

Child Protection of Raheen National School

Responsibilities of ALL School Personnel

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

“Child Protection Guidelines and Procedures”

The Board of Management 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 Skill’s Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post Primary Schools, the Board of Management of Raheen N.S. has agreed the following child protection policy:

The Board of Management 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 over all child protection policy

The Designated Liaison Person

- (1) The Principal of the school is the ‘Designated Liaison Person’ (D.L.P.). If this person is unavailable, for whatever reason, the Deputy Principal will be the acting D.L.P. – the nominated replacement.
- (11) The D.L.P. will deal with any case of allegations of child abuse or suspicions of child abuse which may arise. The D.L.P. will liase with the Health Service Executive, the Department of Education & Science and other parties if necessary, e.g., An Garda Síochána, The School Patron (Diocese of Ferns).

The Designated Liaison Person (DLP) is:- **John Curran**

The Deputy Designated Liaison Person (Deputy DLP) is:- **Catherine Greene**

In its policies, practices and activities, Raheen 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.

The school will also adhere to the above principles in relation to any adult pupil with a special vulnerability.

Diocesan Support.

As Raheen N.S. is under the patronage of the Bishop of Ferns, the B.O.M. of Raheen N.S. takes cognisance of the most recent child protection guidelines from the Diocese of Ferns.

The Bishop of Ferns is available to meet with complaints and/or talk with those Who have concerns about the welfare of a child. (Diocesan Office 053 9122177)

Parish Support

A Parish Representative gives/ will support at local level. Every parish in the diocese has/will have at least one parish representative who helps with the development of best practice procedures in the area of child protection within all church-based groups.

In 2004, the Catholic Bishops of Ireland launched a new Child Protection Website, www.cpo.ie. This website provides resource and contact information for anyone working with children in a parish setting or for anyone who might have a child protection concern.

The Stay Safe Programme.

The B.O.M. and Teaching Staff of Raheen N.S. recognises the importance of the 'Stay Safe Programme' within Social Personal Health Education (S.P.H.E.).

This programme of lessons will give children the language they need and the confidence to deal with a potentially unwanted approach by a peer, older child, or other adult. This programme will be taught.

Record Keeping

When child abuse is suspected, it is the policy of Raheen N.S. to keep a record of all the information available.

- (1) Staff should note carefully what they have observed and when they observed it. Signs of physical injury should be described in detail and, if appropriate, sketched. Any comment by the child concerned, or any other person, about how an injury occurred will be recorded, preferably quoting words actually used, as soon as possible after the comment has been made. All records will be regarded as highly confidential and will be retained in a secure location by the designated Liaison Person.
- (11) The Standard Reporting form for reporting child protection and welfare concerns to the relevant health board will be used when required. See Appendix 3, page.78, 79 – Children First, National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children 2011.
- (111) When deemed necessary, the H.S.E. may hold a case conference where there are serious concerns about the welfare of a child/children. A child's teacher and/or D.L.P. may be required to give evidence at such a conference. The form to 'Report by School Personnel to Child Protection Conference' will be used in such a case.

(1V) **Incident/Accident Report Notebook**

Used to record incidents during school time (see Anti-Bullying Policy).

(v) **Visiting Teachers / Parent Helpers** (see Health & Safety Policy).

The Volunteer form will be filled in when deemed necessary.

(VI) **Parental Consent Form**

The B.O.M. of Raheen N.S. will require the Parental / Guardian Consent Form to be completed when pupils are:

- 1) Engaged in activities during school hours which involves a visiting teacher / coach.
- 2) Engaged in after school activities, held within the school or school grounds.
- 3) When a visiting teacher /coach / outside speaker visits the school to work with or talk to the children, a teacher and / or the Principal will be in attendance. (See also Health & Safety).

Allegations or suspicions of child Abuse by School Employees.

As employers, the B.O.M. should seek legal advice in such cases as circumstances can vary from one case to another and it is not possible to address every scenario in guidelines.

The most important consideration of the B.O.M is the protection of children to whom it has a duty to care. Their safety and well being is the first priority. Because of the involvement of school employees, the B.O.M. has duties in respect of them also.

The following two procedures must be followed:

- (1) the reporting procedure in respect of the allegation
- (2) the procedure for dealing with the employee.

Reporting Procedure

Where an allegation of abuse is made against a school employee the D.L.P. will act immediately in accordance with the procedures laid down.

A written statement of the allegation should be sought from the person / agency making the allegation (parents / guardians may make a statement on behalf of the child).

Whether or not the matter is being reported to the appropriate Health Board, the D.L.P. should always inform the Chairperson of the B.O.M. of the allegation.

School employees, other than the D.L.P. who receive allegations of abuse against another school employee will report the matter to the D.L.P. Prescribed procedures to be then followed.

The Chairperson

When a chairperson of the B.O.M is made aware of an allegation of abuse against a school employee, the Chairperson will privately inform the employers of the following:

- (1) the fact that the allegation has been made against him/her;
- (11) the nature of the allegation;
- (111) whether or not the matter has been reported to the appropriate Health Board by the D.L.P.

The employee will be given a copy of the written allegation, and any other relevant information.

The employee will be asked to respond to the allegation in writing to the B.O.M. , within a specified time. (and to the health board).

The priority, as always, is that no child is exposed to any unnecessary risk so the chairperson will as a matter of urgency take any protective measures deemed necessary.

A leave of absence offered to the member of staff and taken would be regarded as administrative leave of absence with pay and not a suspension. Such a leave of absence does not imply any degree of guilt on the part of the school employee.

Where such a leave of absence is invoked, the DES will be contacted with regard to:

- (1) Formal approval for the paid leave of absence of the school employee; and

- (11) Departmental sanction for the employment of a substitute teacher.

Peer Abuse and Bullying.

(See Anti – Bullying Policy).

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 test is whether or not the person has a legitimate involvement or role in dealing with the issue.

Giving information to those who need to have that information for the protection of a child who may have been or has been abused, is not a breach of confidentiality.

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.

This means that even if a reported suspicion of child abuse proves unfounded, a plaintiff who took an action would have to prove that the reporter had not acted reasonably and in good faith making the report.

The act provides significant protection for employees who report child abuse. These protections cover all employees and all forms of discrimination up to and including dismissal.

Qualified Privilege

While the legal protection outlined above only applies to reports made to the appropriate authorities (i.e. The Health Boards and An Garda Síochána), Common Law qualified privilege continues to apply as heretofore. Consequently, should a Board of Management member or school personnel furnish information with regard to suspicions of child abuse to the DLP or the Board of Management Chairperson, such communication would be regarded under common law as having qualified privilege.

A further definition of qualified privilege is outlined in Section 1.4.2 and 1.4.3, page 6 of Child Protection – Guidelines & Procedures.

Freedom of Information Act 1997

Reports made to Health Boards may be subject to provisions of the Freedom Information Act 1997, which 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

A child may be subjected to more than one form of abuse at any given time.

Definitions for each form of abuse are detailed in 'Children First 2011' – (Dept of Children & Youth Affairs) Chapter 2 Section 2.1 – 2.5 pages 8– 10.

Guidelines for Recognition of Child Abuse

A list of child abuse indicators is contained in 'Children First 2011' – Page 10 -11. It is important to stress that, no one indicator should be seen as conclusive in itself of abuse; it may indicate conditions other than 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:-

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

Each of these stages is developed in 'Children First 2011' Pages 8-17

Handling Disclosures From Children

'Child Protection' gives comprehensive details of how disclosures should be approached.

When information is offered in confidence the member of staff will need tact and sensitivity in responding to the disclosure. The member of staff will need to reassure the 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 following advice is offered to school personnel to whom a child makes a disclosure of abuse.

- Listen to the child
- 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

This information should then be passed onto the DLP.

If the reporting person or member of the school staff and the DLP are satisfied that there are reasonable grounds for the suspicion / allegation, the procedures for reporting will be followed.

Child Protection at Raheen N.S. – In Summary

Raheen National School will 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.

- Mindful of this primary duty of care, the Board of Management of Raheen N.S. fully endorses “Children First 2011”, the designated guidelines for the protection and welfare of children as issued by the Department of Children & Youth Affairs, 2011 and “Child Protection Procedures for Primary & Post Primary Schools, Circular 0065/2011 from the Department of Education & Science.
- The Board nominates the 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 the Principal, the Deputy Principal will act as Deputy Designated Liaison Person (DDLp).
- The Board will ensure that appropriate and on going training as necessary will be available for DLP, DDLp and all staff members.
- The Board fully endorses arrangements for the vetting of teaching and non-teaching staff as outlined in circular 0094/2006, June 2006, for the Department of Education & Science.
- Recognising that the safety and well being 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 forthwith.
- The Board will ensure that all school staff, teaching and non-teaching are aware of their obligations under the guidelines detailed in “Children First” and the procedures to be followed in the event of concern.
- The Board recognises that it has two duties of care. The primary duty is the protection, safety and welfare of the children attending Raheen N.S. The Board as an employer also has duties and responsibilities towards its employees.
- The Board will adhere to the protocol outlined in Ch. 4. Allegations or Suspicions of Child Abuse of School Employees, in accordance with requirements of DES’ Child Protection Procedures for Primary & Post Primary Schools Education & Science, 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 circulate this Child Protection policy statement to all parents and guardians at time of enrolment and on a regular basis thereafter. This policy statement and “Children First” will be available for viewing at the school office.

- This policy statement regarding Child Protection at Raheen N.S. applies to all staff, members of the Board of Management, volunteers and contractors working in the school.
- This policy statement will be subject to review annually, each December.
- At each B.O.M. meeting the Principal's report must include the number of those cases where a report involving a child in the school has been submitted to the H.S.E., the DLP shall also state any cases where advice was sought from the H.S.E. and as a result of this advice, no report was made. If n either of these happened then this must be stated also.
- The name of the DLP will be displayed in a prominent position near the entrance to the school. It will be also displayed in the staff room.
- The Principal will enquire about all available training for staff in the area of Child Protection.
- The Principal will ensure that all important contact details for key child protection personnel are to hand.
- This policy will be made available to the Parents' Association and all parents.

Legislation

- The Data Protection Act, 1988
- The Child Care Act, 1991.
- Domestic Violence Act, 1996
- The Non-Fatal Offences Against the Person Act, 1997.
- Freedom of Information Act, 1997.
- The Education Act, 1998.
- Protections for Persons Reporting Child Abuse Act, 1998.
- Children First, published by the Department of Health & Children – guidelines for the protection and welfare of children, 1999.
- Children Protection Guidelines for Primary Schools, Department of Education & Science, 2001.
- 'Our Duty to Care', Department of Health & Children, 2002.
- Circular 46/2007
- Children First: National Guidelines for the Protection and Welfare of children and youth Affairs 2011
- Circular 0065/2011

This policy was adopted by the Board of Management on _____ (date)

Signed: _____
(Chairperson of Board of Management)

Signed: _____
(Principal)

Date: _____

Date: _____

Date of next review: _____

