

St. Mary's College Dundalk



Substance use Policy

Approved by Board of Management on 18th May 2004

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Section One: Introduction

Mission Statement

St Mary's College is a Catholic secondary school under the patronage of the Marist Fathers. The primary aim of the school, through its spiritual and humanistic endeavours, is to promote and develop a sense of community where those entrusted to its care can be brought to the fullness of their human potential in accordance with the teachings of the Gospel. The school, through its academic, pastoral and spiritual undertakings strives to provide for the holistic development and welfare of each of the students in its care.

The school policy on substance use applies to the entire school community including teachers and ancillary staff, students, parents/guardians and all other users of the school buildings and premises. This policy applies also to anyone involved in school activities both on and off campus.

The Substance Use Policy is part of the pastoral approach of the school which is designed to foster a healthy, caring and supportive learning environment where each student is encouraged and assisted to develop a sense of personal identity, self-esteem, and awareness of her/his own talents and limitations, combined with a respect for the rights of others.

In accordance with its Mission the school asserts its right to protect and promote its Catholic ethos by requiring certain standards of behaviour and by prohibiting certain practices.

The prevalence of tobacco, alcohol, and drug misuse pose challenges and opportunities for the school community as an important social partner in providing appropriate drug awareness and education on what are sometimes sensitive and emotive issues.

The Board of Management of St Mary's College supports the underlying principles of natural justice, fairness and social responsibility. It recognises and accepts the seriousness of various research findings regarding the problems associated with drug and, in particular, alcohol misuse.

The school Policy on Substance Use aims to co-operate fully with the strategic plan adopted by the government under the National Drugs Strategy 2001-2008 and made mandatory for schools in circular 18/02.

The Education Act (1998) provides that schools promote the social and personal education of students and provide health education for them having regard to the characteristic spirit of the school (Section 9d).

In response to these concerns the following policies, programmes and procedures have been adopted by the school.

Section Two: School Policy

St. Mary's College does not accept or tolerate the possession, use or supply of banned or prohibited substances and/or drug paraphernalia by any student in the school, on school trips and outings, or during any school-related activity.

However, the school makes an exception for proper use of properly prescribed drugs. The parents/guardians of students taking prescribed medication must inform the school of the fact immediately or as soon as possible, depending on the medication.

Section Three:

Programmes for Alcohol, Tobacco, Volatile Substances and Drug Education.

Educational Aims of St. Mary's College:

1. To equip the students with the knowledge and skills to make informed, healthy and responsible choices.
2. To provide students with honest, age appropriate and up to date information on drugs, etc.

Approaches: In St. Mary's College these aims will be met through the following actions:

(1) Cross-curricular Education i.e.

- Social, Personal and Health Education (1st Year)
- Civic, Social and Political Education (1st –3rd Year)
- Home Economics (1st Year)
- P.E. (All students)
- Religious Education (All students)

-Specific modules are included in the 5th and 6th year Religious Education programmes. The 5th Year six week module is based on DAY (Drink Awareness for Youth) programme. In 6th Year there is a development of the issues raised in 5th Year, based on various programmes and courses including textbooks such as 'The Challenge of God' by Niall Boyle, 'The Challenge of God – Exploring Morality' by Anne and Niall Boyle and 'Moral Questions' by John McKenna. We also bring in speakers where possible to these groups.

- Social, Personal and Health Education (T.Y.)
- Science (1st –3rd Years).

In the next two years S.P.H.E. will be made available to 2nd and 3rd year students. Home Economics will be provided for some students in 2nd and 3rd year.

(2) Guest Speakers:

- When appropriate, visiting speakers will be used to reinforce, supplement and support the school's programme.

(3) Liaise With the Wider Community.

- St. Mary's College acknowledges that Substance Abuse is a social issue. In order to provide an effective programme of Substance Use Education, the school aims to build a network of support through liaising with the North Eastern Health Board, Social

Services, Gardaí, voluntary services and others with expertise in the field of Substance Abuse.

(4) Parental Support.

- Since parents are the primary educators of their children, we in St. Mary's College acknowledge their crucial role in partnership with the school with regard to informing and educating their children about Substance Abuse.
- We in St. Mary's College, welcome consultation with and co-operation from parents in relation to Substance Abuse.

(5) Information for Parents.

To support parents in their partnership role we in St. Mary's College will;

- Inform parents of the school's policy on Substance Abuse.
- Keep parents informed about the Substance Abuse provision in the school.
- Inform parents about the procedures expected of students who are taking prescribed medication while in school. They must notify the school in writing immediately, depending on the medication.
- Supply more information leaflets on Substance Abuse.
- Organise talks for parents on Substance Abuse.
- Provide a listening ear for parental concerns through the school Year Heads, Class Tutors, Pastoral Care Team and School Chaplain.

Section Four :

PROCEDURES FOR MANAGING ALCOHOL, TOBACCO, DRUG-RELATED OR SUBSTANCE ABUSE INCIDENTS

In the event of an abuse incident, we in St. Mary's College will seek to strike a balance between the welfare of the individual or individuals involved and the welfare of the school community as a whole and the reputation of the school.

Procedure to be followed in managing and investigating an abuse incident :

1. Where it is obvious 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 student involved in a suspected abuse incident pending a further and complete investigation of the incident.
2. An Abuse Incident Report Form must be filled in (see attached example).
3. The school will take all the steps required to fully investigate and assess any abuse incident and will take whatever time deemed necessary to do this.
4. St. Mary's College will take possession of any banned or prohibited substance 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, we will seek statements from all persons involved in, concerned with, or having knowledge of the incident and will record these statements.
6. A written record will be maintained of all stages of the investigation of the 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 our own discretion, will liaise with any appropriate outside authority and seek advice or assistance as we deem appropriate in relation to our investigation of an incident. Gardaí and other agencies may need to be involved.
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 student concerned and to the nature of the complaints or allegations that a student is facing will be made available to the student and his/her parents – at the discretion of the school – in time to permit the student to a reasonable opportunity to make his/her own reply to the matters at issue and any representations that he/she would wish to make or have made on his/her behalf.
 - (b) The school will allow the student concerned and his/her parents reasonable time to respond to the matters at issue. We will take into account any response so made and any other relevant extraneous considerations or mitigating circumstances that may be appropriate to the specific case.
 - (c) We shall shortly thereafter inform the student and his/her parents of the school's findings and the reasons for these. If we find that the student has been guilty of or involved or implicated in an incident, we shall indicate the penalty or the sanctions that we intend 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. We, the Board of Management and Staff of St. Mary's College, can, at our sole discretion, postpone the issue of sanctions in order to take account of mitigating circumstances or representations that we consider should be taken into account. The school asserts the right to exercise an appropriate show of mercy.
11. We will also ensure that pastoral supports are offered to the student/students and parents affected by an incident of substance abuse. These incidents can be sometimes traumatic for those involved and we will offer the services of a tutor, counsellor or chaplain in order to demonstrate our Christian commitment in a time of personal crisis.
12. If a member of Staff, be it a teaching or ancillary staff member, should be involved in an incident of abuse, then procedures as have been agreed upon by union bodies and management should be carried out. Non-union workers are subject to the Principal.
13. Visitors to the school are subject to the same strictures as everyone else on the premises.

SECTION FIVE:

The involvement and roles of various parties in an incident investigation:

The Principal or his delegate is the person responsible for all matters relating to this area.

He/She may nominate the Deputy Principal, or Year Head, or other nominated staff member to act on his/her behalf in the investigation of a substance incident.

The duties and responsibilities of the Principal (hereafter to be understood as meaning the Principal or his/her nominee) in this regard include the following:

The Principal is responsible for dealing with abuse incidents arising at the school.

All reports of abuse incidents or suspected incidents must be reported to the Principal.

The Principal makes all the decisions regarding investigation of an incident; communication with, liaison with, and reporting to relevant parties; and disclosure of information regarding an investigation.

The Principal is responsible for keeping all relevant parties properly informed regarding investigation developments.

The Principal is responsible for the secure and confidential storing of any written documentation and records associated with an incident.

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.

The Principal may seek the assistance of the deputy Principal, year head, and/or school guidance counselor in conducting an incident investigation.

In the case of a suspected abuse incident, the school will immediately inform parents/guardians – particularly where there is a concern regarding the health and welfare of the child – and share any available information that may help parents/guardians in attending to their child’s health and well-being and will keep students informed about what is happening and why. These actions will be taken without prejudice to the school’s separate and independent obligation to investigate and manage any abuse incident.

The school recognizes the importance, as far as is practicable, of limiting the number of people involved in investigating and managing an abuse incident and it is the aim of the school only to involve those properly concerned with an incident. Students and parents/guardians must accept that:

The duty of teachers and staff to the whole school community preclude them from offering total confidentiality to any students when they come in contact with an abuse incident or suspected abuse incident.

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

The school may need to engage the expert advice 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 DES guidelines.

As regards to media inquiries into a suspected abuse incident, the school will not comment on any individual matter when an investigation is in progress other than to outline its policy and procedures for managing an incident.

However, in the interests of the school’s reputation, the Board of Management may clarify the school’s position regarding an incident after the investigation has been completely concluded.

In the case where a Staff member might have concerns about someone being involved in substance abuse they should inform the Principal of their concerns, outlining the specific grounds for their suspicions. The Principal will then decide what action to take.

SECTION SIX: Training and Development

The school will provide training for the staff, Board of Management, Parents, and Students.

In relation to staff, the school will deliver training in delivering education programmes relating to alcohol, tobacco and drugs, will give specific training on the role of staff in relation to the management and investigation of an abuse incident.

In relation to Parents & the Board of Management the school will provide opportunities to attend information sessions and workshops in relation to drugs and policy, will provide appropriate information, guidance, and support to the board regarding issues relating to investigation of and adjudication on incident investigations.

In relation to the students, the school will offer all student programmes relating to alcohol, tobacco, and will offer drug education within the context of the Junior Certificate, and Leaving Certificate programmes.

Section Seven: Monitoring of the Policy.

Review of the Policy

The policy will be reviewed annually, or in the light of changing information. The completed draft of the policy will be circulated among the relevant parties and amended as deemed necessary in January 2004. It will come into force in September 2004.

Evaluation

Teachers, Parents, Students, Board of Management and other relevant groups will be involved in the evaluation of this policy when it has been in place for two years and any resulting changes will be incorporated into the amended policy.

Three main areas of the policy we will evaluate are:

- Drug Education Programmes
- Managing Drug Related Incidents
- Parent, Staff and Management Training and courses offered to the school Community.

Dissemination of Policy

Copies of the policy will be disseminated to all the school community. It will be freely available on the School Website and from the Principal's office.

Young people will be made aware of the policy as part of their drugs education. Parents and students aged over 18 years will be asked to sign a statement to the effect that they have read the policy and agree that they are bound by it.

Appendix – Definitions

The School

This refers to school buildings, grounds, play areas, public areas where students congregate coming to and going from school, and any other specific area that may apply.

Banned/Prohibited substances

This refers to all substances banned by the Misuse of Drugs Act, non-validated prescription medication, all alcohol, and tobaccos used contrary to the law of the land. The school reserves the right to determine that a substance found at the school qualifies as a banned or prohibited substance.

Drug Paraphernalia

This refers to any banned/prohibited substances as defined above, any items that were deemed to have been used in the taking of illicit substances, and any written or printed material promoting the use of illicit substances.

An Abuse Incident

This refers to any incident relating to banned/prohibited substances that occurs in the school or during school functions or outings or any such incident that may be deemed damaging to the health or welfare of the student concerned, to other students, or to the policy or reputation of the school.

The school reserves the right to determine whether a specific incident constitutes an abuse incident to be addressed under the terms of the policy.

Parents

This refers to natural parents, foster parents, step-parents, or guardian or the student concerned as applicable, or any person acting in *loco parentis*, either on a temporary or permanent basis, on the date of an abuse incident.

Principal

This refers to the principal for the time being as appointed by the school and defined in the Education Act (Welfare) 2000, or the deputy principal where the principal is either unavailable or has delegated to the deputy principal.

Whole School Community

In dealing with the whole school community, members of staff are subject to procedures as have been agreed by union bodies and management. Non – union workers are subject to procedures agreed with the principal.

SUBSTANCE ABUSE INCIDENT REPORT FORM

Name(s) of individual(s) involved: _____

Class: _____ Form Teacher: _____ Year Head: _____

Details of Incident:

Where it occurred: _____

When? _____

Who was involved? _____

What happened? _____

What action was taken? _____

What follow-up has been planned? _____

Signed _____ Date _____