Child Protection Policy

Introduction

The BOM of Derrycreha N.S. has adopted the Department of Education and Science Guidelines and Procedures for schools in relation to Child Protection and Welfare. This policy is an outline of how Derrycreha N.S. proposes to implement these guidelines in order to ensure the protection and welfare of all children attending the school.

Derrycreha 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 they will be acted on.

Aims

1. 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 etc.
2. To put in place clear procedures for all school personnel dealing with suspicions and allegations of child abuse.
3. To identify other policy areas which need to be amended in light of the 'Child Protection Guidelines'.
4. To identify curricular content and resources that contribute to the prevention of child abuse and to enable children to properly deal with the abuse if it occurs.

Guidelines

The guidelines are laid out as follows:

1. Appointment of a Designated Liaison Person (DLP).
2. Roles, Responsibilities and Guidelines.
   2.1 Roles of Board of Management.
   2.2 Role of the Staff Members (Teachers, SNA's, Caretaker, Secretary).
   2.3 Role of the Designated Liaison Person.
3. Case Conferences.

4. Organisational Implications.
5. Curriculum Implications.

Appointment of a Designated Liaison Person (DLP)

a) The Board of Management has appointed the principal Anna O'Sullivan as the Designated Liaison Person (DLP) in Derrycreha N.S. to have specific responsibilities for child protection.
b) The Deputy Principal Angela Murphy has been appointed as Deputy DLP to take the place of the DLP if he/she is unavailable for whatever reason.
c) The position of DLP will be addressed at the first meeting of each new Board of Management. The DLP will continue to act as such until such time as he/she is replaced by the BOM for whatever reason.
d) The names of the DLP and the DDLP are displayed in a prominent position near the main entrance to the school.

Roles and Responsibilities

- The BOM has primary responsibility for the care and welfare of their pupils.
- The DLP has specific responsibility for child protection in the school.
- All staff have a general duty of care to ensure that arrangements are in place to protect children from harm.
  Specifically they will;
    a) Appoint a DLP and deputy DLP.
    b) Have clear procedures for dealing with allegations or suspicions of child abuse (see below).
    c) Monitor the progress of children at risk.
    d) Ensure that curricular provision is in place for the prevention of child abuse.
    e) Investigate and respond to allegations of child abuse against one of the school's employees which have been reported to the HSE or Gardaí.
    f) Decide on teachers attendance at child protection meetings/case conferences and advise teachers before attending such meetings/conferences.

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

Reporting

In the event of receiving a complaint or suspicion regarding an employee;

1. The DLP will immediately inform the chairperson.
2. She/he will seek a written statement of the allegation from the person/agency making the allegation. Parents/guardians may make a statement on behalf of a child.
3. The DLP will seek advice from the relevant HSE and will take responsibility for reporting, based on this advice.
4. If the DLP, following consultation with the HSE, decides that this matter is not for reporting, she/he must inform the Chairperson. They must then inform, in writing, the person or agency making the allegation, of the reasons for this decision. If this person or agency still has concerns, they are free to consult with or report to the relevant HSE or Gardaí on an individual basis. The provisions of the Protections for Persons reporting Child Abuse Act 1998 apply, once they report reasonably and in good faith.
5. If the DLP/DDLP completes a standard reporting form as comprehensively as is possible.
6. When the Chairperson becomes aware of an allegation of abuse she/he will always seek legal advice and base his/her response on this advice.
7. She/he will privately inform the employees of the fact and nature of the allegation and whether or not it has been reported by the DLP to the HSE. Refer to 4.2 -4.3, pg 16 of Child Protection Guidelines and Procedures (DES 2001). The Chairperson has a duty to afford the employee fairness and due process – she/he is entitled to details and a copy of the written allegation, to advice and representation and an opportunity to respond to the Board within a week.

Responding

1. When the Chairperson becomes aware of an allegation of abuse she/he will always seek legal advice and base his/her response on this advice.
2. The Chairperson will consider whether there is any risk to pupils' safety. If the Chairperson considers that there is a risk – she/he may require the employee to take immediate administrative leave. If unsure the Chairperson considers that there is a risk – she/he may require the employee to take immediate administrative leave. If unsure the chairperson will consult the HSE/Gardaí.
3. If administrative leave has been invoked, the Chairperson will inform the DES. The HSE (in some cases the Gardaí) may also be notified in accordance with legal advise received.
4. Once it is deemed necessary by the DLP and Chairperson to make a report (after receiving advise from the HSE) the Chairperson will convene and inform a meeting of the BOM as soon as possible.
5. Where the alleged abuse has taken place within the school, or relates to the abuse of pupils of the school, by school employees outside of school time, the BOM will investigate the matter. They will convene a further meeting, once the relevant information has been gathered. At this meeting the BOM will consider in detail;
    - The allegations made and their source.
    - The advice given by relevant authorities.
    - And the written responses of the employee.
6. At this meeting also;

- The person/agency who is alleging abuse by the school employee should be offered an opportunity to present his/her case to the BOM and may be accompanied by another person.
- Parents/Guardians may act on behalf of a child.
- The employee should also be afforded an opportunity to present his/her case and may also be accompanied.

7. The BOM must deal with the matter sensitively and the employee must be fairly treated.
8. The BOM will make a decision on action, if any, based on their investigation and will inform the employee of this in writing. They will

also inform the DES of the outcome, if the employee has been absent on administrative leave.

9. Where it is not possible for the BOM to conduct an enquiry into allegations, (e.g. where abuse has occurred in past employment, or where the employee is undergoing investigation by relevant authorities), the Chairperson will act on advice of authorities. The Chairperson will maintain close contact with the HSE and receive reports and records from them where appropriate.

   Role of the staff member (to include teachers, SNA's, caretaker, secretary etc)
   It is the responsibility of all teachers and staff members to familiarise themselves with the Children First National Guidelines for the Protection and Welfare of Children (1999) especially.
   - Chapter 3 Definition and Recognition of Child Abuse
   - Chapter 4 Basis for Reporting and Standard Reporting Procedures
   - Appendix 1 Signs and Symptoms of Child Abuse.

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 advise 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 nto 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 and 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 onto the Chairperson who will proceed as per guidelines.

Suspicions of Abuse:

a) Staff members who suspect abuse should refer to Children First National Guidelines for the Protection and Welfare of Children (1999) especially.
   - Chapter 3 Definition and Recognition of Child Abuse
   - Chapter 4 Basis for Reporting and Standard Reporting Procedures
   - Appendix 1 Signs and Symptoms of Child Abuse.

b) Staff members should observe and record over time the dates/signs/symptoms/behaviour causing them concern.
c) They should inform the DLP and pass on all records.

Role of the Designated Liaison Person (DLP)

a) The DLP acts as a liaison with outside agencies, HSE, Gardaí and other parties with child protection concerns.
b) The DLP will inform all school personnel of the availability of the Children First Guidelines in the school. She/he will photocopy and circulate to all staff chapters 3&4 & appendix 1 of these guidelines and advise on good practice.
c) The DLP will be available to staff for consultation regarding suspicions or disclosures of abuse. She/he will keep records of these consultations.
d) The DLP will seek advice from the HSE.
e) The DLP will report suspicions and allegations of child abuse to the HSE and/or An Garda Síochána based on this advise.
f) The DLP will maintain proper records in a secure, confidential manner and in a secure location.
g) The DLP will keep up to date on current developments regarding child protection.

3. Child Protection Meetings/ Case Conferences

Staff will adhere to the procedures outlined on pages 13-14 of Child Protection Guidelines.

4.Organisational Implications

Current school routines and procedures will be constantly reviewed and adapted as necessary.

- Staff are rigorous in their commitment to supervising pupils at all times.
- Incidents of bullying are dealt with as soon as teachers are aware of the fact.
- Serious incidents are recorded in a notebook and stored in the filing cabinet. Such records are deemed to be confidential.
- Any form of inappropriate play/sexualised behaviour is dealt with promptly and discreetly.
- All pupils from juniors to sixth class attend swimming lessons in Dunmanway for 5/6 weeks each year with the approval of the BOM. Parents always help teachers as the younger pupils usually need help with changing/dressing. Neither parent or teacher work alone.
- On a car journey – teachers will never travel with a single pupil. He/she will always bring two others along.
- Visitors to the yard are also supervised and 'a watchful eye' is kept on cars parked across the road. Visitors/tourists are not allowed to take photographs of the children.

5.Curriculum Implications

The teaching staff do everything possible to make Derrycreha N.S. an emotionally and physically safe place. Children are educated in the protective skills of assertiveness and self-esteem. The Stay Safe Rules are taught – SAY NO – GET AWAY – TELL AN ADULT YOU TRUST.
The Walk Tall and Stay Safe programmes are taught as part of S.P.H.E.

This Policy was ratified by the Board of Management on Wednesday 6th June 2012.