**St. Teresa’s National School**

**Child Protection Policy**

**Introductory Statement**

This policy was formulated by the staff of St. Teresa’s N.S. in consultation with the Board of Management and parents, in accordance with the Guidelines and Procedures for Child Protection issued by the Department of Education & Science.

This document is formulated in response to recent changes in Guidance and Procedures in relation to Child Protection matters and takes account of the provisions of each of the following important 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 Children and Youth Affairs 2011)
* ‘Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post Primary Schools (Department of Education and Skills 2011)

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

St. Teresa’s N.S. wishes to provide a learning environment, which is most conducive to the academic, social, physical, psychological and moral development of all the children in our care. A Child Protection Policy is intrinsic to the ethos of the school, and to our wish that children may share fully in the life of the school and leave St. Teresa’s N.S. as caring and capable young people who will contribute positively to their communities.

The BOM has adopted and will fully implement without modification the Department of Education and Skills Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools 2011. These procedures will therefore underpin the content of this policy.

The following key personnel have been identified and ratified by the BOM:

The Designated Liaison Person (DLP) is Nora Kearins

The Deputy Designated Liaison Person (Deputy DLP) is Ruth Sweeney

**Aims**

By introducing this policy we endeavour to

* Put in place clear procedures which teachers and other school staff must follow where they suspect, or are alerted to, possible child abuse, including where a child discloses abuse.
* Designate a senior member of staff to have specific responsibility for child protection, who will ensure that standard reporting procedure is followed so that suspected cases of child abuse are referred promptly to the local health board or An Garda Siochána.
* To monitor the progress of children considered to be at risk.
* Contribute to the prevention of child abuse through curricular planning – i.e. Stay Safe, Walk Tall, R.S.E., S.P.H.E., and Circle Time.
* Promote In-service training for teachers and Board of Management members to ensure that they have a good working knowledge of child protection issues and procedures.
* Have clear written procedures in place concerning action to be taken where allegations are received against school employees.
* 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.
* Adhere to the above principles in relation to any adult pupil with a special vulnerability.

**Guidelines (Content of Policy)**

This policy focuses on the procedures for the reporting of suspected Child Abuse, the actions to be taken by the Designated Liaison Person, and the actions to be taken by the Board of Management where allegations are received against school employees. It is incumbent on all members of staff and Board of Management to familiarise themselves with “Child Protection Guidelines and Procedures” issued by the Dept. of Education & Science and “Children First, National Guidelines for the Protection and Welfare of Children” published by the Dept. of Health & Children.

**All staff members should be particularly au-fait with Chapter Three, and Appendix One of the latter publication, which deals with the indications of possible 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.

**The “Child First” guidelines state that a health board should always be notified where a person has a reasonable suspicion or reasonable grounds for concern that a child may have been or is being abused or at risk of** **abuse.**

The following examples are quoted as constituting reasonable grounds for concern:

1. Specific indication from the child.
   * In cases of specific indication of abuse from a child to a member of staff, that member should:
   * Listen to the child.
   * Not ask leading questions nor make suggestions to the child
   * Offer reassurance but **not** make promises
   * Not stop a child recalling significant events
   * Not over react
   * Explain that further help may have to be sought
   * Record the discussion accurately and retain the record
2. An account by a person who witnessed the abuse
3. Evidence (injury or behaviour) which is consistent with abuse and unlikely to be caused another way.
4. An injury or behaviour which is consistent with abuse and with an innocent explanation but where there are corroborative indications supporting the concern that it may be a case of abuse.
5. Consistent indication, over a period of time that a child is suffering from emotional or physical neglect.

**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
* The Designated Liaison Person will inform a parent/guardian that a report is being submitted to the health board or An Garda Síochana unless doing so is likely to endanger the child or place the child at further risk. It is not the responsibility of the school to investigate suspected cases of abuse. This is a matter for the health board.
* In emergency situations, where the Health Board cannot be contacted, and the child appears to be at immediate and serious risk, An Garda Siochána should be contacted. A child should not be left in a dangerous situation where Health Board intervention is not forthcoming.

**Record Keeping**

* When child abuse is suspected, it is essential to have a record of all the information supplied.
* Staff will note carefully all that they have observed and when they observed it. Signs of physical abuse should be described in detail. Comments by the child, or by any other person, about how an injury occurred will be recorded as quickly as possible following disclosure – preferably quoting words actually used.
* All records are highly confidential and will be retained by the Designated Liaison Person in a secure location.

**Action to be taken by school staff**

If a school employee receives an allegation or has a suspicion that a pupil is being abused s/he shall report the matter to the Designated Liaison Person.

**Action to be taken by Designated Liaison Person**

* If the school employee and the Designated Liaison Person are satisfied that there are reasonable grounds for the suspicion or allegation the Designated Liaison Person will report the matter to the Health Service Executive immediately.
* Such a report will be made in person by phone or in writing to the duty social worker.
* In the event of an emergency, or un-availability of the appropriate health board staff, the report will be made to An Garda Síochana.
* In cases where school personnel are unsure whether to submit a report or not, advice should be sought from the appropriate health board staff.
* If the health board advises that referral should be made the Designated Liaison Person should act on that advice.
* When a report is being made to the HSE the Designated Liaison Person will inform the Chairperson of the Board of Management and will make a decision on whether or not the parents/guardians of the child should be informed.
* Should the Designated Liaison Person decide that the concerns of a school employee should not be referred to the health board; the employee will be given a clear statement, in writing, as to the reasons why action is not being taken. The employee will be advised that if concerns remain s/he is free to consult the health board.

**Peer Abuse**

* Sexualised behaviour between children is inappropriate and will be taken seriously. Separate meetings with the parents of all children involved in such behaviour will be arranged with a view to resolving the situation.
* Such behaviour may be indicative of a situation that requires assessment by
* the health board.
* In cases where children are abusive towards other children, it is not the schools responsibility to establish treatment programmes. This is a matter for the HSE.

**Procedures for dealing with allegations or suspicions of child abuse by school employees.**

* In dealing with such cases the Board of Management will seek legal advice from the CPSMA.
* The primary aim of the Board of Management is to protect the children within the school to whom they have a duty of care. However, school employees may be subject to erroneous or malicious allegations, and any allegations should be dealt with sensitively and the employee fairly treated. This includes the right not to be judged in advance of a full and fair enquiry.
* In cases of allegations or suspicions of child abuse by an employee, two procedures are to be followed:
  + - **the reporting procedure**
    - **the procedure for dealing with an employee.**
* The Designated Liaison Person will be responsible for reporting the matter to the HSE; and the Chairperson, in consultation with the Board of Management is responsible for addressing the employment issues. However, where the allegation is against the Designated Liaison Person, the Chairperson is responsible for reporting the matter.
* Legal advice should be sought by the BOM in relation to an allegation in relation to an employee.

**Reporting**

When an allegation of abuse is made against a school employee, the DLP should act in accordance with the procedures outlined in Children First. 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 and is responsible for liaising with the HSE. The Chairperson assumes responsibility for dealing with the 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.

**Action to be taken by the Chairperson**

* On becoming aware of an allegation against an employee the Chairperson will inform the employee privately:

that an allegation has been made against him/her.

the nature of the allegation.

Whether or not the matter has been reported to the HSE or Gardaí.

* The employee will be given a copy of the written allegation, and will be asked to respond in writing to the Board of Management, within a specified period of time.
* This response may be passed on to the HSE.
* To ensure that a child is not exposed to unnecessary risk the Chairperson will, as a matter of urgency, take any protective measures.
* If, in the Chairperson’s opinion, the nature of the allegation warrants immediate action he will direct that the employee absent him/herself from the school with immediate effect.
* The Chairperson will convene a meeting of the Board of Management to inform them of the matter and of any action taken. Members of the Board of Management will be reminded of the importance of confidentiality about all matters relating to this issue.
* Where alleged abuse has taken place within the school or relates to pupils of the school outside of school time the Board of Management will convene a future meeting, where all details of the alleged abuse shall be considered.
* At this meeting, the person making the allegation will be offered an opportunity to present his/her case.
* The employee will also be offered the opportunity to present his/her case.
* Both parties may be accompanied by another person.
* Having followed these procedures the Board of Management will then make a decision on the action, if any, it considers necessary to take in respect of the employee. The Dept. of Education & Science will be informed of the outcome where the employee had been absent on administrative leave.

**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. St. Teresa’s N.S. shall 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 (see also our website [www.ballintogherns.ie](http://www.ballintogherns.ie))

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 BOM meeting.

5. St. Teresa’s N.S. will undertake an annual review of its Child Protection Policy and its implementation by the school. A checklist will be used in undertaking the review (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 make every effort not to 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.
* When possible children should work in groups
* Children with physical disabilities who may require assistance in toileting 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 (DES Procedures 2:3). 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.

**Success Criteria**

Puttingthe policy in place will have the effect of providing school staff with clear procedures on reporting suspected cases of child abuse. Its success will be determined by feedback from staff, the Board of Management, Parents, the Dept. of Education & Science and the Health Board.

**Roles and Responsibility**

The Board of Management of St. Teresa’s N.S. is responsible for monitoring, evaluating and implementing this policy.

The principal will co-ordinate the progress of this policy, and will encourage and accept feedback from staff, parents, etc., and ultimately report back to the staff and Board of Management.

**Timeframe for Implementation**

This policy is now being fully implemented.

**Timeframe for Review**

This policy was last reviewed in October 2011 and is scheduled to be reviewed again in September 2013, unless circumstances deem it necessary for earlier review.

**Ratification of Policy**

This policy will be reviewed by the Board of Management once in every school year.

This policy was adopted by the Board of Management on 19/11/2012

The Board further endorses the Principal, Nora Kearins as the school DLP and Ruth Sweeney as Deputy DLP.

**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 St. Teresa’s N.S. and reserves the right to do so if/when the need occurs.

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|  | 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 |
|  | Has the Board formally adopted a child protection policy in accordance with the  ‘Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post Primary Schools’? | YES | NO |
|  | 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 |
|  | Are there both a DLP and a Deputy DLP currently appointed? | YES | NO |
|  | Are the relevant contact details (HSE and An Garda Síochána) to hand? | YES | NO |
|  | Has the DLP attended available child protection training? | YES | NO |
|  | Has the Deputy DLP attended available child protection training? | YES | NO |
|  | Have any members of the Board attended child protection training? | YES | NO |
|  | 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 |
|  | Has the Board ensured that the Department’s ‘Child Protection Procedures for Primary  and Post Primary Schools’ are available to all school personnel? | YES | NO |
|  | Does the Board have arrangements in place to communicate the school’s child protection policy to new school personnel? | YES | NO |
|  | 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 |
|  | 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 |
|  | 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 |
|  | 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 |
|  | Were child protection matters reported to the Board appropriately recorded in the Board minutes? | YES | NO |
|  | Is the Board satisfied that all records relating to child protection are appropriately filed and stored securely? | YES | NO |
|  | Has the Board ensured that the Parents’ Association has been provided with the school’s child protection policy? | YES | NO |