

Holy Family NS Child Protection Policy

Introductory Statement and Rationale

This document was formulated by the staff and Board of Management to respond to recent changes in Guidance and Procedures in relation to Child Protection matters. This policy also further develops the school's previous policy and takes account of the provisions of the following pieces of legislation:

- Children First Act 2015
- Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools 2017
- National Vetting Bureau (Children and Vulnerable Persons) Acts 2012 to 2016 (the Vetting Act)
- Education Act 1998
- The Protection for Persons reporting Child Abuse Act 1997 and 2003

The new procedures are based on the Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools 2017. The Board of Management has adopted and will fully implement without modification the DES Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools. These procedures will therefore underpin the content of this policy.

Relationship to the Characteristic Spirit of the School

Holy Family NS seeks to help children to grow and develop into healthy, confident, mature adults capable of realizing 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

- To establish and maintain an environment where children feel secure and safe and are encouraged to talk knowing that they will be listened to.
- To raise an awareness of child abuse- emotional, physical, sexual and neglect among all staff members and all education partners in our school.
- To ensure that parents/guardians have an understanding of the legal obligations placed on the school and staff to report incidences of child abuse.

- To ensure that all staff members know the correct procedures for reporting and recording any suspicions or allegations of child abuse
- To identify curricular content and resources that contribute to the prevention of child abuse and to enable children to report to abuse if it occurs.
- To ensure that children know that there are adults in the school that they can approach if they are worried.

A copy of the school's Child Protection Policy which includes the names of the Designated Liaison Person (DLP) and the Deputy Designated Liaison Person (Deputy DLP) will be given to all staff members.

Parents may also view this policy in the principal's office. A copy of the policy is available for the attention of the DES and the patron if requested.

Adherence to principles of best practice in child protection and welfare

In its policies and practices, Holy Family NS will adhere to the following principles of best practice in Child Protection and Child Welfare. Our school recognizes that the protection and welfare of children is of paramount importance regardless of all other considerations and will therefore:

- Fully co-operate with the relevant authorities in relation to child protection and welfare matters.
- Adopt safe practice to minimize the possibility of harm or accidents happening to children and protect workers from the necessity to take unnecessary risks that may leave themselves open to accusations of abuse or neglect.
- Develop a practice of openness with parents/ guardians and encourage parental involvement in the education of their children.
- Fully respect confidentiality in dealing with child protection matters.

Vetting

Holy Family NS will ensure compliance with the requirements of the National Vetting Bureau (Children and Vulnerable Persons) Acts 2012 to 2016 (the Vetting Act) and with relevant Department's circulars in relation to Garda vetting of school personnel and other persons who undertake relevant work or activities with children or vulnerable persons.

Appointment of DLP

- The Board of Management has appointed Pearse Mc Groary as the Designated Liaison Person (DLP) in Holy Family NS to have specific responsibility for child protection.
- Edel Mc Nally has been appointed as Deputy DLP to take the place of the DLP if he 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 she is replaced by the Board for whatever reason.
- The DLP's name is clearly visible on the school corridors/staffroom.

Roles and Responsibilities

1. The Board of Management.
2. The DLP.
3. Staff

Role and responsibilities of the Board of Management

The Board will:

- Ensure that the school has robust procedures in place to enable it to deal fully and properly with all child protection matters in the school in accordance with the Children First Act, 2015, the Children First National Guidance 2017 and with the Department's requirements as set out in **Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools 2017**.
- Appoint DLP and Deputy DLP.
- Review Child Protection Policy and Child Welfare Statement at the first board meeting each year.
- Provide appropriate staff development and training.
- Monitor the progress of children at risk.
- Ensure that curricular provision is in place for the prevention of child abuse.
- Follow the correct procedures in cases of allegations or suspicions of child abuse by a school employee.
- Decide on teachers' attendance at child protection meetings/conferences and to advise teachers before attending such meetings /conferences.

Child Protection Oversight Report

At each board of management meeting, the principal's report to the board of management shall include a Child Protection Oversight Report containing information under 4 headings as follows- (1) Allegations of abuse made against members of school personnel (2) Other child protection concerns in respect of pupils in the school (3) Child protection concerns arising from alleged bullying behaviour amongst pupils and (4) Summary data in respect of reporting.

Procedures for BOM in cases of allegations or suspicions of abuse by a school employee.

The Chairperson and the DLP are concerned with the protection of the children in their care in the first instance. However, employees must be protected against false and malicious claims. Due process must be observed in relation to allegations against employees. Legal Advice should be sought by the BOM in relation to an allegation in relation to an employee. If the allegation is against the DLP the Chairperson will assume the responsibility for reporting the matter to the HSE. However, school employees may be subject to malicious or erroneous allegations and therefore any threat of abuse should be dealt with sensitively, and the employee fairly treated.

Reporting Procedures

When an allegation of abuse is made against a school employee, the DLP should act in accordance with the procedures outlined in Chapter 3 paragraph 3.2 Department of Education Guidelines. A written statement of the allegation should be sought from the person/agency making the report. A parent/guardian may make a statement on behalf of a child. The DLP should always inform the Chairperson of the BOM who will then be responsible for liaising with the HSE/Gardaí. The Chairperson assumes responsibility for dealing with an employee.

School employees, other than the DLP, who receive allegations against another school employee, should immediately report the matter to the DLP. School employees who form suspicions regarding conduct of another school employee should consult with the DLP.

The DLP will immediately inform the Chairperson.

The employee should be informed by the Chairperson (Employer) that:

a. An allegation has been made against him/her

b. The nature of the allegation

c. Whether or not Tusla or Gardaí has been informed.

The employee should be given a copy of the written allegation and any other relevant documentation. The employee should be requested to respond to the allegation in writing to the BOM within a specified period and told that this may be passed to the Gardaí, HSE and legal advisers.

The Chairperson must take the necessary steps to protect the child and may consult the BOM in this matter. The BOM may direct that the employee take administrative leave with pay and avoid suspension, thus removing any implication of guilt until matters are investigated. The DES should be contacted immediately with regard to

- Formal approval of paid leave of absence of the school employee.
- DES sanction for the employment of a substitute teacher/staff member.

Role and responsibility of the DLP

- The DLP will be responsible for all dealings with Tusla, An Garda Síochána and all other parties in connection with allegations of abuse. Those other parties should be advised that they should conduct all matters pertaining to the processing or investigation of alleged child abuse to the DLP whose name will be posted on the school corridor.
- He will be responsible for informing the BOM of the number of cases where she submitted a report to the HSE or Gardaí or sought advice from the HSE and as a result of this advice no report was made. At each Board of Management meeting, the Principal's report shall include the number of all such cases and this will be recorded in the minutes of the board meeting.
- The DLP will ensure all staff have a copy of **Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools 2017**, Holy Family NS Child Protection policy and Holy Family NS Child Welfare Statement
- The DLP will be available to staff for consultation regarding suspicions or disclosures of abuse. He will keep records of these consultations.
- He will maintain proper records in a secure, confidential manner and in a secure location.

Reporting Procedure for the DLP

If a school employee receives an allegation or has a suspicion that a pupil is being abused, he/she should report the matter to the DLP. The need for confidentiality is essential. Therefore, the child concerned will be identified on any written reports, only by their number on the school register.

- If the school employee and the DLP are satisfied that there are reasonable grounds for suspicion or allegation, the DLP should report the matter immediately to Tusla.
- A report should be made in person, by phone or in writing to the social worker on duty. Personal contact with the social worker is preferable, to allow for the transfer of as much information as possible.
- In the event of an emergency or the non-availability of Tusla staff, the report should be made to An Garda Síochána.
- The report should include as much information as possible on the Standard Reporting form
- The Chairperson of the Board of Management should be informed at this point.
- The parents/guardians of the child will be informed also, unless doing so is likely to endanger the child or place the child at further risk. A decision not to inform the parents/guardians should be recorded briefly along with the reason for not doing so.
- Where school personnel have concerns about a child, but are unsure whether to report the matter, the DLP shall seek appropriate advice, by consulting with Tusla staff. He shall be explicit that she is not making a report but is requesting advice. If Tusla advise that a referral should be made, then the DLP should act on that advice.
- If, following discussions, the DLP decides that the matter should not be formally referred to Tusla, then she should give a clear statement, in writing to the school employee, as to the reasons why action is not being taken. The school employee should be advised that if he/she remains concerned, about the situation, he/she is free to consult with or report to Tusla again.
- It is essential that at all time these matters be treated in the strictest confidence and not discussed except among those mentioned above.

Role of Staff

- It is the responsibility of all teachers and staff members to familiarise themselves with the **Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools 2017**.
- School personnel are especially well placed to observe changes in children's behaviour, their lack of development or outward signs of abuse. In any situation where a member of school personnel (including a registered teacher), receives an allegation or has a suspicion that a child may have been abused or neglected, is being abused or neglected, or is at risk of abuse or neglect, he or she shall, without delay, report the matter to the

designated liaison person (DLP) in accordance with the procedures outlined in the Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools 2017.

- Every registered teacher, as a mandated person, now also has a statutory obligation to make his or her own mandated report to Tusla where the concern about the child is at or above a threshold of harm as defined in the Act. Therefore, in addition to reporting his or her concern to the DLP, a registered teacher must also consider whether or not the concern is at or above the defined threshold of harm at which the registered teacher has his or her own statutory obligation under the Children First Act, 2015 to submit a mandated report to Tusla.

Guidelines on dealing with 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.
- 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.

Suspensions of Abuse

- Staff members who suspect abuse should refer to Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools 2017

Staff members should observe and record over time the dates, signs, symptoms or behaviour causing them concern.

They should inform the DLP and pass on all records.

Attendance at Child Protection Meetings (Case Conferences)

- a. A request is made from the Health Board through the D.L.P. 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.
- b. The school employee may complete a report for the meeting/conference.
- c. 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.
- d. 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.
- e. In all cases, individuals who refer or discuss their concerns about the care and protection of children with Tusla 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

Confidentiality

All information regarding concerns of possible child abuse should only be shared on a 'need to know' basis in the interests of the child. The giving of information to those who need to have that information is not a breach of confidentiality. This procedure exists for the protection of a child who may have been or has been abused. The DLP who is submitting a report to Tusla or An Garda Síochána should inform a parent/guardian, unless doing so is likely to endanger the child or place that child at further risk. A decision not to inform a parent/guardian should be briefly recorded together with the reasons for not doing so.

In emergency situations, where Tusla cannot be contacted, and the child appears to be at immediate and serious risk, An Garda Síochána should be contacted. A child should not be left in a dangerous situation where Health Board intervention is not forthcoming.

Protection for Persons Reporting Child Abuse

The protection for persons reporting Child Abuse Act 1998 provides immunity from civil liability to any person who reports a child protection concern 'reasonably and in good faith' to designated officers of Tusla or any member of An Garda Síochána (DES Procedures 1:10)

Qualified Privilege

People making a report to the DLP in good faith have 'qualified privilege' under common law. Reports made to Health Boards may be subject to provisions of the Freedom of Information Act, 1997. This act enables members of the public to obtain access to personal information relating to them which is in the possession of public bodies. However, the act also provides that public bodies may refuse access to information obtained by them in confidence (DES Procedures 1:11)

Curricular Implications

It is the responsibility of all schools to contribute to the prevention of child abuse and neglect through curricular provision. In that context the Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) programme is a mandatory part of the curriculum for all students in primary schools and will be fully implemented in Holy Family NS.

Holy Family NS will fully implement the Stay Safe programme. The Stay Safe programme for primary schools plays a valuable role in helping children develop the skills necessary to enable them to recognise and resist abuse and potentially abusive situations.

Other Considerations

Physical contact

It is advisable for staff not to make inappropriate physical contact with children.

Physical contact between school personnel and the child should always be in response to the health and safety needs of the child and not the needs of the adult.

While physical contact may be used to comfort, reassure or assist a child the following should be factors in determining its appropriateness:

- It is acceptable to the child
- It is open and not secretive
- The age and developmental stage of the child

School personnel should avoid doing anything of a personal nature for children that they can do for themselves.

Visitors / Guest Speakers

The school has a responsibility to check out the credentials of the visitor/guest speaker and to ensure that the material in use by guests is appropriate.

Children with specific toileting/intimate care needs

In all situations where a pupil needs assistance with toileting /intimate care a meeting will be convened, after enrolment and before the child starts school, between parents/guardians, class teacher, special needs assistant, principal and if appropriate the pupil. The purpose of the meeting will be to ascertain the specific needs of the child and to determine how the school can best meet those needs. The staff to be involved in this care will be identified and provision will be made for occasions when the particular staff involved are absent. A written copy of what has been agreed will be made and kept in the child's file.

One- to One teaching

One-to-one teaching is sometimes in the best interest of the child. This teaching should take place in an open environment or in a classroom with a glass panel allowing visibility from the corridor. Parents of children who are to be involved in one-to-one teaching will be informed and their agreement sought.

Changing for Games/ PE/ Swimming

Pupils will be expected to dress and undress themselves for games/PE/ swimming. Under no circumstances will members of staff/ volunteers be expected to or allowed to dress/undress a child in a cubicle/private area. In such situations where privacy is required the parent/guardian of the child will be asked to assist the child. At all times there must be adequate supervision of pupils.

Supervision

School supervision policy will be followed by all staff to ensure that there is comprehensive supervision of children at all breaks. A supervision rota will be displayed to cover 11 o'clock and lunchtime breaks.

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 is considered to be of a sexualised nature, the DLP will be notified and will record it and respond to it appropriately.

Visibility

Teachers will ensure that children are visible in the schoolyard. Children will not be allowed to spend time in classrooms or other areas where they would not be under adult supervision. They are not to leave the school yard or to engage with adults who are outside of the school yard.

Visitors

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.

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.

Induction of Teachers and Ancillary Staff

The DLP will be responsible for informing all new teachers and ancillary staff of the Children First Guidelines (1999). The DLP will give a copy Holy Family NS Child Protection Policy and Holy Family NS Child Welfare Statement to all new staff. All new teachers are expected to teach the objectives in the SPHE programme. The principal 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 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 and SPHE. All new parents are given a copy of the school's enrolment policy, which 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 are given a copy of the school's Code of Behaviour.

Communication

Every effort will be made to enhance pupil-teacher communication. If pupils have concerns they will be listened to sympathetically. The SPHE/Oral English/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.

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 or poor punctuality in correlation with signs of neglect/physical/emotional abuse.

Implementation and Review

The guidelines outlined in this policy are implemented with immediate effect from September 2018 and will be reviewed on an annual basis following the check list for review as outlined in Circular 65/2011. The school shall put in place an action plan to address any areas for improvement identified by the review. The BOM shall make arrangements to inform school personnel that the review has been undertaken.

Ratification

This policy was adopted by the Board of Management on _____

Signed: _____
(Chairperson of Board of Management)

Signed: _____
(Principal)

Date: _____

Date: _____

Date of next review: _____