

Robertstown National School

CHILD PROTECTION POLICY

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This document is formulated in response to recent changes in Guidance and Procedures in relation to Child Protection matters and takes account of the provisions of each of the following pieces of legislation:

- Freedom of Information Act 1997
- The Education Act 1998
- The Child Welfare Act 2000
- Children First – National guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children 2011

The new procedures are based on the recently published Children First – National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children 2011

References

- “Children First” (Department of Children and Youth Affairs 2011)
- “Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post Primary Schools (Department of Education and Skills 2011)

The Board of Management (‘the Board’) of Robertstown National School strive to provide a well-ordered, caring, happy and secure atmosphere where the academic, personal and social development of all our pupils flourishes in a culture of respect, tolerance and openness. Accordingly, in accordance with the requirements of the Department of Education and Skills, Child Protection for Primary and Post Primary Schools, the B.O.M. of Robertstown N.S. has approved this Child Protection Policy. The Board recognise that child protection and welfare considerations permeate all aspects of school life and must be reflected in all of the school’s policies and practices. The Board fully accept that child protection is and must be a priority for the school and be at the core of all of our educational and non-educational activities. Mindful of the school’s obligation and duty to provide pupils with the highest possible standard of care in order to promote their well-being and protect them from harm, the Board has adopted and commits to implement fully, and without modification, the Department of Education and Skills’ ‘Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post Primary Schools’ - 2011 (‘Child Protection Procedures 2011’), as part of the school’s overall child protection policy.

Rationale

Following a collaborative process between the staff, the Board and parents’ representatives of the school, this child protection policy is set out in order to:

1. reaffirm the Board’s commitment to the safety, protection and welfare of every child in our school;
2. formally recognise that the protection and welfare of children in our school is of overriding importance to all other considerations;
3. give clear direction and guidance in implementing Children First – National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children’ – 2011 (‘Children First’) in a consistent and uniform manner within the school when dealing with allegations/suspicions of child abuse; and
4. update the school’s existing child protection policy in line with the ‘Child Protection Procedures 2011’, and ‘Children First’.

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Aims and Objectives

The Board's commitment to the protection and welfare of our pupils is reflected in this policy. Through this policy the Board will:

1. give effect to the improved oversight arrangements contained in the Child Protection Procedures 2011;
2. ensure that school staff and volunteers are aware of how to recognise signs of child abuse or neglect;
3. develop guidance and procedures for school staff and volunteers who may have reasonable grounds for concern about the safety and welfare of children at the school;
4. identify and adopt safe practices to minimise the possibility of harm or accidents to children and protect school staff and volunteers from the necessity to take unnecessary risks that may leave them open to accusations of abuse or neglect;
5. ensure best practice in the recruitment of staff and volunteers;
6. fully co-operate with the relevant statutory authorities in relation to child protection and welfare matters;
7. develop a practice of openness with parents/guardians and encourage parental involvement in the education of their children;
8. ensure that confidentiality requirements in dealing with child protection matters are fully complied with; and
9. ensure that curricular provisions are utilised fully and effectively in order to provide a personal safety skills education which specifically addresses abuse prevention for all children in the school.

Principles Underpinning the Policy

The principles that underpin and inform this policy, and provide the contextual basis for best practice in the protection and welfare of our pupils are:

1. the welfare of children is of paramount importance;
2. children have a right to be heard, listened to and taken seriously;
3. parents/guardians have a right to respect and should be consulted and involved in matters that concern their family;
4. the prevention of child abuse requires a coordinated multidisciplinary approach, effective management, clarity of responsibility and training of school staff and volunteers; and
5. early intervention and support should be available to promote the welfare of children and families, particularly where they are vulnerable or at risk of not receiving adequate care or protection.

ORGANISATIONAL RESPONSIBILITIES

The purpose of the Child Protection Procedures 2011 is to give direction and guidance to school authorities, school staff and volunteers in the implementation of Children First when dealing with allegations/suspensions of child abuse. In addition, the Child Protection Procedures 2011 also aim to provide sufficient information to school authorities, school staff and volunteers to enable them to be alert to, and to be aware of, what to do in situations where there is a concern, suspicion or allegation of child abuse.

This policy addresses the responsibilities of the Board in the following areas:

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1. Personnel - the roles the Designated Liaison Person ('DLP'), the Deputy Designated Liaison Person ('Deputy DLP'), the Principal (other than as the DLP), school staff, the Chairperson (as DLP pro tempore), the Board, and volunteers have, and the responsibilities that are attached to these roles in relation to child protection.
2. Prevention – measures that can contribute to the prevention of child abuse through curricular provision.
3. Procedures – how to identify child abuse and the procedures for dealing with allegations/suspensions.
4. Practice – what measures are in place or can be instituted to provide best practice in the protection and welfare of our pupils and staff.

1. PERSONNEL

For the purposes of this policy, school staff shall mean; teachers, Special Needs Assistants ('SNA'), secretarial staff and maintenance staff. Volunteers shall mean; parental volunteers, community volunteers, people seeking work experience, representatives of sporting or other organisations, and students on teaching practice.

1.1. Designated Liaison Person (DLP)

The Designated Liaison Person is the Principal **Mary Dillon**.

The DLP has the specific responsibilities (as contained in section 3.2.2 of the Child Protection Procedures 2011) for:

1. ensuring that the standard reporting procedure for suspected cases of child abuse (as contained in section 4.2 of the Child Protection Procedures 2011) are referred promptly to the designated person in the HSE Children and Family Services or in the event of an emergency and the unavailability of the HSE, to An Garda Síochána;
2. requesting advice and consultation from the HSE Children and Family Services (in accordance in section 4.2 of the Child Protection Procedures 2011) in relation to the making of reports of suspected cases of child abuse. In doing so, the DLP explicitly states that the request is for advice and consultation and not a formal report;
3. representing the school in all dealings with the HSE, An Garda Síochána and other parties in connection with allegations/suspensions of child abuse. All matters pertaining to the processing or investigation of child abuse will be processed through the DLP; and
4. acting as a resource person to any of the school staff or volunteers who have child protection concerns.

1.2. The Deputy Designated Liaison Person (Deputy DLP)

The Deputy Designated Liaison Person is the Deputy Principal **Aoife O'Sullivan**

The Deputy DLP will assume the responsibilities of the DLP, where the DLP is unavailable for whatever reason. In order for the Deputy DLP to effectively assume these responsibilities in the absence of the DLP, the Deputy DLP will have access to all relevant records pertaining to child protection matters as required.

1.3. Principal

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At meetings of the Board, the Principal (other than as the DLP) has responsibility (in accordance with section 3.3 of the Child Protection Procedures 2011) for reporting the number of reports made to the HSE by the DLP, the number of cases where the DLP sought advice from the HSE and as a result of this advice, no report was made, and where there were no such reports made or advice sought.

1.4. School Staff

School staff are especially well placed to observe changes in children's behaviour, their lack of development or outward signs of abuse. Where a member of the school staff has suspicions or receives a disclosure involving possible child abuse, such suspicions or disclosure will be recorded by the member of school staff and immediately reported to the DLP (or Deputy DLP where necessary).

1.5. Chairperson of the Board

The Chairperson works closely with the DLP when a suspicion or allegation of child abuse is reported to the DLP and/or HSE. The Chairperson also has responsibility, where an allegation or concern of abuse relates to the DLP, to assume the role normally undertaken by the DLP. The Chairperson will follow the standard reporting procedure for suspected cases of child abuse (as contained in section 4.2 of the Child Protection Procedures 2011), in addition to the procedures where an allegation of abuse or neglect is made against a school employee (as contained in section 5 of the Child Protection Procedures 2011).

1.6. Board of Management

The Board has the primary duty of care for the protection, safety and welfare of all pupils of the school. In relation to this overriding duty, the Board has specific responsibilities for:

1. production of procedures, which all school staff and volunteers must follow where they suspect, or are alerted to, possible child abuse, including where a child discloses abuse;
2. designation of a DLP and a Deputy DLP;
3. monitoring of the progress of children considered to be at risk;
4. contributing to the prevention of child abuse through curricular provision;
5. provision of access or in-service training for school staff and volunteers to ensure a good working knowledge of child protection issues and procedures.

The Board also has a duty of care to the employees of the school. As an employer the Board has specific responsibilities for the action to be taken where allegations are received against employees;

1.7. Volunteers

Where a volunteer has suspicions or receives a disclosure involving possible child abuse, such suspicions or disclosure will be recorded by the volunteer and immediately reported to the DLP (or Deputy DLP where necessary).

2. PREVENTION

The Stay Safe programme is a vital resource used by the school to help children develop the skills necessary to enable them to recognise and resist abuse and potentially abusive situations. The programme is taught under the strand unit 'Safety and Protection' as part of

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the schools' Social Personal and Health Education ('SPHE') curricular programme. In addition to this, the school, as part of the SPHE curriculum, provides Relationship and Sexuality Education ('RSE'). RSE provides children with structured opportunities to develop the knowledge, attitudes, values, beliefs and practical skills necessary to establish and sustain healthy personal relationships as children and, subsequently, as adults. All children are taught the Stay Safe programme and RSE in an age appropriate way, with teaching materials used to ensure the full understanding of the programme's content.

Children with special education needs follow the Stay Safe Programme and RSE in a manner that is appropriate to their needs. Prior to the commencement of the programme in the classroom, parents/guardians are invited to share and discuss issues and opinions relevant to their child's needs, and where a child has poor communicative skills the Special Needs Teacher and/or SNA will encourage and help the pupil verbalise their opinions.

Upon enrolment of their child(ren), the school requests that parents/guardians give consent to their child(ren) taking part in RSE and the Stay Safe Programme as part of the SPHE curriculum. However, in accordance with section 30(2)(e) of the Education Act 1998, the school shall not require any student to attend instruction in any subject which is contrary to the conscience of the parents/guardians. Should parents/guardians wish to withdraw their child(ren) from the sensitive aspects of the SPHE curriculum, then the school will endeavour to facilitate such withdraw by making reasonable alternative organisational arrangements which respect the beliefs and sensibilities of the parents/guardian and child(ren).

In the event that a teacher opts out of teaching the sensitive aspects of the SPHE curriculum, another teacher suitably qualified from the school staff will take over the administering of the programme in that classroom.

3. PROCEDURES

All school staff, members of the Board and volunteers will follow the Child Protection Procedures 2011 for the reporting of suspicions or disclosures that a child may have been abused, or is being abused, or is at risk of abuse.

3.1. Definition of Abuse

Child abuse may take many forms but it can be categorised into four different types: neglect, physical abuse, emotional abuse and sexual abuse (as contained in sections 2.1 to 2.1.7 of the Child Protection Procedures 2011). A child may be subjected to one or more forms of abuse at any given time.

3.2. Recognition and Recording of Abuse

There are a number of indicators of child abuse (as contained in Appendix 3 of the Child Protection Procedures 2011). It is important to stress that, no one indicator should be seen as conclusive in itself of abuse. All signs and symptoms must be examined in the total context of the child's situation and family circumstances.

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In situations where a member of school staff or volunteer suspects that a child may have been abused, or is being abused, or is at risk of abuse, they will ensure that such suspicions are recorded (in accordance with section 3.6 of the Child Protection Policy 2011).

School staff or volunteers will make a full written record of:

1. what they have observed;
2. when they observed it;
3. any signs of physical injury, a detailed description of such injury and, if appropriate, a sketch or such injury;
4. any comment by the child concerned, or by any other person, about how an injury occurred, preferably quoting words actually used, as soon as possible after the comment has been made.

The written record will be signed, dated and given to the DLP without delay (in accordance with section 4.1 of the Child Protection Procedures 2011), who will retain it in a secure location and discuss the contents of the record with the reporting member of school staff or volunteer in order to decide the appropriate course of action to be taken (in accordance with sections 4.1 to 4.2.8 of the Child Protection Procedures 2011).

3.3. Disclosure and Recording of Abuse

In situations where a member of school staff or volunteer receives a disclosure from a child or third party that abuse has taken place, or is taking place, or there is a risk of abuse occurring, school staff and volunteers have a supportive, not an investigative role.

3.3.1. Disclosure from a Child

An abused child is likely to be under severe emotional stress and a member of staff or volunteer may be the only adult whom the child is prepared to trust. When information is offered in confidence, the member of school staff or volunteer will act tactfully and sensitivity in responding to the disclosure. Accordingly, they will listen to, and facilitate the child to talk about the situation, rather than interviewing the child about details of what has happened.

School staff or volunteers will:

1. listen to the child and take all disclosures seriously;
2. make a full and accurate written record of the discussion (in accordance with section 3.6 of the Child Protection Policy 2011);
3. not ask leading questions or make suggestions to the child;
4. not stop the child recalling significant events;
5. remain calm and offer reassurance that everything possible will be done to protect and support them but not make promises;
6. explain the need for action and the possible consequences, which will necessarily involve other adults being informed.

The written record will be signed, dated and given to the DLP without delay (in accordance with section 4.1 of the Child Protection Procedures 2011), who will retain it in a secure location and discuss the contents of the record with the reporting school staff member or volunteer in order to decide the appropriate course of action to be taken (in accordance with sections 4.1 to 4.2.8 of the Child Protection Procedures 2011).

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3.3.2. Disclosures from a Third Party

In situations where a member of school staff or volunteer receives a disclosure from a third party that a child may have been abused, or is being abused, or is at risk of abuse, then the member of school staff or volunteer will request that the third party immediately makes a report to the DLP. If the third party does not make such a report to the DLP, then the staff member or volunteer to whom the third party initially disclosed the information to will make a report to the DLP detailing the disclosure made (in accordance with section 4.1 of the Child Protection Procedures 2011).

3.4. DLP & Reporting Procedures

Where, after discussion with the reporting member of school staff or volunteer, the DLP is satisfied that there are reasonable grounds for the suspicion or disclosure of child abuse (in accordance with section 4.2.2 of the Child Protection Procedures 2011), or where the DLP has requested advice and consultation from the HSE Children and Family Services and been advised that a report should be made (in accordance with section 4.2.1 of the Child Protection Procedures 2011), then the reporting procedures contained in section 4.2 of the Child Protection Procedures 2011 will be adhered to.

The DLP will also inform the parents/guardians of the child that a report has been made to the HSE (or An Garda Síochána) and will record the information communicated to the parents/guardians. However, the DLP will not inform the parents/guardians in circumstances where the decision to inform is likely to endanger the child or place the child at further risk. The decision not to inform the parents/guardians will be recorded by the DLP, in addition to the reasons for such a decision (in accordance with section 1.9.3 of the Child Protection Procedures 2011).

3.5. Allegations or Suspicions Involving School Employees

The most important consideration for the Board and the DLP is the safety and protection of the children at the school. Notwithstanding this, the Board (as employer) also has a duty to protect school staff against claims which may be false or malicious.

Where an allegation or suspicion of child abuse is made against a member of school staff, there are two procedures to be followed:

1. the reporting procedure as contained in sections 4.2 and 5.3 of the Child Protection Procedures 2011 which is the responsibility of the DLP (if the allegation or suspicions is made against the DLP, the Chairperson will act as DLP pro tempore and will assume the responsibility for reporting the matter); and
2. the procedure for dealing with the employee as contained in section 5.4 of the Child Protection Procedures 2011 which is the responsibility of the Board.

The DLP will inform the Chairperson of an allegation or suspicion of child abuse against an employee. The Chairperson and DLP will make the employee aware privately that:

1. an allegation has been made against them;
2. the nature of the allegation; and
3. whether or not the matter has been reported at that point.

The employee will be given a copy of the written allegation and any other relevant documentation. The employee will be requested to respond to the allegation in writing to the Board within five days.

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The priority in all cases is that no child be exposed to unnecessary risk. Therefore, the Chairperson may seek advice and consultation from the HSE and/or An Garda Síochána as to the appropriate protective action to take. These measures will be proportionate to the level of risk and will not unreasonably penalise the employee in any way unless to protect the child.

If the nature of the allegation warrants immediate action in the Chairperson's opinion, the Board will be convened to consider the matter. This may result in the Board directing that the employee absent themselves from the school forthwith while the matter is being investigated. Where the Board is unsure as to whether this should occur, advice will be sought from An Garda Síochána, the HSE and/or external legal advisers. Should the Board direct that the employee absent themselves, such an absence of the employee will be regarded as an administrative leave of absence with pay and not suspension and will not imply any degree of guilt. The DES will also be informed.

3.6. Allegations or Suspicions Involving a Member of the Board

Where an allegation or suspicion of child abuse is made against a member of the Board, the DLP will adhere to the reporting procedure in accordance with section 4.2 of the Child Protection Procedures 2011, and will also inform the Chairperson of an allegation or suspicion of abuse against a member of the Board. The Chairperson will inform the Patron that a report involving a member of the Board has been submitted to the HSE and shall take direction from the Patron as to the continued involvement of that member of the Board. Where the allegation or suspicion of child abuse is against the Chairperson, the DLP will adhere to the reporting procedure in accordance with section 4.2 of the Child Protection Procedures 2011, and the Principal or Secretary of the Board will inform the Patron that a report involving the Chairperson has been submitted to the HSE.

3.7. Peer Abuse

In some cases of child abuse the alleged perpetrator may be a child. In a situation where child abuse is alleged or disclosed to have been carried out by another child, the reporting procedures contained in section 4.1 and 4.2 of the Child Protection Policy 2011 will be followed.

3.8. Confidentiality

In the course of discharging their responsibilities under section 4.2 of the Child Protection Procedures, the DLP will also act in accordance with section 1.9 of the Child Protection Procedures 2011 in relation to the sharing of information. All information regarding allegations/suspicions of child abuse will only be shared on a need to know basis, in the interests of the child with persons who have a legitimate involvement or role in dealing with the allegation or suspicion. Giving information to those who need to have that information for the protection of a child who may have been or has been abused, is not a breach of confidentiality.

3.9. Protection for Persons Reporting Child Abuse

The Protection for Persons Reporting Child Abuse Act (1998) provides immunity from civil liability to any person who reports child abuse 'reasonably and in good faith' to designated officers of HSE or any member of An Garda Síochána. Where a reported suspicion of child abuse proves unfounded, a person who takes an action would have to prove that the

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reporter had not acted reasonably and in good faith making the report. The act provides significant protection for employees who report child abuse.

4. PRACTICE

In order to provide best practice in the protection and welfare of our pupils and staff, the Board has identified the following areas of school practice that can contribute to ensuring that children and staff are protected.

4.1. Recruitment and Selection of Staff

The recruitment of school staff and volunteers is crucial to ensuring that those working with children in the school are safe adults insofar as this can be determined. The Board requires all applicants to supply appropriate personal details, past and current work experience, indicating relevant qualifications or skills acquired and a minimum of two written references, the veracity of which are checked through verbal contact with the referees. All persons being appointed to teaching, non-teaching or volunteer positions who will have unsupervised access to the children at the school are required to be vetted by the Garda Vetting Unit prior to commencing the position in accordance with the Department of Education and Skills' Circular 0063/2010. In addition to this, all persons being appointed to teaching and non-teaching roles are required to provide the Statutory Declaration and Form of Undertaking contained in Circular 0063/2010.

4.2. Supervision of Children

The school Supervision Policy and routines are followed by all staff to ensure that there is comprehensive supervision of children at all times. School staff ensure that children are always visible in the school yard and children are not permitted to spend time in classrooms or toilets where they would not be under adult supervision. Certain areas of the school premises outside of the school yard are also monitored by CCTV in order to provide an additional resource for the supervision of the children's safety and welfare. Children are not permitted to leave the school yard or to engage with adults who are outside of the school yard.

Children are to be encouraged at all times to play co-operatively and inappropriate behaviour will be addressed under the Code of Behaviour and, where necessary, the Anti-Bullying policy. If an incident occurs which is considered to be of a sexualised nature, the supervising member of staff will notify the DLP who will record it and respond to it appropriately in accordance with section 6.2 of the Child Protection Procedures 2011.

4.3. First Aid/Accidents

Accidents occur in spite of supervision and the school's First Aid policy provides clear guidelines for all school staff on how first aid should be administered where a child has a minor accident.

In accordance with the school's Accident Policy, in the event of a more serious accident or a child becoming very ill and requiring the assistance of trained medical professionals, every possible effort is made to contact the pupil's parents/guardians or the persons delegated to take responsibility for that child. Where such contact cannot be made the child is taken immediately to a doctor or hospital by a member of staff. School staff will not carry children

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alone in their cars at anytime, and in such circumstances will be accompanied by a second member of the school staff or volunteer.

In all cases involving minor or more serious accidents, parents/guardians, upon enrolment of their child(ren) in the school are requested to give their written consent to the administering of first aid and the transportation of their child(ren) to trained medical professionals if necessary.

4.4. Toileting/Intimate Care

A child who has specific toileting and/or intimate care needs will normally have an SNA assigned to them. Prior to the child's enrolment in the school, a meeting between the child's parents/guardians and all school staff involved with the child is held to address and agree the practices that are acceptable as to how the school will meet the needs of the child. Toileting and/or intimate care will be normally be given by the child's SNA in the presence of, and where necessary, the assistance of another member of staff.

Toileting accidents are not uncommon, particularly with junior infants. Upon enrolment of their child(ren) in the school, parents/guardians are requested to give their written consent to the changing of the child's uniform where there has been a toileting accident or other soiling as a result of illness. The uniform will be changed by a member of school staff in the presence of another staff member.

4.5. Swimming

The school offers swimming as an additional activity. In deciding the classes that will participate in the activity, the school takes into account the age of the pupils and the level of assistance in changing/dressing that is required relative to the pupils' ages. This is in order to minimise the level of assistance that members of staff or volunteers are required to give to pupils in this regard. All members of staff and volunteers assisting with supervision in changing areas will act prudently and will not enter changing cubicles, except where a child has an accident requiring assistance from a member of staff.

4.6. One-to-One Teaching

The school actively promotes in-class support for pupils with special educational needs and those requiring additional learning support in order to minimise one-to-one teaching and promote inclusion in accordance with the school's Equal Opportunity & Gender Equality policy.

4.7. Attendance

Parents/guardians, upon enrolment of their child(ren) in the school are made aware of the school's obligations under the Education Welfare Act 2000. In accordance with the school's Attendance policy, the school utilises administration software that enables each member of staff to record and monitor a child's attendance. The administration software also allows members of staff to monitor trends in a child's non-attendance.

4.8. Resource Content

All resource material is checked, insofar as practicable, by school staff for its appropriateness with regard to age and suitability.

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4.9. Visitors

All visitors are supervised in the discharge of their business. As an additional measure, to minimise the risk of unsupervised access to the school premises, all entrance and exit points are locked after pupils enter the school, with access to the school premises only available via the main entrance which is monitored by CCTV.

4.10. Internet

As part of the school's overall education programme, it offers pupils supervised access to the internet (in accordance with the Acceptable Usage Policy/Internet Policy). The school promotes the safe and responsible use of the internet by protecting pupils from what is inappropriate and/or harmful and guiding them to what is safe, appropriate, fun, and educational. The school also provides information to parents/guardians to assist them in making their children's internet usage safer at home.

4.11. Custody and Separation

Parents experiencing separation are encouraged to come and speak confidentially to the teachers and/or principal. Such matters will be treated with sensitivity and compassion, and ultimately the primary concern of the school is for the well-being and overall development of the child. When the child spends time in two homes, the Board requires that both sets of emergency contact numbers are given by the parents to the school. The Board also requires any changes in collection arrangements to be communicated by the parents to the school. In the absence of a custody arrangement, both parents will be treated as equal partners in terms of parenting rights and responsibilities. School staff will not withhold a child from either parent, unless a custody arrangement or court order requires such withholding.

Implementation & Review

This child protection policy applies to all school staff, members of the Board, volunteers and contractors working in the school. Accordingly, the Board will ensure that all personnel are aware of their relative obligations and responsibilities under the Child Protection Procedures 2011 and the procedures to be followed in the event of an allegation or suspicion of child abuse.

The Board will ensure that all appropriate and on-going training will be made available for the DLP and the Deputy DLP, and, where necessary, school staff, members of the Board and volunteers.

This policy will be circulated to all school staff, members of the Board and volunteers and will be readily accessible to parents/guardians.

This policy will be reviewed annually by the Board.