Child Safeguarding Statement

St. Paul's National School – Ratoath

St. Paul's National School's

Child Safeguarding Statement

St. Paul's National School is a primary school providing primary education to pupils from Junior Infants to Sixth Class.
In accordance with the requirements of the Children First Act 2015, Children First: National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children 2017, the Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post Primary Schools 2017, the revised procedures of 2023 and Tusla Guidance on the preparation of Child Safeguarding Statements, the Board of Management of St. Paul's has agreed the Child Safeguarding Statement set out in this document.

1 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 2017, and the revised procedures of 2023, as part of this overall Child Safeguarding Statement

2 The Designated Liaison Person (DLP) is **Stephen Harte.**

3 The Deputy Designated Liaison Person (Deputy DLP) is **Lizzy Ward**

4 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, procedures, practices and activities In its policies, procedures, practices and activities, the 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 comply with its statutory obligations under the Children First Act 2015 and other relevant legislation relating to the protection and welfare of children;
- fully co-operate with the relevant statutory authorities in relation to child protection and welfare matters
- adopt safe practices to minimise the risk 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.

5 The following procedures/measures are in place:

- In relation to any member of staff who is the subject of any investigation (howsoever described) in respect of any act, omission or circumstance in respect of a child attending the school, the school adheres to the relevant procedures set out in Chapter 7 of the Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools 2017 and the revised procedures of 2023, and to the relevant agreed disciplinary procedures for school staff which are published on the DE website.

- In relation to the selection or recruitment of staff and their suitability to work with children, the school adheres to the statutory vetting requirements of the National Vetting Bureau (Children and Vulnerable Persons) Acts 2012 to 2016 and to the wider duty of care guidance set out in relevant Garda vetting and recruitment circulars published by the DE and available on the DE website.

- In relation to the provision of information and, where necessary, instruction and training, to staff in respect of the identification of the occurrence of harm (as defined in the 2015 Act) the school:

  - Has provided each member of staff with a copy of the school's Child Safeguarding Statement;
  - Ensures all new staff are provided with a copy of the school's Child Safeguarding Statement;
  - Ensures staff avail of relevant training;
  - Encourages Board of Management members to avail of relevant training;
  - Through the Board of Management, maintains records of all staff and Board member training.

- In relation to reporting of child protection concerns to Tusla, all school personnel are required to adhere to the procedures set out in the Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools 2017 and the revised procedures of 2023, including in the case of registered teachers, those in relation to mandated reporting under the Children First Act 2015.

- In this school the Board has appointed the abovenamed DLP as the "relevant person" (as defined in the Children First Act 2015) to be the first point of contact in respect of the child safeguarding statement.

- All registered teachers employed by the school are mandated persons under the Children First Act 2015.

- In accordance with the Children First Act 2015, the Board has carried out an assessment of any potential for harm to a child while attending the school or participating in school activities. A written assessment setting out the areas of risk identified and the school's procedures for managing those risks is attached as an appendix to these procedures.

- The various procedures referred to in this Statement can be accessed via the school's website, the DE website or will be made available on request by the school.

6 This statement has been published on the school's website and has been provided to all members of school personnel, the Parents' Association (if any) and the patron. It is readily accessible to parents and guardians on request. A copy of this Statement will be made available to Tusla and the Department if requested.

7 This Child Safeguarding Statement will be reviewed annually or as soon as practicable after there has been a material change in any matter to which this statement refers.

Relationship to Characteristic Spirit of the School

St. Paul's N.S. seeks to help the children to grow and develop into healthy, confident, mature adults, capable of realising their full potential as human beings. We strive to create a happy, safe environment for the children where they feel secure, knowing that if they have concerns, they will be listened to with understanding and respect and their concerns will be addressed.

Aims

- To raise awareness of child abuse namely, emotional, physical, sexual abuse and neglect, among all members of our school community including Board of Management, teachers, pupils, parents, SNAs, secretary and caretaker.
- To put in place clear procedures for all school personnel dealing with suspicions and allegations of child abuse.
- To identify curricular content and resources that contributes to the prevention of child abuse and to enable children to seek assistance and/or properly deal with abuse if it occurs.

Guidelines for school personnel:

Roles and Responsibilities

- The Board of Management has primary responsibility for the care and welfare of their pupils.
- The DLP has specific responsibility for child protection in the school.
- All staff has a general duty of care to ensure that arrangements are in place to protect children from harm.
- All teaching staff is mandated to report concerns, suspicions, allegations or disclosures.

Role of the Board of Management

- To arrange for the planning, development and implementation of an effective child protection programme.
- To monitor and evaluate its effectiveness.
- To provide appropriate staff development and training.
- To ensure proper recruitment procedures are followed and that all employees complete their vetting before taking up their positions. It is the responsibility of all employees to ensure their Garda vetting is in place and up to date.
- To receive an oversight report at each Board meeting (Appendix 4)

Specifically they will:

- Appoint a DLP and deputy DLP.
- Have clear procedures for dealing with allegations or suspicions of child abuse (See below)
- Monitor the progress of children at risk.
- Ensure that curricular provision is in place for the prevention of child abuse.
- Investigate and respond to allegations of child abuse against any of the school's employees.
- Through the Principal, decide on teachers' attendance at child protection meetings/case conferences and to advise teachers before attending such meetings/conferences. In the case of mandatory reporting attendance may be mandated.

Procedures for BOM in cases of allegations or suspicions of child abuse by a school employee:

In a school context, the most important consideration to be taken into account is the protection of children, and their safety and well-being must be the priority.

Each school authority also has a duty and responsibility, as an employer, in respect of its employees. The procedure to be followed in chapter 7 of the Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post Primary Schools 2017 and the revised procedures of 2023, is to assist

employers in having due regard to the rights and interests of the children under their care and those of the employee against whom an allegation is made.

In the case of primary schools the board of management is the employer. Therefore in this chapter, the phrase "the employer" is used to refer to the board of management. Employers should also be aware of and comply with employment legislation and any other relevant employee relations policies.

It is important to note that there are two procedures to be followed:

(a) the reporting procedure in respect of the allegation/suspicion;

(b) the procedure for dealing with the employee. In general the same person shall not have responsibility for dealing with the reporting issue and the employment issue.

The designated liaison person (DLP) is responsible for reporting the matter to Tusla while the employer is responsible for addressing the employment issues. However, where the allegation/suspicion relates to the DLP, the chairperson shall assume the responsibility for seeking advice from and/or for reporting the matter to Tusla, as appropriate.

A. Reporting

In the event of receiving a complaint regarding an employee, employers must have in place a protocol which authorises immediate action without the need for a Board of management meeting or legal advice. See Appendix 2.

The procedure will follow the guidelines as laid out in Chapter 7.

Role of the Staff Members (Teachers, SNAs, Caretaker, Secretary …)

- Staff are provided with copies of the following guidelines and it is the responsibility of all staff to familiarise themselves with the school guidelines and the following sources.
    - Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post Primary Schools 2017
    - Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post Primary Schools (revised 2023)
    - Children First: National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children

The Children First Act, 2015 has placed a statutory obligation on specific people to report child protection concerns that are at or above a threshold of harm (as defined in that Act) to Tusla.

Such persons are referred to as "mandated persons" under the Act.

All teachers who are registered with the Teaching Council are mandated persons under the Children First Act, 2015.
The specific statutory responsibilities of registered teachers are outlined in Chapter 4 of the Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post Primary Schools 2017 and the revised procedures of 2023, and they are to be followed by each teacher as a mandated person.

It must be noted that, in accordance with the best practice (non-statutory) requirement of the Children First National Guidance 2017 and the revised procedures of 2023, these procedures continue the previous requirement that any member of school personnel including a registered teacher who receives an allegation or has a suspicion that a child may have been, is being, or is at risk of being abused or neglected, is still required to report the matter, without delay, to the DLP in the school.

Every registered teacher, as a mandated person, now also has a statutory obligation to make his or her own mandated report to Tusla where the concern about the child is at or above a threshold of harm as defined in the Act. Therefore in addition to reporting his or her concern to the DLP, a registered teacher must also consider whether or not the concern is at or above the defined threshold of harm at which the registered teacher has his or her own statutory obligation under the Children First Act, 2015 to submit a mandated report to Tusla.

Chapter 5 of these procedures requires that the registered teacher shall liaise with the DLP in relation to determining if the concern in question is at or above the defined threshold of harm at which the registered teacher must submit a mandated report. Chapter 5 also requires that the registered teacher shall follow the relevant reporting procedures set out in section 5.2, including, where applicable, those requiring the registered teacher to submit a mandated report jointly with the DLP.

Important note for registered teacher: Every registered teacher should note that as a mandated person the statutory obligation under the Children First Act 2015 to make a mandated report to Tusla rests with the individual teacher and this applies regardless of whether or not the DLP reports the concern in question. However a registered teacher who makes a mandated report to Tusla jointly with the DLP meets his or her statutory obligation to report to Tusla under the Children First Act 2015.

Guidelines for teachers and staff members in handling disclosures from children:

Where a child discloses alleged abuse to a staff member, the person receiving that information should listen carefully and supportively. Great care must be taken not to abuse the child's trust. This should not be a formal interview.

The following advice is offered:

- Listen to the child.
- 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.
- Confidentiality should not be assured - explain that further help may have to be sought.
- Record the discussion accurately noting
    - What, where and when?
    - Descriptions and possible sketches of physical injuries.
    - Explanations of injuries using direct quotations if appropriate.
- Retain the record securely.
- The staff member should obtain only necessary relevant facts. It is not the responsibility of school personnel to investigate allegations of abuse.
- The DLP should then be informed and given relevant records.
- If the suspected abuser is the DLP then the suspicion and any records will be passed on to the Chairperson who will proceed as per guidelines.

Guidelines for Teachers and Staff Members in handling suspicions of abuse

Staff members who suspect abuse should refer to Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post Primary Schools 2017 and the revised procedures of 2023, (Appendix A) especially

- Chapter 2: Definition & Recognition of Child Abuse
- Chapter 5: Reporting of concerns
- Appendix 1: Signs and Symptoms Of Child Abuse

- Staff members should observe and record over time the dates, signs, symptoms, behaviour causing them concern.
- <u>They should inform the DLP immediately of their suspicions and pass on all records as they are prepared.</u>

Role of the Designated Liaison Person (DLP)

- The DLP acts as a liaison with outside agencies, HSE, Gardaí and other parties with child protection concerns.

- The DLP will ensure each staff member receives a copy of the Child Safeguarding Statement and will remind them of their responsibility to familiarise themselves with the contents and the Children First National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children and the Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post Primary Schools 2017.
- The DLP will be available to staff for consultation regarding suspicions or disclosures of abuse. She will keep records of these consultations.
- The DLP will seek advice from the HSE.
- The DLP will report suspicions and allegations of child abuse to the HSE or/and An Garda Síochána based on this advice.
- The DLP will maintain proper records in a secure, confidential manner and in a secure location.
- The DLP will keep up to date on current developments regarding child protection.

Guidelines for the DLP in handling reported concerns and disclosures

- Where the DLP/Deputy DLP have concerns about a child, but are not sure whether to report the matter to the HSE, they should seek appropriate advice. To do this the DLP/Deputy should make informal contact with the assigned (on duty) Social Worker. The DLP/Deputy in this case, should be explicit that s/he is requesting advice and not making a report. If advised to report the matter, the DLP will act on that advice.

- A report will then be made to the HSE by the DLP/Deputy in person, by telephone or in writing. In the event of an emergency or non-availability of HSE staff, the report should be made to the Gardaí. The DLP should also report the matter to the Chairperson of the BOM, who should then follow the procedures as outlined in the Children First National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children and the Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post Primary Schools 2017 and the revised procedures of 2023.

- A standard reporting form is completed by the DLP/Deputy as comprehensively as possible.

- Parents/guardians will normally be informed that a report is being made. It may be decided that informing the parent/carer is likely to endanger the child or place the child at further risk. The decision not to inform the parent/carer should be briefly recorded together with the reasons for not doing so.

- When the allegation is against the DLP, the chairperson then assumes responsibility for reporting the matter to the HSE and filling in the standard reporting form.

- Where there are allegations or suspicions of Peer Abuse the DLP will follow the same procedures.

    - Parents of all parties will be notified and the DLP will inform the Chairperson.

- Principal and class teachers will make arrangements to meet separately with all parents, to resolve the matter.
- The school will make arrangements to minimise the possibility of the abusive behaviour recurring.

Child Protection Meetings / Case Conferences

- A request is made from the HSE through the DLP who should consult with the Chairperson of the B.O.M. of the school. The Chairperson may seek clarification through the DLP as to why the attendance of the school employee is necessary and ascertain who else will be present.

- The school employee may complete a report for the meeting/conference. (Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post Primary Schools 2017 and the revised procedures of 2023)

- The school employee will be advised if children/parents/guardians are going to be present. The school employee may contact the Chairperson of the Child Protection Meeting for advice.

- The school employee may keep a child's behaviour under closer observation, if requested to do so. This may include observing the child's behaviour, peer interactions, school progress or informal conversations.

- In all cases, individuals who refer or discuss their concerns about the care and protection of children with HSE staff should be informed of the likely steps to be taken by the professionals involved. Where appropriate and within the normal limits of confidentiality, reporting staff will be kept informed about the outcomes of any enquiry or investigation following on from their report.

- Teachers attending a child protection meeting/case conference should familiarise themselves with the protocol outlined in the Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post Primary Schools 2017 and the revised procedures of 2023.

Organisational Implications

School procedures, below, and new procedures being put in place will be examined with reference to the Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post Primary Schools 2017 and

the revised procedures of 2023, and any child protection issues that may arise will be addressed.

Accidents

While every reasonable precaution will be taken under our Health and Safety Statement to identify and minimise the risk of injury to our children, we realise that accidents will happen. Accidents will be noted in our Incident book and will be addressed under our accident policy as part of Health and Safety.

Physical Contact

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

- Is it acceptable to the child?
- Is it 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.

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 the child will be assisted by a member of staff familiar to the child. Parents will be notified of all such incidents. Where a child requires ongoing assistance, this will be addressed as part of an IEP with a view to developing complete independence and the procedure discussed with the 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; or in the front seat of the car, without prior consent of the parents. It is the responsibility of the staff member to ensure that they are adequately insured. All outings involving staff cars in this way should be brought to the attention of the Principal prior to the event.

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.

Induction of Staff

The DLP will be responsible for informing all new teachers and ancillary staff of the Children First National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children and the Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post Primary Schools 2017 and the revised procedures of 2023. The DLP will give a copy of this Child Safeguarding Statement to all new staff and direct them towards Chapters 2 & 3 and Appendix 1 of Children First: National Guidelines for the Protection and Welfare of Children, Dept. of Children and Youth Affairs, 2017 Appendix A. All new teachers are expected to teach the designated SPHE objectives for their class. Lizzy Ward, Aine O` Toole, Bronwyn Cunningham and Linda Mullen make up the professional Support Team under Droichead. They are responsible for the mentoring of newly qualified teachers. Siobhan Bates/ Marie Dennehy are responsible for supporting all teachers as they implement the SPHE objectives. Colm Duffy ensures that new teachers know how to fill in the roll, and use the online system, correctly and informing the teacher of related 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, Weaving Wellbeing, Stay Safe and SPHE. The attention of new parents is drawn to the school handbook, 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 have access to the school's Code of Behaviour and Anti-Bullying policies.

Record Keeping

The data collection system, Aladdin, is used in the school. Teachers will keep each child's file updated with results of assessments carried out, dates and details of meetings with parents and relevant notes from parents. Aladdin 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 securely in accordance with the retention protocols as advised by the DE.

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 morning and lunchtime breaks. It is expected that staff members make alternative arrangements for cover, if they know they are going to be absent.

Guest Speakers

Guest speakers should never be left alone with pupils. Either the class teacher or SNA should remain with class. The school principal, or deputy principal, have a responsibility to check out the credentials of the guest speaker and to ensure that the material in use by guests as appropriate.

Visitors

Teachers on supervision duty will be aware of visitors entering the school grounds and particularly the school playground and will ascertain their intentions. They will be directed to the school office. They will be supervised in the discharge of their business.
All visitors or teachers who have unsupervised access to the children will be expected to provide their statutory declaration and/or proof of Garda vetting.

One to one teaching

When one to one teaching is used, in cases where it is deemed to be the most appropriate for 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.

Swimming

Children will be brought by bus to the swimming pool. Children will line up in an orderly manner for the bus. Children will be expected to dress and undress themselves for swimming. In the junior classes the doors of the cubicles will be left open in order to offer assistance as needed. Teachers will assist with supervision in the changing rooms in order to ensure the children's safety.

Visibility
Teachers will ensure that children are visible in the school playground. Children will not be allowed to spend time in classrooms where they are not under adult supervision. The children will be sent to an agreed area during break times for use of the toilet or if they need any medical attention. They are not to leave the school playground or to engage with adults who are outside the school playground.

Curriculum Implications

Introduction
In St. Paul's National School all children will be cherished equally and in fulfilling the general aims of the Primary Curriculum we will

1. Enable the child to live a full life as a child and to realise his or her potential
2. Enable the child to develop as a social being through living and co-operating with others and so contribute to the good of society
3. Prepare the child for further education and lifelong learning.

In endeavouring to realise these aims we will create a positive school climate which is open, inclusive, respectful, fair, democratic and tolerant and which seeks to support the holistic development of all children and all adults working with our children. The strategies we will use to create this environment are detailed in our SPHE Plan and will involve:

- Creating a health-promoting physical environment
- Enhancing self-esteem
- Fostering respect for diversity
- Building effective communication within the school
- Developing appropriate home-school communication
- Catering for individual needs
- Developing democratic process
- Fostering inclusive and respectful language.

We strive to ensure that our school will be physically and emotionally safe and we will deliver the curricular content of our SPHE programme with a view to giving our children the protective skills of self-esteem and assertiveness. The circle time methodologies will be used on a whole

school basis. Co-operative interpersonal skills will be developed through working in pairs and working in groups. Older children will be encouraged to work positively and skills in negotiation, building consensus and managing conflict will be developed. The Fun Friends programme is taught to children in First Class and the Friends for Life programme is taught to children in Fifth Class. The Rainbows programme is offered to all children from 1st to 6th who has suffered a loss through separation or bereavement.

Junior and Senior Infants

Infant teachers will teach content objectives as laid out under the 10 strand units in our SPHE programme. They are:

- Self-identity
- Taking care of my body
- Growing and changing
- Safety and protection
- Making decisions
- Myself and my family
- Myself and Others
- My friends and other people
- Relating to others
- Developing citizenship.

These strand units will enable children to develop assertiveness, body integrity, skills relating to self-care, respect for others, identification of feelings and skills necessary to recognise and tell of abuse.

The SPHE programme is supported, using the Walk Tall, Making the Links, RSE resources, Grow in Love programme, HSE materials and the Stay Safe programme.

1st & 2nd classes

Teachers will implement the SPHE programme as laid out under the 10 strand units named to enable the children to develop the skills, knowledge and attitudes pertaining to self-esteem, esteem for others and the environment and skills pertaining to self-care and disclosure. Healthy eating, information on substance use and anti-bullying awareness will be introduced.

The SPHE programme is supported, using the Walk Tall, Making the Links, RSE resources, Grow in Love programme, HSE materials and the Stay Safe programme.

St. Paul's National School also teaches the Fun Friends programme in 1st class.

3rd and 4th classes

Our SPHE programme will again be implemented according to the 10 strand units. Knowledge, skills and attitudes developed in previous classes will be built on. Children will be enabled to develop intra-personal skills and inter-personal skills. As children mature they will be challenged to develop their decision-making skills. They will be encouraged to develop self-protection skills pertaining to smoking and alcohol. Peer pressure and the influence of the media will also be examined. The development of self-esteem, esteem for others, assertiveness, awareness of feelings, and skills around self-protection and disclosure will underpin our teaching.

The SPHE programme is supported, using the Walk Tall, Making the Links, RSE resources, Grow in Love programme, HSE materials, Prim-Ed anti-bullying materials and the Stay Safe programme.

5th and 6th classes

Our SPHE programme will be implemented according to the curricular objectives as laid out under the 10 strands in the SPHE Curriculum. Skills, knowledge and attitudes developed in earlier classes will be enhanced. Children will continue to develop self-awareness and positive attitudes to themselves, others, their environment and the wider world in which they live. Self-protection and respect for others will be fostered, decision-making skills developed, peer influence and media bias examined. Knowledge in relation to legal and illegal drugs and the prevention of substance misuse will be further developed. Children will be enabled to develop good group-building skills, anti-bullying awareness and conflict resolution skills. Self-protection will be emphasised and protection of younger, less able people. Positive attitudes to sexuality will be developed and respect for self and others fostered.

The SPHE programme is supported, using the Walk Tall, Making the Links, RSE resources, Grow in Love programme, HSE materials and the Stay Safe programme.

St. Paul's National School also teaches the Friends for Life programme in 5th class.

An outside speaker is invited in to speak with the children in 6th class about aspects of growing up. The speaker will address the parents first.

Immunity from Civil Liability

Organisations, as well as individuals, may avail of the immunity from civil liability provided in the Protection for Persons reporting Child Abuse Act, 1998, provided they report 'reasonably and in good faith.'

Timeframe for Review

At the first staff meeting of every year the DLP will remind all teachers of the Children First National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children and the Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post Primary Schools 2017 and the revised procedures of 2023. Copies of this policy will be given to those who require them.

A review will be conducted based on the criteria above annually and following any and all incidents when the guidelines are used.

Review and Communication

This Child Safeguarding Statement was reviewed by the Board of Management on 16th September 2025.

Appendix 1:

Definition and Recognition of Child Abuse

This chapter applies to all school personnel who come in contact with children. Everyone must be alert to the possibility that children with whom they are in contact may be experiencing abuse or neglect. This chapter contains guidance (based on chapter 2 of Children First National Guidance 2017 and the revised procedures of 2023) on the four main types of abuse and how abuse and neglect can be recognised.

Reasonable grounds for concern

The Children First National Guidance 2017 and the revised procedures of 2023 require that Tusla should always be informed where a person has reasonable grounds for concern that a child may have been, is being, or is at risk of being abused or neglected. If the symptoms of abuse are ignored, it could result in ongoing harm to the child. It is not necessary for a person to prove that abuse has occurred to report a concern to Tusla. All that is required is that the person has reasonable grounds for concern. It is the role of Tusla to assess concerns that are reported to it. Where a concern is reported, the information will be carefully considered with any other information available and a child protection assessment will be carried out where sufficient risk is identified. Reasonable grounds for a child protection or welfare concern include:

- Evidence (e.g. injury or behaviour) that is consistent with abuse and is unlikely to have been caused in any other way
- Any concern about possible sexual abuse
- Consistent signs that a child is suffering from emotional or physical neglect
- A child saying or indicating by other means that he or she has been abused
- Admission or indication by an adult or a child of an alleged abuse they committed
- An account from a person who saw the child being abused

Types of Child Abuse and how they might be recognised

In Children First National Guidance 2017 and in these procedures, "a child" means a person under the age of 18 years, excluding a person who is or has been married. All school personnel should be familiar with signs and behaviours that may be indicative of child abuse.

This chapter describes the four main types of abuse: neglect, emotional abuse, physical abuse and sexual abuse and outlines how abuse and neglect can be recognised.

- A child may be subjected to one or more forms of abuse at any given time.
- Abuse and neglect can occur within the family, in a community or in an institutional setting. The abuser may be someone known to the child or a stranger, and can be an adult or another child.

- In a situation where abuse is alleged to have been carried out by another child, it should be considered a child welfare and protection issue for both children and child protection procedures should be adhered to for both the alleged victim and the alleged abuser.

Children First National Guidance 2017 states that the important factor in determining whether the behaviour is abuse or neglect is the impact of that behaviour on the child rather than the intention of the parent/carer/other person. The definitions of neglect and abuse presented in this chapter are not legal definitions. They are intended to describe ways in which a child might experience abuse and how this abuse may be recognised. The procedures for reporting child abuse or neglect can be found in chapter 5 of these procedures. If it is considered that a child is in immediate danger and Tusla cannot be contacted, An Garda Síochána should be contacted without delay.

Neglect

Children First National Guidance 2017 outlines that child neglect is the most frequently reported category of abuse, both in Ireland and internationally. Ongoing chronic neglect is recognised as being extremely harmful to the development and wellbeing of the child and may have serious long-term negative consequences. Neglect occurs when a child does not receive adequate care or supervision to the extent that the child is harmed physically or developmentally. It is generally defined in terms of an omission of care, where a child's health, development or welfare is impaired by being deprived of food, clothing, warmth, hygiene, medical care, intellectual stimulation, supervision and safety.

Emotional neglect may also lead to the child having difficulties of attachment. The extent of the damage to the child's health, development or welfare is influenced by a range of factors. These factors include the extent, if any, of positive influence in the child's life, as well as the age of the child and the frequency and consistency of neglect.

Neglect is associated with poverty, but not necessarily caused by it. It is strongly linked to parental substance misuse, domestic violence and parental mental illness and disability. A reasonable concern for the child's welfare would exist when neglect becomes typical of the relationship between the child and the parent or carer. This may become apparent where the child is seen over a period of time, or the effects of neglect may be obvious based on having seen the child once.

The following are features of child neglect:

• Children being left alone without adequate care and supervision
• Malnourishment, lacking food, unsuitable food or erratic feeding
• Non-organic failure to thrive, i.e. a child not gaining weight due not only to malnutrition but also emotional deprivation

• Failure to provide adequate care for the child's medical and developmental needs, including intellectual stimulation
• Inadequate living conditions – unhygienic conditions, environmental issues, including lack of adequate heating and furniture
• Lack of adequate clothing
• Inattention to basic hygiene
• Lack of protection and exposure to danger, including moral danger or lack of supervision appropriate to the child's age
• Persistent failure to attend school
• Abandonment or desertion

Emotional abuse

Emotional abuse is the systematic emotional or psychological ill treatment of a child as part of the overall relationship between a caregiver and a child. Once-off and occasional difficulties between a parent/carer and child are not considered emotional abuse.

Abuse occurs when a child's basic need for attention, affection, approval, consistency and security are not met, due to incapacity or indifference from their parent or caregiver. Emotional abuse can also occur when adults responsible for taking care of children are unaware of and unable (for a range of reasons) to meet the children's emotional and developmental needs. Emotional abuse is not easy to recognise because the effects are not easily seen.

A reasonable concern for the child's welfare would exist when the behaviour becomes typical of the relationship between the child and the parent or carer.

Emotional abuse may be seen in some of the following ways:

• Rejection
• Lack of comfort and love
• Lack of attachment
• Lack of proper stimulation (e.g. fun and play)
• Lack of continuity of care (e.g. frequent moves, particularly unplanned)
• Continuous lack of praise and encouragement
• Persistent criticism, sarcasm, hostility or blaming of the child
• Bullying
• Conditional parenting in which care of, or affection for, a child is made contingent on his or her behaviours or actions
• Extreme over-protectiveness
• Inappropriate non-physical punishment (e.g. locking child in bedroom)
• Ongoing family conflicts and family violence

• Seriously inappropriate expectations of a child relative to his or her age and stage of development

There may be no physical signs of emotional abuse unless it occurs with another type of abuse. A child may show signs of emotional abuse through their actions or emotions in several ways. These include insecure attachment, unhappiness, low self-esteem, educational and developmental underachievement, risk taking and aggressive behaviour. It should be noted that no one indicator is conclusive evidence of emotional abuse. Emotional abuse is more likely to impact negatively on a child where it is persistent over time and where there is a lack of other protective factors.

Physical Abuse

Physical abuse is when someone deliberately hurts a child physically or puts them at risk of being physically hurt. It may occur as a single incident or as a pattern of incidents.

A reasonable concern exists where the child's health and/or development is, may be, or has been damaged as a result of suspected physical abuse.

Physical abuse can include the following:

• Physical punishment
• Beating, slapping, hitting or kicking
• Pushing, shaking or throwing
• Pinching, biting, choking or hair-pulling
• Use of excessive force in handling
• Deliberate poisoning
• Suffocation
• Fabricated/induced illness
• Female genital mutilation

The Children First Act, 2015 includes a provision that abolishes the common law defence of reasonable chastisement in court proceedings. This defence could previously be invoked by a parent or other person in authority who physically disciplined a child. The change in the legislation now means that in prosecutions relating to assault or physical cruelty, a person who administers such punishment to a child cannot rely on the defence of reasonable chastisement in the legal proceedings. Since 1982 corporal punishment has been banned in schools.

Sexual abuse

Sexual abuse occurs when a child is used by another person for his or her gratification or arousal, or for that of others. It includes the child being involved in sexual acts (masturbation, fondling, oral or penetrative sex) or exposing the child to sexual activity directly or through pornography.

Child sexual abuse may cover a wide spectrum of abusive activities. It rarely involves just a single incident and in many instances occurs over a number of years.

Child sexual abuse most commonly happens within the family, including older siblings and extended family members. Cases of sexual abuse mainly come to light through disclosure by the child or his or her siblings/friends, from the suspicions of an adult and/or by physical symptoms. It should be remembered that sexual activity involving a young person may be sexual abuse even if the young person concerned does not themselves recognise it as abusive.

Examples of child sexual abuse include the following:

- Any sexual act intentionally performed in the presence of the child
- An invitation to sexual touching or intentional touching or molesting of a child's body whether by a person or object for the purpose of sexual arousal or gratification
- Masturbation in the presence of a child or the involvement of a child in an act of masturbation
- Sexual intercourse with a child, whether oral, vaginal or anal
- Sexual exploitation of a child, which includes:
    - Inviting, inducing or coercing a child to engage in prostitution or the production of child pornography [for example, exhibition, modelling or posing for the purpose of sexual arousal, gratification or sexual act, including its recording (on film, videotape or other media) or the manipulation, for those purposes, of an image by computer or other means]
    - Inviting, coercing or inducing a child to participate in, or to observe, any sexual, indecent or obscene act
    - Showing sexually explicit material to children, which is often a feature of the 'grooming' process by perpetrators of abuse
- Exposing a child to inappropriate or abusive material through information and communication technology
- Consensual sexual activity involving an adult and an underage person

An Garda Síochána will deal with any criminal aspects of a sexual abuse case under the relevant criminal justice legislation. The prosecution of a sexual offence against a child will be considered within the wider objective of child welfare and protection. The safety of the child is paramount and at no stage should a child's safety be compromised because of concern for the integrity of a criminal investigation.

In relation to child sexual abuse, it should be noted that in criminal law, the age of consent to sexual intercourse is 17 years for both boys and girls. Any sexual relationship where one or both parties are under the age of 17 is illegal. However, it may not necessarily be regarded as child sexual abuse.

Details on the exemptions for mandated reporting of certain underage sexual activity can be found in section 4.7.1 of the procedures. Where a school becomes aware of underage sexual intercourse the school should take appropriate steps to inform the child's parents.

Circumstances which may make children more vulnerable to abuse and neglect

School personnel dealing with children need to be alert to the possibility that a welfare or protection concern may arise in relation to children with whom they come in contact. A child needs to have someone they can trust in order to feel able to disclose abuse they may be experiencing. They need to know that they will be believed and that they will get the help they need. Without these things, they may be vulnerable to continuing abuse.

Some children may be more vulnerable to abuse than others. Also, there may be particular times or circumstances when a child may be more vulnerable to abuse in their lives. In particular, children with disabilities, children with communication difficulties, children in care or living away from home, or children with a parent or parents with problems in their own lives may be more susceptible to abuse.

The following list is intended to assist in identifying the range of issues in a child's life that may place them at greater risk of abuse or neglect. It is important to remember that the presence of any of these factors does not necessarily mean that a child in those circumstances or settings is being abused.

- Parent or Carer Factors:
    - o Drug and alcohol misuse
    - o Addiction, including gambling
    - o Mental health issues
    - o Parental disability issues, including learning or intellectual disability
    - o Conflictual relationships
    - o Domestic violence
    - o Adolescent parents

- Child Factors:
    - o Age
    - o Gender
    - o Sexuality
    - o Disability
    - o Mental health issues including self-harm and suicide
    - o Communication difficulties
    - o Trafficked/Exploited
    - o Previous Abuse
    - o Young carer
- Community Factors:
    - o Cultural, ethnic, religious or faith based norms in the family or community which may not meet the standards of child welfare or protection required in this jurisdiction

- o Culture-specific practices, including:
    - Female genital mutilation
    - Forced marriage
    - Honour-based violence
    - Radicalisation

• Environmental factors:
- o Housing issues
- o Children who are out of home and not living with their parents, whether temporarily or permanently
- o Poverty/Begging
- o Bullying
- o Internet and social media-related concerns

• Poor motivation and poor willingness of parents/guardians to engage:
- o Non-attendance at appointments
- o Lack of insight or understanding of how the child is being affected
- o Lack of understanding about what needs to happen to bring about change
- o Avoidance of contact and reluctance to work with services o Inability or unwillingness to comply with agreed plans

These factors should be considered as part of being alert to the possibility that a child may be at risk of suffering abuse and in bringing reasonable concerns to the attention of Tusla. If it is considered that a child is in immediate danger and Tusla cannot be contacted, An Garda Síochána should be contacted without delay.

Bullying

It is recognised that bullying affects the lives of an increasing number of children and can be the cause of genuine concerns about a child's welfare. Children First National Guidance 2017 outlines that bullying can be defined as repeated aggression – whether it be verbal, psychological or physical – that is conducted by an individual or group against others.

Children First National Guidance 2017 describes bullying as behaviour that is intentionally aggravating and intimidating, and occurs mainly among children in social environments such as schools.

It includes behaviours such as physical aggression, cyber bullying, damage to property, intimidation, isolation/exclusion, name calling, malicious gossip and extortion. Bullying can also take the form of identify abuse based on gender, sexual preference, race, ethnicity and religious factors. With developments in modern technology, children can also be the victims of non-contact bullying, via mobile phones, the internet and other personal devices.

While bullying can happen to any child, some may be more vulnerable. These include children with disabilities or special educational needs; those from ethnic minority and migrant groups; those from the Traveller community; lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or other (LGBTQI+) children and those perceived to be LGBTQI+; and children of minority religious faiths. There can be an increased vulnerability to bullying amongst children with special educational needs. This is particularly so among those who do not understand social cues and/or have difficulty communicating. Some children with complex needs may lack understanding of social situations and therefore trust everyone implicitly. Such children may be more vulnerable because they do not have the same social skills or capacity as others to recognise and defend themselves against bullying behaviour. Research suggests that children with disabilities and with special educational needs are more likely to be bullied than others.

Homophobic and transphobic bullying has also been found to be prevalent with evidence that such pupils have particular difficulty in speaking up or reporting the bullying behaviour. Children First National Guidance 2017 states that bullying in schools can be a particular problem due to the fact that children spend a significant portion of their time there and are in large social groups.

In the first instance school authorities are responsible for dealing with school based bullying behaviour. School authorities are required to have a code of behaviour and an anti-bullying policy in place in accordance with the Department's "Anti-Bullying Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools" (the Anti-Bullying Procedures) and Circular 0045/2013. The Anti-Bullying Procedures define bullying as "unwanted negative behaviour, verbal, psychological or physical conducted by an individual or group against another person (or persons) and which is repeated over time". In the context of the AntiBullying Procedures "placing a once-off offensive or hurtful public message, image or statement on a social network site or other public forum where that message, image or statement can be viewed and/or repeated by other people" is also regarded as bullying behaviour.

School personnel should be aware of their school's anti-bullying policy and the procedures to be followed in relation to any alleged bullying incidents. Children First National Guidance 2017 and the Anti-Bullying Procedures provide that in cases of serious instances of bullying where the behaviour is regarded as possibly abusive, a referral may need to be made to Tusla or An Garda Síochána as appropriate. Where school personnel have concerns about a child arising from alleged bullying behaviour but are not sure whether to report the matter to Tusla, the designated liaison person shall seek advice from Tusla in accordance with the procedures set out in chapter 5 of these procedures.

Appendix 2:

Protocol authorising immediate action in the event of an accusation of abuse against a school employee

The following protocol authorises immediate action under section 7.2 of the Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post Primary Schools 2017, and the revised procedures of 2023, in primary schools other than primary schools under the patronage of an ETB.

In the context of these procedures, where circumstances warrant it, as an essential precautionary measure in order to protect the children in the school, the chairperson of the Board of Management is authorised by the school authority to direct an employee to immediately absent himself or herself from the school without loss of pay until the matter has been considered by the employer.

It is very important to note that the action under the protocol is intended to be precautionary and not disciplinary.

The action under this protocol is an interim measure pending the employer's consideration of the matter. The employee will be invited to a meeting with the chairperson of the board of management, the purpose of which is to inform the employee of the allegation and the action being taken. The employee may be accompanied by an appropriate person of his or her choice and will be so advised. In any event, the employee will also be advised of the matter, in writing. The chairperson of the board of management shall also make a record of the meeting which shall be retained on the relevant case file.

This protocol was reviewed and approved by the Board of Management on the 18th of June 2024.

Appendix 3:

Child Safeguarding Risk Assessment of St. Paul's National School, Ratoath Co.Meath

In accordance with section 11 of the Children First Act 2015 and the requirement in Chapter 8 of the *Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools 2017*, and the revised procedures 2023, the following is the Written Risk Assessment of **St. Paul's National School.**

1. **List of school activities**

- Daily arrival and dismissal of pupils
- Recreation breaks for pupils
- Classroom teaching
- One-to-one teaching
- One-to-one counselling
- Outdoor teaching activities
- Sporting Activities / swimming
- School outings
- Use of toilet/changing areas in schools
- Active week
- Fundraising events involving pupils
- Use of off-site facilities for school activities
- School transport arrangements
- Care of children with additional needs, including intimate care where needed,
- Administration of Medicine
- Administration of First Aid
- Curricular provision in respect of SPHE, RSE,
- Prevention and dealing with bullying amongst pupils
- Training of school personnel in child protection matters
- Use of external personnel to support sports and other activities
- Care of pupils with specific vulnerabilities/ needs such as
  - Pupils from ethnic minorities/migrants
  - Members of the Traveller community
  - Lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender (LGBT) children
  - Pupils perceived to be LGBT
  - Pupils of minority religious faiths
  - Children in care
  - Children on CPNS
- Recruitment of school personnel including -
  - Teachers/SNAs

- Caretaker/Secretary/Cleaners
- Sports coaches
- External Tutors/Guest Speakers
- Volunteers/Parents in school activities
- Visitors/contractors present in school during school hours
- Visitors/contractors present during after school activities

- Participation by pupils in religious ceremonies external to the school
- Use of Information and Communication Technology by pupils in school
- Application of sanctions under the school's Code of Behaviour including detention of pupils, confiscation of phones etc.
- Students participating in work experience in the school
- Student teachers undertaking training placement in school
- Use of video/photography/other media to record school events
- After school use of school premises by other organisations
- After school use of school premises by school staff

2. **The school has identified the following risk of harm in respect of its activities** –

- Risk of harm not being recognised by school personnel
- Risk of harm not being reported properly and promptly by school personnel
- Risk of child being harmed in the school by a member of school personnel
- Risk of child being harmed in the school by another child
- Risk of child being harmed in the school by volunteer or visitor to the school
- Risk of child being harmed by a member of school personnel, a member of staff of another organisation or other person while child participating in out of school activities e.g. school trip, swimming lessons
- Risk of harm due to bullying of child
- Risk of harm due to inadequate supervision of children in school
- Risk of harm due to inadequate supervision of children while attending out of school activities
- Risk of harm due to inappropriate relationship/communications between child and another child or adult
- Risk of harm due to children inappropriately accessing/using computers, social media, phones and other devices while at school
- Risk of harm to children with SEN who have particular vulnerabilities

- Risk of harm to child while a child is receiving intimate care
- Risk of harm due to inadequate code of behaviour
- Risk of harm in one-to-one teaching, counselling, coaching situation
- Risk of harm caused by member of school personnel communicating with pupils in an inappropriate manner via social media, texting, digital device or other manner
- Risk of harm caused by member of school personnel accessing/circulating inappropriate material via social media, texting, digital device or other manner

3. **The school has the following procedures in place to address the risks of harm identified in this assessment –**

- All school personnel are provided with a copy of the school's *Child Safeguarding Statement*
- The *Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools 2017* , and the revised procedures 2023, are made available to all school personnel
- School Personnel are required to adhere to the *Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools 2017*, and the revised procedures 2023, and all registered teaching staff are required to adhere to the *Children First Act 2015*
- The school implements in full the SPHE curriculum
- The school implements in full the RSE, SPHE and Stay Safe programmes
- The school has an Anti-Bullying Policy which fully adheres to the requirements of the Department's *Anti-Bullying Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools*
- The school has a supervision roster in place to ensure appropriate supervision of students during, assembly, dismissal and breaks
- The school has a policy and clear procedures in respect of school outings
- The school adheres to the requirements of the Garda vetting legislation and relevant DES circulars in relation to recruitment and Garda vetting
- The school complies with the agreed disciplinary procedures for all staff
- The school has a Special Educational Needs policy
- The school has in place a policy and procedures for the administration of medication to pupils

- The school –

- Has provided each member of school staff with a copy of the school's Child Safeguarding Statement
- Ensures all new staff are provided with a copy of the school's Child Safeguarding Statement
- Ensures staff avail of relevant training
- Encourages board of management members to avail of relevant training
- Maintains records of all staff and board member training

- The school has in place a code of behaviour for pupils
- The staff assess all areas accessed by the children for potential risk and ensure, in so far as is possible, that the area is safe for the children
- The school regularly provides First Aid training for all staff
- The school has in place an ICT policy in respect of usage of ICT by pupils
- The school has in place a mobile phone/device policy in respect of usage of mobile phones and devices by pupils
- The school has in place a Critical Incident Management Plan

Important Note: It should be noted that risk in the context of this risk assessment is the risk of "harm" as defined in the Children First Act 2015 and not general health and safety risk. The definition of harm is set out in Chapter 4 of the *Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post- Primary Schools 201* and the revised procedures 2023.

In undertaking this risk assessment, the board of management has endeavoured to identify as far as possible the risks of harm that are relevant to this school and to ensure that adequate procedures are in place to manage all risks identified. While it is not possible to foresee and remove all risk of harm, the school has in place the procedures listed in this risk assessment to manage and reduce risk to the greatest possible extent.

This risk assessment was initially completed by the Board of Management on the 16th of March 2018. It is reviewed as part of the school's annual review of its Child Safeguarding Statement. This version was reviewed, revised and ratified on the 16th of September 2025.

Principal's oversight report to the Board of Management

A. Allegations of abuse against members of school personnel

	Category	No
a	Reports made to Tusla	
b	Cases where the DLP sought advice from Tusla and the matter was not reported by the DLP based on the advice of Tusla	
c	Cases where the DLP has not sought advice from Tusla and has not reported the matter to Tusla	
d	Cases where the DLP did not report the matter to Tusla in circumstances where Tusla has advised the DLP that it should be reported	
e	No cases in a to d above – put an X in the box ➔	

B. Child protection concerns in respect of pupils in the school

	Category	No
a	Cases where a mandated report was sent by DLP to Tusla following advice from Tusla	
b	Cases where a member of school personnel has submitted a report to Tusla in circumstances where the DLP has decided that the matter did not warrant reporting	
c	Cases where the DLP has sought the advice of Tusla and Tusla has advised that the matter should not be reported	
d	Cases where the DLP has sought the advice of Tusla and Tusla has advised that the matter should be reported but the DLP has not reported the matter in question	
	No cases in a to d above – put an X in the box ➔	

C. CHILD PROTECTION CONCERNS ARISING FROM ALLEGED BULLYING BEHAVIOUR AMONGST PUPILS

	Category	No
a	Cases where the DLP has reported a concern	
b	Cases where the DLP has sought Tusla advice as to whether to report a concern	
c	No cases in a to b above – put an X in the box ➔	

D. SUMMARY DATA

	Category	No
a	Total reports made to Tusla by DLP • No of those total reports which were mandated • No of those total reports concerning members of school personnel	
b	Number of cases where the DLP has sought the advice of Tusla and, as a result of the advice, no report was made by the DLP • No of those total reports concerning members of school personnel	
c	Number of cases where a member of school personnel provided the DLP with a copy of a report submitted by that person to Tusla in relation to a matter that the DLP had considered did not require reporting or did not require reporting as a mandated report • Number of those total reports concerning members of school personnel	
	No cases in a to c above – put an X in the box ➔	

Signed: _____ *Date:* _____
Principal

Signed: _____ *Date:* _____
Chairperson