

Child Protection Policy

April 2024

Scoil Mhuire Effin

Child Protection Policy: Scoil Mhuire Effin

1. INTRODUCTION

The Board of Management of **Scoil Mhuire** values and encourages the participation of pupils in all activities that enhance their spiritual, physical, emotional, intellectual and social development. The school recognises the dignity and rights of all pupils and is committed to ensuring their protection and support. Management, staff and volunteers accept and recognise our responsibilities both to develop awareness of the practices which cause children harm and to create an environment that safeguards the well-being of all the children that attend the school.

The Child Protection Policy of **Scoil Mhuire** has been developed in accordance with:

- The Children First Act, 2015 and the “Children First: National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children” published by the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs in 2017 {hereinafter referred to as “Children First National Guidance 2017”}, the Addendum to Children First {2019}, General Data Protection Regulation {GDPR}, the Child Protection and Safeguarding Procedures for Boarding Facilities associated with Recognised Schools 2023 and the Teaching Council {Information to be Furnished by Employer in Case of Dismissal or Resignation of Registered Teacher} Regulations 2023.

Queries about Child Protection Procedures in our school should be directed to:

- *Ms. Mary Power*
Chairperson Board of Management
Tel: 087 7960214

Allegations or suspicions of child abuse should be brought to the attention of the Chairperson of the Board of Management, the Designated Liaison Person (DLP), or the relevant authorities.

- *Board of Management Chairperson: Ms. Mary Power 087 7960214*
- *DLP: Anne-Maria Murphy, 086 7768993 (school) 083-3324831 (mobile)*
- *Kilmallock Garda Station: 063-98018*
- *Tusla; Child and Family Agency, Newcastle West 069-66653*

2. BACKGROUND

2.1 Child Abuse: Towards a Definition

Scoil Mhuire has adopted the definition of child abuse as described in the 'Children First: National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children'.

The 'Children First Guidelines', defines child abuse by using 4 categories: neglect, emotional abuse, physical abuse and sexual abuse. It should be noted that a child may be subject to more than one form of abuse at any given time.

Neglect

Neglect can be defined in terms of an omission, where the child suffers significant harm or impairment of development by being deprived of food, clothing, warmth, hygiene, intellectual stimulation, supervision and safety, medical care or attachment to and affection from adults. The threshold of significant harm is reached when the child's needs are neglected to the extent that their well-being and/or development are severely affected.

Emotional Abuse

Emotional abuse is normally found in the relationship between a care-giver (an adult person who has responsibility for a child in the short or long term) and a child rather than in a specific event or pattern of events. It occurs when a child's needs for affection, approval, consistency and security are not met. It is rarely manifested in terms of physical symptoms. Children show signs of emotional abuse by their behaviour (for example excessive clinginess to or avoidance of the parent or carer), their emotional state (low self-esteem, unhappiness) or their development. The threshold of significant harm is reached when abusive interactions dominate and become typical of the relationship between the child and parent or carer.

Physical Abuse

Physical abuse is any form of non-accidental injury or any injury that results from willful or neglectful failure to protect a child. Examples of physical injury include:

- shaking,
- use of excessive force in handling,
- deliberate poisoning,
- suffocation,
- Munchausen's Syndrome by proxy (where parents make up stories of illness about their child or cause physical signs of illness), or
- allowing or creating a substantial risk of significant harm to a child.

Sexual Abuse

Sexual abuse occurs when a child is used by another person for their gratification or sexual arousal, or for that of others. Examples of sexual abuse include:

- exposing sexual organs or intentionally performing any sexual act in the presence of a child,
- intentional touching or molesting the body of a child, by a person or object, for the purpose of sexual arousal or gratification,
- masturbating in the presence of a child or involving the child in the act of masturbation,
- engaging in sexual intercourse with the child, whether oral, vaginal or anal,
- sexually exploiting a child, or
- consensual sexual activity between an adult and a child under 17 years.

(In relation to child sexual abuse, it should be noted that, for the purposes of criminal law, the age of consent to sexual intercourse is 17 years).

Aggressive/Bullying/Sexualised Behaviour:

While bullying is not a category in itself, it is important to be aware of it in relation to child abuse.

Bullying can be defined as repeated verbal, psychological or physical aggression that is conducted by an individual or group against others. It includes behaviour such as teasing, taunting, threatening and hitting.

- In **Scoil Mhuire** peer to peer bullying as described above will be dealt with in accordance with the school's Code of Behaviour and Anti-Bullying Policies
- Bullying behaviour that is perpetrated by an adult against a child will be dealt with under the provisions of this policy.

Sexualised behaviour displayed by an individual child, or occurring between children is inappropriate. Should such behaviour occur the school:

- Will arrange meetings (separate meetings if there are children from more than one family implicated) with the parent(s)/guardian(s) of the child/children involved.
- May if deemed appropriate seek advice from the HSE.

In a situation where child abuse is alleged to have been carried out by another child, the child protection procedures will be adhered to for both the victim and the alleged abuser; that is, the matter will be considered a child care and protection issue for both children.

2.2 Responsibility to Report Suspected or Actual Abuse

Any person who suspects that a child is being abused or is at risk of abuse, has a responsibility and a duty of care to report their concerns to Tusla: Child and Family Agency or an Garda Síochána, either directly or through the Designated Liaison Person.

The **Protection for Persons Reporting Child Abuse Act, 1998** provides immunity from civil liability to people who report child abuse 'reasonably and in good faith' to the Child and Family Agency or the Gardaí.

This means that even if a reported suspicion of child abuse proves unfounded, a plaintiff who took an action would have to prove that the reporter had not acted reasonably and in good faith making the report.

The act provides significant protection for employees who report child abuse. These protections cover all employees and all forms of discrimination up to and including dismissal.

Qualified Privilege

While the legal protection outlined above only applies to reports made to the appropriate authorities (i.e. Child and Family Agency/An Garda Síochána). Persons furnishing information with regard to suspicions of child abuse 'reasonably and in good faith' to the DLP or Chairperson of the Board of Management are protected under '*Qualified Privilege*' as defined by Common Law.

'*Qualified Privilege*' arises where the person making the communication has a duty to do so, or a right, or interest to protect the child and where the communication is made to a person with a similar duty, right or interest. The person making the report acting in loco parentis, would be expected to act in the child's best interests and in making the report would be regarded as acting in such a manner. Privilege can be displaced only where it can be established that the person making the report acted maliciously.

It is a criminal offence to make a report of child abuse 'knowing the statement to be false'.

2.3 Tusla: Child and Family Agency

The Child and Family Agency has a range of statutory responsibilities in the area of child welfare, family support, child protection and child care.

Once an allegation of child abuse has been reported to the Child and Family Agency, it is then a matter for the Child and Family Agency to decide upon the action, if any, which is necessitated by that report.

In the case of allegations or suspicions of child abuse by school employees the ***Children First*** guidelines place an onus on the Child and Family Agency to ensure that arrangements are put in place to provide feedback to the Board of Management 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. The Child and Family Agency is required to pass on reports and records to the Board of Management and the employee in question where appropriate. The Board of Management should always be notified of the outcome of investigations. It is the responsibility of the Chairperson of the Board of Management to maintain close contact with the Child and Family Agency to ensure that the health boards act promptly in cases of alleged abuse involving school employees.

3. ROLES & RESPONSIBILITIES

3.1 The Board of Management

The Board of Management of **Scoil Mhuire** acknowledges its responsibilities in respect of child protection to include the following:

- Primary responsibility for the care and welfare of pupils.
- The development and implementation of an effective child protection policy.
- The appointment of a DLP and deputy DLP.
- The review and evaluation of the child protection policy and associated procedures.
- The provision of appropriate staff development and training.
- To monitor the progress of children at risk.
- The Investigation of allegations of child abuse against one of the school's employees which have been reported to the Child and Family Agency or An Garda Síochána.
- To ensure that curriculum provision aimed at the prevention of child abuse is in place.
- The development of a policy on teachers' attendance at child protection meetings/case conferences and the provision of advice to teachers before attending such meetings/conferences.

3.2 School Staff & Volunteers

- All staff have a general duty of care to ensure that arrangements are in place to protect children from harm.
- Staff are responsible for adhering to the child protection procedures as detailed in the school's child protection policy.
- Teaching staff are responsible for the delivery of the curriculum aimed at the prevention of child abuse.
- Staff and volunteers are expected to comply with the child protection **Code of Good Practice** as detailed in this document.
- All school personnel are especially well placed to observe changes in behaviour, failure to develop or outward signs of abuse in children. In situations where school staff or volunteers suspect abuse or have concerns regarding the welfare of a child they are required to act in accordance with the procedures detailed in this document.

3.3 Role of the Designated Liaison Person (DLP)

- The Designated Liaison Person has specific responsibility for child protection.
- The DLP is the first point of contact within the school regarding suspicions or disclosures of abuse.
- This person is the Designated Liaison Person for the school in all dealings with the Child and Family agency, An Garda Síochána and other parties, in connection with allegations of abuse.
- In instances where there are reasonable grounds for a suspicion or allegation of child abuse the DLP is responsible for reporting the matter to the Child and Family Agency, or in the case of an emergency the Garda Síochána.
- The DLP is responsible for informing the Chairperson of the Board of Management if a report involving a pupil in the school has been submitted to the Child and Family Agency or Garda Síochána.
- It is expected that the DLP will normally be the principal Teacher

3.4 Role of the Deputy Designated Liaison Person (DDLDP)

- The Deputy Designated Liaison Person is responsible for performing the DLP's responsibilities if *he/she* is unavailable or in *his/her* absence.
- The DDLP of **Scoil Mhuire** is **Nuala Dooly**

4. CHILD PROTECTION: CREATING A SAFE & SECURE ENVIRONMENT

4.1 Code of Good Practice for, BoM members, Staff & Volunteers

*For the purposes of the **Code of Good Practice** the term personnel describes anyone who engages with pupils of the school during the school day (including school activities organised outside of school hours or off the school premises), whether as a paid employee or as a volunteer.*

General Conduct

- Physical punishment of pupils is not permissible under any circumstances.
- Verbal abuse of pupils, the use of sexual innuendo or telling jokes of a sexual nature in the presence of pupils is never acceptable. Great care should be taken if it is necessary to have a conversation regarding sexual matters with a pupil.
- Being alone with a pupil is not good practice. If a situation arises where it is necessary to be alone with a pupil, another member of staff should be informed immediately, and the room door should remain open for the duration. A diary note that the meeting with the young person took place, including the reasons for it, should be made.
- All pupils must be treated with equal respect; favouritism is not acceptable.
- Personnel should not engage in or tolerate any behaviour – verbal, psychological or physical – that could be construed as bullying or abusive.
- A disproportionate amount of time should not be spent with any particular pupil or group of pupils.
- Under no circumstances should school personnel give alcohol, tobacco or drugs to pupils.

Respect for Physical Integrity

- The physical integrity of pupils must be respected at all times.
- Personnel must not engage in inappropriate physical contact of any kind – including tough physical play, physical reprimand and horseplay (tickling, wrestling). This should not prevent appropriate contact in situations where it is necessary to ensure the safety and well-being of a pupil (for example, where a pupil is distressed).

Respect for Privacy

- The right to privacy of pupils must be respected at all times.
- Particular care regarding privacy must be taken when pupils are in locations such as changing areas, swimming pools, showers and toilets.
- Photographs of pupils must never be taken while they are in changing areas (for example, in a locker room or bathing facility) or toilets.
- Tasks of a personal nature (for example, helping with toileting, washing or changing clothing) should not be done for pupils if they can undertake these tasks themselves.

Meetings with Pupils

- If it is necessary to meet alone with a pupil, such meetings should not be held in an isolated environment. The times and designated locations for meetings should allow for transparency and accountability (for example, be held in rooms with a clear glass panel or window, in buildings where other people are present, and with the door of the room left open).
- Both the length and number of meetings should be limited.
- Parents or guardians should be informed that the meeting(s) took place, except in circumstances where to do so might place the pupil in danger.
- When the need for a visit to the home of a pupil or young person arises, professional boundaries must be observed at all times.

Pupils with Special Needs or Disability

- Pupils with special needs or disability may depend on adults more than other pupils for their care and safety, and so sensitivity and clear communication are particularly important
- Where it is necessary to carry out tasks of a personal nature for a pupil with special needs, this should be done with the full understanding and consent of parents or guardians.
- In carrying out such personal care tasks, sensitivity must be shown to the pupil and the tasks should be undertaken with the utmost discretion.
- Any care task of a personal nature which a pupil or young person can do for themselves should not be undertaken by personnel.
- In an emergency situation where this type of help is required, parents should be fully informed as soon as is reasonably possible.

Vulnerable Pupils

- As especially vulnerable pupils may depend on adults more than other children for their care and safety, sensitivity and clear communication are of utmost importance.
- Workers should be aware that vulnerable pupils may be more likely than other pupils to be bullied or subjected to other forms of abuse, and may also be less clear about physical and emotional boundaries.
- It is particularly important that vulnerable pupils should be carefully listened to, in recognition of the fact that they may have difficulty in expressing their concerns and in order that the importance of what they say is not underestimated.

Handling Disclosures from Pupils

Personnel dealing with disclosures from pupils should act with tact and sensitivity. In particular personnel who find themselves in such a situation should:

- Listen to the pupil
- Not ask leading questions or make suggestions to the pupil
- Offer reassurance but not make promises (e.g. promising not to tell anyone else)
- Not stop a pupil recalling significant events
- Not over react
- Explain that further help may have to be sought
- Record the conversation accurately and retain the record
- Report the matter to the DLP (or to the Chairperson of the BoM if the DLP is implicated)

Maintaining Records

When child abuse is suspected, it is essential to have a record of all the information available. Personnel should note carefully what they have observed and when they observed it. Signs of physical injury should be described in detail and, if appropriate, sketched. Any comment by the child concerned, or by any other person, about how an injury occurred should be recorded, preferably quoting words actually used, as soon as possible after the comment has been made. All records so created should be regarded as highly confidential and retained in a secure location by the Designated Liaison Person.

4.2 Vetting of New Employees

The Board of Management undertakes that-

- A Garda Vetting Report is requested in respect of all new appointees (permanent, fixed term and substitute).
- Reference checks will be carried out in respect of all new appointees.

4.3 Induction of New Employees

- All new employees will be given a copy of this policy.
- The DLP will be responsible for:
 - providing all new teachers and ancillary staff with a copy of the Children First: National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children, 2011 and Circular 0065/2011.
 - providing all new staff with a copy of this policy document and discussing their obligations with regard to same.
- All new teachers are expected to teach the designated SPHE objectives for their class.

4.4 Supervision

Every effort will be made to ensure that there is comprehensive supervision of pupils throughout the school day. A roster of staff on duty is displayed in the office/staff room. Teachers will ensure that pupils are visible in the schoolyard. Pupils will not be permitted to leave the school yard or engage with adults outside of the schoolyard.

4.5 One-to-One Teaching

Parent(s)/Guardian(s) will be made aware when one-to-one teaching is deemed to be in the best interest of a pupil. Written consent is required for all one-to-one teaching and this consent form will be retained on the child's file.

4.6 Attendance

Procedures with regard to the monitoring of school attendance are contained in the school's Code of Behaviour.

4.7 Curriculum

In Scoil Mhuire all children are cherished equally and in fulfilling the general aims of the primary Curriculum we will:

- *Enable the child to live a full life as a child and to realise his/her potential*
- *Enable the child to develop as a social being through living and co-operating with others and so contribute to the good of society*
- *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, democratic, fair 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 a democratic process

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- 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.

All teachers will teach content objectives as laid out under the ten 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; My friends and other people; Relating to others; developing citizenship.

The SPHE programme will be supported by using the *Walk Tall* resources, the *Grow in Love* programme, the *Stay Safe* programme and the *RSE* programme.

The combination of these programmes and resources 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.

4.8 Use of Images of Children

- The school undertakes to seek parents' or guardians' permission for the use of photographs of pupils for any publicity purposes.
- At school ceremonies and other public events, the school will publicly announce the use of photographic and audio visual equipment so that anyone who would rather not be photographed or videoed can remove themselves.
- Only images of pupils in appropriate dress will be used.
- Inappropriate use of images of pupils will be brought to the attention of the DLP.
- No images of any pupil may be taken by an external agency or person without receiving the prior authorisation of the school principal.

4.9 Use of Technology

- Procedures with regard to the use of technology are contained in the school's **Acceptable Usage Policy**.
- Procedures with regard to the use of mobile phones are contained in the school's **Mobile Phone Policy**.

4.10 School Visitors

Procedures with regard to school visitors are contained in the **School Visitors Policy**.

4.11 Travel

Best practice in relation to travel with pupils will be observed. Personnel will not undertake any car or minibus journey alone with a pupil. If, in certain circumstances, only one adult is available, there should be a minimum of two pupils present for the entire journey. In the event of an emergency, where it is necessary to make a journey alone with a pupil, a record of this will be made and the pupil's parent(s) or guardian(s) will be informed as soon as is possible.

4.12 School Tours

- All trips will be carefully planned in advance, to include adequate provision for safety in regard to transport, facilities, activities and emergencies. Adequate insurance will be put in place.
- Written consent by a parent or guardian specifically for each trip and related activities will be obtained in advance.
- A copy of the itinerary and contact telephone numbers will be made available to parents and guardians.
- There will be adequate, gender-appropriate, supervision for boys and girls.
- Arrangements and procedures will be put in place to ensure that rules and appropriate boundaries are maintained in the relaxed environment of trips away.

6. REPORTING CASES OF SUSPECTED CHILD ABUSE

6.1 Action to be Taken by School Personnel

- If a school employee receives an allegation or has a suspicion that a pupil is being abused the school employee will, in the first instance, report the matter to the Designated Liaison Person.

6.2 Action to be Taken by the Designated Liaison Person

- If the school employee and the Designated Liaison Person are satisfied that there are **reasonable grounds** for the suspicion or allegation the Designated Liaison Person will report the matter to the Child And Family Agency immediately.

Reasonable Grounds

The following examples are quoted in *Children First Guidelines* as constituting reasonable grounds for concern:

- Specific information from the child that he/she was abused;
- An account by a person who saw the child being abused;
- Evidence, such as injury or behaviour, which is consistent with abuse and unlikely to be caused another way;
- An injury or behaviour which is consistent both with abuse and with an innocent explanation but where there are corroborative indicators supporting the concern that it is a case of abuse e.g. a pattern of injuries, an implausible explanation, other indications of abuse, dysfunctional behaviour; and
- Consistent evidence, over a period of time that a child is suffering from emotional or physical neglect.

A suspicion, which is not supported by any objective indication of abuse or neglect, would not constitute a reasonable suspicion or reasonable grounds for concern in the first instance.

- The DLP will make every attempt to make personal contact with the duty social worker but in any event such a report will be made to the Child and Family Agency in writing.
 - In the event of an emergency, or the non-availability of Child and Family Agency staff, the report will be made to An Garda Síochána.
 - When a report is being made to the Child and Family or An Garda Síochána, the Chairperson of the Board of Management of the school will be informed.
 - When a report is being made to the Child and Family Agency or An Garda Síochána, the DLP will inform a parent/guardian unless doing so is likely to endanger the pupil or place the pupil at further risk. A decision not to inform a parent/guardian will be recorded together with the reasons for not doing so.
- In cases where school personnel have concerns about a child, but are not sure whether to report the matter the Designated Liaison Person will consult the appropriate Child and Family Agency staff. In consulting the Child and Family Agency, the Designated Liaison Person will clearly state that she is requesting advice and consultation and that she is not making a report. If the Child and Family Agency advises that a referral should be made, the Designated Liaison Person will act on that advice.
- If following consultation with the appropriate Child and Family staff, the Designated Liaison Person decides that the concerns of the school employee will not be referred, the school employee will be given a clear statement, in writing, as to the reasons why action is not being taken. The school employee will be advised that, if he/she remains concerned about the situation, he/she is free to consult with or report to the Child and Family Agency.

7. CHILD PROTECTION CONFERENCES

A child protection conference is a forum for the co-ordination of information from all relevant sources, including where necessary, school employees. The child protection conference plays a pivotal role in making recommendations and planning for the welfare of children who may be at serious risk.

- A request from the Child and Family Agency for a school employee to attend a child protection conference should be made to the Designated Liaison Person who will consult with the Chairperson of the Board of Management of the school. The Chairperson of the Board of Management may, through the Designated Liaison Person, request the appropriate authorities to clarify why the attendance of the school employee at the child protection conference is considered necessary, who else is going to be present and if the employee is required to provide a report.
- If there are concerns about the attendance of parents/guardians, the school will contact the conference chairperson for guidance.
- As a result of the CP conference the school employee may be requested to keep the child's behaviour under closer observation, in a manner that is not inconsistent with the school employee's existing duties to his/her class as a whole. 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 Child and Family Agency staff should be informed of the likely steps to be taken by the professionals involved. Wherever appropriate and within the normal limits of confidentiality, the Child and Family Agency have a responsibility to inform persons reporting alleged child abuse and other involved professionals about the outcomes of any enquiry or investigation into that reported concern.

8. ALLEGATIONS OR SUSPICIONS OF CHILD ABUSE BY SCHOOL EMPLOYEES

The primary concern of the Board of Management of **Scoil Mhuire** is to protect the pupils attending the school to whom we have a duty of care. However, as an employer, the Board of Management also has responsibilities towards its employees. In this respect, and in the event of an allegation of abuse being made against an employee of the school the Board of Management will observe the employees' right not to be judged in advance of a full and fair enquiry.

Should an allegation of abuse be made against a school employee the Board of Management undertakes to seek legal advice in respect of same.

8.1 Reporting Procedure

- School employees, other than the Designated Liaison Person, who receive allegations of abuse against another school employee, will report the matter without delay to the Designated Liaison Person (or Chairperson of the Board of Management if appropriate).
- School employees who form suspicions regarding the conduct of another school employee will consult with the Designated Liaison Person (or Chairperson of the Board of Management if appropriate).
- Where an allegation of abuse is made against a school employee, the Designated Liaison Person within the school will immediately act in accordance with the procedures outlined in Section 6.2 of this policy. A written statement of the allegation will be sought from the person/agency making the allegation (parents/guardians may make a statement on behalf of the child).
- Whether or not the matter is being reported to the Child and Family Agency, the Designated Liaison Person will inform the Chairperson of the Board of Management of the allegation.
- Where the allegation of abuse is against the Designated Liaison Person, the Chairperson of the Board of Management will assume responsibility for reporting the matter to the Child and Family Agency or An Garda Síochána.

8.2 Action to be Taken by the Chairperson of the Board of Management

- When a Chairperson of a Board of Management becomes aware of an allegation of abuse against a school employee, the Chairperson will privately inform the employee of the following:
 - the fact that an allegation has been made against him/her;
 - the nature of the allegation;
 - whether or not the matter has been reported to the Child and Family Agency or An Garda Síochána by the Designated Liaison Person.
- 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 of Management within a specified period of time. The employee will be informed that his/her explanation to the Board of Management will also have to be passed on to the Child and Family Agency.
- In accordance with its duty of care the first priority of the Board of Management will be to ensure that no child is exposed to unnecessary risk. In this respect the Chairperson of the Board will as a matter of urgency take any necessary protective measures. These measures will be proportionate to the level of risk and will not unreasonably penalise the employee, financially or otherwise, unless necessary to protect pupils.
- If, in the Chairperson's opinion, the nature of the allegation warrants immediate action, the Chairperson, on behalf of the Board of Management, will direct that the employee absent

him/herself from the school with immediate effect. Where the Chairperson is unsure as to whether the nature of the allegations warrants the absence of the employee from the school while the matter is being investigated, he will consult with the Child and Family Agency and/or An Garda Síochána for advice as to the action that those authorities consider necessary. Following those consultations, the Chairperson will have due regard for the advice offered.

- Any absence by a school employee will be regarded as administrative leave of absence with pay and not a suspension. Such a leave of absence will not imply any degree of guilt on the part of the school employee. Where such a leave of absence is invoked, the Department of Education and Science will be contacted with regard to:
 - Formal approval for the paid leave of absence of the school employee; and
 - Departmental sanction for the employment of a substitute teacher.
- The Chairperson will convene an immediate meeting of the Board for this purpose and inform the Board members of the nature of the allegations, the action taken in respect of same and the outcome of any consultations with the Child and Family Agency and/or An Garda Síochána.

Allegations Against Employees Pertaining to Previous Employment / Incidents Outside of School Hours:

- In situations where the allegations of abuse relate to the past employment of the school employee and where these allegations are being investigated by either the Child and Family Agency or An Garda Síochána the Chairperson of the Board of Management will maintain regular and close liaison with those authorities and a decision on the position of the school employee will be taken having due regard to the advice given to the Board of Management by those authorities. If the decision is taken that the school employee should take administrative leave of absence, the Department of Education and Science will be immediately informed.
- Where the alleged abuse has taken place within **Scoil Mhuire**, or relates to the abuse of pupils of the school by school employees outside of school time, the Board of Management will convene a further meeting. At this meeting the Board will consider in detail the allegations which have been made against the school employee and the source of those allegations, the advice of the Child and Family Agency and/or An Garda Síochána in relation to the allegation and the written response of the employee to the allegations. At this meeting
 - the person/agency who is alleging abuse by the school employee will be offered an opportunity to present his/her case to the Board and may be accompanied by another person in doing so.
 - Parents/guardians may act on behalf of a child.
 - Likewise the employee will be afforded an opportunity to make a presentation of his/her case to the Board and may also be accompanied by another person.
- Having followed the procedures outlined above, and having satisfied itself that it has sufficient information to hand in order to make a determination in relation to the allegation, the Board will then make a decision on the action, if any, it considers necessary to take in respect of the employee. The Department of Education and Science will be informed of the outcome where the school employee had been directed to absent him/herself on administrative leave.

9. CONFIDENTIALITY

- All information regarding concerns of possible child abuse will only be shared on a need to know basis in the interests of the child.
- 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.
- Any Designated Liaison Person who is submitting a report to the Child and Family Agency or An Garda Síochána will inform a parent/guardian unless doing so is likely to endanger the child or place the child at further risk. A decision not to inform a parent/guardian will be recorded together with the reasons for not doing so.
- The Board of Management and staff of **Scoil Mhuire** give an undertaking to deal with all child protection issues with the utmost confidentiality.

10. RELATED POLICIES

- *Code of Behaviour*
- *School Visitors Policy*
- *Acceptable Usage Policy*
- *Mobile Phone Policy*
- *School Enrolment Policy*

11. POLICY RATIFICATION

The Child Protection Policy was reviewed, ammended and ratified by the Board of Management of **Scoil Mhuire Effin** at its meeting held on

Date _____

Signed: _____ Chairperson, Board of Management

12. PATRON'S APPROVAL

This policy has been approved by St. Senan's Education Office, acting on behalf of the Patron

Bishop Brendan Leahy

A circular official stamp with the text "Official Stamp" inside.

Official
Stamp