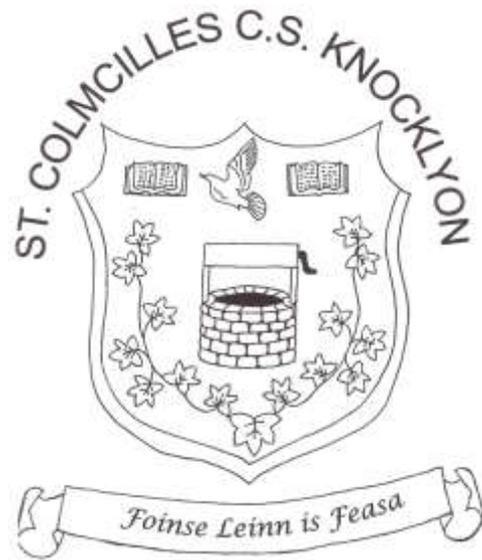


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CHILD PROTECTION POLICY & GUIDELINES

Our school community provides a caring, happy and safe environment, which strives to foster a love of life-long learning.

We endeavour to develop each person's academic, physical, moral, cultural and spiritual potential based on mutual respect, fairness and honesty.

We want our students to emerge as confident, adaptable, independent, responsible and caring citizens.

School Mission Statement

It is the policy of St. Colmcille's Community School to safeguard the welfare of all students by protecting them from physical, sexual and emotional harm.

The aim of this policy is to:

- Give direction and guidance to staff in dealing with allegations/suspicions of child abuse
- Provide sufficient information to staff to enable them to be alert and to be aware of what to do in situations where there is a concern, suspicion or allegation of child abuse.

The guidelines outlined in this document are based on the following documents:

- Children First: National Guidelines for the Protection and Welfare of Children
(Dept of Health & Children 1999)
- Child Protection Guidelines for Post Primary Schools
(Dept of Education and Science 2004)

This policy is supported by other policy documents within the school including the Anti-bullying Policy, Health & Safety Policy and SPHE programme

Roles and Responsibilities

- **The Role of the Student**

The school has in place strong pastoral structures. Students understand that if they are concerned about the welfare of another student for any reason they should speak to the Principal or any member of the teaching staff

- **The Role of all School Personnel**

There is an obligation on schools to provide students with the highest possible standard of care in order to promote their well-being and protect them from harm.

All school personnel are especially well placed to observe changes in behaviour, failure to develop or outward signs of abuse in children. Staff should be familiar with signs and behaviour that may be indicative of child abuse.

In situations where a member of staff suspects that a student may have been abused, or is being abused, or is at risk of abuse, they should ensure that concerns are reported in accordance with the procedures as outlined in this Policy Document.

- **The Role of the Designated Liaison Person**

The Designated Liaison Person appointed by the Board of Management at St. Colmcille's Community School is:

Mr. John Mc Kennedy – Principal

In his absence the designated person is:

Ms. Aileen Ryan – Deputy Principal

The designated person acts as a liaison person with outside agencies and as a resource person for any member of staff who has child protection concerns.

The designated person liaises with health boards, An Garda Siochana and other parties, in connection with allegations of and/or concerns about child abuse.

It is the responsibility of the designated Liaison Person to inform the Board of Management as soon as possible of any reports relating to student in the school has been submitted to the health board.

The Designated Liaison Person ensures that the confidentiality of the student is not compromised

Categories of Child Abuse

Child abuse can take different forms, but usually consists of one or more of the following:

- **Neglect**

Where a child's needs for food, warmth, shelter, nurturance and safety are not provided to the extent that the child suffers significant harm

- **Emotional Abuse**

Where a child's need for affection, approval, consistency and security is not being met. For children with disabilities it may include over-protection or conversely failure to acknowledge or understand a child's disability.

- **Physical Abuse**

Where a child is assaulted or injured in some way that is deliberate.

- **Sexual Abuse**

Where a child is used for the sexual gratification of another.

Signs and Symptoms of Child Abuse

Signs of abuse can be physical, behavioural or developmental. A cluster or pattern of signs is the most reliable indicator of abuse. The indicators highlighted in this document should be noted. It is important however for staff to realise that all these indicators can occur in other situations where abuse has not been a factor and that the list is not exhaustive.

Signs and Symptoms of Child Abuse

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Physical Indicators

Unexplained bruising in soft tissue areas
 Repeated injury
 Black eye
 Injury to mouth
 Torn or bloodstained clothes
 Burns or scalds
 Fractures
 Marks from implements
 Inconsistent stories, excuses relating to injury

Behavioural / Developmental Indicators

Unexplained changes in behaviour – becoming withdrawn or aggressive
 Regressive behaviour
 Difficulty in making friends
 Distrustful of adults or excessive attachment to adults
 Sudden drop in performance
 Inappropriate sexual awareness, behaviour or language
 Unusual reluctance to remove clothing
 Reluctance to go home
 Change in attendance pattern

Particular behavioural signs and emotional problems suggestive of child abuse in older children may include mood change, running away, substance abuse, self harm, suicide attempts, delinquency, truancy, eating disorders and isolation.

Taken from 'Child Protection Guidelines for Post Primary Schools'
 Department of Education and Science – Sept 2004

If you suspect that child abuse:

- **Do** realise that your concerns could be significant and should be passed on. Tell the Designated Liaison Person of your concerns.
- **Don't** examine the student
- **Don't** ask leading questions

Dealing with disclosures from students

An abused child is likely to be under severe emotional stress and a member of staff may be the only adult whom the child is prepared to trust. Great care should be taken not to damage that trust.

When information is offered in confidence, the member of staff will need tact and sensitivity in responding to the disclosure. The member of staff will need to reassure the student, and endeavour to retain his or her trust, while explaining the need for action which will necessarily involve other adults being informed.

It is important to tell the student that everything possible will be done to protect and support him/her, but not to make promises that cannot be kept e.g. promising not to tell anyone else.

If a student makes a disclosure to you:

- **Do** allow the student to do the talking
- **Do** listen – take the student seriously
- **Do** remain calm and caring
- **Do** allow the student to finish
- **Do** record the conversation as soon as possible afterwards (it is important to use the student's own words)
- **Do** tell the student what is going to happen next, such as informing the designated liaison person
- **Don't** postpone or delay the opportunity to listen
- **Don't** ask leading questions
- **Don't** allow your own feelings (such as anger, pity or shock) to surface
- **Don't** make false promises (that you will keep 'the secret' for example)
- **Don't** interpret what you have been told, just record it.

If a member of staff receives an allegation or has a suspicion that a student may have been abused, or is being abused, or is at risk of abuse he/she should, **without delay**, report the matter to the Designated Liaison Person

Record Keeping

When child abuse is suspected, it is essential to have a written record of all the information available. Staff should note carefully what they have observed and when they observed it.

Signs of physical injury should be described in detail and, if appropriate sketched.

Any comment by the student concerned, or by any other person, about how the injury occurred should be recorded, preferably quoting words actually used, as soon as possible after the comment has been made.

The record of discussion should be signed and dated by the member of staff and given to the Designated Liaison Person. The need for confidentiality at all times should be borne in mind.

The supports of the school should continue to be made available to the student.

At St. Colmcille's these include:

- A strong Pastoral System
- A School Welfare Officer
- A School Chaplain
- A comprehensive SPHE programme
- A Career and Guidance Counsellor

The Mission Statement of St. Colmcille's reflects the School's commitment to the care and well being of the students. Through this policy and guidelines the school endeavours to make staff aware of the procedures and policies relating to Child Protection.

Each member of staff is issued with a copy of these guidelines. There is a copy of the 'Children First' document available in the Staffroom and a summary of the Do's and Don't of Child Protection is contained in the Staff Handbook. (appendix 1)

The school is committed to the ongoing professional development of staff as appropriate.

Dealing with disclosures from students

It is important to deal with any allegation of abuse in sensitive and competent way through listening and facilitating the student to tell about the problem, rather than interviewing the student about details of what happened.

- It is important to stay calm and not to show any extreme reaction to what the student is saying. Listen compassionately and take what the student is saying seriously
- It should be understood that the student has decided to tell about something very important and has taken a risk to do so. The experience of telling should be a positive one so that the student will not mind talking to those involved.
- The student should understand that it is not possible that any information will be kept a secret
- No judgemental statement should be made about the person against whom the allegation is made
- The student should not be questioned unless the nature of what he/she is saying is unclear. Leading questions should be avoided. Open, non-specific questions should be used such as 'Can you explain to me what you mean by that?'
- The student should be given some indication of what will happen next, such as informing the designated Liaison Person. It should be kept in mind that the student may have been threatened and may feel vulnerable at this stage
- Record the disclosure immediately afterwards using, as far as possible the students own words.

The duty of the recipient of such information is to report it to the Designated Liaison Person without delay. It must always be remembered that teachers have a supportive, not an investigative role.

Reporting Concerns – The role of the Designated Liaison Person

If the designated Liaison Person is satisfied that there are reasonable grounds for a suspicion or allegation reported by a member of staff then he/she should report the matter to the relevant health board immediately.

The designated liaison person should:

- Make a report to the health board either in person, by phone or in writing. Each health board area has a social worker on duty each day. The Duty Social Worker is available to meet with, or talk on the telephone to persons wishing to report child protection concerns.
- The designated liaison person should make personal contact with the Duty Social Worker. This is helpful as it will facilitate the social worker in gathering as much information as possible about the student and his/her parents
- In the event of an emergency, or the non-availability of health board staff, the report should be made to An Garda Síochána.

All reports should include as much as possible of the information sought in the Standard Reporting Form (appendix 2). If a report is made by phone, this form should be forwarded to the health board ASAP. The form should be completed as comprehensively as possible.

If the designated liaison person is submitting a report to the Health Board or An Garda Síochána they should inform the parent unless doing so is likely to endanger the student or place the student at further risk. A record should be made of the information communicated to the parent.

A decision not to inform a parent should be briefly recorded together with the reasons for not doing so.

If a designated Liaison Person is not sure whether a reported concern needs to be forwarded to the health board they should seek the advice of the Duty Social Worker. In doing so the designated liaison person should be explicit that he/she is **requesting advice and not making a report**. At this informal stage the Designated Liaison Person need not give identifying details. If the health board advice that a referral should be made the Designated Liaison Person must act on this advice.

Reporting Concerns – The role of the Designated Liaison Person

The Designated Liaison Person, or his/her nominated replacement should inform the Board of Management that a report involving a student has been submitted to the relevant health board. This should be done immediately. In the interest of protecting the anonymity of the student, no details of the report should be disclosed to the Board of Management.

If following discussions with staff the Designated Liaison Person decides that a concern should not be referred to the health board, the member of staff should be given a clear statement, in writing, as to the reasons why action is not being taken. The member of staff should be advised that if he/she remains concerned about the situation, he/she is free to consult with the health board. The Standard Reporting Form should be used and such reports would be covered by the Protection for Persons Reporting Child Abuse Act 1998.

A list of health board contact addresses, phone and fax numbers is contained in these guidelines. (Appendix 3)

Child Protection Conferences

A request may be made by a health board for a school staff member to attend a child protection conference. This request will be made to the designated liaison person who should consult with the Board of Management.

A member of staff attending the child protection conference would normally be required to submit a report. The type of information required in the report is as follows:

The child's personal details

- Name, Date of Birth, address, School and Class

Academic performance – to include

- Level of attainment
- Changes noticed in academic performance
- Strengths, weaknesses and achievements
- Overall assessment of general performance

Behaviour – including significant changes in behaviour

- In classroom
- In social areas of the school

Social Skills

- Interactions with peers
- Interactions with adults

School Issues

- To what extent is the young person disposed to avail of what the school has to offer

Any concerns that you have noted about the student should be included.

The report should be signed and dated and include contact details of the school.

It is recommended that the report be marked 'Private and Confidential' and include a line at the end to the effect that 'this report is written without prejudice'

Appendices

- The do's and don'ts of Child Protection
- Standard Reporting Forms
- Health Board Contact Details

Allegations or Suspicions of Child Abuse by School Employees

In the event of an allegation being made against a school employees the Board of management will adopt the protocol authorising immediate action.

Guidance notes and Protocol as outlined in the DES guidelines attached