



CHILD PROTECTION POLICY

Solefield School

This policy applies to the whole school including the Early Years Foundation Stage.

Solefield School's local safeguarding authority is The Kent Safeguarding Children Board (KSCB). This policy is available on the open part of the school's website and is also available to parents (both prospective and current) from the school office.

The school operates safe recruitment procedures (including CRB checks and compliance with Independent School Standards Regulations); details may be found in the school's Safeguarding and Recruitment Policy. The school aims to comply with all relevant recommendations and guidance including the recommendations of the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) in *Safeguarding Children and Safer Recruitment in Education* and the code of practice published by the Criminal Records Bureau (CRB). The school always seeks to ensure that appropriate child protection checks and procedures apply to any staff employed by other organisations working with the school's pupils on another site (for example, on residential trips).

This section is based on the Social Services Department Child Protection Policy and Guidance for Staff in Independent Schools

While most staff will never come across child abuse, it is a real and serious problem for many children. By virtue of their close and sustained contact with children, teachers are often the most likely people to see signs or receive a disclosure of child abuse.

Definitions of Abuse

Child abuse may take several forms, the different forms are not mutually exclusive.

1. **Physical Abuse** results from acts or omissions by a parent or carer that cause injury to the child. Signs include the following:

- Unexplained recurrent injuries or burns
- Improbable excuses or refusal to explain injuries
- Wearing clothes to cover injuries, even in hot weather
- Refusal to undress for gym
- Bald patches
- Chronic running away
- Fear of medical help or examination
- Self-destructive tendencies
- Aggression towards others
- Fear of physical contact - shrinking back if touched
- Admitting that they are punished, but the punishment is excessive (such as a child being beaten every night to 'make him study')
- Fear of suspected abuser being contacted

2. **Neglect** involves wantonly or through ignorance not providing the basic necessities: food, warmth, shelter, caring, supervision, and reasonable cleanliness. Signs include the following:

- Constant hunger
- Poor personal hygiene
- Constant tiredness
- Poor state of clothing
- Emaciation
- Untreated medical problems
- No social relationships
- Compulsive scavenging
- Destructive tendencies

3. **Emotional Abuse** is harder to detect or define than the above. It may result from locking the child away, excessive shouting, teasing or belittling, the denial of love, over-protection so as to deny the child the normal experiences of life, lack of stimulation or play, or simply ignoring the child. Signs include the following:

- Physical, mental and emotional development lags
- Sudden speech disorders
- Continual self-depreciation ('I'm stupid, ugly, worthless, etc')
- Overreaction to mistakes
- Extreme fear of any new situation
- Inappropriate response to pain ('I deserve this')
- Neurotic behaviour (rocking, hair twisting, self-mutilation)
- Extremes of passivity or aggression

4. **Sexual Abuse** is the involvement of emotionally immature children or young people in sexual activity with an adult or significantly older person to which they cannot give informed consent or which defies social taboos. The long-term damaging emotional and physical effects of this form of abuse are now recognised, as is its prevalence. Most reported sexual abuse involves an adult male who is very well known to the child. However, sexual abuse by women has also been reported and must not be ignored. Signs include the following:

- Being overly affectionate or knowledgeable in a sexual way inappropriate to the child's age
- Medical problems such as chronic itching, pain in the genitals, venereal diseases
- Other extreme reactions, such as depression, self-mutilation, suicide attempts, running away, overdoses, anorexia
- Personality changes such as becoming insecure or clinging
- Regressing to younger behaviour patterns such as thumb sucking or bringing out discarded cuddly toys
- Sudden loss of appetite or compulsive eating
- Being isolated or withdrawn
- Inability to concentrate
- Lack of trust or fear of someone they know well, such as not wanting to be alone with a babysitter or child minder
- Starting to wet again, day or night/nightmares
- Become worried about clothing being removed
- Suddenly drawing sexually explicit pictures
- Trying to be 'ultra-good' or perfect; overreacting to criticism

Note: A child may be subjected to a combination of different kinds of abuse. It is also possible that a child may show no outward signs and hide what is happening from everyone

5. **Abuse by children other than bullying** is rare in a prep school but must not be ignored. Abuse that is based in a disparity of ages and where there is an element of exploitation of a younger child, particularly where such exploitation would merit criminal charges if perpetrated by an adult, must be regarded as abuse and not merely bullying. Such activity is not expected at Solefield but staff must always be on their guard.

6. **Other circumstances** may exist which do not amount to child abuse but which nevertheless give teachers or other staff serious cause for concern. Whenever a teacher suspects that a child is in moral danger from another pupil or adult, is uncared for, is engaged in anti-social or inappropriate behaviour out of school etc., the DCPC must be informed, and she will inform the Kent Safeguarding Children Board.

It is important that all staff realise that abuse can lead to serious injury, illness, depression and even suicide.

Designated Member of Staff

The Diana Mahon is the Designated Child Protection Coordinator DCPC including for the EYFS and as such is the member of staff appointed to deal with questions of child welfare and abuse. Dougal Philips is also a trained Child Protection Coordinator to whom issues should be addressed if Diana Mahon is unavailable. If the allegation involves the Headmaster or his wife the Chairman of Governors must be contacted immediately. All members of teaching, admin and support staff will be made aware of the Designated Child Protection Coordinator. However every member of staff is responsible for identifying and communicating suspected abuse of children. DCPCs are required to attend training every two years; this includes training on child protection and interagency work. The Headmaster and the whole staff (full and part-time) are trained in Child Protection every three years. Volunteer staff, peripatetic music staff and gap year students are given individual training by Diana Mahon in child protection as part of their induction.

Helpful Agencies

- ❖ **Social Services Department** is the agency with the statutory responsibility for the investigation of allegations of abuse and the protection of children. It has powers to take emergency action, to institute proceedings in the Family Proceedings Court, and a legal obligation to promote the welfare of children. Not all cases involve legal action and staff should not be deterred from consulting their local Social Services Offices (via the DCPC) by fear of what they imagine could be the consequences.
- ❖ **The NSPCC** does not take emergency action but has considerable experience in dealing with cases of abuse and can be a source of advice and information concerning child protection.
- ❖ **Social Services Departments** have arrangements to investigate jointly allegations of child abuse.
- ❖ **The Family Doctor/Health Visitor** may know the family very well and so be able to put into context what staff have noticed.
- ❖ **The Police** may also investigate allegations of abuse and have power to protect children and to prosecute adults who have offended. Police and Social Services Departments have arrangements to investigate jointly allegations of child abuse.

Dealing with Suspicions

1. Any suspicion that a pupil has been injured or ill-treated, or is being neglected or otherwise abused, should be discussed with one of the DCPCs at once. It is always better to share concern that later proves groundless than to wait for certainty which may mean actual injury to the child. Enquiries to parents about children's welfare are not accusations or investigations and it is important that this is always understood by all parties. The school (DCPC) will contact a welfare agency within 24 hours of a disclosure or suspicion of abuse;
2. Confidentiality cannot be promised to a pupil giving evidence; when speaking with a child you must try to avoid asking leading questions.
3. If possible, the actual words used by all involved should be noted.
4. If the suspected abuse is by one or more pupils against another pupil, the pupils will be kept separate until they can be interviewed by the DCPC;
5. When an allegation of abuse is made or evidence is received the DCPC will proceed in accordance with Social Services guidelines. They will work with staff members concerned as much as possible while recognising the issues of family privacy and confidentiality involved in the case.

Sexual Abuse

When a pupil makes an allegation of sexual abuse, she or he should be believed. When the allegation involves a member of the child's household or a member of the school community the DCPC must be informed at once and he will then inform the Social Services. The DCPC will then proceed with the Social Services according to Social Services guidelines.

Occasionally a child will disclose sexual abuse but ask that the adult does not tell anyone. This is an untenable position and the member of staff must refer to the DCPC at once in order that the child can be protected.

Guidance for School Staff

Teachers may unknowingly place themselves at risk of being accused of child abuse under the headings covered by the definition of child abuse. The following guidelines should be followed:

Private Meetings with Pupils

(a) Teachers should be aware of the dangers, which may arise from individual lessons or interviews with children. It is recognised that there will be occasions when confidential interview must take place, but, where possible, such interviews should be conducted in a room with visual access, or with the door open, or in a room or area which is likely to be frequented by other people.

(b) Where such conditions cannot apply teachers are advised to ensure that another adult knows that the interview is taking place. Where possible another pupil or another adult should be present or nearby during the interview.

Physical Contact with Pupils

(a) As a general principle teachers are advised not to make unnecessary physical contact with the children. This is particularly the case maturing children of primary school age.

(b) Physical contact which may be misconstrued by the pupil, parent or other casual observer should be avoided. Such contact can include well-intentioned informal gestures such as putting a hand on the shoulder or arm, which if repeated with an individual pupil, could be misconstrued, as well as more obvious and more intimate contact, which should never occur.

(c) There may be occasions when a distressed child needs comfort and reassurance which may include physical comforting such as a caring parent would give. Whilst this is very much part of a caring environment, teachers should use their discretion in such cases to ensure that what is, and what is seen by others present to be, normal and natural does not become unnecessary and unjustified contact, particularly with the same child over a period of time.

(d) Some teachers are likely to come into physical contact with their pupils from time to time in the course of their teaching, for example when showing a pupil how to use a piece of apparatus or equipment or while demonstrating a move or exercise during games or PE. Teachers should be aware of the limits within which such contact should properly take place and of the possibility of such contact being misinterpreted by the pupil.

(f) Staff who have to administer first-aid should ensure wherever possible that other children or another adult are present if they are in any doubt as to whether necessary physical contact in the circumstances could be misconstrued.

(g) Following any incident where a teacher feels that his/her actions have been, or maybe, misconstrued a written report of the incident should be submitted immediately to the headmaster. This would apply especially in a case where a teacher had been obliged to restrain a child physically to prevent him/her from inflicting injury or self-injury. Physical restraint should be exercised with caution. Help should be summoned when a single member of staff might not be able to deal with, for example, a fight.

(h) Teachers should be particularly careful when supervising pupils on residential trips, where more informal relationships tend to be usual and where teachers may be in proximity to pupils in circumstances very different from the normal school environment.

Choice and Use of Teaching Materials

(a) Teachers should avoid teaching material, the choice of which might be misinterpreted and reflect upon the motives of the choice.

(b) When using teaching materials of a sensitive nature a teacher should be aware of the danger that their application, either by pupils or by the teacher, might after the event be criticised. The school always consults parents when using materials in connection with sex education programmes.

Relationships and Attitudes

Teachers should ensure that their relationships with pupils are appropriate to the age and of the boys at Solefield School. Interaction outside school should be carefully considered to avoid being misconstrued. Under no circumstances should staff have contact with children of the school via social networking sites such as Facebook, Bebo, MySpace etc.

It would be impossible and inappropriate to lay down hard and fast rules to cover all the circumstances in which teachers interrelate with pupils and where opportunities for their conduct to be misconstrued might occur. In all circumstances teachers' professional judgement will be exercised and form the vast majority of teachers the above confirms what has always been their practice.

From time to time, however, it is wise for all teachers to review their teaching styles, relationships with pupils and their manner and approach to individual pupils, to ensure that they given no grounds for doubt about their intentions, in the minds of colleagues, pupils or parents.

Consequences for School Staff

Staff can be assured of the full support of the DCPC, the Headmaster, and the Social Services Department and other agencies, in acting against child abuse. Where appropriate this will involve counselling and further training.

Abuse by a member of the school staff

If any member of staff, teaching or non-teaching, has reason to believe that a member of the school staff is abusing or has abused a pupil or any other child, that suspicion must be reported to the DCPC at once, however improbable the suggestion might be. If the allegation involves the Headmaster or his wife the Chairman of Governors must be contacted immediately. This information will be passed to the Kent Safeguarding Children Board.

The school will report to the Independent Safeguarding Authority (ISA), within one month of leaving the school any person (whether employed, contracted, a volunteer or student) whose services are no longer used because he or she is considered unsuitable to work with children.

Responsibility

The governors are responsible for monitoring this policy and the efficiency with which the related duties have been discharged annually. The governors require any matters to do with child welfare are dealt with immediately and the Chairman of Governors informed. Any matters regarding child welfare are raised at the full governors' meeting; these meetings take place termly.

Any deficiencies or weaknesses in the school's child protection policy or procedures will be remedied without delay

Agency Contact Details

Independent Safeguarding Authority (ISA)
PO Box 181,
Darlington.
DL1 9FA
Tel 0300 123 1111

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