

CHILD PROTECTION POLICY

Coláiste Feirste

Updated April 2023

Designated Teacher for Child Protection: Emer Mhic an Fhailí
Deputy Designated Teachers for Child Protection; Siobhán Nic
Giolla Eáin,
Designated Governor for Child Protection Governance: Seán Mistéil

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Review date: September 2023	

INTRODUCTION

The governors and staff of Coláiste Feirste fully recognise the contribution it makes to safeguarding children. We recognise that all staff, including volunteers, have a full and active part in protecting our pupils from harm.

All staff and Governors believe that our school should provide a caring, positive, safe and stimulating environment which promotes the social physical and moral development of the individual child.

This policy is informed by the guidance and procedures set out by DE 'Pastoral Care in Schools: Child Protection (1999) and the Area Child Protection Committees' (ACPC) Regional Policy and Procedures (2005).

The central thrust of The Children (Northern Ireland) Order 1995 is that *the welfare of the child must be the paramount consideration* in all decision concerning the child. This is also reflected in Article 3 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child – *the best interests of the child shall be of primary consideration*. The 'paramourcy' of the child principle underpins our Child Protection policy and procedures.

Our policy applies to all staff, governors and volunteers working in the school. The purpose of the procedures set out in this policy is to safeguard and protect our pupils by ensuring that every adult who works in our school – teachers, non-teaching staff and volunteers – has clear guidance on the action which is required where abuse or neglect of a child is suspected. The issue of child abuse will not be ignored by anyone who works in our school, and we know that some forms of child abuse are also a criminal offence.

There are five main elements to our policy:

1. Establishing a safe environment in which children can learn and develop
2. Developing and implementing procedures for identifying and reporting cases, or suspected cases, of abuse
3. Ensuring we practice safe recruitment in checking the suitability of staff and volunteers to work with children
4. Raising awareness of child protection issues and equipping children with the skills needed to keep them safe
5. Supporting pupils who have been abused in accordance with his/her agreed child protection plan

THE SAFEGUARDING TEAM AT COLÁISTE FEIRSTE

Chair of Governors: Seán Mistéil

Designated Governor for Child Protection Governance: Seán Mistéil

Principal: Mícheál Mac Giolla Gunna

Designated Teacher for Child Protection: Emer Mhic an Fhailí

Deputy Designated Teachers for Child Protection: Siobhán Nic Giolla Eáin.

WHAT IS CHILD ABUSE?

(A child is a person under the age of 18 years as defined in the Children Order)

Child Abuse occurs when ‘a child is neglected, harmed, or not provided with proper care. Children maybe abused in many settings, in a family, in an institutional or community setting, by those known to them, or more rarely by a stranger.’ (ACPC, 2005)

Types of Abuse

Physical Abuse – is the deliberate physical injury to a child, or the wilful neglectful failure to prevent physical injury or suffering. This may include hitting, shaking, throwing, poisoning, burning or scalding, drowning, suffocating, confinement to a room or cot, or inappropriately giving drugs to control behaviour. (ACPC, 2005)

Possible signs or symptoms of physical abuse include:

- Unexplained bruises (in places difficult to mark)
- Human bite marks, welts or bald spots
- Unexplained lacerations, fractions or abrasions
- Untreated injuries
- Self-destructive tendencies
- Chronic runaway
- Fear of going home

Emotional Abuse – is the persistent emotional ill treatment of a child such as to cause severe and persistent adverse effects on the child’s emotional development. It may involve conveying to a child that he is worthless or unloved, inadequate, or valued only insofar as he meets the needs of another person. It may involve causing a child frequently to feel frightened or in danger, or the exploitation or corruption of a child. Domestic violence, adult mental health problems and parental substance misuse may expose a child to emotional abuse. (ACPC, 2005)

Possible signs or symptoms of emotional abuse include:

- Bullying of others
- Change in personality from outgoing to withdrawn
- Difficulty in forming / maintaining relationships with others
- Depression

- Signs of mutilation
- Attention seeking
- Chronic runaway
- Wetting and soiling
- Sudden speech disorders
- Low self-esteem

Sexual Abuse – involves forcing or enticing a child to take part in sexual activities. The activities may involve physical contact, including penetrative or non-penetrative acts. They may include non-contact activities, such as involving children to look at, or in the production of, pornographic material or watching sexual activities, or encouraging children to behave in sexually inappropriate ways. (ACPC, 2005)

Possible signs or symptoms of sexual abuse include:

- Bruised or sore genitals
- Genital infection
- Difficulty in walking or sitting
- Inappropriate sexualised language or behaviour
- Low self-esteem
- Chronic depression
- Substance abuse
- Personality changes
- Fear of going home

Neglect – is the persistent failure to meet a child’s physical, emotional and/or psychological needs, likely to result in significant harm. It may involve a parent or carer failing to provide adequate food, shelter and clothing, failing to protect a child from physical harm or danger, failing to ensure access to appropriate medical care or treatment, lack of stimulation or lack of supervision. It may also include non-organic failure to thrive. (ACPC, 2005)

Possible signs or symptoms of neglect include:

- Poor hygiene
- Constant hunger/cramming food
- Inadequate / inappropriate clothing
- Constant tiredness
- Exposed to danger / lack of adequate supervision
- Untreated illness
- Lack of peer relationships
- Compulsive stealing / begging

A child may suffer or be at risk of suffering from one or more types of abuse and abuse may take place on a single occasion or may occur repeatedly over time.

Bullying

Bullying is a highly distressing and damaging form of abuse and is not tolerated in Colaiste Feirste. Our anti- bullying policy is set out in a separate

policy and acknowledges that to allow or condone bullying may lead to consideration under child protection procedures.

PROCEDURES FOR REPORTING SUSPECTED (OR DISCLOSED) CHILD ABUSE

The designated teacher for child protection (DT) is Emer Mhic An Fhailí. In his absence **the deputy designated teacher for child protection (DDT)**, Siobhán Nic Giolla Éain, will assume responsibility for child protection. On the rare occasion that neither DT nor DDT is in the school the Principal Micheál Mac Giolla Ghunna will assume responsibility for child protection.

If a child makes a disclosure to a teacher or other member of staff which gives rise to concerns about possible abuse, or if a member of staff has concerns about a child, **the member of staff must act promptly.**

He/she should not investigate – this is a matter for social services – but should report these concerns immediately to the DT, discuss the matter with him/her, make full notes (signing and dating them), and hand the note to the DT.

The DT will discuss the matter with the principal as a matter of urgency to plan a course of action, and ensure that a written record of decisions is made.

The DT, in consultation with the principal, will decide whether, in the best interests of the child, the matter needs to be referred to social services. **If there are concerns that the child may be at risk of significant harm, the school is obliged to make a referral to social services.** Unless there are concerns that a parent may be the possible abuser, the parents will be informed immediately.

The DT may seek clarification or advice and consult with The Child Protection Support Service for Schools (CPSSS) - Designated Officer for Child Protection at the BELB, or a senior social worker before a referral is made. No decisions to refer a child to social services will be made without full consideration and on appropriate advice. **The safety of the child is our first priority.**

Where there are concerns about possible abuse, the DT will inform:

- Social Services
- BELB's/CCMS's Designated Officer for Child Protection

(This will be done in an envelope marked 'CONFIDENTIAL – CHILD PROTECTION').

If a complaint about possible child abuse is made against a member of staff, the Principal (or the DT if the Principal is unavailable) must be informed immediately. The above procedures will apply (unless the complaint is about the designated teacher or the Principal). Where the matter is referred to social

services the member of staff may be removed from duties involving direct contact with pupils and may be suspended from duty as a precautionary measure pending investigations by social services. The Chairperson of the Board of Governors will be informed immediately.

If a complaint about possible child abuse is made against the Principal, the DT must be informed immediately. He/she will inform the Chairperson of the Board of Governors and together they will take appropriate advice and ensure the necessary action is taken.

If any member of staff feels unsure about what to do if he/she has concerns about a child, or unsure about being able to recognise signs or symptoms of possible child abuse, he/she should talk with the DT.

It should be noted that the information given to members of staff about possible child abuse cannot be held 'in confidence'. In the interests of the child, staff may need to share this information with other professionals. However, only those who need to know will be informed.

ROLE OF THE DESIGNATED TEACHER (DT) AND DEPUTY DESIGNATED TEACHER (DDT)

The DT:

- To provide training to all school staff including support staff
- Being available to discuss the child protection concerns of any member of staff
- Responsibility for recordkeeping of all child protection concerns
- Making referrals to social services or PSNI Public Protection Units
- Liaising with EA /CCMS Designated Officers for Child Protection
- Keeping the school principal informed
- The lead responsibility for the development and updating of the school's child protection policy
- Ensures parents receive a copy of the child protection policy every 2 years which alerts them to the fact that referrals may be made and the role of the school on this
- Promotion of a child protection ethos in the school
- Written reports to the Board of Governors regarding child protection
- Maintains all records pertaining to child protection in a secure location (accessed only by The Safeguarding Team as appropriate)

DDT:

To support and undertake the duties of the Designated Teacher for Child Protection as required

Record Keeping

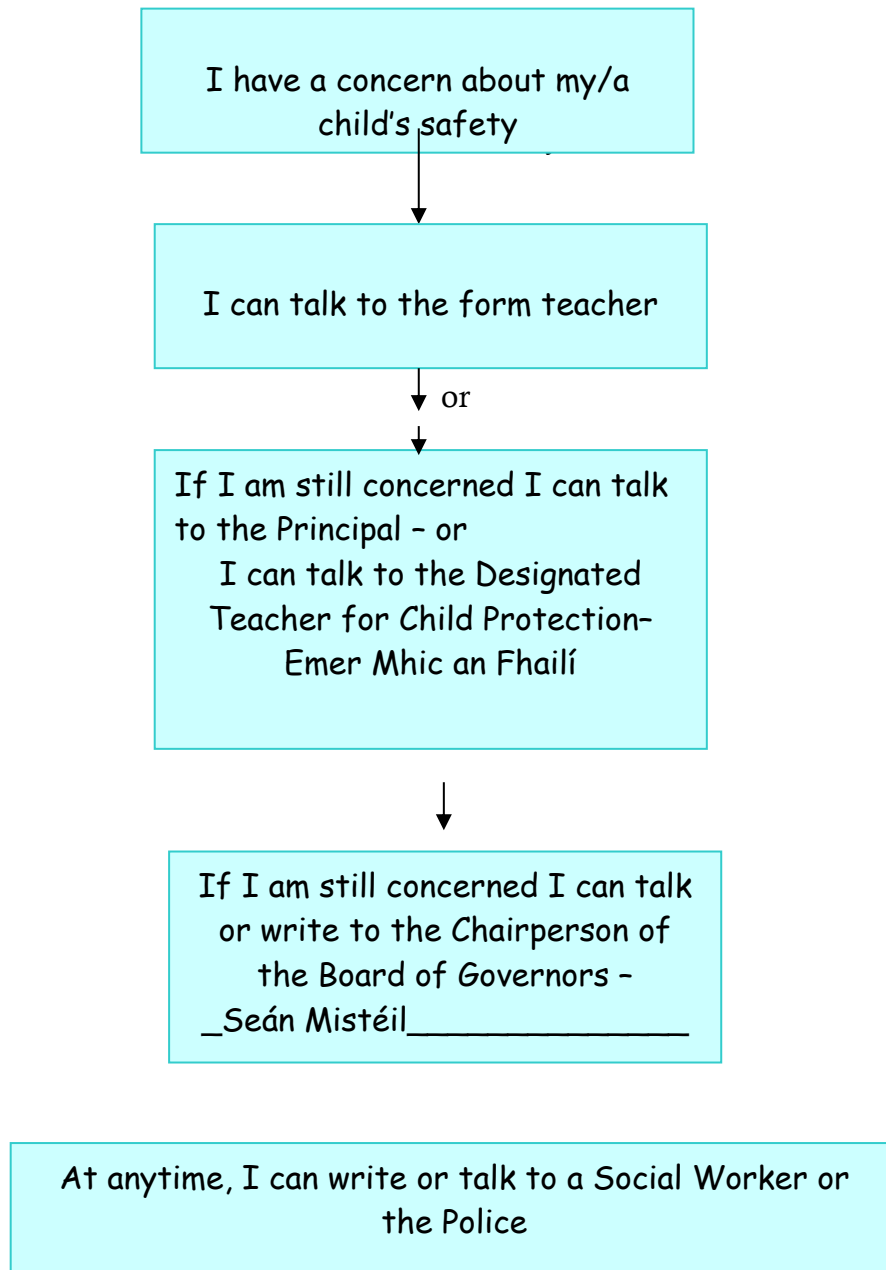
The school principal (or in the case where the principal is being accused, the chairperson of the board of governors) will ensure that a proper record is kept, dated, and signed, of every complaint received.

Keeping of Factual Record.

- The nature of the information.
- Days, dates, times.
- Personnel who have been involved, informed of the referral.
- Observations.
- Action taken reason for action.
- If the case was referred to social services, how was this done, when was it done and who did it, the name and the position of the person who received the referral, and every current contact with Social Services about the case. In the case of a referral the DT makes a telephone call to social services and a follow up in writing on a UNOCINI template within 24 hours.
- A signed and date record by the DT.
- If the complaint is against, he principal the chairperson of the board of governors will have the responsibility for record keeping.

HOW A PARENT CAN MAKE A RAISE A CHILD PROTECION CONCERN

If a parent has a child protection concern they can follow the guide below:



PHYSICAL RESTRAINT

Our policy on physical restraint by staff is set out in a separate policy Pastoral Care in accordance with guidelines from BELB. It acknowledges that staff must only use physical intervention as a last resort, and that at all times it must be the minimal force necessary to prevent injury to another person. This is in line with the Team Teach training all staff have received from the BELB.

THE PREVENTATIVE CURRICULUM

The staff of Coláiste Feirste recognise that children who are abused or witness violence may find it difficult to develop a sense of self worth. They may feel helplessness, humiliation and some sense of blame. The school may be the only stable, secure and predictable element in the lives of children at risk. When at school their behaviour maybe challenging or they maybe withdrawn.

Coláiste Feirste will endeavour to support the pupils who are exposed to risk of harm through supporting such pupils in accordance with his/her agreed protection plan.

Support for all pupils in the school in developing skills in self protection and developing confidence will be afforded as follows:

- The content of the curriculum, particularly Personal Development.
- The school ethos which promotes a positive supportive and secure environment and gives pupils a sense of being valued.
- The school behaviour policy which is aimed at supporting vulnerable pupils in the school. The school will ensure that pupils understand the difference between acceptable and unacceptable behaviours towards themselves and others
- Liaison with other agencies that support the pupil such as Social Services, Education Welfare Service, Educational Psychology, Helping Hands, PSNI and the school nurse.
- Posters throughout the school indicating who the DT and DDT are and what action pupils should take if they have any concerns
- A Child Protection display on main corridor of school.

THE INTERNET AND DIGITAL TECHNOLOGIES

Our policy on the internet and digital technologies is set out in a separate document (Online Safety) and is informed by DE guidance. It acknowledges the opportunities for learning as well as the risks attached to the internet and digital technologies. Specifically, it addresses safeguarding issues that may arise in the use of the internet and digital technologies, eg bullying.

PHOTOGRAPHY AND IMAGES OF CHILDREN

All parents are asked for their consent for as to the use of photos and digital images of their child. This consent, when given, is deemed to last for the child's entire time at Colaiste Feirste. This is done when at an induction meeting with the parent when they are asked to sign the consent form. All photos and images are solely for school use.

EDUCATIONAL TRIPS / VISITS

Coláiste Feirste's child protection policy applies to all school trips. In the case of a residential, staff must consider any child protection issues when carrying out their risk assessment for the trip.

REVIEWING OUR CHILD PROTECTION POLICY

The Child Protection Policy is reviewed on an annual basis in line with DE guidance and any necessary amendments carried out.

COLÁISTE FEIRSTE'S VETTING PROCEDURES

The school's vetting processes are compliant with practice advised in DE circulars. Copies of these circulars are available on the DE website:
www.deni.gov.uk

Appendix 1

GUIDELINES FOR VOLUNTEERS AND EXTRA CURRICULAR PAID WORKERS

Volunteers and extra curricular paid workers have an important and beneficial role in supporting the work of teachers and other support staff in Coláiste Feirste and in contributing, by their efforts and initiative, to the life of the school.

It is essential however, that appropriate steps are taken, through screening and selection arrangements, to ensure that children are not placed at risk through allowing the unsupervised and unmanaged access of unsuitable adults to the school.

Who are a Volunteers and extra curricular paid workers?

Volunteers and extra-curricular paid workers are individuals who, subject to the satisfactory procedures below, either

1. Assumes duties in a school on a regular basis on more than two occasions or
2. is engaged by the school to accompany or assist in school visits or trips; residential activities or to undertake coaching in sports activities.

Formal arrangements as to selection and vetting should not be required for volunteers and extra curricular paid workers who are involved outside school hours and who **do not have unsupervised contact with pupils**. These would include fund raisers, people using school premises for meetings etc.

Use of Volunteers and extra-curricular paid workers

There are three main categories into which the use of Volunteers and extra curricular paid workers might be grouped and to which guidance will apply:

- During school hours involving direct contact with Pupils
- Outside school hours involving direct contact with pupils
- During school hours but not usually involving direct contact with Pupils

Recruiting and Selecting Volunteers and extra curricular paid workers

The school may canvass for Volunteers and extra curricular paid workers or people may come forward to offer assistance at their own initiative. In many cases potential Volunteers and extra curricular paid workers may already be known to the school. Others may come forward from the local community. Engagement of Volunteers and extra curricular paid workers is only undertaken with agreement of the Board of Governors.

Initial Appraisal.

In the case where Volunteers and extra curricular paid workers may be working with pupils unsupervised then the following

As a minimum requirement all potential Volunteers and extra curricular paid workers are asked to provide the following information:

- personal details
- qualifications and previous work with children
- **Undergo an annual criminal record check through AccessNI (via Education Authority)**
- **Provide proof of a criminal record check through AccessNI (via EA**
- **or any other board only) been carried out within the previous 12-month period. Checks carried by other organisations other than a library board are not acceptable.**

No individual will be admitted to the school as a Volunteer or extra curricular paid worker to work with pupils unsupervised until these basic steps have been completed and the results assessed.

Accepting Volunteers and extra curricular paid workers

Where the previous procedures have been followed as appropriate and the school is satisfied that:

- the volunteer or paid worker is a suitable person to have contact with the children and has the character, skills and experience to support the work of the school.
- well defined and worthwhile activities have been identified for the volunteer or paid worker to undertake and he/she is competent to undertake them;

the school will notify the individual that he/she has been accepted for duties in the school

The use of Volunteers and extra curricular paid workers

These are the fundamental principles observed when using volunteers:

- the purpose of the Volunteers and extra curricular paid workers is to assist staff, whether teaching or non-teaching. They are not used as substitutes either to cover activities normally undertaken by paid staff who are absent, or to release such staff to undertake other duties:
- Volunteers and extra curricular paid workers are not placed in a position of sole responsibility for the security of children, premises or equipment;
- Volunteers and extra curricular paid workers should understand the tasks they are to undertake and receive appropriate training to enable them to perform these;
- Volunteers and extra curricular paid workers are only allocated duties after consultation and agreement with the teacher or other member of staff with whom the Volunteers and extra curricular paid workers will

be closely involved. Teachers are not to be placed under any pressure to accept Volunteers and extra-curricular paid workers in their classroom;

- Volunteers and extra curricular paid workers are not afforded access to records or other information relating to staff or pupils. An exception might be made where a child has a medical or other condition of which all those working with the pupil should be made aware, and where agreement of the parent has been sought.

Health and Safety Insurance

Volunteers are owed a duty of care under the requirements of Health and Safety Legislation. Coláiste Feirste therefore ensures that volunteers are treated no less favourably than paid employees in terms of Coláiste Feirste's obligations under the legislation.

Duration

Coláiste Feirste places a time limit on the period of the Volunteers and extra curricular paid workers' service. This is done where the work earmarked for the Volunteers and extra curricular paid workers is likely to be completed within a specific period. Where a volunteer's involvement is likely to be long term, the school advises the volunteer that he/she will be subject to a trial period, during which the Principal monitors the volunteer's effectiveness in contributing to the life and work of the school.

Information and Training

The school ensures that the Volunteers and extra curricular paid workers receive such information, guidance, preparation and where necessary, training to enable him/her to perform tasks effectively. As a minimum, Volunteers and extra curricular paid workers are briefed on:

- the policy of the school and the management authority in relation to pastoral care and child protection, including its behaviour/discipline policy, including rewards and sanctions, and the extent of the volunteer's authority within it; its child protection procedures
- Coláiste Feirste's Health and Safety Policy

Arrangements are made for the Volunteers and extra curricular paid workers to have a formal line of communication to the KS3/4 Co-ordinator or Vice Principal for reporting issues of concern or the welfare of the children in the school.

School Security

Coláiste Feirste has drawn on the advice from the guidance Document "Security and Personal Safety in Schools" 1997 to establish arrangements for

the admission and supervision of Volunteers and extra curricular paid workers on school premises. Particular attention is drawn to:

- Visitors, Volunteers and extra curricular paid workers registering at the beginning of each visit
- Providing the visitor, Volunteers and extra curricular paid workers with a readily identifiable name badge or pass giving his/her name and status

The school ensures passes are surrendered at the end of each day and when the volunteers' involvement with the school comes to an end.

Appendix 2

A CODE OF CONDUCT FOR ALL STAFF

All staff and volunteers are aware of and have received a copy of our code of conduct. The Code is informed by guidance from DE.

This Code of Conduct is not intended to detract from the enriching experiences pupils at Coláiste Feirste gain from positive interaction with staff. It is intended to assist staff in respect of the complex issue of child abuse, by drawing attention to the areas of risk for staff and by offering guidance on prudent conduct.

1. Private Meetings with Pupils

Staff should be aware of the dangers which may arise from private interviews with individual pupils. It is recognised that there are occasions when confidential interviews must take place. As far as possible, staff should conduct such interviews in a room with visual access, or with the door open.

Where such conditions cannot apply, staff are advised to ensure that another adult knows that the interview is taking place. It may be necessary to use a sign indicating that the room is in use, but it is not advisable to use signs prohibiting entry to the room.

Where possible another pupil or (preferably) another adult should be present or nearby during the interview, and the school should take active measures to facilitate this.

2. Physical Contact with Pupils

As a general principle, staff are advised not to make unnecessary physical contact with pupils.

It is unrealistic and unnecessary, however to, to suggest that staff should touch pupils only in emergencies.

Staff should never touch a child who has clearly indicated that he/she is or would be, uncomfortable with such contact, unless it is necessary to protect the child, others or property from harm. Physical punishment is illegal, as is any form of physical response to misbehaviour, unless it is by way of necessary restraint.

Staff who administer first-aid to a pupil should ensure whenever possible that this is done in the presence of other children or another adult. *However, no member of staff should hesitate to provide first-aid in an emergency simply because another person is not present.*

Any physical contact which would be likely to be misinterpreted by the pupil, parent or other casual observer should be avoided.

Following any incident where a member of staff feels that his/her actions have been, or maybe, misconstrued, a written report of the incident should be submitted immediately to the Principal or Vice Principal.

Staff should be particularly careful when supervising pupils in a residential setting, or in approved out of school activities, where more informal relationships tend to be usual and where staff may be in proximity to pupils in circumstances very different from the normal school/work environment.

3. Choice and Use of Teaching Materials

Teachers should avoid teaching materials, the choice of which might be misinterpreted and reflect upon the motives for the choice.

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.

If in doubt about the appropriateness of a particular teaching material, the teacher should consult with the Principal before using it.

4. Relationships and Attitudes

Staff should ensure that their relationships with pupils are appropriate to the age, maturity and sex of the pupils, taking care that their conduct does not give rise to comment or speculation. Attitudes, demeanour and language all require care and thought, particularly when staff are dealing with adolescent boys and girls. Staff are aware that they are in a position of trust in relation to the children and young people at the school.

It would be impossible and inappropriate to lay down hard and fast rules to cover all circumstances in which staff interrelate with children and young people, or where opportunities for their conduct to be misconstrued might occur.

In all circumstances, employees' professional judgement will be exercised and for the vast majority of employees this Code of Conduct will serve only to confirm what has always been their practice.

From time to time, however, it is prudent for all staff to reappraise their teaching styles, relationships with children/young people and their manner and approach to individual children/young people, to ensure that they give no grounds for doubt about their intentions, in the minds of colleagues, of children/young people or of their parents/guardians.

Operation Encompass

We are an Operation Encompass school. Operation Encompass is an early intervention partnership between local Police and our school, aimed at supporting children who are victims of domestic violence and abuse. As a school, we recognise that children's exposure to domestic violence is a traumatic event for them.

Children experiencing domestic abuse are negatively impacted by this exposure. Domestic abuse has been identified as an Adverse Childhood Experience and can lead to emotional, physical and psychological harm. Operation Encompass aims to mitigate this harm by enabling the provision of immediate support. This rapid provision of support within the school environment means children are better safeguarded against the short, medium and long-term effects of domestic abuse.

As an Operation Encompass school, when the police have attended a domestic incident and one of our pupils is present, they will make contact with the school at the start of the next working day to share this information with a member of the school safeguarding team. This will allow the school safeguarding team to provide immediate emotional support to this child as well as giving the designated teacher greater insight into any wider safeguarding concerns.

This information will be treated in strict confidence, like any other category of child protection information. It will be processed as per DE Circular 2020/07 'Child Protection Record Keeping in Schools' and a note will be made in the child's child protection file. The information received on an Operation Encompass call from the Police will only be shared outside of the safeguarding team on a proportionate and need to know basis. All members of the safeguarding team will complete online Operation Encompass training, so they are able to take these calls. Any staff responsible for answering the phone at school will be made aware of Operation Encompass and the need to pass these calls on with urgency to a member of the Safeguarding team.

Further information see [The Domestic Abuse Information Sharing with Schools etc. Regulations \(Northern Ireland\) 2022.](#)