



Scoil Mhuire

Substance Use Policy

This policy is inspired by the Mercy commitment to a learning and teaching environment that is conducive to the holistic development of the student and the formation of right attitudes and values.

This policy is one of a number introduced by the school to ensure a safe, healthy, caring and supportive environment in Scoil Mhuire. ***

We are also mindful of our duty to the whole community served by Scoil Mhuire to maintain high standards of behaviour and to turn out good people who will contribute positively to their world.

Scope

The policy applies to the entire school community, including teachers, students, parents/guardians and all users of the school premises.

Rationale

The world in which we live presents young people with many challenges that affect their health and wellbeing. Exposure to alcohol, tobacco, and drugs is part of this reality. Schools need to reflect upon how they might provide for the needs of their student cohort and respond appropriately to what are sometimes sensitive and emotive issues.

Parents/guardians are the primary educators but we are aware of our responsibilities in providing drug awareness and education. The Education Act (1998) provides that schools should promote the social and personal development of students and provide health education for them.

The Department of Health document *Reducing Harm, Supporting Recovery – A health – led response to drug and alcohol use in Ireland 2017 – 2025* has a section on school – based interventions. It states that *evidence suggests that comprehensive school-based programmes that combine social and personal development and provide information about substance use are more likely to be effective in preventing early substance use.*

It also states that SPHE teachers and Guidance Counsellors should be given the opportunity to avail of continuing professional development to build their capacity to deliver substance use education.

Scoil Mhuire does not accept or tolerate the possession, use or supply of banned or prohibited drugs or drug paraphernalia by any student in the school, on school trips and outings, or during any school-related activity.

Individual exceptions will be made for the use of prescribed drugs. Parents/guardians of students taking prescribed drugs must inform the school in writing of this fact.

Objectives

The central objective of a school substance use policy is the welfare, care, protection, and education of every young person. It should also equip schools and teachers to deal with issues relating to substance misuse in a planned and considered way and in accordance with their statutory responsibilities.

Education about alcohol, tobacco and drugs is most effective if provided in the broader context of the Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) programme which is delivered in the context of a supportive whole school environment.

This programme will be age appropriate and seek to build on and complement existing programmes being taught in the school – Religious Education, Physical Education, Science, Home Economics, and Civic, Social and Political Education (CSPE).

Outside speakers organised to provide talks on substance use for both students and parents/guardians during each school year to enhance the work done in class.

Role of Parents/Guardians

- To acknowledge the importance of and support school programmes that deal with substance abuse.
- To recognise that they are essential partners in relation to informing and educating their children regarding substance abuse.
- To assist and cooperate fully with the school as it seeks to deal justly and effectively with any incident(s) that may arise.

Procedures for Managing Alcohol, Drug Related, or Substance Abuse incidents.

In the event of an abuse incident, the school will seek to strike a balance between the welfare of the student or students involved and the welfare of the school community as a whole and the reputation of the school.

The following procedures will be invoked:

1. Where it is apparent that there is immediate danger to students or the school community, the school reserves the right to suspend or remove temporarily from the school any students involved in a suspected abuse incident pending a further and complete investigation of the incident.
2. An Substance Abuse Incident Report Form will be completed. (Appendix 1)
3. The school will take all the steps required to fully investigate and assess any abuse incident and will take whatever time it deems necessary to do this.
4. The school will take possession of any banned or prohibited substances and drug paraphernalia associated with an abuse incident, carefully recording all such items

and retaining them pending completion of the investigation, unless otherwise instructed by appropriate outside agencies.

5. In the event of an incident, the school will seek statements from all persons involved in, concerned with or having knowledge of the incident and will record these statements.
6. The school will maintain a written record of all stages of the investigation of an incident, including records referred to in the above steps, communications with other people or agencies involved or concerned with the matters under investigation, the investigation outcome, decisions taken and the rationale for these decisions, any penalties or disciplinary measures imposed following an investigation, and the management and outcome of any appeal that may arise following an investigation.
7. The school, at its own discretion, will liaise with any appropriate outside authority and seek advice or assistance as it deems appropriate in relation to its investigation of an incident.
8. If the circumstances merit and the investigation is continuing, the school will put the full particulars of the incident to the students concerned and their parents in the following manner.
 - (a) Copies of all records deemed relevant to the position of the students concerned and to the nature of the complaints or allegations that a student is facing will be made available to the student and her parents – at the discretion of the school – in time to permit the student a reasonable opportunity to make her own reply to the matters at issue and any representations that she would wish to make or have made on her behalf.
 - (b) The school will allow the student concerned and her parent's reasonable time to respond to the matters at issue. The school will take in to account any response so made and any other relevant extraneous considerations or mitigating circumstances that may be appropriate to the specific case.
 - (c) The school shall shortly thereafter inform the student and her parents of the school's findings and their reasons for these. If the school finds that the student has been guilty of or involved or implicated in an incident, it shall indicate the penalty or sanctions that it intends to impose in the circumstances.
9. In relation to a verified and investigated incident, the Board of Management may implement disciplinary actions or sanctions, including but not limited to: an oral warning, a written warning, a suspension of three days duration, a suspension of more than three days duration, other sanctions short of expulsion, and expulsion.

10. The school can, at its sole discretion, postpone the issue of sanctions to take account of mitigating circumstances or representations that it considers should be taken into account. The school asserts the right to exercise an appropriate show of mercy.
11. The school will, within the resources available to it, offer pastoral supports to the student / students and parents affected by an incident of substance abuse.

The involvement and roles of various parties in an incident investigation

The Principal or his/her delegate is the person responsible for all matters relating to this area. He or she may nominate a Deputy Principal or Year Head or other nominated staff to act on his/her behalf in the investigation of a substance abuse incident.

The duties and responsibilities of the Principal in this regard include the following:

- (i) the Principal is responsible for dealing with abuse incidents arising at the school
- (ii) all reports of abuse incidents or suspected incidents must be reported to the Principal
- (iii) the Principal makes all decisions regarding investigation of an incident; communication with, liaison with, and report to relevant parties, and disclosure of information regarding an investigation
- (iv) the Principal is responsible for keeping all relevant parties properly informed regarding investigation developments
- (v) the Principal is responsible for the secure and confidential storage of any written documentation and records associated with an incident
- (vi) the Principal is responsible for taking possession of any banned or prohibited substances or drug paraphernalia and deciding what should be done with same upon appropriate advice
- (vii) the Principal may seek the assistance of a deputy principal, year head and/or school guidance counsellor in conducting an incident investigation.

The school may wish to contact the parents/guardians of a student for a variety of reasons regarding a suspected abuse incident.

In such an event, the school will immediately inform parents/guardians – particularly where there is a concern regarding the health and welfare of a child – and share any available information that may help parents in attending to their child’s health and well-being and will keep students informed about what is happening and why. The school may advise parents/guardians to take their daughter to a medical practitioner to undergo a drug test.

Such actions will be undertaken without prejudice to the school’s separate and independent obligation to investigate and manage any abuse incident.

The school may be required in a given situation to contact, as appropriate, such authorities as the Gardai, Health Board, Probation Service, or Officers of the Courts.

The school may need to engage the expert assistance of an appropriate third party to properly investigate an incident.

The school may be duty bound to notify certain persons about an incident and/or the outcome of an incident investigation under statute, regulations, or Department of Education guidelines.

Review

The school will monitor, review and evaluate this policy and all related work and procedures on an ongoing basis.

Approved: 18th January 2024

****Refer to Scoil Mhuire Anti-Smoking – Vaping Policy*

Appendix 1



Substance Abuse Incident Report Form

Date _____ Time _____

Person Reporting _____

Person(s) Involved _____

Witnesses _____

Detailed Description of Incident

Factual Account of Events:

Item(s)

Confiscated: _____

Action taken:

Signature _____ Date _____