

Midleton College



CHILD PROTECTION POLICY

Midleton College undertakes to promote the welfare, health and full development of its pupils.

It undertakes to protect the personal integrity, safety and well being of each pupil in compliance with the provisions of the Child Protection Guidelines for Post Primary Schools (1994) and Children First (1999, 2009) *see below*

This policy is based on four beliefs we as a school community share:

1. Children must be protected from abuse and neglect.
2. The welfare and protection of children is of paramount importance.
3. Everyone has a responsibility for the welfare and protection of children.
4. School personnel are especially well placed to observe changes in behaviour, failure to develop, or outward signs of abuse or neglect.

In the specific context of Midleton College being a Boarding School, members of staff carry a significant responsibility as they are invariably placed in the role of *loco parentis* in interacting with pupils and are therefore required to ensure that DES Guidelines are adhered to at all times and in all activities.

In line with the DES Child Protection Guidelines, the Board of management has ratified the Principal as the Designated Liaison Person (DLP) and the Deputy Principal as Deputy (DLP). Both have received in-service training in relation to their roles and responsibilities where child protection is concerned. These positions are renewed on a yearly basis and ratified by the Board of Management.

Midleton College has in place other policies which support and complement this Child Protection Policy. These include:

Health and Safety.
Anti Bullying.
Code of Behaviour.
New Pupil Entry and Settling in.
Safe Employment.
Data Protection.
Substance Abuse.
Crisis Response.
School Trips and Tours.
Appropriate use of Technology.

This policy has been ratified by the Board of Management on 18th February 2011 and was created in consultation with the teaching staff, Student Council and Parent Teacher Association.

It replaces all previous policies on child protection and will be reviewed every three years.

Child Protection Guidelines For Post-Primary Schools (adapted for purposes of this policy)

“*Children First*”, the national child protection guidelines, published in September 1999, noted that school staff are particularly well placed to observe and monitor children for signs of abuse. It called on schools to put in place clear procedures which school staff must follow where they suspect, or are alerted to, possible child abuse.

The “*Child Protection Guidelines for Post-Primary Schools*”, was produced to meet this need. The Guidelines reflect the particular circumstances of the post-primary school setting and provide management authorities and school staff with guidance in relation to recognising the signs and symptoms of child abuse and with procedures for dealing immediately with such concerns. The Guidelines should be taken in conjunction with *Children First* and not as a stand-alone document.

A central facet of the Guidelines is the requirement for each Board of Management to designate a senior member of staff as the Designated Liaison Person (DLP) for the school. The DLP will act as a liaison with outside agencies such as HSEs and as a resource person to any staff member who has child protection concerns.

Recognising child abuse:

Child abuse can take different forms, but usually consists of one or more of the following:

- **Neglect:** Where a child’s needs for food, warmth, shelter, nurturance and safety are not provided to the extent that the child suffers significant harm.
- **Emotional Abuse:** Where a child’s need for affection, approval, consistency and security is not being met.
- **Physical Abuse:** Where a child is assaulted or injured in some way that is deliberate.
- **Sexual Abuse:** Where a child is used for the sexual gratification of another.

Responsibilities of school personnel:

School personnel will familiarize themselves with *Children First* Guidelines and agree to be guided by them.

In situations where school personnel suspect that a child may have been abused, or is being abused, or is at risk of abuse, they will ensure that such concerns are reported in accordance with the procedures outlined in the Guidelines.

Where a pupil has similar concerns regarding themselves or another pupil they are encouraged to bring this to the attention of a staff member.

Reporting concerns :

If a member of staff receives an allegation or has a suspicion that a child may have been abused, or is being abused, or is at risk of abuse he/she will, without delay, report the matter to the school DLP. If the DLP is satisfied that there are reasonable grounds for the suspicion or allegation he/she will report the matter to the HSE immediately.

If the DLP is not sure whether to report the matter to the HSE, the DLP should seek advice from the Duty Social Worker in the HSE.

If the DLP decides that the concerns of a member of staff should not be reported to the HSE, the member of staff should be given a clear statement, in writing, as to the reasons why. The member of staff should be advised that, if he/she remains concerned about the situation, he/she is free to consult with or report the matter to the HSE.

Anyone who has made a report to the DLP is entitled to track the progress of that report with the DLP.

What will the HSE do with a report?

Once a report of suspected child abuse has been made to HSE, it is then a matter for the HSE to decide upon the action, if any, which is necessitated by that report. The social worker handling the case may need to seek further clarification from the person who first raised the concerns. In some cases, the response of the HSE will be to call a child protection conference.

Allegations or suspicions of child abuse concerning school employees:

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. However, the school also has duties and responsibilities, as an Employer, in respect of its employees.

School employees may be subject to allegations. Such allegations could be legitimate but they could also be erroneous or malicious in nature. Therefore any allegation of abuse will be dealt with sensitively and support provided for staff, including counseling where necessary. The employee will be treated fairly, which includes the right not to be judged in advance of a full and fair enquiry.

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

- the reporting procedure in respect of the allegation.
- the procedure for dealing with the employee.

In the case of post-primary schools, the DLP is responsible for reporting the matter to the appropriate HSE while the Employer is responsible for addressing the employment issues.

Protocol authorising immediate action:

The Guidelines provide a written protocol by which the Employer may authorise the school Principal to absent an employee from the school where circumstances warrant it as a precautionary measure in order to protect children in the school.

Where the Protocol authorizing immediate action is invoked to absent an employee from the school an emergency meeting of the Board of Management/Governors should be convened.

Action to be taken by the employer:

The Guidelines provide advice to the Employer on the immediate actions to be taken where a report has been made to a HSE concerning a school employee.

It is essential that at all times the matter be treated in the strictest confidence and that the identity of the employee should not be disclosed until such time as the employee has been offered the opportunity to address and/or be represented to the employer.

Further follow-up required:

The employer should maintain strict confidentiality and that any further follow-up action should accord with the established grievance and disciplinary procedures for the sector.

Feedback from HSEs:

The Children First guidelines place an onus on HSEs to ensure that arrangements are put in place to provide feedback to employers in regard to the progress of a child abuse investigation regarding an employee. It is clearly stated in those guidelines that efforts should be made to investigate complaints against employees promptly bearing in mind the serious implications for an innocent employee.

Peer abuse and bullying:

The Guidelines provide advice on the recognition and reporting of abuse perpetrated by a child's peers. It is important that potentially abusive behaviour between children will not be ignored and, as appropriate, certain cases should be referred to the HSE.

As per Middleton College Anti Bullying Policy, school management is responsible, in the first instance, for dealing with bullying in school. The more extreme forms of bullying behaviour, when perpetrated by adults rather than children, would be regarded as physical or emotional abuse. Only such serious incidences of bullying should be referred to the HSE.

Drafted 2007

Ratified by The Board of Governors June 2007

Adopted by Board of Management June 2009

Reviewed December 2010

Ratified Board of Management February 2011