

Confidentiality Policy



School Name:	St. Mary's Secondary School, Charleville
Purpose:	The purpose of our school's confidentiality policy is to outline and clarify information and procedures around confidentiality for all stakeholders within our school community. This policy outlines all aspects involved in confidentiality within the school and should be read in conjunction with other school policies.
Context:	Our school is a voluntary secondary school, founded by Catherine McAuley and has flourished under the Mercy Order ever since. We continue to uphold a Catholic ethos in our school that is welcoming and supportive to all. There are 309 pupils and 30 staff here. The aim of St. Mary's Secondary School is to provide holistic education, in the Catholic tradition for all our students. We are committed to the academic, creative, emotional, spiritual and physical development of each student, in a caring and safe environment. This confidentiality policy is written in the context of contemporary legislation and other relevant publications. A list of references is provided at the end of this document
Confidentiality and the Guidance Counsellor	The Guidance Counsellor will: • ensure adherence to child protection guidelines in their practice and policy • provide a safe environment in which students may discuss, in confidence, issues relating to personal, social, careers and educational decisions • ensure that notes and records of students' interaction with the guidance service are kept in a secure and confidential manner. • clarify, for students, other clients and for the school community, the boundaries of confidentiality • ensure that records are managed in accordance with good practice and in keeping with data-protection legislation. All records are kept in a locked filing cabinet in the guidance counsellor's office.

Confidentiality & the role of staff:	The safety and welfare of children is the key principle underlying all decision making within our school in line with the Child Care Act 1991 and the Children First Act (2015) Our school adopts a student-centred approach to education. Support of students is paramount in our school community. The Children First Guidelines (2017) are applied in our school as appropriate. All staff members are aware that absolute confidentiality cannot be guaranteed. In supporting the students of our school, all stakeholders are aware of the following limits to confidentiality: <i>-In the event that a student reports to a teacher/member of staff that she has been abused, the DLP/DDLP must be informed.</i> <i>-In the event that a student is deemed to be a danger to themselves or a danger to another the DLP/DDLP must be informed</i> All staff are aware of the legal obligation to share information as follows, where a student's welfare is at risk. In the case where any member of the school community is aware of a concern to child welfare and safety this concern must be reported to one of the following:
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	(i) The Designated Liaison Person (DLP) in our school: Maighread Finn, Principal (ii) The Deputy Designated Liaison Person is (DDL), Yvonne O’Keeffe, Deputy Principal. (iii) Child and Family Agency Child Protection Social Work Services: Any stakeholder can report a child protection concern about a student or school directly to the by contacting the local social work office. Contact details for offices should be inserted here. This information can be found at https://www.tusla.ie/services/child-protectionwelfare/contact-a-social-worker/ In cases where school personnel have a concern about a child but are not sure whether to report the matter to Tusla, the designated liaison person shall seek advice from Tusla. In cases of emergency, where a child appears to be at immediate and serious risk, and it is not possible to contact Tusla, An Garda Síochána shall be contacted immediately. This may be done at any Garda Station. Under no circumstances should a child be left in a dangerous situation pending Tusla intervention. It is not the responsibility of school personnel to assess or investigate or to make enquiries of parents/carers, and in some cases, it could be counterproductive for them to do so. It is a matter for Tusla to assess and investigate suspected abuse and neglect and determine what action it shall take.
Additional information for learners under 18 years of age:	All information regarding concerns of possible child abuse or neglect should be shared only on a ‘need to know’ basis in the interests of the child. Children First: National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children 2017 states that it is good practice to inform the parent/carer that a report is being made and the reasons for the decision to make the report. However, Children First National Guidance 2017 notes that it is not necessary to inform a parent/carer that a report is being made - (a) if by doing so, the child will be placed at further risk (b) in cases where the family’s knowledge of the report could impair Tusla’s ability to carry out a risk assessment (c) if the reporter is of the reasonable opinion that by doing so it may place the reporter at risk of harm from the family. Where there is any doubt as to whether to inform a parent/carer that a report is being made concerning his or her child the advice of Tusla shall be sought.

Confidentiality and learners Over 18:	It is recognised that some schools may also cater for adult pupils with additional vulnerabilities. Where a vulnerable adult may have been, is being, or is at future risk of being abused or neglected - the advice of the HSE, or if necessary, An Garda Síochána should be sought. Further information in relation to the safeguarding of vulnerable adults is available on the website of the HSE www.hse.ie
Links between this policy and other policies:	This confidentiality policy should be read in conjunction with the School's policies on; • behaviour • referrals • admissions • etc. Links to these policies may be inserted here.
Record keeping:	Our school recognises the importance of record keeping. Our school keeps records in accordance with Appendix 4 of the DES Child Protection Procedures in Primary and Post-primary (2017) All school records and data pertaining to students and parents/guardians are regarded as highly confidential and are stored in line with are stored in line with GDPR (2018) procedures. (Additional information available at https://gdpr4schools.ie)
Communicating the limits to confidentiality with staff	The limits to all staff-student confidentiality are made clear to the staff on an annual basis at the first staff meeting of the year. Staff should consult a member of management if they have any questions or concerns about our school's confidentiality policy

Communicating the limits to confidentiality with students and parents/guardians	The limits to all staff-student confidentiality are made clear to students & parents/guardians in our school in the following ways: - Parents/Guardians sign a 'Confidentiality Agreement' when a student first registers as a student in the school. - Students are reminded about confidentiality at their first assembly of every school year - A 'limits to confidentiality' sign is on display in the Guidance Counsellors office There are limits to confidentiality within our school. Under circumstances where an individual is at risk of significant harm, a duty exists on the part of those with information to alert others to the risk perceived.	
What to do when an issue arises:	The sample School Referral Procedures (see separate document) provide information and guidelines as to how to respond to any issue presented to a staff member. TUSLA the Child and Family Agency and An Garda Síochána are the two key authorities. TUSLA the Child and Family Agency has a duty to assess reports regarding a child's welfare or safety. The specific focus of An Garda Síochána is on the investigation of alleged offences and whether a crime has been committed.	
Responsibilities in relation to the policy:	This section should clearly outline who is involved in the development, implementation and review of the policy. This may differ from school to school, obviously guidance counsellor, possibly SEN team, school management, possibly a post holder with responsibility for policy development or others.	
Accessibility:	Where is this policy available? E.g. online? Hardcopy in the staffroom?	
SSE	Our school is aware that when conducting a Whole School Evaluation, Department inspectors seek evidence to confirm that a school is complying with the requirements of the Child Protection Procedures for Primary and PostPrimary Schools 2017.	

Date Ratified = 5-2-25

Chairperson = 