worker or the Police

The Preventative Curriculum

We recognise that the school plays a significant part in the prevention of harm of our pupils by providing pupils with good lines of communication with trusted adults, supportive friends and liaison with other agencies that support the pupil such as Social Services, Education Welfare Service, Educational Psychology, PSNI and the school nurse. An awareness of "stranger danger"; an understanding of how to respond to perceived threats; care in regard to e-safety; and the development of standards of behaviour that are appropriate for primary school children, are all reinforced through the school's work on Personal Development and Mutual Understanding within the Northern Ireland Curriculum. They are also the focus of assemblies, health promotion activities, visits from outside professionals and ongoing guidance as opportunities for such teaching and learning arise.

Safe Handling and Use of Reasonable Force

Our policy on physical restraint by staff is set out in accordance with guidelines from the E.A.. It acknowledges that staff must only use physical intervention as a last resort, and that at all times it must be the minimal force necessary to prevent injury to another person.

Health and Safety

Our Health and Safety Policy, along with the Educational Visits policy, reflect the consideration we give to the protection of our children both within the school environment and when away from the school when undertaking school trips and visits.

Intimate Care

As a general principle, members of staff are advised not to make unnecessary physical contact with pupils. It is, however, unrealistic to suggest that staff should touch pupils only in emergencies. A distressed child may need reassurance that involves appropriate physical comforting, particularly in the Nurture room. Our document, Safe Handling and the Use of Reasonable Force is intended to clarify school policy in relation to physical contact.

The Internet and Digital Technologies

Our policy on the internet and digital technologies is set out in a separate document and is informed by DE guidance. It acknowledges the opportunities for learning as well as the risks attached to the internet and digital technologies. Specifically it addresses safeguarding issues that may arise in the use of the internet and digital technologies.

Vetting Procedures

The school's vetting processes are compliant with practice advised in DE circulars. Copies of these circulars are available on the DE website: www.deni.gov.uk

Operation Encompass

We are an Operation Encompass school. Operation Encompass is an early intervention partnership between local Police and our school, aimed at supporting children who are victims of domestic violence and abuse. As a school, we recognise that children's exposure to domestic violence is a traumatic event for them.

Children experiencing domestic abuse are negatively impacted by this exposure. Domestic abuse has been identified as an Adverse Childhood Experience and can lead to emotional, physical and psychological harm. Operation Encompass aims to mitigate this harm by enabling the provision of immediate support. This rapid provision of support within the school environment means children are better safeguarded against the short, medium and long-term effects of domestic abuse.

As an Operation Encompass school, when the police have attended a domestic incident and one of our pupils is present, they will make contact with the school at the start of the next working day to share this information with a member of the school safeguarding team. This will allow the school safeguarding team to provide immediate emotional support to this child as well as giving the designated teacher greater insight into any wider safeguarding concerns.

This information will be treated in strict confidence, like any other category of child protection information. It will be processed as per DE Circular 2020/07 'Child Protection Record Keeping in Schools' and a note will be made in the child's child protection file. The information received on an Operation Encompass call from the Police will only be shared outside of the safeguarding team on a proportionate and need to know basis. All members of the safeguarding team will complete online Operation Encompass training, so they are able to take these calls. Any staff responsible for answering the phone at school will be made aware of Operation Encompass and the need to pass these calls on with urgency to a member of the Safeguarding team.

Further information see [The Domestic Abuse Information Sharing with Schools etc. Regulations \(Northern Ireland\) 2022](#).

Policy Review

This policy will be reviewed annually by the Board of Governors and updated as necessary, particularly in the light of new advice from DENI or E.A.

All actions concerning children and young people must uphold the best interests of the young person as a primary consideration. Staff must always be mindful of the fact that they hold a position of trust, and that their behaviour towards the children and young people in their charge must be above reproach. This Code of Conduct is not intended to detract from the enriching experiences children and young people gain from positive interaction with staff within the education sector. It is intended to assist staff in respect of the complex issue of child abuse, by drawing attention to the areas of risk for staff and by offering guidance on prudent conduct.

Code of Conduct

1. Private Meetings with Pupils

- Staff should be aware of the dangers which may arise from private interviews with individual pupils. It is recognised that there will be occasions when confidential interviews must take place. As far as possible, staff should conduct such interviews in a room with visual access, or with the door open.
- Where such conditions cannot apply, staff is advised to ensure that another adult knows that the interview is taking place. It may be necessary to use a sign indicating that the room is in use, but it is not advisable to use signs prohibiting entry to the room.
- Where possible another pupil or (preferably) another adult should be present or nearby during the interview, and the school should take active measures to facilitate this.

2. Physical Contact with Pupils

a. As a general principle, staff is advised not to make unnecessary physical contact with their pupils.

b. It is unrealistic and unnecessary, however, to suggest that staff should touch pupils only in emergencies. In particular, a distressed child, especially a younger child, may need reassurance involving physical comforting, particularly in the Nurture Room, as a caring parent would provide. Staff should not feel inhibited from providing this. As a nurturing school, as well as using positive language, it may be necessary to comfort a child in an appropriate way using for example a hug.

c. Staff should never touch a child who has clearly indicated that he/she is, or would be, uncomfortable with such contact, unless it is necessary to protect the child, others or property from harm. (DENI Circular 1999/9, on the use of reasonable force, gives guidance on Article 4 of the Education (Northern Ireland) Order 1998 (Power of member of staff to restrain pupils).

d. Physical punishment is illegal, as is any form of physical response to misbehaviour, unless it is by way of necessary restraint.

e. Staff who have to administer first-aid to a pupil should ensure wherever possible that this is done in the presence of other children or another adult. However, no member of staff should hesitate to provide first-aid in an emergency simply because another person is not present.

f. Any physical contact which would be likely to be misinterpreted by the pupil, parent or other casual observer should be avoided.

g. Following any incident where a member of staff feels that his/her actions have been, or may be, misconstrued, a written report of the incident should be submitted immediately to the principal.

2. **Relationships and Attitudes**

Staff should ensure that their relationships with pupils are appropriate to the age, maturity and sex of the pupils, taking care that their conduct does not give rise to comment or speculation. Attitudes, demeanour and language all require care and thought. Social Media Sites/New Technologies Staff must not communicate with pupils on social media sites or accept or respond to invitations from pupils to add as a friend. Staff must not text or phone pupils.

Designated Teacher for Child Protection - Mr J. McCann (24-03-2023)

Deputy Designated Teacher for Child Protection – Mrs L. McAllister

(To be reviewed 24-03-2024)