

Ashgrove Primary School

Policy for
Child Protection

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Version 2:3

Child Protection Policy

Introduction

Having responsibility for children during a large part of every day, the school is well placed to notice changes in appearance, behaviour and achievement. Our primary responsibility is the welfare of individual children and any concerns about their emotional or physical well-being will be raised promptly with parents. Parents are asked to update school information regularly, to disclose relevant advice on court orders, etc. and to inform the school about anything which would cause distress and change to a child such as a bereavement, family disruption or social problem, and so enable the school to be sensitive and supportive to the child's needs as a caring partner.

Where evidence, or disclosure from a child, raises concerns of abuse or neglect, the school will act quickly to follow child protection procedures.

This policy has been written with reference to "Protection of Children and Vulnerable Adults (POCVA) Order" (2003), Department of Education for Northern Ireland circular "Pastoral Care in Schools: Child Protection" (DENI, 1999) and "Vetting and Barring Scheme" (HM Government Guidance, October 2009).

As a *specified place* the school falls within the category of *regulated activity providers (RAPs)*.

Regulated Activities

Regulated activities include any paid or unpaid person working with children to:

- Teach, train or instruct;
- Care or supervise;
- Provide advice, guidance, assistance or entertainment;
- Provide healthcare treatment or therapy; and
- Drive a vehicle to convey children.

Regulated activities also include the full range of activities where there is an opportunity for contact with children in the school setting including:

- Cleaning
- Catering and serving;
- Administration and governance;
- Maintenance; and
- Contractors.

Enhanced disclosures (also known as criminal record checks) **must** be sought from AccessNI for those involved with regulated activities.

Controlled Activities

Controlled activities include any other task or role that might lead to contact with children, possibly in relation to visitors and to visits. It also includes the management and supervision of staff carrying out regulated or controlled activities and those involved with children's records.

Enhanced disclosures **may** be sought for those involved with controlled activities.

Categories of Abuse

The purpose behind regulation and control, and behind vetting and child protection procedures is to minimise the risk of abuse to children. Children may be abused by a stranger, a relative, an acquaintance, another child or a carer or other professional with responsibility. As defined by DENI (Circular 1997/4), abuse may be in a variety of forms:

Neglect

Actual or likely, persistent or significant neglect of a child, or the failure to protect a child from exposure to any kind of danger, including cold or starvation, or persistent failure to carry out important aspects of a child's health or development, including non-organic failure to thrive.

Physical Injury

Actual or likely, deliberate physical injury to a child, or wilful or neglectful failure to prevent physical injury or suffering to a child.

Sexual Abuse

Actual or likely, sexual exploitation of a child. The involvement of children and adolescents in sexual activities which they do not truly comprehend, to which they are unable to give informed consent or that violate the social taboos of family roles.

Emotional Abuse

Actual or likely persistent or significant emotional ill-treatment or rejection resulting in severe adverse effects on the emotional, physical and/or behavioural development of a child.

Procedures for Dealing with Cases of Suspected or Disclosed Abuse

In line with advice, the school will ensure that specific procedures are followed in the event of a member of staff becoming concerned about the abuse of a child. The emphasis will be on early detection and swift intervention, but no member of the school's staff will investigate directly. It is not the school's role to consider evidence or disclosure as proof of abuse.

The procedures to be followed in cases of suspected or disclosed abuse are:

1 Detection

Members of staff may be informed by a child about abuse or become concerned as a result of observation.

2 Referral to Designated Teacher

Staff will act promptly in referring the concern to the Designated Teacher. Together they will discuss the concern and complete an incident form.

3 Action Planning

The Designated Teacher meets with the Principal (or Chairperson of the Board of Governors in the absence of the Principal) and an appropriate course of action is planned.

4 Action

One or more of the following actions will be effected as appropriate to the specific concerns:

- the Teacher and/or Designated Teacher will talk further with the child in an attempt to reassure the child and simply clarify and record what has happened (this will not involve detailed investigation or interpretation and no promise of confidentiality will be given); the second section of the form Child Protection: Record of Initial Interview will be completed;
- where any suggestion of abuse remains, the Designated Teacher will inform the Principal who will refer the matter to the NEELB's Designated Officer and (using a UNOCINI form) to Social Services;
- the Care Unit of the PSNI will be contacted if there is suspicion of physical or sexual abuse.

The Role of the Designated Teacher

In Ashgrove the Vice-Principal will be the Designated Teacher with responsibility for child protection. If the Designated Teacher is unavailable, the Head of Foundation Stage & Key Stage 1 will fulfil the role as Deputy Designated Teacher. In the event of both being unavailable, the Principal or Chairman of the Board of Governors will act in this capacity.

In seeking advice from any agency, full confidentiality may be maintained provided that no child is identified by name. In deciding upon a course of action reference may be made to the following (with hypothetical questions at first if necessary):

Designated Officer with responsibility for Child Protection in NEELB
Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator (SENCO)
Education Welfare Officer (EWO)
Educational Psychologist

Social Services
School Nurse
Clinical Medical Officer

The school will co-operate fully with any agency involved in the care of an individual child, compiling such information and attending such case conferences as may be required. Reporting will be done to case conferences on Report to Child Protection Case Conference form.

Record Keeping and Confidentiality

The rapport and positive professional relationship between teachers and children is a key factor in developing children's full potential and while teachers would not wish to damage such relationships, it will be explained to any child about whom there is concern, that it may be necessary to tell the Designated Teacher and perhaps other agencies that will help. No promise of confidentiality can be given.

As outlined above in Procedures for Dealing with Cases of Suspected or Disclosed Abuse, detailed records will be kept of all concerns and actions relating to suspicions of abuse.

The "Education (Pupil Records) Regulations (NI) 1990" exempts records relating to issues of suspected or actual child abuse from being disclosed to those persons normally entitled to see a child's school records. Their disclosure will therefore only be to anyone whose role relates to official investigation and/or care. All notes will be written objectively, without speculation and immediately following any incident that they record.

Parents and Child Protection

The Child Protection Policy is made available to parents through the school website or as hard copies upon request. Hard copies are sent home bi-annually. Advice is given on the procedures for reporting child abuse and a synopsis of the policy are included in the school prospectus.

Parents are asked to supply the school with lists of people whom they permit to collect their children. These lists are retained by teachers and used to ensure that children are only released to approved people at the end of the school day. Parents are asked to notify the school of any short- or long-term changes. Parents are asked to give details of arrangements following any separation or divorce. Staff need to be aware of legal responsibilities, agreed access and any involvement of social services. Such information will be requested formally each September, but parents are encouraged to keep the school informed as necessary.

Parents will be made aware that staff may on occasions have to help change pupils' clothes when administering first aid, after toilet accidents, for PE and on other such occasions.

In the event of any parent making an accusation against another child, the accused child's parents will be informed. Any associated disciplinary issues will be dealt with by the school.

Staff Relationships

Relationships between children and all staff are developed on trust and mutual respect. While their integrity is both professional and personal, it is essential that the potential for misunderstanding is acknowledged. Staff should ensure that their words and actions cannot be misconstrued as abuse in any form and so will be careful that all physical and verbal contact with children is irreproachable, particularly in a one-to-one situation. As a general principle members of staff are advised not to make unnecessary physical contact with pupils; it is, however, unrealistic to suggest that staff should touch pupils only in emergencies. In particular, a distressed child may need reassurance that involves physical comforting similar to that provided by a loving parent.

Members of staff who have to administer first aid to a pupil will ensure, wherever possible, that another adult/child is present. **If no other person is available, emergencies will be attended to without hesitation.** (The Vetting and Barring Scheme, 2009 (page 9) also permits a barred person to carry out a regulated activity to prevent harm to a child in an emergency but stipulates that the activity must not continue once the emergency is over.)

Our documents, “Intimate Care Policy” and “Policy for Safe Handling & the Use of Reasonable Force with Children” are intended to clarify school policy in relation to physical contact.

All staff and volunteers in contact with children will have undergone vetting by AccessNI upon appointment. Expert and interesting people can offer much to a child’s education and welfare, but whether in a professional or voluntary capacity, only vetted persons will be given unsupervised access to children. Any visitor to the school will only have contact with children within a situation controlled by a vetted adult.

In the event of a complaint being made against a member of staff, the Principal or Chairperson of the Board of Governors will clarify the situation and if the concern persists, will ask the NEELB’s Designated Officer to carry out an investigation in line with DENI Circular 1997/4, namely:

- the alleged abuser will be informed of the allegations and progress of the investigation;
- investigation as per any other suspected abuser;
- regard to be shown in priority to the welfare of child, the efficient functioning of school; and the rights of the individual accused to be considered innocent until proven guilty; and
- where appropriate the member of staff will be suspended pending investigation (in law suspension is considered a neutral act).

NEELB Guidelines for Staff Self-Protection

- 1 In the event of injury to a child, ensure that it is recorded and witnessed by another adult.
- 2 Keep records of any false allegations a child makes against you or other staff including – “You’re always picking on me”, “You hit me”, or “Don’t touch me”. Keep a record of dates and times. Get another adult to witness the allegation if possible.
- 3 If a child touches you or talks to you in a sexually inappropriate way or place, record what happened and tell another adult. As it could be totally innocent, do not make the child feel like a criminal. However, remember that ignoring this or allowing it to go on may place you in an untenable situation. Neither is it a good idea for the child to go on doing this as the next person might take advantage and then say the child instigated it.
- 4 If you take children on journeys, always have at least two along. If it is an overnight trip, always check the rooms in pairs.
- 5 Do not spend excessive amounts of time alone with one child away from other people. If in a one-to-one situation make sure the door is open. Tell another member of staff if you are going to see a child on your own.
- 6 If you are in a holiday or residential setting never, under any circumstances, take a child or children into your room.
- 7 Do give firm guidelines on sexually inappropriate behaviour to the child. Explain that the behaviour is unacceptable and could get the child into difficulty, but do not make the child feel guilty. The behaviour may be an imitation of the abuse the child has suffered and is not the child’s fault.
- 8 If you are in a care situation with children with special needs, try to have another person present when changing nappies or clothing or bathing a child.
- 9 Never do something of a personal nature for children that they can do for themselves. This includes cleaning bottoms, etc. or any other activity that could be misconstrued.
- 10 Do not go into the toilet alone with children if possible.
- 11 Be mindful how and where you touch children. Never pat a child on the bottom. If you work with young children or children with special needs who sit on your lap, get a ‘lap cushion’ which they can sit on.
- 12 Be careful of extended hugs and kisses from children. This might be particularly relevant to those working with special needs. This guideline is important not only for your protection, but for the children as well.

- 13 When taking children on an outing, think of how you appear to the public – they may misunderstand your actions. It may mean that disruptive children cannot go on outings.
- 14 All members of staff should carry identification when on journeys with children.
- 15 If you must physically restrain a child for any reason, be aware that it could be misinterpreted as assault.
- 16 Do not make sexually suggestive comments about a child even in jest.
- 17 Never keep suspicions of abuse or inappropriate behaviour by a colleague to yourself. If there is an attempted cover-up, you could be implicated in the silence.
- 18 Ensure that you have the opportunity to discuss your own feelings, if possible, with other members of staff.