

A Guide for Staff and Parents

We are obliged under the terms of the Children Acts 1989 & 2004, the Education Act 2002 and the Education (Independent Schools Standards) (England) Regulations 2003 to ensure that all staff and parents are aware of the procedures for dealing with allegations of abuse, within or outside the school. This Policy is part of a wider brief concerning the safeguarding of children and includes our other policies such as those on:-

- Health & Safety
- Bullying
- First Aid
- School Security

Abuse can be defined as being where a child has suffered 'significant harm' or impairment of health and development by reason of physical violence, sexual interference, emotional pressure or neglect.

Please familiarise yourself with the text. **In the event that one of us does receive such information, it is vital and a legal requirement that it is dealt with as described within this document.**

The Headmaster is the designated member of staff with responsibility for child protection issues in the school. In the text that follows, all references to the designated staff member should be read as referring to him. All child protection issues brought to the attention of The Headmaster may be shared with the Infant Special Needs Coordinator who is also the EYFS designated member of staff for Child Protection. In the absence of The Headmaster, any allegation should be referred to the Infant Special Needs Coordinator.

The Procedure

Any member of staff who is told of any incident or strong suspicion of physical or sexual child abuse occurring in the school, or to a pupil of the school at home or outside the school, or who themselves knows of or suspects such abuse, must report the information immediately to the designated staff member. In the absence of the designated person and the Infant Special Needs Coordinator, the immediate report should be made to the senior member of staff present. (If the allegation or suspicion is about the designated person or the Infant Special Needs Coordinator, the report should be made to the Social Care Local Authority Designated Officer on duty.)

Child abuse to be reported includes abuse of a pupil by a staff member or other adult, abuse at home which a pupil reports to staff, abuse by a stranger outside school and abuse of one pupil by another pupil. In the case of abuse by a pupil, or group of pupils, the key issues identifying the problem as abuse (rather than an isolated instance of bullying or 'adolescent experimentation' which might be considered within normal bounds in the school community) are:

- i. the frequency, nature and severity of the incident(s),
- ii. whether the victim was coerced by physical force, fear, or by a pupil or group of pupils significantly older than the victim, or having power or authority over the victim,
- iii. whether the incident involved a potentially criminal act, and,
- iv. whether if the same incident (or injury) had occurred to a member of staff or other adult, it would have been regarded as assault or otherwise actionable.

School staff, including The Headmaster and Infant Special Needs Coordinator, should not investigate reports of physical or sexual abuse themselves. Alleged victims, perpetrators, those reporting abuse and others involved should NOT be interviewed by school staff beyond the point at which it is clear there is an allegation of abuse.

One of the major reasons for the inclusion of Independent Schools within the Children Act was to ensure the local child protection procedures are followed in cases of alleged abuse. These procedures require that to minimise the risk of problems that have occurred in the investigation of abuse, the interviewing of children and adults involved is now carried out only by specially trained staff. The method of interviewing follows procedures agreed between, amongst others, the local authority and police in line with government requirements and in the light of recommendations of past inquiries into the handling of child abuse issues. These are designed to avoid unnecessary or repeated interviewing and examinations, to involve police and medical examinations as appropriate and, in the light of previous investigations, to avoid the 'contamination' of evidence that may later be needed in court by interviews that may have 'led' a witness. Similarly, Social Care Inspectors will not interview or investigate allegations of child abuse themselves, they too will refer the investigation to specialist social care and police staff.

It is important to acknowledge that the Children Act does inevitably lead to some investigations being triggered which do not substantiate the allegation made, as well as those that do. It is a basic assumption that it is better to endure some 'false alarms' than to fail to initiate specialist investigation of instances of real abuse. Social Care Inspectors will work with The Headmaster, staff and pupils involved in any 'false alarm' investigation to assist in recovery from the incident, as well as working with the school to assist in 'living through' and recovering from a substantiated investigation.

Staff members, and other adults, at the school, should never give absolute guarantees of confidentiality to pupils or adults wishing to tell them about something serious. They should, however, guarantee that they will **only** pass on information to the **minimum** number of people who **must** be told in order to ensure that the proper action is taken to sort out the problem, that **they will never tell anyone who does not have a clear 'need to know'**, and that they will personally take whatever steps they can to protect the informing pupil or adult from any retaliation or unnecessary stress that might be feared after a disclosure of alleged abuse has been made.

Any staff member to whom an allegation of physical or sexual abuse is made should:

1. Limit any questioning to the minimum necessary to seek clarification only, strictly avoiding 'leading' the pupil or adult who has approached them by making suggestions or asking questions that introduce their own ideas about what may have happened. (Do not ask questions like 'Did he do X to you?', using instead a minimum of questions of the 'Tell me what happened' type.)

2. Stop asking any more questions as soon as the pupil or adult has disclosed that he or she believes that something abusive has happened to him or her, or to someone else.
3. Tell the informing pupil or adult that the staff member will now make sure that the appropriate people are brought in to follow the problem up; these will include a specialist social worker who may need to involve the police as well.
4. Ask the informing pupil or adult what steps **they** would like taken to protect them now that they have made an allegation, and assure them that the school will try to follow their wishes.
5. Refer the matter immediately with all relevant details, to the designated staff member or, in his absence, the Infant Special Needs Coordinator, or direct to Social Care if the matter relates to either the designated staff member or the Infant Special Needs Coordinator.
6. Make a written record within one hour of what they have been told, and make a copy of this available to the designated staff member or the Infant Special Needs Coordinator.

After the designated staff member has received an allegation of abuse, he will need to coordinate various courses of action. He will NOT investigate the matter further but will refer it to the local Social Care Child Protection Duty Officer. It may be necessary to allocate another member of staff to stay with the child (preferably a staff member of the child's own choice.)

NO-ONE WILL CONTACT parents or other staff, the police, the alleged perpetrator or witnesses. The designated staff member will be advised by Social Care as to whether a) parents should be told (there are clearly circumstances where this would be inappropriate) or b) any medical treatment or examination is necessary (again, this would be contra-indicated in some situations). Further advice will be taken as to whether the child should be isolated or any other staff be informed. Experience has shown that once an investigation is under way, there is the possibility of the perpetrators being 'warned' and pressure applied to potential witnesses. **It may be, therefore, that if you have to report an incident, you will hear nothing further for some considerable time**, since specialised social workers/police will deal with it.

In any subsequent interview involving the child, you, or a staff member of the child's choice, may be required to accompany the child.

Wherever a staff member has what may be described as 'low level' concerns, which do not amount to suspicion of abuse, **but where there is a chance** that such abuse **may** occur, then the designated staff member will discuss these with the Social Care Inspector. Similarly, the inspector may voice such concerns following a visit to the school and may wish to discuss child protection issues with the staff.

All staff should be aware of risk situations for themselves. In particular, it is not advisable for staff of one gender to spend time on a one-to-one basis with pupils of the opposite gender where it may give rise to allegations. Inappropriate physical contact should be avoided with pupils of either sex. This does **not** mean that there must never be **any** physical contact. Clearly, since we are in loco parentis, to put one's arm around a child in distress may be an appropriate and right thing to do. St Peter & St Paul School is known for its relaxed and friendly relationships between staff and pupils. Nevertheless, staff should be aware that some distance should always be preserved.

It is a requirement of the Act that this Policy should be reviewed annually, that temporary staff should be made aware of the Policy and its contents, and that all staff who work with children should have their training updated at 3 yearly intervals. Training should be provided at 2 yearly intervals for both The

Headmaster, as the school's designated person, and The Infant Special Needs Co-ordinator as the EYFS designated person. The training of all staff will include training on identifying signs of abuse.

Please note that in order to comply with the regulations set out in law, it is the policy of the school

1. to follow all locally agreed inter-agency procedures including informing the LADO whose contact details are available from the school office.
2. to make this policy available on the school website at www.spsp.org.uk.
3. to operate safe recruitment procedures, including CRB checks and compliance with Independent School Standards Regulations. The safe recruitment procedures are as laid down by DCSF in 'Safeguarding Children and Safer Recruitment in Education'.
4. to ensure that any deficiencies or weaknesses in child protection arrangements are remedied without delay.
5. to ensure that all regulations relating to Early Years Foundation Stage settings are followed including informing Ofsted of any allegations of serious harm or abuse by any person working, or looking after children at the school (whether that allegation relates to harm or abuse committed on the premises or elsewhere), or any other abuse which is alleged to have taken place on the premises, and of the action taken in respect of these allegations.
6. To ensure that the Independent Safeguarding Authority are informed 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.
7. to carry out an annual review of the school's child protection policies and procedures and of the efficiency with which the related duties have been discharged and that the review will be carried out by a member of the Board of Trustees.

Revised January 2011