

St Mary's High School Downpatrick



'Every Child Matters'

Child Protection Policy 2022/2023



*Spirit of Catholic Education
Award 2022*



Child Protection Policy

2022/23

Designated Teacher for Child Protection: **Mrs M Arkins**
Deputy Designated Teacher 1: **Ms D Dornan**
Deputy Designated Teacher 2: **Ms R McLaughlin, Principal**
Designated Governor: **Mr C McGrath**

Chair of the Board of Governors: **Mr Eamonn McGrady**

The central thrust of the **Children (Northern Ireland) Order 1995** is that the welfare of the child must be the **paramount** consideration and this is the essential principle, which underpins our school's policy for child protection. Child protection is a part of overall safeguarding measures which we in St. Mary's put in place to ensure positive student welfare.

Date of Policy Review	
Signed:	Designated Teacher
Signed:	Principal
Signed:	Chair of Board of Governors

As a Rights Respecting School we in St Mary's are bound by the **United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)**. This sets out the rights which protect all young people until aged 18yrs. This policy is especially concerned with **Articles 3,12,19 & 23**

Safeguarding Principles

Within our policy we:

- **Promote** the welfare for all our students with the understanding that their welfare is **Paramount**
- Understand that the voice of the young person must be heard
- **Prevent** harm occurring though early identification of risk and using appropriate, proportionate & timely interventions
- **Protect** our students from harm when this is required
- Work in **partnership** with parents and external agencies
- Understand the role of **Parents and their Responsibility** in relation to their children

1. Child Protection Ethos

We in St Mary's have a pastoral responsibility towards the children in our charge and we must take all reasonable steps to ensure that their welfare is safeguarded and their safety is preserved. This will be done in a caring, supportive and safe environment where each student's unique talents and abilities are recognised.

All staff will be alert to the signs of possible abuse and be aware of the procedures to be followed if they have any concerns.

2.General Aims of the Policy

1. To help the child develop a sense of self respect, the capacity to live as an independent adult and the ability to function as a contributing member of society
2. To help the child acquire knowledge, skills and practical abilities and the will to use them
3. To prepare the child for adult life at home, at work, at leisure and at large as a responsible citizen
4. To help the child develop qualities of mind, body, spirit, feeling and imagination.
5. To enhance the child's capacity for making judgements of a social, moral and aesthetic nature and thus come to a deeper understanding of his/herself and of the world in which they live

3.Child Protection Definitions

Definition of Harm

Harm can be suffered by a child or young person by acts of abuse perpetrated upon them by others. Abuse can happen in any family, but children may be more at risk if their parents, carers have problems with drugs, alcohol and mental health or of they live in a home where domestic abuse occurs.

(co-operating to Safeguard Children and Young People in Northern Ireland August 2017)

Harm can be caused by:

Sexual Abuse

Sexual Abuse occurs when others use and exploit children sexually for their own gratification or gain or the gratification of others. Sexual abuse may involve physical contact, including assault by penetration (for example, rape, or oral sex) or non-penetrative acts such as masturbation, kissing, rubbing and touching outside clothing. It may include non-contact activities, such as involving children in the production of sexual images, forcing children to look at sexual images or watch sexual activities, encouraging children to behave in sexually inappropriate ways or grooming a child in preparation for abuse (including via e-technology). Adult males do not solely perpetrate sexual abuse. Women can commit acts of sexual abuse, as can other children.

Emotional/Mental Abuse

This is the persistent emotional or psychological ill treatment of a child such as to cause severe and persistent adverse effects on the child's emotional development. It may involve conveying to children that they are worthless or unloved, inadequate or valued only in so far as they meet the needs of the other person. It may include not giving child opportunities to express their views, deliberately silencing them, or 'making fun' of what they say or how they communicate. Emotional abuse may involve bullying including online bullying through social networks, online games or mobile phones by a child's peers. It may involve causing children frequently to feel frightened or in danger or the exploitation or corruption of children. Some level of emotional abuse is involved in all types of ill-treatment of a child.

Domestic Violence*

Domestic abuse is defined as threatening, controlling, coercive behaviour, violence or abuse (psychological, physical, virtual, verbal, sexual, financial or emotional) inflicted on one person by another (irrespective of age, ethnicity, religion, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation or any form of disability) by a current or former intimate partner or family member.

(Stopping domestic violence and sexual abuse in NI (DHSSPS/DOJ March 2016)

The school will always refer Domestic Violence concerns to Social Services

*In September 2021 St. Mary's committed to being part of a pilot programme called **'Operation Encompass'**

'Operation Encompass is an early intervention partnership between local Police and our school, aimed at supporting children who are victims of domestic violence and abuse. As a school, we recognise that children's exposure to domestic violence is a traumatic event for them.

When the police have attended a domestic incident and one of our students is present, they will make contact with the school at the start of the next working day, to share this information with a member of the school's safeguarding team. This will allow the safeguarding team the opportunity to provide direct or indirect support to this child and their family'

This information will be treated like any other child protection case as per DE Circular 2020/07. It will only be shared outside of the safeguarding team on a proportionate and need to know basis. All members of the school based safeguarding team have completed the online Operation Encompass training, so they are able to take these calls. Any staff responsible for answering the phone initially has been made aware of Operation Encompass and the need to pass these calls on with urgency. Any calls relating to Operation Encompass are put through to either Ms Arkins(DT) or Ms Dornan(DDT). Ms McLaughlin(DDT & Principal) will take this call if the other 2 staff members are unavailable

Physical Abuse

The deliberate physical injury to a child, or the wilful or neglectful failure to prevent physical injury or suffering. This may include hitting, biting, pinching, shaking, throwing, poisoning, burning, scalding, drowning, suffocating, confinement to a room or cot, or inappropriately giving drugs to control behaviour.

Neglect

The persistent failure to meet a child's basic physical, emotional and/or psychological needs, likely to result in significant harm. It may involve a parent or carer failing to provide adequate food, hygiene, shelter or clothing. It is failing to protect a child from physical harm or danger, failing to ensure access to appropriate medical care or treatment. It is a lack of stimulation or lack of supervision. It may also include non-organic failure to thrive. Some children who are emotionally abused often suffer from other types of abuse.

Child Sexual Exploitation(CSE)

The intentional ill-treatment, manipulation or imbalance of power to coerce, control, manipulate or deceive a child or young person; to take selfish or unfair advantage of a child or young person or situation, for personal gain. It may manifest itself in many forms such as child labour, slavery, servitude, engagement in criminal or sexual activity (even if the sexual activity appears consensual) begging, benefit or other financial fraud or child trafficking. It extends to the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of children for the purpose of exploitation. Exploitation can also occur through the use of technology.

*** Although 'exploitation' is not a category for the Child Protection Register, it should be noted that children who are or who have been exploited will usually suffer from physical, emotional, sexual abuse or a combination of all these forms of abuse*

Grooming

Grooming of a child or young person is always abusive or exploitative. It often involves perpetrators gaining the trust of the child or young person or the family, friends or community of the young person and making an emotional connection with the victim in order to facilitate abuse in advance of the abuse commencing. Grooming may occur face to face, online and /or through social media.

***Those involved in grooming may also be children or young people and may be acting under coercion or the influence of adults. Careful consideration should always be given to any punitive approach or to the 'criminalising' of young people.

E Safety/Internet/Online Abuse

Online safety means acting and staying safe when using digital technologies. It is wider than simply internet technology. It is concerned with texting, apps and all communication through digital devices. It has become a concern in schools and we must endeavour to reducing risk by teaching students how to act responsibly and keep themselves safe. This aspect of safeguarding is covered in the ICT/AUP policy.

Female Genital Mutilation(FGM)

This is a form of child abuse and violence against women and girls. It involves procedures that include the partial or total removal of the external female genitalia for no medical reason and is totally illegal. This procedure is medically unnecessary and has serious health consequences. It is on the rise in NI due to the multi-cultural nature of our society. Children may be taken out of the country for a prolonged period for this procedure to be performed. Any suspicions by staff will be reported to Social Services through the Gateway Team and PSNI immediately.

(Definitions of categories from Co-Operating to Safeguard Children and Young People in Northern Ireland 2016)

4.Symptoms or Indicators of Abuse

It is not always easy for professionals in school to identify abuse in young people. Symptoms or signs on their own may not always indicate that abuse is taking place but it may mean something may be bothering a young person and intervention may be required.

The list below is not an exhaustive list of indicators but when there are several or when taken together may be a cause for concern:

- Marks or bruises with no proper or a conflicting explanation of the cause which may be a regular occurrence
- Poor hygiene such as untreated head lice
- Child may be aggressive or extremely withdrawn
- Fear of a particular adult or
- Eating disorder
- Social Isolation
- Poor school attendance
- Poor peer group relationships
- Fear of going home
- Unusual themes in child's artwork or stories
- Symptoms of self-harming or suicide attempts
- Low self-esteem and low self-expectations
- Falling standards in school and poor concentration
- Lack of parental engagement

Indicators may be useful in identifying potential risk but their presence does not necessarily mean abuse is occurring but at the same time absence of such indicators does not mean it is not happening. It is important to note that a child may be coming to school from a poor or abusive family setting and this may impact on their mood, outcomes etc. It is vital that staff refer such cases to the designated or deputy designated teachers so that the appropriate agencies may be alerted

5.Roles and Responsibilities

Designated Teacher for Child Protection

This role ensures:

- Induction and training of all school staff and BOG
- Ensuring all staff are familiar with how and when to complete the CPIR 1 'Note of Concern' form
- Discussing student safeguarding concerns with staff members when necessary
- Keeping records of all child protection concerns
- Liaising with outside agencies such as EA and Social Services
- Updating BOG regularly regarding Child Protection matters in a written format
- Making referrals to Social Services and PSNI where appropriate
- Attending LAC reviews/Case Conferences regarding individual students where appropriate
- Disposing of all CP records within the timeline laid down by DENI
- Promoting a safeguarding and child protection ethos in the school
- Taking the lead responsibility for the development of the school's child protection policy

Deputy Designated Teacher(s) for Child Protection

The role of the DDT(s) is to work co-operatively with the DT in fulfilling her responsibilities. In St Mary's there are 2 DDTs including the Principal

Board of Governors

This role ensures:

- Having a full understanding of the roles of the Designated and Deputy Designated Teachers for Child Protection
- That safeguarding training is afforded to all staff and governors including refresher training
- There is a Child Protection Policy in place which is reviewed annually and disseminated to students and parents every 2 years
- Making sure there is an Anti-Bullying Policy which is reviewed every 4 years and that all incidents of bullying or alleged bullying are recorded
- There is a 'Safeguarding Practices' Policy for all staff working in the school
- A vetting procedure is in place for school staff and volunteers
- A full annual written report on Child Protection matters as well as updates at each BOG meeting are presented by the DT

**** In the event of a safeguarding or child protection complaint being made against the Principal, it is the Chairperson of the Board of Governors who will assume lead responsibility for managing the complaint/allegation in keeping with guidance issued by the Department of Education.**

The Chairperson is responsible for ensuring child protection records are kept and the Chairperson also signs the 'Record of Child Abuse Complaints against staff' even if there have been no entries.

The School Principal

This role ensures:

- As the secretary to the BOG the Principal will keep the governors informed of any changes to guidance, procedure or legislation relating to safeguarding and child protection
- The Principal will take the lead in any child protection concerns relating to staff
- The DT & DDTs conduct awareness training with staff including new staff and volunteers as part of an induction programme

Parent/Carer

The primary responsibility for safeguarding and protection of children rests with parents/carers who should feel confident in raising any concerns they have in relation to their child.

The role ensures:

- That parents keep the school informed regarding health or educational needs their child may have
- That parent/carer provides up to date contact details to the school
- Keeping the school abreast of information regarding Court Orders relating to their child's safety
- Parents being proactive in alerting the school to any change in circumstances such as address, contact details, or parental responsibility
- Keeping the school informed as to the reason for student absences
- That parents control their children's social media usage including being aware of the age restrictions for setting up accounts for the various platforms

6.The Preventative Curriculum

In St Mary's students are encouraged to develop their social, physical and emotional health in a mutually respectful environment. This is facilitated through the taught Statutory Pastoral and Curricular Programmes.

In St Mary's we:

- Promote student self-awareness and understanding of safeguarding issues through Personal Development time or when they arise within the subject context
- Encourage the development of coping strategies and resilience building in order to make more positive choices in a range of situations
- Access external agencies who provide speakers and workshops for students in the promotion of safeguarding messages such as positive mental health, alcohol, drug misuse and safer internet use
- Use materials and resources to address sensitive issues such as those provided on the RSE Hub(CCEA)

7.Responding to Safeguarding and Child Protection Concerns

It takes a lot of courage for a child to disclose that they are being abused. They may feel ashamed, particularly if the abuse is sexual; their abuser may have threatened what will happen if they tell; they may have lost all trust in adults; or they may believe, or have been told, that the abuse is their own fault. Sometimes they may not be aware that what is happening is abusive. A child whose first language is not English must be given the opportunity to express themselves to someone with appropriate language skills. Support must be sought from the **EA's Intercultural Education Service**.

1. How a member of staff can raise a concern about possible abuse of a student (by someone other than by a member of staff)

- If a member of staff has a concern about a student or a student has made a disclosure to a member of staff, the staff member must complete a CPIR 1 'Note of Concern' form **Appendix 1**
- **Staff must not investigate the concern. This is a matter for Social Services.**
- If a student speaks to a member of staff about any concerns or risks to their safety or wellbeing, **the staff member will let the student know that in order to help them they must pass the information on to the DT/DDT and that they cannot promise confidentiality.** It is vital to be caring, empathetic and open to the young person to ensure they feel confident in talking about this problem or concern they may have.

Further details on how staff can raise a concern is found on **Appendix 2**

2. How a Parent/Carer can raise a concern about a Child Protection concern within the school

- In St. Mary's we aim to work closely with parents/carers in supporting all aspects of their child's development and wellbeing. Any concerns raised by them will be taken seriously and will be dealt with in a professional manner.

Further details on how a concern can be raised is found in **Appendix 3**

3. How a complaint can be made about possible abuse by a member of the school's staff or a volunteer

If an allegation of Abuse is made against a member of staff this allegation is investigated by the Principal (or Designated teacher if the Principal is not available). If the complaint is against the Principal the DT liaises with the Chair of the Board of Governors

The procedures are outlined in **Appendix 4**

8.Consent/Confidentiality/Information Sharing and Record keeping

Before a referral is made to Social Services by the DT/DDT the consent of the parent/carers and or the young person is usually sought. The exception to this would be if seeking such consent would put a young person or others at increased risk of serious harm or it would undermine the prevention, detection or prosecution of a serious crime or where consent may lead to interference with any potential investigation.

Where consent has been sought and withheld these wishes will be considered. The primary consideration must always be the safety and welfare of the child and a referral will be made if we believe that it is in the best interests of the child to do so.

Consent relating to students aged over 18 years

There is a difficult balance between gaining consent from an over 18 yr old and ensuring the young person is protected from harm. If consent is withheld, then no referral is made unless:

- **The person causing harm is a member of staff or a volunteer**
- **Consent has been provided under influence, coercion or duress**
- **A crime may be suspected or alleged**

Confidentiality and Information Sharing

- Information given to members of staff about possible child abuse cannot be held 'in confidence'. Staff have a responsibility to share relevant information about the protection of children with other professionals especially investigative agencies such as Social Services and the PSNI
- In keeping with the principle of confidentiality, the sharing of information with school staff will be on a 'need to know basis' only
- If a student transfers to another school we will consider what information to share with the DT of the receiving school but it will be vital to alert another school to any current or historic Child Protection concerns

Information will be shared with other statutory agencies in accordance with the requirement and GDPR regulations of this policy, the school's data protection policy

Record Keeping

In accordance with DE guidance we will follow the guidelines on reporting storage, retention and destruction of electronic records where they relate to child protection concerns

The Child Protection Records are stored securely in the Pastoral Office with only the DT/DDTs allowed access to them. These records will be stored from the child's date of birth plus 30 years. Files will be archived when the student leaves the school with clear information showing the disposal date of said file.

If a complaint is upheld against a member of staff these records should be kept indefinitely*

*Indefinitely is regarded as 40yrs

9.Safe Recruitment Procedures

In St Mary's vetting checks are a key preventative measure in preventing individuals access to children and young people through the education system and schools must ensure that all persons on school property are vetted, inducted and supervised as appropriate.

All staff paid or unpaid who are appointed to positions in this school are vetted in accordance with DE guidance.

10. Monitoring and Evaluation

This policy will be reviewed annually by the Safeguarding Team and approved by the BOG for dissemination to parents, students and staff. It will be implemented through the school's staff induction and training programme at the start of the new school year. Compliance with the policy will be monitored on an ongoing basis by the DT. The BOG through the regular updates by the DT will monitor child protection activity in the school.

11. Related Policies

This policy complements and supports a range of other policies including:

- *Anti-Bullying Policy*
- *Attendance Policy*
- *Behaviour for Learning Policy*
- *Safeguarding Practices for all Staff*
- *RSE Policy*
- *ICT/AUP Policy*
- *Educational Visits Policy*

Documents used as a guide in producing this policy are:

1. *Safeguarding and Child Protection in Schools (DENI September 2019 updated June 2020)*
2. *Co-operating to Safeguard Children and Young People in NI (DHSSPSNI August 2017)*
3. *Core Child Protection Policy and Procedures (SBNI 2017)*
4. *Child Protection: Record Keeping in Schools (DE 1020/07)*

*****Policies are available on the school website***