

Child Protection Policy

This document is a response to recent changes in legislation and takes account of the provisions of each of the following pieces of legislation

- Freedom of Information Act 1997
- The Education Act 1998
- The Child Welfare Act 2000
- Children First – National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children 2011.

The new procedures are based on the recently published *Children First – National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children 2011*.

References

- 'Children First' (Department of Health and Children 1999)
- 'Our Children Our Church' (CORI 2005)
- 'Child Protection Guidelines and Procedures' (Department of Education and Science 2001)
- Policy Sources accessed through Internet

The Board of Management (BoM) recognises that child protection and welfare considerations permeate all aspects of school life and must be reflected in all of the school's policies, practices and activities. Accordingly, in accordance with the requirements of the Department of Education and Skills, Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post Primary Schools, the BoM of Mercy Primary School has agreed the following child protection policy.

The BoM has adopted and will implement fully and without modification the Department's Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post Primary Schools as part of this overall child protection policy.

The Designated Liaison Person (DLP) is Barbara Hanamy

The Deputy Designated Liaison Person (Deputy DLP) is Anne Cooney

In its policies, practices and activities, Mercy Primary School 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
- Fully respect confidentiality requirements in dealing with child protection matters
- The school will also adhere to the above principles in relation to any adult pupil with a special vulnerability

Certain policies such as Mercy Primary School's Code of Behaviour/Anti-bullying Policy, Pupil Attendance Policy and the Supervision of Pupils Policy will take particular account of this Child Protection Policy. This policy will also be considered with reference to the participation by pupils in sporting activities, other extra-curricular activities and school

outings. Other practices and activities, where child protection might have particular relevance, will take due consideration of the procedures outlined within this policy. The Board has ensured that the necessary policies, protocols or practices as appropriate are in place in respect of each of the above listed items.

This policy has been made available to school personnel and the Parent Association and is readily accessible to parents on request. A copy of this policy will be made available to the DES and the patron if requested.

Designated Liaison Person (DLP)

In Mercy Primary School the Principal, appointed by the BOM, is the DLP. Anne Cooney acts as Deputy DLP. Both teachers will undertake training from the Child Abuse Prevention Programme at the earliest opportunity. **CAPP** provides training to the whole school community (staff, parents and Boards of Management) on the stay Safe Programme.

The DLP has specific responsibility for child protection and will represent the school in all correspondence with Health Boards, An Garda Síochána and other parties in connection with allegations of abuse. All matters pertaining to the processing or investigation of child abuse should be processed through the DLP.

Further information on the responsibilities of the DLP can be referred to on page 8, section 2.2 of 'Child Protection' (DES 2001).

The DLP acts in cases where there are reasonable grounds for suspicion or where an allegation has been made, as referred to in 'Child Protection' (DES 2001, pages 11-12).

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 the Health Board 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 the Health Board cannot be contacted, and the child appears to be at immediate and serious risk, An Garda Síochána should be contacted immediately. A child should not be left in a dangerous situation pending Health Board intervention.

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 child abuse 'reasonably and in good faith' to designated officers of Health Boards or any member of an Garda Síochána, see 'Child Protection' (DES 2001, page 6).

Qualified Privilege

People making a report to the DLP in good faith have 'qualified privilege' under common law, see 'Child Protection Guidelines and Procedures' (DES 2001, page 6). 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.

Definition and Recognition of Child Abuse

Child abuse can be categorised into four different types:

- Neglect
- Emotional abuse
- Physical abuse
- Sexual abuse

Each of these categories is defined in full in 'Children First' (Dept Health and Children 1999, pages 31-33) but for the purpose of this policy attention is drawn to the stated definition of 'neglect'.

Neglect can be defined in terms of an *omission*, where the child suffers significant harm or impairment of development by being deprived of food, clothing, warmth, hygiene, intellectual stimulation, supervision and safety, attachment to and affection from adults, medical care.

Guidelines for Recognition of Child Abuse

A list of child abuse indicators is contained in Appendix 1 'Children First' (DHC 1999, pages 31-33). This policy draws particular attention to 'persistent evidence' of neglect, including indicators such as no lunch, lack of uniform, no homework, poor attendance, persistent health problems, lack of sleep indicating inappropriate television viewing late at night and other evidence that would indicate lack of supervision in the home. 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:

1. Considering the possibility
2. Looking out for signs of abuse
3. Recording of information

Each of these stages is developed in 'Children First' (DHC 1999, pages 34-35).

Handling Disclosures from Children

'Child Protection' (DES 2001, page 9) gives comprehensive details of how disclosures should be approached. Staffs are advised to deal with each situation sensitively, reassure the child but not to make promises that cannot be fulfilled.

The adult should not ask leading questions or make suggestions. They should explain that further help may have to be sought. The discussion should then be recorded accurately.

The record should include reference to what was observed with sketches of physical injury where necessary. It should also record when the alleged incident took place. Records should be kept in a secure place. The information should then be conveyed to the school DLP.

If the reporting person and the DLP are satisfied that there are reasonable grounds for the suspicion/allegation, the procedures outlined in 'Children First' (DHC, page 38) will be adhered to. Standardised reporting forms should be used (Appendix 1). The content of the report should follow the guidelines on page 39 of 'Children First'. The Chairperson of the BoM will be informed before the DLP makes contact with the relevant authorities.

Allegations or Suspicions in relation to School Employees

The Chairperson and the DLP are primarily concerned with the protection of the children in their care. However, employees must be protected against false and malicious claims.

Legal Advice should be sought by the board in relation to the employee. If the allegation is against the DLP, the BOM Chairperson will assume the responsibility for reporting the matter to the Health Board.

Reporting

When an allegation of abuse is made against a school employee, the DLP should act in accordance with the procedures outlined in 'Child Protection' (DES 2001, page 11). 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.

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 'Child Protection' (DES 2001, page 16) should be referred to.

The Chairperson and the DLP should make the employee aware privately:

- a. That an allegation has been made against him/her
- b. Of the nature of the allegation
- c. Whether or not the Health Board 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, Health Board 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. The DES should be immediately informed.

Further follow-up procedures should be observed as outlined in 'Child Protection Guidelines and Procedures' (page 17).

School Measures Taken to Protect the Children in Our Care

There are a number of areas where common sense in our school should prevail in order to protect the children in the school and the staff who care for them. In relation to this, certain points should be noted:

1. Mercy Primary School will fully implement the Stay Safe programme
2. A copy of the school's child protection policy, which includes the names of the Designated Liaison Person (DLP) and Deputy DLP, will be made available to all school personnel and the Parents' Association and is readily accessible to parents on request
3. The name of the DLP and other relevant support services are displayed in a prominent position near the main entrance to the school
4. In addition to informing the school authority of those cases where a report involving a child in the school has been submitted to the HSE, the DLP shall also inform the school authority of cases where the DLP sought advice from the HSE and as a result of this advice, no report was made. At each BOM meeting, the Principal's Report shall include the number of all such cases and this shall be recorded in the minutes of the board meeting.
5. Mercy Primary School will undertake an annual review of its Child Protection Policy and its implementation by the school. A checklist, to be used in undertaking the review is included at **Appendix 1**. The school has put in place an action plan to address any areas for improvement which might be identified in the annual review. The Board of

Management shall make arrangements to inform school personnel that the review has been undertaken. Written notification that the review has been undertaken shall be provided to the Parent Association. A record of the review and its outcome shall be made available, if requested, to the patron and the DES.

- Staff who take classes swimming should make sure that there are two adults in attendance at all times. The dressing rooms and pool area should be well supervised
- Staff should not be alone in a classroom with one child or detain a child on their own after school. In the case of special needs pupils where resource hours and assistance are sanctioned on an individual basis, it is school policy that staff in such a situation should work with the classroom door open, thus rendering the occupants visible at all times (see Intimate Care Policy)
- When possible children should work in groups
- Children with physical disabilities who may require assistance in toiletry matters will be aided by a Special Needs Assistant who has met the necessary screening requirements when being employed by the school.

It should be noted that children with disabilities may be more at risk of abuse due to a number of reasons (see list outlined on page 99 of 'Children First Guidelines'). Parents, teachers and all staff involved in services for children with disabilities need to be familiar with the indicators of abuse and to be alert for signs of abuse.

Appendix 1: Checklist for Annual Review of the Child Protection Policy

The Board of Management must undertake an annual review of its Child Protection Policy and the following checklist shall be used for this purpose.

The checklist is designed as an aid to conducting this review and is not intended as an exhaustive list. The BOM may wish to include other items in the checklist that are of particular relevance to Mercy Primary School and reserves the right to do so if/when the need occurs.

1.	As part of the overall review process, Boards of Management should also assess other school policies, practices and activities vis a vis their adherence to the principles of best practice in child protection and welfare as set out in the school's Child Protection policy	YES	NO
2.	Has the Board formally adopted a child protection policy in accordance with the 'Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post Primary Schools'?	YES	NO
3.	As part of the school's child protection policy, has the Board formally adopted, without modification, the 'Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post Primary Schools'?	YES	NO
4.	Are there both a DLP and a Deputy DLP currently appointed?	YES	NO
5.	Are the relevant contact details (HSE and An Garda Síochána) to hand?	YES	NO
6.	Has the DLP attended available child protection training?	YES	NO
7.	Has the Deputy DLP attended available child protection training?	YES	NO
8.	Have any members of the Board attended child protection training?	YES	NO
9.	Has the school's child protection policy identified other school policies, practices and activities that are regarded as having particular child protection relevance?	YES	NO
10.	Has the Board ensured that the Department's "Child Protection Procedures for Primary & Post Primary Schools" are available to all school personnel?	YES	NO
11.	Does the Board have arrangements in place to communicate the school's child protection policy to new school personnel?	YES	NO
12.	Is the Board satisfied that all school personnel have been made aware of their responsibilities under the 'Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post Primary Schools'?	YES	NO
13.	Since the Board's last annual review, was the Board informed of any child protection reports made to the HSE/An Garda Síochána by the DLP?	YES	NO
14.	Since the Board's last annual review, was the Board informed of any cases where the DLP sought advice from the HSE and as a result of this advice, no report to the HSE was made?	YES	NO
15.	Is the Board satisfied that the child protection procedures in relation to the making of reports to the HSE/ An Garda Síochána were appropriately followed?	YES	NO
16.	Were child protection matters reported to the Board appropriately recorded in the Board minutes?	YES	NO
17.	Is the Board satisfied that all records relating to child protection are appropriately filed and stored securely?	YES	NO
18.	Has the Board ensured that the Parents' Association has been provided with the school's child protection policy?	YES	NO

APPENDIX A

Child Protection Practices

The staff and BoM of this school have identified the following as areas of specific concern in relation to Child Protection. Following discussion and consultation, the staff and BoM have agreed that the following practices be adopted:

- Physical contact between school personnel and the child should always be in response to the 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.

School personnel should never engage in or allow:

- The use of inappropriate language or behaviours
- Physical punishment of any kind
- Sexually provocative games or suggestive comments about or to a child
- The use of sexually explicit or pornographic material

All media products (CDs, DVDs etc.) should be checked for their appropriateness with regard to age and suitability.

Visitors/Guest Speakers

Vetted guest speakers and visiting teachers of varying disciplines, employed by the BoM of Mercy Primary School to perform specific duties, will be left work with a class alone at the Principal's discretion

Visitors/Guest speakers should never be left alone with pupils. The school (principal/teachers) has a responsibility to check out the credentials of the visitor/guest speaker and to ensure that the material in use 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
- Two members of staff will be present when dealing with intimate care/toileting needs. Any deviation from the agreed procedure will be recorded and notified to the DLP and the parents/guardians.

Toileting accidents

Clean underwear and suitable clothing will be kept in the school so that if a pupil has an 'accident' of this nature, they will in the first instance be offered fresh clothing into which they can change.

If the pupil for whatever reason cannot clean or change themselves and the parents/guardians cannot be contacted, the child will be assisted by members of staff familiar to the child. In all such situations, two members of staff should be present. A record of all such incidents will be kept and Principal and parents will be notified.

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 Accident book and will be addressed under our Accident Policy as part of Health and Safety.

On-to-one teaching

- It is the policy in this school that one-to-one teaching is often in the best interest of the child
- Every effort will be made to ensure that this teaching takes place in an open environment
- Parents of children who are to be involved in one-to-one teaching will be informed and their agreement sought
- Work being carried out by Special Needs Assistants will be carried out under the direction of the class teacher in an open environment.

Changing for games/ PE / Swimming

Pupils will be expected to dress and undress themselves for Games/ PE/ Swimming. Where assistance is needed this will be done in the communal area and with the consent of parents. Under no circumstances will members of staff be expected to or allowed to dress/undress a child in a cubicle/private area. In such situations where privacy is required, the parents/guardians of the child will be asked to assist the child. Mercy Primary School will endeavour to have two female members of staff in the female changing area.

At all times there must be adequate supervision of pupils. While every effort will be made to adhere to best practice as agreed and outlined above, in the event of an emergency where this is not possible or practicable, a full record of the incident should be made and reported to the Principal and parents.

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 or request a colleague to attend. Further details on communications are found in the school's Communication Policy.

Induction of Staff

The DLP will be responsible for informing all new teachers and ancillary staff of the Child Protection Guidelines and Procedures (DES, 2001) and Children First Guidelines (1999), but particularly the recently published Children First – National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children (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. A member of staff, once trained, will be responsible for the mentoring of new teachers and will be responsible for supporting new teachers as they implement the SPHE objectives. Anne Cooney is responsible for ensuring that new teachers know how to fill in the roll book correctly and 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, Stay Safe and SPHE. All new parents will be 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 will be given a copy of the school's Code of Behaviour and Anti-Bullying policies.

Internet Safety

It is the intention of the Principal and Staff at Mercy Primary School to ensure that child protection concerns will be addressed in the school's Acceptable Use Policy as part of its Information and Communication Technology policy.

Record Keeping

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 office. Further details on record keeping will be found in the school's Record Keeping Policy.

Supervision

The school's supervision policy will be followed by all staff to ensure that there is comprehensive supervision of children at all breaks. A rota will be displayed to cover 10.50a.m. and lunchtime breaks. See Supervision Policy for agreed rules around break-times and procedures around teacher absences.

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.

Appendix B

Reporting Form for Child Protection and Welfare Concerns to a Health Board

1. Date of Report
2. Name of person reporting
3. Address of person reporting
4. Relationship of reporting person with the child concerned
5. Method of report (telephone call, personal call to office)
6. Family Details

Details of Child Concerned

Surname
Forename
DOB
Male/female
Alias (known as)
Address:

Correspondence address (if different)

Telephone number

7. State whether you consider your report to indicate (a) suspected or actual child abuse or (b) need for family support, giving reasons

	Physical Abuse	Sexual Abuse	Emotional Abuse	Neglect
Suspect	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Actual	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

8. Details of other family members/household members

Name	Age	Relationship to child	Employment/School	Location

In cases of emergency, or outside Health Board hours, reports should be made to An Garda Síochána.

9. Name of Other Professionals Involved with Child/ren and/or Parents/Carers.

Public health nurse:

School:

General practitioner:

Any other agency or professional involved (please describe the nature of any involvement):

Report Details.

10. Describe, as fully as possible the nature of the problem or incident being reported, giving details of times and dates of individual incidents, the circumstances in which they occurred, any other persons who were present at the time, and their involvement

11. Has any explanation been offered by the child, and/or parents/carers, which would account for the current problem or incident? (Details)

12. As far as possible, describe the state of the child/ren's physical, mental and emotional well-being.

13. If child abuse is being alleged, who is believed to be responsible for causing it?

Include (if known)

Name:

Address:

Degree of contact with child:

Degree of contact with other children:

14. Describe (in detail) any risks to which the child/ren in this situation is/are believed to be exposed.

15. How did this information come to your attention

16. What has prompted you to report your concern at this time?

17. What evidence of harm exists at present?

18. Are there any factors in the child and/or parents/carers' present situation, which may have relevance to the current concern? (for example, recent illness, bereavement, separation, addiction, mental health problem or other difficulty)

19. Are there any factors in the child and/or parents/carers' situation which could be considered protective or helpful (for example, extended family or community support)?

20. Has any action been taken in response to the current concern or incident (Details)

21. Are the child's parents/ carers aware that this concern is being reported to the health board?

22. Is there a need for urgent protective action at this point?

23. Any other comments.

Signed: _____

Date: _____

Appendix C

Dear Parents/Guardians,

In recent years, as a society, we have become very aware of the problem of child abuse through neglect, emotional, physical or sexual abuse.

Each one of us has a duty to protect children and Children First, the National Guidelines, for the Protection and Welfare of Children noted that teachers, who are the main care givers to children outside the family, are particularly well placed to observe and monitor children for signs of abuse.

In response to this, the Department of Education and Skills published Guidelines and Procedures for all schools in relation to child protection and welfare. These guidelines promote the safety and welfare of all children and are to be welcomed.

The Board of Management of Mercy Primary School has adopted these guidelines as school policy. Consequently, if school staff suspect or are alerted to possible child abuse, they are obliged to refer this matter to the Health Service Executive (HSE). The HSE will then assess the situation and provide support for the child concerned.

Children First, the National Guidelines for the Protection of Children may be assessed on the website of the Department of Health and Children (www.dohc.ie) and the Department of Education and Skills Child Protection Guidelines can be read on the Department's website (www.education.ie). Parents/Guardians are also welcome to look through the guidelines here at the school.

Yours sincerely,

Barbara Hanamy,
Principal