**Child Protection Policy**

**Introductory Statement**

The BOM recognises that child protection and welfare considerations permeate all aspects of school life and must be reflected in all of the school policies, practices and activities. Accordingly, in accordance with the requirements of the Department of Education and Skills’ Child Protection for Primary and Post Primary Schools, the BOM of Kill NS has agreed the following child protection policy:

This policy statement regarding child protection at Kill NS applies to all staff, members of the BOM, volunteers and contractors working in the school. The BOM , staff and representatives of parents of Kill NS drafted and agreed the following policy.

**Rationale**

The BOM of Kill NS has adopted the Children First: National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children 2011 and the Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post Primary 2011. The school aims to provide its pupils with the highest standards of care and protection, in order to promote each child’s wellbeing and safeguard him/her from harm while in the school.

**Relationship to Ethos**

Kill NS seeks to help all pupils 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 that action will be taken to address those concerns.

**Aims**

This policy aims to

1. Develop awareness and responsibility in the area of child protection among all staff members (Teachers, Caretaker, Secretary etc.)
2. Ensure that all staff members are familiar with the “Children First” and DES guidelines and procedures in relation to child abuse
3. Put in place clear procedures for all personnel dealing with suspicions and allegations of child abuse
4. Identify curricular content and resources that contribute to the prevention of child abuse and which also enable children to deal properly with abuse if it occurs
5. Identify other policy areas that need to be amended in light of the guidelines.

**Roles and Responsibilities**

* The BOM has primary responsibility for the care and welfare of all pupils during school hours
* The DLP has a specific responsibility for child protection within the school
* All staff has a general duty of care to ensure that arrangements are in place to protect children from harm.

Staff are provided with copies of the following guidelines and it is the responsibility of all staff to familiarise themselves with the guidelines.

* Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post Primary School 2011
* Children First: National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children, 2011 especially
* Chapter 2 Definition & Recognition of Child Abuse
* Chapter 3 Basis for Reporting & Standard Reporting Procedures
* Appendix 1 Signs and Symptoms of Child Abuse

**Role of BOM**

* To arrange for the planning, development and implementation of an effective child protection programme
* To monitor and evaluate its effectiveness
* To provide appropriate staff development and training

Specifically they will

* Appoint a DLP and Deputy DLP
* Have clear procedures for dealing with allegations or suspicions of child abuse
* Monitor the progress of children at risk
* Ensure that curricular provision is in place for the prevention of child abuse
* Investigate and respond to allegations of child abuse against one of the school’s employees which have been reported to the Health Service Executive (HSE) or Gardaí
* To decide on teachers’ attendance at child protection meetings/case conference and to advise teachers before attending such meetings/conferences.

**Designated Liaison Person (DLP)**

The BOM has appointed Mr Pearse McKenna, Principal as Designated Liaison Person with specific responsibility for child protection. Should circumstances warrant it, Mary McKenna, Deputy Principal, shall act as Deputy DLP. The DLP has specific responsibility for child protection and will represent the school in all dealings with Health Boards, An Garda Síochana and other parties in connection with allegations of abuse. All matters pertaining to the processing or investigation of child abuse should be processed through the DLP.

**Role of the Designated Liaison Person (DLP)**

* The DLP acts as a liaison with outside agencies, HSE, Gardaí and other parties with child protection concerns
* The DLP will inform all school personnel of the availability of the Child Protection Guidelines and photocopy/circulate to all staff Chapters 2 & 3 & Appendix 1 of the Children First Guidelines and advise on good practice
* The DLP will be available to staff for consultation regarding suspicions or disclosure. He will keep records of these consultations
* The DLP will seek advice from the HSE
* The DLP will report suspicions and allegations of child abuse to the HSE or/and An Garda Síochana based on this advice
* The DLP will maintain proper records in a secure, confidential manner and in a secure location
* The DLP will keep up to date on current developments regarding child protection.

**Guidelines for the DLP in handling reported concerns and disclosures**

* Where the DLP/Deputy DLP have concerns about a child, but are not sure whether to report the matter to the HSE, they should seek appropriate advice. To do this the DLP/Deputy should make informal contact with the assigned (on Duty) Social Worker. The DLP/Deputy in this case, should be explicit that s/he is requesting advice and not making a report. If advised to report this matter, the DLP will act on that advice.
* A report will then be made to the HSE by the DLP/Deputy in person, by telephone or in writing. In the event of an emergency or non-availability of the HSE staff, the report should be made to the Gardaí. The DLP should also report the matter to the Chairperson of the BOM, who should then follow the procedures as outlined in Chapter 3 of the Children First Guidelines for the Protection and Welfare of Children, 2011.
* A standard reporting form is completed by the DLP/Deputy as comprehensively as possible (See Appendix 1. Child Protection Guidelines and Procedures, DES)
* Parents/Guardians will normally be informed that a report is being made. It may be decided that informing the parent/carer is likely to endanger the child or place the child at further risk. The decision not to inform the parent/carer should be briefly recorded together with the reasons for not doing so.
* When the allegation is against the DLP, the chairperson then assumes responsibility for reporting the matter to the HSE and filling in the standard reporting form
* Where there are allegations or suspicions of Peer Abuse the DLP will follow the same procedures
* Parents of all parties will be notified and the DLP will inform the Chairperson
* Principal and class teachers will make arrangements to meet separately with all parents, to resolve the matter
* The school will make arrangements to minimise the possibility of the abusive behaviour recurring.

**Prevention**

The Stay Safe programme is the primary resource used in this school to provide education for children on abuse prevention. The programme is taught as part of the school’s Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) curriculum under the strand unit “Safety and Protection”.

**Procedures**

All staff (teachers, secretary, caretaker etc.) in this school will follow the recommendations for reporting concerns or disclosures as outlined in “Children First” and in the Department Education and Science document “Child Protection, Guidelines and Procedures”.

**Practice**

The staff and BOM of this school have identified the following as areas of specific concern in relation to child protection. Following consultation and discussion the staff and BOM have agreed that the following practices be adopted:

* **Recruitment and selection of staff**

When recruiting staff (and volunteers) the school needs to satisfy itself that they select people of the highest calibre insofar as can be determined. While correct procedures must always be followed in relation to advertising, interviewing and the selection of staff, other practices should also be considered.

All applicants should be required to supply in writing information which includes:

1. Appropriate personal details – address, PPS number etc
2. A resume of past and current work/volunteering experience, indicating relevant qualifications or skills acquired;
3. Al least two written references including addresses and telephone numbers of referees. Verification of references will be sought through making verbal contact with the referees.

Garda vetting, where necessary (for all paid employees), will be sought but it is important to note that vetting is not in itself a complete safeguard, as many perpetrators of abuse are not known to the authorities.

The school has decided that it will do background checks on anyone being considered to assist in a voluntary capacity or seeking work experience in the school, where evidence of Garda vetting has not been presented by the person.

* **General Conduct**

It is imperative in all dealings with the children in our care that a balance is struck between the rights of the child and the need for intervention. In general any physical contact between school personnel and a child should be in response to the needs of the child. While physical contact can be used to comfort, reassure or assist a child the following should be factors in assessing its appropriateness:

1. It is acceptable to the child concerned
2. It is open and not secretive
3. It is appropriate to the age and developmental stage of the child

School personnel should not do things of a personal nature for a child which the child can do for him/herself. Inappropriate physical contact also includes rough physical play and horseplay (tickling, wrestling etc).

All children should be treated with equal respect – favouritism is not acceptable. School personnel should never engage in or allow:

* The use of inappropriate language or behaviours eg. Sarcasm
* Physical punishment of any kind
* Sexually provocative games or sexually suggestive comments about or to a child
* The use of sexually explicit or pornographic material etc.

All media products (DVD’s, CD’s etc) should be checked for their appropriateness with regards to age and suitability. Where a doubt exists in this regard, principal, parents and BOM should be consulted as necessary. It is incumbent on the BOM that all school personnel are familiar with the DES guidelines on child protection and to ensure that they are adhered to in the event of concerns or disclosures around child protection. The DLP should be notified promptly of any concerns with regard to the behaviour of a staff member or any allegations of abuse made by a child or an adult.

* Toileting/Intimate care

*Children with specific toileting/intimate care needs*

Normally a child with specific toileting needs will have a Special Needs Assistant assigned to him or her. After the child is enrolled in the school a meeting will be convened at which all school personnel involved with the child will attend along with the child’s parents. At the meeting the needs of the child should be addressed and agreement reached as to how the school can meet those needs. It is important that those involved in the intimate care needs of the child agree practices which are acceptable to the staff, the child and the parents. It may be useful to have an intimate care policy outlining the agreed practices. These practises should be sufficiently flexible to cover unforeseen situation, e.g. if personnel involved in assisting the child are absent. The BOM should be made aware of the practices agreed.

*Toileting Accidents*

Toileting accidents are not uncommon particularly at junior level, and it is therefore prudent that schools address how these situations will be dealt with in the school. Parents may not be in a position to come to school immediately should their child have an “accident” and consideration has to be given to the complications of leaving a child unattended to in this situation. Unless there are specific reasons why school staff should not attend to the child procedures with which staff members are comfortable and which have due regard to minimising upset to the child should be agreed. A record should be kept of such incidents and parents should be informed.

*Changing for games/PE/Swimming*

Pupils will be expected to dress and undress themselves for Games/PE/Swimming. Where assistance is needed, this will be done in the communal area and with the consent of parents. Under no circumstances will members of staff/volunteers be expected to or allowed to dress/undress a child unsupervised in a cubicle/private area. In such situations where privacy is required, the parents/guardians of the child will be asked to assist the child. Kill National School will endeavour to have two members of staff in the communal changing area.

Up to 2010, the Parents’ Association had provided swimming lessons for the pupils on an afterschool basis. The staff had felt that we were ill-equipped to provide Aquatic education due to the many complications caused regarding supervision of children in dressing areas and supervision of pupils who remain at school.

However during our planning and review process at the end of June 2010, (having regard for best practice and after consultations), the staff decided that the school ought to provide the Aquatic Strand as laid down in the Revised Curriculum. Board of Management approval was given in October 2010. The decision was made to take pupils from 3rd – 6th .  This will be reviewed annually . The Parents’ Association may continue to provide lessons. It was also decided to use Monaghan Swimming Pool as it has communal changing facilities which would assist with supervision of the children.

*Supervision children/School Supervision Policy will be followed by all staff*

Children are supervised from 9.20am until 3pm on all normal school days. During lunch breaks a teacher will supervise on the yard. A rota will be displayed to cover 11 o’clock and lunchtime breaks.

Staff will not take children, on journeys, alone in their cars. Children will not be released to adults who are unknown to the teacher/school staff unless parents have informed the school in writing or by telephone authorising the teacher about the new arrangement.

Where one parent informs the school that another parent is not allowed access to their children the school will require a copy of the court order which outlines details of the same. In the event of a parent not complying with a court order the Gardaí will be summoned to the school to enforce it.

* **One-to-one teaching**

When it has been deemed appropriate for individual students, one-to-one teaching may be provided. Every effort will be made to ensure the protection of the child and staff member. Vision panels are installed in doors where this type of teaching takes place. Parents will be notified if their child is to receive this type of support.

* **Accidents**

While every precaution will be taken under our Health and Safety Statement to ensure the safety of children, we realise that accidents will happen. Accidents will be noted in our Incident book and will be addressed under our Accident Policy as part of Health and Safety.

* **Visitors/guest speakers**

Visitors and guest speakers will not be left alone with children. The school will check out the credentials of the visitor/guest speaker and will ensure the content/material in use is appropriate.

* **Internet Safety**

It is the intention of the Principal and Staff at Kill National School to ensure that child protection concerns will be addressed in the school’s Acceptable Use Policy as part of its Information and Communication Technology policy. The Stay Safe lessons in each classroom may be supplemented with appropriate resources. An outside speaker will be sought to come into the school and to speak about internet safety to the pupils.

Permission will be sought from parents to allow us to place photographs onto the school’s website. The school uses the internet filter system provided by NCTE but children will also be instructed about safety on the internet. An “Acceptable Use Policy” will also be implemented with regard to the internet usage.

* **Special Educational Needs**

Research has shown that children with special needs are more vulnerable and consequently more at risk of becoming victims of abuse for reasons such as:

* Poor communication skills
* Limited sense of danger
* Need for intimate care
* Lack of mobility and greater reliance on adults
* Need for attention, friendship or affection
* Limited assertiveness and poorer self-confidence
* Limited understanding of sexuality or sexual behaviour
* Fear of not being believed.

In an effort to address the personal safety needs of children with special needs, the Stay Safe Pack “Personal Safety Skills for Children with Learning Difficulties” supplements the Stay Safe Pack to assist teachers with this work. Support teachers will spend time with these children supporting the work of the class teacher. Special Needs Assistants, where applicable, have a vital role in supporting their safety and should therefore have access to training in child protection.

**Guidelines for Recognition of Child Abuse**

All signs and symptoms must be examined in the total context of the child’s situation and family circumstances.

There are commonly three stages in the identification of child abuse.

These are:-

* Considering the possibility
* Looking out for signs of abuse
* Recording of information

**Suspicions of Abuse**

Staff members who suspect abuse should refer to Children First National Guidelines for the Protection and Welfare of Children 2011, especially

* Chapter 2: Definition & Recognition of Child Abuse
* Chapter 3: Basis for Reporting and Standard Reporting Procedures
* Appendix 1: Signs & Symptoms of Child Abuse

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

If the reporting person or member of the school staff and the DLP is satisfied that there are reasonable grounds for the suspicion/allegation, the procedures for reporting as laid out in Children First: National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children 2011 – Section 3.4 (Appendix 3) will be adhered to.

**Handling Disclosures from Children**

When information is offered in confidence the member of staff will need to act with sensitivity in responding to the disclosure. The member of staff will need to reassure the child, and retain his/her trust, while explaining the need for action and the possible consequences, which will necessarily involve other adults being informed. It is important to tell the child that everything possible will be done to protect and support him/her but not to make promises that cannot be kept e.g. promising not to tell anyone else. The welfare of the child is regarded as the first and paramount consideration. In so far as is practicable, due consideration will be given, having regard to age and understanding, the wishes of the child.

The following advice is offered to school personnel to whom a child makes a disclosure of abuse.

* Remain calm
* Listen to the child with sensitivity and openness
* Take all disclosures seriously
* 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
* Explain that further help may be sought
* Record the discussion accurately and retain the record of dates, times, names, locations, context and factual details of conservation.

This information should be then passed onto the DLP and a record will be retained in the school.

The chairperson of the BOM will be informed before the DLP makes contact with the relevant authorities unless the situation demands that more immediate action be taken for the safety of the child in which case the chairman may be informed after the report has been submitted.

Any professional who suspects child abuse should inform parents/carers if a report is to be submitted to the Health Board or An Garda Síochána unless doing so is likely to endanger the child.

In cases of emergency, where the child appears to be at immediate and serious risk, and a duty social worker is unavailable, an Garda Síochána should be contacted. Under no circumstances should a child be left in a dangerous situation pending Health Board intervention.

**Child protection Meetings/Case Conferences**

* A request is made from the HSE through the DLP who should consult with the Chairperson of the BOM of the school. The Chairperson may seek clarification through the DLP as to why the attendance of the school employee is necessary and ascertain who else will be present.
* The school employee may complete a report for the meeting/case conference. (see Appendix 3, Child Protection Guidelines and Procedure, DES)
* The school employee will be advised if children/parents/guardians are going to be present. The school employee may contact the Chairperson of the Child Protection Meeting for advice
* The school employee may keep a child’s behaviour under closer observation, if requested to do so. 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 HSE staff, should be informed of the likely steps to be taken by the professionals involved. Where appropriate and within the normal limits of confidentially, reporting staff will be kept informed about the outcomes of any enquiry or investigations following on from their report.
* Teachers attending a child protection meeting/case conference should familiarise themselves with the protocol outlines in chapter 5 section 5.8 Children First: National Guidance for the protection and Welfare of Chapter 2011; chapter 4 Section 4.5 Child Protection Guidelines and Procedures, DES 2011.

**Allegations against school Employees**

The most important considerations for the Chairperson, BOM or the DLP is the safety and protection of the child. However, employees also have a right to protection against claims which are false or malicious.

As employers, the BOM should always seek legal advice as the circumstances can vary from one case to another.

As employers, the BOM should always seek legal advice as the circumstances can vary from one case to another.

There are two procedures to be followed:

* The reporting Procedure
* The Procedure for dealing with the Employee.

The DLP has responsibility for reporting the matter to the Health Board. The Chairperson, BOM has responsibility, acting in consultation with his/her Board, for addressing the employment issues. If the allegation is against the DLP, the chairperson of the BOM will assume the responsibility for reporting the matter to the Health Board.

**Reporting**

When an allegation of abuse is made against a school employee, the DLP should immediately act in accordance with the procedures outlined in “Child Protection”.

A written statement of the allegation should be sought from the person/agency making the report. The DLP should always inform the Chairperson of the BOM.

School employees, other than the DLP who receive allegations against another school employee, should immediately report the matter to the DLP. School employees who form suspicions regarding conduct of another school employee should consult with the DLP. The procedures outlined in Children First: National Guidance for the protection and Welfare of Children 2011 will then be followed.

The Chairperson of the Board and DLP should make the employee aware privately

1. That an allegation has been made against him/her
2. The nature of the allegation
3. Whether or not the Health Board or Gardaí has been/will be/must be/should be informed.

The employee should be given a copy of the written allegation and any other relevant documentation. The employee should be requested to respond to the allegation in writing to the BOM within a specified period and told that this may be passed to the Gardaí, Health Board, and legal advisers.

The priority in all cases is that no child be exposed to unnecessary risk. Therefore, as a matter of urgency, the Chairperson should take any necessary protective measures. The measures should be appropriate to the level of risk and should not unreasonably penalise the employee in anyway unless to protect the child.

If the nature of the allegations warrant immediate action in the Chairperson’s opinion, the BOM should be convened to consider the matter. The Board will consider feedback if any has been received from the Health Board, Gardaí or relevant source. This may result in the BOM directing that the employee absent him/herself from the school forthwith while the matter is being investigated (Administrative Leave). When the BOM is unsure as to whether this should occur, advice should be sought from the Gardaí and/or the child Care Manager of the Health Board and the legal advisers to the BOM.

**Administrative Leave**

Should the BOM direct that the employee absent him/herself as above, such absence of the employee would be regarded as administrative leave of absence with pay and not suspension and would not imply degree of guilt. The DES should be immediately informed.

**BOM**

The Chairperson should inform the BOM of all the details and remind the members of their serious responsibility to maintain strict confidentially on all matters relating to the issue and the principles of due process and natural justice.

**Success Criteria**

We will evaluate the success of this policy using the following criteria:

* Delivery and participation by all staff in training
* Delivery of the SPHE curriculum
* Resources to support the delivery of SPHE
* Delivery and participation by children in the Stay Safe Programme
* Assessment of these procedures by participants following a child protection case
* Feedback from all staff.

**Timeframe and Implementation**

These procedures will be implemented following ratification by the BOM.

**Timeframe for Review**

At the first staff meeting of every year the DLP will remind all teachers of the guidelines and copies of Chapter 2 & 3 & Appendix 1 of the Children First Guidelines and Child Protection Guidelines and Procedures, DES will be given to those who require them. A review will be conducted based on the criteria above, following any and all incidents when the guidelines are used.

**Responsibility for Review**

* DLP, Principal, all staff.
* Ratification and Communication
* This policy was ratified by the BOM on 28th March 2012. Parents/Guardians are welcome to look through the procedures and Child Protection Policy at the school.

**Ratified by the BOM on 28th March 2012**.

Signed

Chairperson, BOM