

# *St. Patrick's G.N.S., Hollypark, Dublin 18*

## **Child Protection Policy**

### **Rationale**

The BOM of St. Patrick's G.N.S. has adopted the Department of Education and Skills Guidelines and Procedures for schools in relation to child protection and welfare.

### **Relationship to Characteristic Spirit of the School**

St. Patrick's G.N.S. 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**

- To raise awareness of child abuse namely, emotional, physical, sexual abuse and neglect, among all members of our school community including Board of Management, teachers, pupils, parents, SNAs, secretary and caretaker.
- To put in place clear procedures for all school personnel dealing with suspicions and allegations of child abuse.
- To identify curricular content and resources that contributes to the prevention of child abuse and to enable children to properly deal with abuse if it occurs.

### **Guidelines for school personnel**

- 1.0 Appointment of a Designated Liaison Person (DLP)
- 2.0 Roles, Responsibilities and Guidelines
  - 2.1 Role of the Board of Management
  - 2.2 Role of the Staff Members (Teachers, SNAs, Caretaker, Secretary)
  - 2.3 Role of the Designated Liaison Person
- 3.0 Child Protection meetings /Case Conferences
- 4.0 Organisational Implications
- 5.0 Curriculum Implications

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

- The Board of Management has appointed the principal, Ms. Joan Casey, the Designated Liaison Person (DLP) in St. Patrick's G.N.S. to have specific responsibility for child protection.
- Ms. Susan Murphy (Deputy Principal) has been appointed as Deputy DLP to take the place of the DLP if she is unavailable for whatever reason.
- The position of DLP will be addressed at the first meeting of each new Board of Management. The DLP will continue to act as such until such time as he/she is replaced by the BOM for whatever reason.

#### **2.0 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 has a general duty of care to ensure that arrangements are in place to protect children from harm.

## **2.1 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

Specifically they 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 Service Executive (HSE) or Gardaí.
- To decide on teachers' attendance at child protection meetings/case conferences and to advise teachers before attending such meetings/conferences.

### **Procedures for BOM 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.
- She 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 HSE and will take responsibility for reporting, based on this advice.
- If the DLP, following consultation with the HSE, 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 HSE 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 HSE, 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 and Procedures, DES, 2001.
- 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. (Refer to 4.2 – 4.3, p.16 of Child Protection Guidelines and Procedures, DES, 2001. The chairperson has a duty to afford the employee 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 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 consult with the HSE/Gardaí.
- If administrative leave has been invoked, the chairperson will inform the DES. The HSE (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) 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
  - 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 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 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 HSE and receive reports and records from them where appropriate.

## 2.2 Role of the Staff Members (Teachers, SNAs, Caretaker, Secretary ...)

- Staff are provided with copies of the following guidelines and it is the responsibility of all staff to familiarise themselves with the guidelines.
  - *Child Protection Guidelines and Procedures, DES, 2001*
  - *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*

## **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?*
  - *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.
  
- The Protection for Persons Reporting Child Abuse Act 1998 provides immunity from civil liability to any person who reports child abuse 'reasonably and in good faith' to designated officers of the HSE or any member of An Garda Síochána. This means that even if a reported suspicion of child abuse proves unfounded, a plaintiff who took an action would have to prove that the reporter had not acted reasonably and in good faith making the report. The act provides significant protection for employees who report child abuse. These protections cover all employees and all forms of discrimination up to and including dismissal.

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

- The DLP acts as a liaison with outside agencies, HSE, 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 Guidelines in the school. S/he will circulate the DES guidelines and photocopy/circulate to all staff Chapters 3 & 4 & Appendix 1 of the Children First guidelines and advise on good practice
- The DLP will be available to staff for consultation regarding suspicions or disclosures of abuse. S/he will keep records of these consultations.
- The DLP will seek advice from the HSE.
- The DLP will report suspicions and allegations of child abuse to the HSE 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 have 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/Deputy should make informal contact with the assigned (on duty) Social Worker. The DLP/Deputy in this case, should be explicit that s/he 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 HSE by the DLP/Deputy in person, by telephone or in writing. In the event of an emergency or non-availability of HSE 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 (See Appendix 1, Child Protection Guidelines and Procedures, 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.
- 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.

## **3.0 Child Protection Meetings / Case Conferences**

- A request is made from the HSE through the DLP who should consult with the Chairperson of the B.O.M. 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. (See Appendix 3, Child Protection Guidelines and Procedures, DES).

- 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 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 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 Guidelines, 1999; pgs. 13-14 Child Protection Guidelines and Procedures, DES.

#### **4.0 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.

The following procedures have been addressed in this review:

- *Accidents*
- *Attendance*
- *Behaviour*
- *Bullying*
- *Children travelling in staff cars*
- *Record keeping*
- *Supervision*
- *Visibility*
- *Visitors*
- *Garda Vetting*

#### **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 in our Incident book 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 travelling in staff cars**

Members of the school staff will not carry children alone in their cars at any time.

### **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 are requested to leave the classroom door open.

### **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 and SPHE. All new parents can view the school's enrolment policy on the school website or in the lobby. The enrolment policy outlines the procedures parents and children 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 may also view the school's Code of Behaviour and Anti-Bullying policies on the school website or in the lobby.

### **Record Keeping**

Teachers will keep each child's file updated with results of assessments carried out and, dates and details of meetings with 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 kept in the filing cabinet in the deputy principal's office for 5 years.

### **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.

### **Visibility**

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

### **Visitors**

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

### **Garda Vetting**

All members of the school staff should have a Garda check or vetting before they are Employed.

## **5.0 Curriculum Implications**

### **Introduction**

In St. Patrick's G.N.S. 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 or 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

#### **A. 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. The circle time methodologies will be used on a whole school basis. Co-operative interpersonal skills will be developed through working in pairs and working in groups. Older children will be encouraged to work positively and skills in negotiation, building consensus and managing conflict will be developed.

### **Junior and Senior Infants**

Infant teachers will teach content objectives as laid out under the 10 strand units in our SPHE programme. They are

- Self Identity
- Taking care of my body
- Growing and changing
- Safety and protection
- Making decisions
- Myself and my family
- My friends and other people
- Relating to others
- Developing citizenship.

These strand units enable children to develop assertiveness, body integrity, skills relating to self-care, respect for others, identification of feelings and skills necessary to recognise and tell of abuse.

The SPHE programme would be supported, using the Walk Tall resources, our Alive-O programme and Stay Safe resources.

### **1<sup>st</sup> & 2<sup>nd</sup> classes**

Again we will implement our SPHE programme as laid out under the 10 strand units named above to enable the children to develop skills, knowledge and attitudes pertaining to self-esteem, esteem for others and the environment and skills pertaining to self-care and disclosure. Healthy eating, information on substance use and anti-bullying awareness will be introduced.

The SPHE programme will be supported by using the Walk Tall resources, our Alive-O programme, North Western Health Board materials and the Stay Safe programme.

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

Our SPHE programme will again 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.

Our SPHE programme will be supported by the use of Walk Tall resources, Prim-Ed anti-bullying materials, RSE materials and the Stay Safe programme.

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

Our SPHE programme will be implemented according to the curricular objectives as laid out under the 10 strands in the SPHE 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 the 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 in relation to legal and illegal drugs and the prevention of substance misuse 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 and protection of younger, less able people. Positive attitudes to sexuality will be developed and respect for self and others fostered (see RSE policy).

The SPHE programme will be supported by the use of the Walk Tall materials, RSE resources, Stay Safe resources, a full day talk from Accord facilitators and North-Western Health board resources.

## **Ratification and Communication**

This policy was ratified by the Board of Management on 9<sup>th</sup> November, 2010.

The policy was published on the school website and made available in the school for parents of children in the school.

Reviewed by Deputy Principal: November 2010

Next Review due: November 2012