

# St Kevin's NS Child Protection Policy

## Introduction

Schools have an obligation to provide students with the highest possible standard of care in order to promote their well-being and protect them from harm. School personnel are especially well placed to observe changes in behaviour, failure to develop or outward signs of abuse in children.

## Endorsement of "Children First" and "Child Protection Guidelines and Procedures"

Mindful of this primary duty of care, the Board of Management of St. Kevin's N.S. fully endorses, formally adopts and will implement without modification "Children First: National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children" as issued by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs, July 2011 and "Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools" from the Department of Education & Skills (Circular 0065/2011).

## Designated Liaison Person and Deputy Designated Liaison Person

The Board nominates Corrina Bailey (School Principal) as the designated liaison person (DLP) to act as a liaison with outside agencies such as health board and as a resource person to any staff having child protection concerns. In the absence of Corrina Bailey, Mary Begg (Assistant Principal) will act as Deputy Designated Liaison Person.

## School Policies, Practices and Procedures

In its policies, practices and activities, St. Kevin's N.S. will adhere to the following principles of best practice in child protection and welfare. The school will:

- Recognise that the protection and welfare of children is of paramount importance, regardless of all other considerations.
- Fully co-operate with the relevant statutory authorities in relation to child protection and welfare matters.
- Adopt safe practices to minimise 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 and encourage parental involvement in the education of their children; and fully respect confidentiality requirements in dealing with child protection matters.

## Associated Policies

- **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 nonattendance 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.
- **Acceptable Use Policy:** Internet sessions will always be supervised by a teacher. Filtering software and/or equivalent systems will be used in order to minimise the risk of exposure to inappropriate material. Students and teachers will be provided with information and advice in the area of Internet safety.
- **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 unless they have a glass panel in their door.
- **Induction of Staff:** The DLP will be responsible for informing all new teachers and ancillary staff of the “Children First: National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children” as issued by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs, July 2011 and “Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools” from the Department of Education & Skills (Circular 0065/2011). The DLP will give a copy of the Child Protection Guidelines and Procedures, Chapters 3 & 4 and Appendix 1 of Children First and this Child Protection Policy to all new staff. All new teachers are expected to teach the designated SPHE objectives for their class and also the Stay Safe Programme. The Deputy Principal will be responsible for ensuring that new teachers know how to fill in the roll book correctly and each new teacher will be given a copy of the school’s record keeping and data protection policy.
- **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 will be informed of the school’s attendance policy, which outlines the procedures parents should use when contacting the school if there are absences. Parents are encouraged to make an appointment with the class teacher/principal if they wish to discuss their child’s progress. All parents will be directed to read the school’s Code of Behaviour, Acceptable Use Policy and Anti-Bullying policies and sign a declaration that they have read and agree to abide by these policies.

- **Record Keeping:** Teachers will keep each child's file updated with results of assessments carried out, dates and details of meetings on Aladdin. 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 principal's office for a minimum of 7 years after the child has left the school. Further details on record keeping are found in the school's Record Keeping Policy.
- **St. Kevin's School Tours Policy:** addresses the duty of care that is commensurate with school trips.
- **St. Kevin's S.P.H.E. Policy:** Strand Unit "Safety and Protection" is addressed at each class level in the context of the Stay Safe programme. The school will also ensure that the Stay Safe programme is also taught throughout the school.
- **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. The Principal will be involved in supervising the pupils before school begins. A rota will be displayed to cover morning and lunchtime breaks. See supervision policy for agreed rules around break-times, procedures around teacher absences.
- **Toileting:** Where possible two adults will supervise a child in need of toileting.
- **Visibility:** Teachers will ensure that children are visible in the school playground. 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 playground or to engage with adults who are outside of the school playground.

### Training

The Board will ensure that appropriate and on-going training as necessary will be available for all staff, including the DLP and the DDLP. Every effort will be made to avail of training provided by appropriate agencies and our local Education Centre.

### Vetting

The school will follow the Statutory requirements for Garda vetting as per D.E.S. circular 0031/2016 ([https://www.education.ie/en/Circulars-and-Forms/Active-Circulars/cl0031\\_2016.pdf](https://www.education.ie/en/Circulars-and-Forms/Active-Circulars/cl0031_2016.pdf)).

### Reviewing Child Protection Issues

Recognising that the safety and wellbeing of children attending the school is a priority, the Board undertakes to include Child Protection & Health & Safety matters as items on the agenda of all Board meetings and all staff meetings forthwith. Child Protection will also be addressed in the principal's report to the Board of Management.

### **Staff and Volunteer Induction**

The Board will ensure that all school staff, teaching and non-teaching and all parent volunteers are aware of their obligations under the guidelines detailed in Children First and the procedures to be followed in the event of concern.

### **Role of St. Kevin's Board of Management**

The Board recognises that it has two duties of care. The primary duty is the protection, safety and welfare of the children attending St. Kevin's. The Board as an employer also has duties and responsibilities towards its employees.

- As an employer, the Board will seek legal advice if an allegation of abuse is made against a school employee.
- The Board will adhere to the protocol outlined in Ch. 5. Allegations or Suspicions of Child Abuse regarding School Employees, in "Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools" from the Department of Education and Skills 2011, to authorise any actions required to protect the children in its care. The Board notes that school employees may be subject to erroneous or malicious allegations. Any allegation of abuse should be dealt with sensitively. The employee should be treated fairly which includes the right not to be judged in advance of a full and fair enquiry. The Board accepts that the principles of natural justice and fair procedures must be adhered to.
- The Board believes that the academic, personal and social development of children flourishes in a culture where good relationships are encouraged, people feel valued and respected and appropriate support is available for those in difficulty.
- The Board is committed to the maintenance of the environment where children feel secure, are encouraged to express themselves and are listened to. All children in the school will be made aware that there are adults in the school whom they can approach if they are worried. In addition, opportunities will be included in the curriculum for children to develop the skills they need to keep them safe.
- The Board undertakes to make this Child Protection Policy statement available to all parents and guardians. This policy statement and "Children First" will be available for viewing at the school office.
- This policy statement regarding Child Protection at St. Kevin's N.S. applies to all staff, members of the Board of Management, volunteers and contractors working in the school.
- A copy of this policy will be made available to the Department of Education and Skills and the patron, if requested.
- This policy statement will be subject to review during each academic year forthwith.

- See Appendix 1 for the school's 'Child Protection Guidelines and Procedures.' A copy of these will be provided to all staff.

## **Appendix 1 - Child Protection Guidelines and Procedures**

### **Categories of Child Abuse**

All school personnel should be familiar with signs and behaviours that may be indicative of child abuse. Child abuse can be categorised into four different types: neglect, emotional abuse, physical abuse and sexual abuse. A child may be subjected to one or more forms of abuse at any given time (More detail on each type of abuse is given in Appendix 1 of Children First).

### **Guidelines for Recognition of Child Abuse**

All signs and symptoms must be examined in the total context of the child's situation and family circumstances. There are commonly three stages in the identification of child abuse. These are: -

- Considering the possibility
- Looking out for signs of abuse
- Recording of information

A list of indicators of child abuse as outlined in Appendix 1 of Children First is also contained in Appendix 3 of the Department of Education and Skills' Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post Primary Schools. All school personnel shall familiarise themselves with these signs and symptoms of child abuse. No one sign or symptom should be seen as conclusive in itself and may indicate conditions other than child abuse. It is important that all school personnel would consult Appendix 3 of the procedures and liaise with the DLP (Corrina Bailey) where they have concerns that a child may have been abused or neglected, or is being abused or neglected, or is at risk of abuse and neglect. The DLP shall make Children First accessible to school personnel. The Children First document is also available on [www.dcyia.ie](http://www.dcyia.ie).

### **Handling Disclosures from Children**

When information is offered in confidence staff will act with sensitivity in responding to the disclosure. The member of staff will need to reassure the child, and retain his/her trust, while explaining the need for action and the possible consequences, which will necessarily involve other adults being informed. It is important to tell the child 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. The welfare of the child is regarded as the first and paramount consideration. In so far as is practicable, due consideration will be given, having regard to age and understanding the wishes of the child.

The following advice is offered to school personnel to whom a child makes a disclosure of abuse.

- Remain calm.
- Listen to the child with sensitivity and openness.
- Take all disclosures seriously
- 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
- Explain that further help may have to be sought
- Record the discussion accurately and retain the record of dates, times, names, locations, context and factual details of conversation.

This information should then be passed onto the DLP and a record will be retained in the school. If the reporting person or member of the school staff and the DLP is satisfied that there are reasonable grounds for the suspicion/allegation, the procedures for reporting as laid out in 'Children First' – Section 3.4 P. 14 will be adhered to.

The Chairperson of the Board of Management will be informed before the DLP makes contact with the relevant authorities unless the situation demands that more immediate action be taken for the safety of the child in which case the Chairperson may be informed after the report has been submitted.

Any professional who suspects child abuse should inform parents/carers if a report is to be submitted to An Garda Síochána unless doing so is likely to endanger the child.

In cases of emergency, where a child appears to be at immediate and serious risk, and a duty social worker is unavailable, an Garda Síochána should be contacted. Under no circumstances should a child be left in a dangerous situation pending TUSLA intervention.

### **Allegations against School Employees**

The most important consideration for the Chairperson, Board of Management or the DLP is the safety and protection of the child. However, employees also have a right to protection against claims which are false or malicious. As employers, the Board of Management should always seek legal advice as the circumstances can vary from one case to another. There are two procedures to be followed:

- The reporting Procedure
- The Procedure for dealing with the Employee.

The DLP has responsibility for reporting the matter to the Health Board. The Chairperson of the Board of Management has responsibility, acting in consultation with his/her Board, for addressing the employment issues. If the allegation is against the DLP, the Chairperson of the Board of Management will assume the responsibility for reporting the matter to the Child and Family Agency.

### Reporting

When an allegation of abuse is made against a school employee, the DLP should immediately act in accordance with the procedures outlined in “Child Protection.”

A written statement of the allegation should be sought from the person/agency making the report. The DLP should always inform the Chairperson of the Board of Management. 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 procedures outlined in will then be followed.

The chairperson of the Board and DLP should make the employee aware privately:

- a) That an allegation has been made against him/her
- b) The nature of the allegation
- c) Whether or not the Child and Family Agency or Gardaí has been/will be/must be/should be 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 Board of Management within a specified period and told that this may be passed to the Gardaí, Child and Family Agency and legal advisers.

The priority in all cases is that no child be exposed to unnecessary risk. Therefore, as a matter of urgency, the Chairperson should take any necessary protective measures. These measure should be proportionate to the level of risk and should not unreasonably penalise the employee in any way unless to protect the child.

If the nature of the allegations warrants immediate action in the Chairperson’s opinion, the Board of Management should be convened to consider the matter. The Board will consider feedback if any has been received from the Child and Family Agency, Gardaí or relevant source. This may result in the Board of Management directing that the employee absent him/herself from the school forthwith while the matter is being investigated (Administrative Leave). When the Board of Management is unsure as to whether this should occur, advice



should be sought from the Gardaí and/or the Child Care Manager of the Child and Family Agency and the legal advisers to the Board of Management.

**Administrative Leave**

Should the Board of Management direct that the employee absent him/herself as above, such absence of the employee would be regarded as administrative leave of absence with pay and not suspension and would not imply any degree of guilt. The DES should be immediately informed.

**Board of Management**

The Chairperson should inform the Board of Management of all the details and remind the members of their serious responsibility to maintain strict confidentiality on all matters relating to the issue and the principles of due process and natural justice. A hard Copy of Children First, National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children 2011 can be found in the Principal's Office/Staffroom.

***Ratified – 22/09/2020***

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

*Board Chairperson*

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

*Principal*