

Belfast High School

Child Protection Policy and Procedures

(Information for Parents)

ETHOS

Belfast High School fully recognises its responsibilities for child protection. The School will do its utmost to safeguard and promote the welfare of all registered pupils. In all actions the child's best interests shall be the primary consideration.

Our policy applies to all staff, pupils, parents, governors and to anyone working in the school. This policy should be read in conjunction with the School Anti-Bullying Policy.

The Principal has the overall responsibility for the day to day running of the School, including the appointment and management of suitable staff to the designated teacher posts. The Principal must ensure that parents and pupils receive a copy of the Child Protection Policy and Complaints Procedure every two years.

The Principal, as the secretary to the Board of Governors, will have the responsibility of making sure that the Board of Governors fulfil their Child Protection duties, keeping them informed of any changes to guidance, procedure or legislation relating to Child Protection, ensuring timely inclusion of Child Protection activities on the agenda.

Designated Teacher - Mrs L Gormley, Principal

Every school is required to have a Designated and Deputy Designated Teacher with responsibility for Child Protection. This is a highly skilled role developed and supported through specialised training requiring knowledge and professional judgement on complex and emotive issues. It involves :

- The training of all School staff including support staff
- Being available to discuss Child Protection concerns of any member of staff
- Responsibility for record keeping of all Child Protection concerns
- Making referral to Social Services or PSNI Care Units
- Liaison with the ELB Designated Officers for Child Protection
- Keeping the School principal involved
- Lead responsibility for the School's Child Protection Policy
- Promotion of a Child Protection ethos within the school
- Written reports to the Board of Governors regarding Child Protection
- Notifying the following of Child protection referrals:

The Chair of the Board of Governors in voluntary grammar and grant maintained schools

Deputy Designated Teacher - Mrs A McNutt, Assistant Principal

To support and undertake the duties of the Designated Teacher for Child Protection as required.

Chair of the Board of Governors - Mrs M Gordon

The Chairperson of the Board of Governors plays a pivotal role in creating the safe-guarding ethos within the school environment. As such, the Chairperson should ensure that he/she has received the appropriate ELB Child Protection Training from both Human Resources and the Child Protection Support Service for Schools (CPSSS) in order to fulfil his/her responsibilities. In addition, the chair should also ensure that at least one governor has ELB recruitment and selection training. In the event of a Child Protection complaint being made against the Principal, it is the Chairperson who must assume responsibility for managing the complaint/allegation.

The names of the Designated and Deputy Designated staff for Child Protection are displayed in school on the Pastoral Care notice-board.

Staff - What to do if you have a concern:

1. If an assistant teacher has concerns about any pupil or is in receipt of a complaint, rumour or allegation, they must convey that to the Deputy Designated Teacher, Mrs McNutt, or the Designated Teacher, Mrs Gormley.
2. The substance of the concern must be recorded in writing by the Deputy Designated Teacher, Mrs McNutt, or the Designated Teacher, Mrs Gormley and the content of the report agreed.
3. Teachers should not investigate a complaint, rumour or allegation unless it is clearly of a trivial nature.
4. The responsibility of the teacher ends when they have met with the Deputy Designated Teacher, Mrs McNutt, or the Designated Teacher, Mrs Gormley. Subsequent action will be the responsibility of the Deputy Designated Teacher, Mrs McNutt, or the Designated Teacher, Mrs Gormley.

There are five main elements to our policy:

- Ensuring we practise safe recruitment in checking the suitability of staff and volunteers to work with children.
- Raising awareness of child protection issues and equipping children with the skills needed to keep them safe.
- Developing and then implementing procedures for identifying and reporting cases, or suspected cases, of abuse.

- Supporting pupils who have been abused in accordance with their agreed child protection plan
- Establishing a safe environment in which children can learn and develop.

Policy Statement

Children who are suffering or are at risk of suffering significant harm, either as the result of a deliberate act or through failure to act or provide proper care, need to be made safe from harm alongside meeting their other needs.

Potential Signs and Symptoms of Child Abuse

These can be divided into 4 areas:-

Neglect

Physical Injury

Sexual Abuse

Emotional Abuse

There are no absolute guidelines for judging what constitutes significant harm.

There may be a series of events which in themselves do not necessarily cause concern but are significant, if viewed together.

Initially the incident may not seem serious but it should be remembered that prompt help may prevent minor abuse escalating into something more serious.

A child may indicate by signs of behaviour that he or she is being abused. If parents have any concerns they should contact to Mrs Gormley or Mrs McNutt.

Confidentiality

Child protection raises issues of confidentiality which should be clearly understood by all staff. Staff have a professional responsibility to share relevant information about the protection of children with other professionals, particularly investigative agencies and, when physical or sexual abuse is suspected, a legal duty to report this. If a child confides in a member of staff and requests that the information be kept secret, it is important that the member should tell the child, sensitively, that he or she has a responsibility to refer cases of alleged abuse to the appropriate agencies for the child's own sake. Within that context the child should, however, be assured that the matter be disclosed only to people who need to know about it. Staff who receive information about children and their families in the course of their work should share that information **only** within appropriate professional contexts. Child protection records should be kept under secure conditions.

We recognise that because of the day to day contact with children, school staff are well placed to observe the outward signs of abuse. The school will therefore:

- Establish and maintain an environment where children feel secure, are encouraged to talk, and are listened to.
- Ensure children know that there are adults in the school whom they can approach if they are worried.
- Include opportunities in the PSHE (Personal Social and Health Education) curriculum for children to develop the skills they need to recognise and stay safe from abuse.

We will follow the guidance issued by the Department for Education to:

- Ensure we have a designated senior person for child protection who has received appropriate training and support for this role.
- Ensure we have a nominated governor responsible for child protection.
- Ensure every member of staff (including temporary and supply staff and volunteers) and governing body knows the name of the designated senior person responsible for child protection and their role.
- Ensure all staff and volunteers understand their responsibilities in being alert to the signs of abuse and responsibility for referring any concerns to the designated senior person responsible for child protection.
- Ensure that parents have an understanding of the responsibility placed on the school and staff for child protection.
- Notify Social Services if there is an unexplained absence of a pupil who is on the child protection register.
- Develop effective links with relevant agencies and co-operate as required with their enquiries regarding child protection matters including attendance at case conferences.
- Keep written records of concerns about children, even where there is no need to refer the matter immediately.
- Ensure all records are kept securely, separate from the main pupil file, and in locked locations.
- Develop and then follow procedures where an allegation is made against a member of staff or volunteer.
- Ensure safe recruitment practices are always followed.

We recognise that children who are abused or witness violence may find it difficult to develop a sense of self worth. They may feel helplessness, humiliation and some sense of blame. The school may be the only stable, secure and predictable element in the lives of children at risk. When at school their behaviour may be challenging and defiant or they may be withdrawn. The school will endeavour to support the pupil through:

- The content of the curriculum.
- The school ethos which promotes a positive, supportive and secure environment and gives pupils a sense of being valued.
- The **School Pastoral Care Policy** which is aimed at supporting vulnerable pupils in the school. The school will ensure that the pupil knows that some behaviour is unacceptable but they are valued and not to be blamed for any abuse which has occurred.
- Liaison with other agencies that support the pupil such as Social Services, Child and Adult Mental Health Service, Education Welfare Service and Educational Psychology Service.
- Ensuring that, where a pupil on the child protection register leaves, their information is transferred to the new school immediately and that the child's social worker is informed.

Vetting Procedures

All new staff will be appointed subject to a satisfactory Criminal Records Bureau police check. The Registrar will ensure that this process is completed and will report to the Principal. See recruitment and vetting procedures.

In summary the underlying principles are:

- a. The welfare, safety and well-being of the pupils have primacy and must be considered before any other issue.
- b. All concerns and actions must be dated, recorded, agreed and filed.
- c. Once a matter is raised with a more senior member of staff the responsibility for decision making and subsequent action becomes that of the more senior teacher.

The relationship between a pupil and a teacher is based on trust. Staff should not give the pupil an undertaking of confidentiality, although they should reassure the pupil that information will be disclosed only to people who need to know.

CHILD PROTECTION CODE OF CONDUCT FOR STAFF

All staff must adhere to the following Code of Conduct;

All actions concerning children must uphold the best interests of the child as a primary consideration. Staff must always be mindful of the fact that they hold a position of trust and that their behaviour towards the children in their charge must be above reproach. This Code of Conduct is not intended to detract from the enriching experiences children gain from positive interaction with staff within the education sector. It is intended to assist staff in respect of the complex issue of child abuse, by drawing attention to the areas of risk for staff and by offering guidance on prudent conduct.

1. Private meetings with pupils:

- a. Staff should be aware of the dangers that may arise from private interviews with individual pupils. It is recognised that there will be occasions when confidential interviews must take place. As far as possible, staff should conduct such interviews in a room with visual access or with the door open.
- b. Where such conditions cannot apply, staff are advised to ensure that another adult knows that the interview is taking place. It may be necessary to use a sign indicating that the room is in use but it is not advisable to use signs prohibiting entry to the room.
- c. Where possible another pupil or (preferably) another adult should be present or nearby during the interview and the school will take active measures to facilitate this.

2. Physical contact with pupils:

- a. As a general principle, staff are advised not to make unnecessary physical contact with their pupils.
- b. It is unrealistic and unnecessary, however, to suggest that staff should touch pupils only in emergencies. In particular, a distressed child, especially a younger child, may need reassurance involving physical comforting, as a caring parent would provide. Staff should not feel inhibited from providing this, but there should still be minimal physical contact eg arm round shoulder.
- c. Staff should never touch a child who has clearly indicated that he/she is, or would be, uncomfortable with such contact, unless it is necessary to protect the child, others or property from harm. (DENI Circular 1999/9 on the use of reasonable force, gives guidance on Article 4 of the Education (NI) Order 1998 (Power of member of staff to restrain pupils).
- d. Physical punishment is illegal, as is any form of physical response to misbehaviour, unless it is by way of necessary restraint.
- e. Staff who have to administer first aid to a pupil should ensure wherever possible that this is done in the presence of other children or another adult. However, no member of staff should hesitate to provide first aid in an emergency simply because another person is not present.

- f. Any physical contact, which would be likely to be misinterpreted, by the pupil, parent or other casual observer, should be avoided.
- g. Following any incident where a member of staff feels that his/her actions have been, or may be, misconstrued, a written report of the incident should be submitted immediately to his/her Designated Teacher/Principal.
- h. Staff should be particularly careful when supervising pupils in a residential setting or in approved out of school activities where more informal relationships tend to be usual and where staff may be in proximity to pupils in circumstances very different from the normal school/work environment.

Code of Conduct

All staff will be reminded of Procedures on an annual basis. Staff who do not adhere to the Belfast High School Child Protection Policy and Procedures may be subject to disciplinary procedures.

3. Choice and use of teaching materials:

- a. Teachers should avoid teaching material, the choice of which might be misinterpreted and reflect upon the motives for the choice.
- b. When using teaching materials of a sensitive nature a teacher should be aware of the danger that their application, either by pupils or by the teacher, might after the event be criticised. Schools have already received advice on the value of consulting parents and Governors when proposing to use materials in connection with sex education programmes.
- c. If in doubt about the appropriateness of a particular teaching material, the teacher should consult with the Principal before using it.

4. Relationships and attitudes:

Within the Pastoral Care Policies of the school and the empowering authority, staff should ensure that their relationships with pupils are appropriate to the age, maturity and sex of the pupils, taking care that their conduct does not give rise to comment or speculation. Attitudes, demeanour and language all require care and thought.

Key points to remember

- 1. Do not promise confidentiality to a pupil.
- 2. Take any serious Child Protection concern directly to Mrs Gormley or Mrs McNutt
- 3. Do not investigate a Child protection concern
- 4. Do not discuss a Child Protection concern with anyone other than Mrs Gormley or Mrs McNutt

REPORTING PROCESS FOR CONCERNS ABOUT SCHOOL STAFF OR VOLUNTEERS

I have a concern about my / a child's safety

I can talk to or write to the Year Teacher or Vice-Principal for Pastoral Care
(see below)

If I am still concerned I can talk to the Designated Teacher or Deputy Designated
Teacher (see below)

If I am still concerned I can talk to or write to the Chairman of the Board of Governors.

At any time I can talk to Social Services or the Police CARE Unit.

(Social Services 90 849142/93 315100/28 275427, Police CARE Unit 90 259458)

Parents can be assured that **all** allegations, complaints or requests for action will be:

- (i) Listened to or received sympathetically.
- (ii) Noted in detail if not received in writing.
- (iii) Acted upon in accordance with School procedures unless an immediate clarification is sufficient.
- (iv) Replied to in writing or by telephone.

**Assistant Principal for Pastoral Care
Year Teachers**

Mrs McNutt
Form 1: Mrs A Lowry
Form 2: Mrs P Creighton
Form 3: Mrs E Addis
Form 4: Mr K Doyle
Form 5: Mrs J Barkley
L6: Mrs E Hood
U6: Mr R Bleakley

**Designated Teacher for Child Protection
Deputy Designated Teacher for Child Protection
Chairman, Board of Governors**

Mrs L Gormley
Mrs A McNutt
Mr T McGrath