St Paul's High School, Bessbrook

Child Protection & Safeguarding Policy

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Version:	6
Date:	February 2024
Review Date:	February 2026
Updates:	• Updated on 12 December 2024 to reflect change in Safeguarding Team following the appointment of a new governor with Safeguarding and Child Protection. • Updated on 19 November 2026 to reflect the change of Designated Teacher for Child Protection.

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1. Mission Statement

1.1 We at St Paul's High School are committed to providing a loving and caring atmosphere which embodies our Catholic ethos in which the children can grow and develop to their full potential in all aspects of their lives.

2. Statement of Aims

2.1 At St. Paul's, our foremost commitment is to the care, welfare, and safety of the pupils entrusted to our guidance. We fulfil this commitment through our Pastoral Care Policy, designed to foster a nurturing, Christian environment. Here, we celebrate individual talents and abilities, creating a supportive space where every young person is encouraged to reach their full potential.

2.2 Our team, including all staff and volunteers, undergoes thorough background checks and adheres strictly to our Code of Practice, which governs interactions with pupils. This vigilance and dedication extend to our comprehensive Child Protection procedures.

2.3 These procedures serve a crucial purpose: to safeguard our pupils. They provide clear, actionable guidance for both teaching and non-teaching staff on responding to suspicions of abuse or neglect. In every situation, our primary focus is the wellbeing of the child; their care, welfare, and safety are our overriding priorities.

2.4 We acknowledge the gravity of child abuse and its potential criminal implications. This issue is never overlooked or underestimated within our school community. We maintain a proactive stance, ensuring that every member of our team is equipped to act decisively and compassionately for the protection of every child.

3. Definition of Child Abuse

Child abuse takes various forms, each deeply harmful and intolerable. At St Paul's, we define and address the following types of child abuse:

1. Neglect: This involves consistently failing to meet a child's basic needs, leading to significant harm to their health or development. Neglect may include exposure to danger, inadequate protection from harmful elements, and failure to provide essential care.
2. Physical Abuse: This includes any physical harm to a child, whether intentional or due to a failure to prevent injury.
3. Sexual Abuse: This encompasses exploiting a child for sexual gratification. It includes involving children in any sexual activity beyond their understanding or consent and exposure to inappropriate materials, thereby violating family values.
4. Exploitation: This is the abuse of power over a child, manipulating or taking unfair advantage of them for personal gain. Forms include child labour, slavery, criminal activities, and trafficking, and can extend to sexual exploitation.

5. Emotional Abuse: This refers to severe ill-treatment affecting a child's emotional and psychological well-being, leading to adverse effects on their emotional, physical, and behavioural development.
6. Bullying: Bullying, a distressing form of abuse, is not tolerated. We are committed to preventing, identifying, and addressing bullying promptly and effectively.
7. Cyberbullying: This modern form of bullying uses digital technology to harass or harm others. We work collaboratively with parents and external agencies to address and resolve such issues, recognizing the crucial role of parental support.

4. Procedures for reporting suspected (or disclosed) child abuse

At St. Paul's, we have designated personnel and a structured approach to handle suspected or disclosed child abuse cases:

Designated Contacts:

- Designated Teacher for Child Protection: Ms Christine Fearon
- Deputy Designated Teacher for Child Protection: Mrs Mary McMahon
- Board of Governor Representative for Child Protection: Mrs Jenny Magee

Reporting Process:

1. Initial Disclosure: If a staff member receives a disclosure from a child that raises concerns, they must act promptly. They are not to investigate but to report the matter immediately.
2. Reporting to Designated Teacher: The staff member will report these concerns directly to Ms Fearon, the Designated Teacher for Child Protection.
3. Consultation and Record Keeping: Ms Fearon will consult urgently with Mrs McMahon, the Deputy Designated Teacher, to determine the next steps, ensuring that a written record of the disclosure is made and stored securely.
4. Decision Making: Ms Fearon and Mrs McMahon will assess whether the case should be referred to Social Services, prioritising the child's best interests. In situations where a child is at risk, advice will be sought from the Child Protection Team in the Education Authority. Parental notification will occur immediately, unless there is a concern of parental involvement in the abuse.
5. Referral to Social Services: Any decision to refer a case to Social Services will be made with utmost care and based on appropriate advice. The child's safety is our primary concern.

Where there are concerns about possible abuse, the Designated Teacher in consultation with the principal will seek advice and guidance from:

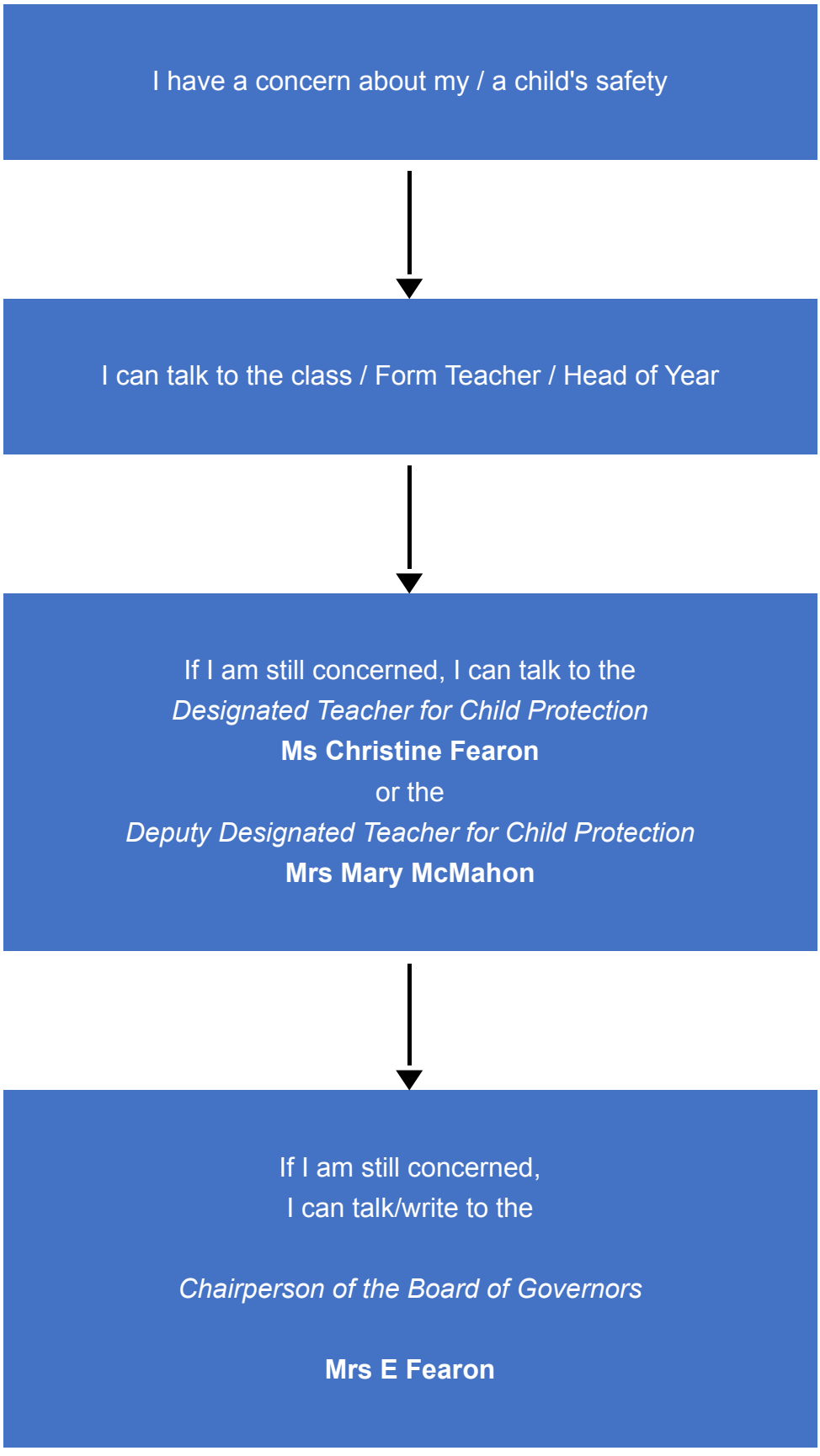
- Education Authority's Designated Officer for Child Protection
- Social Services
- CCMS' Designated Officer for Child Protection

5. Confidentiality and Information Sharing

It should be noted that information given to members of staff about possible child abuse or potential harm cannot be held ‘in confidence’.

In the interests of the child, staff may need to share this information with other professionals. Only those who need to know will be told.

6. Raising a concern or making a complaint



7. Emergency Contact Procedures

In an emergency, when school authorities such as the Principal, Vice-Principal, Senior Leadership Team, Designated Teacher (DT), or Deputy Designated Teacher (DDT) are not accessible, and if a child is in immediate danger or at risk, the following emergency contacts should be used without delay:

1. Social Services Gateway Team:
    - Phone: 028 3082 5000
    - Contact for immediate assistance in child protection matters.
2. Police (PSNI Care Unit):
    - Phone: 028 90 259299
    - Call in cases where there is an immediate threat to a child's safety.

These contacts are critical in ensuring the immediate safety and protection of a child in emergency situations.