

SUBSTANCE USE POLICY

Draft Policy circulated to teachers, students, parents and members of the Board of Management June 2006.

This Substance Use Policy operates within the framework of the School's Mission Statement and supports the School's mission to foster human and spiritual values which equip students for a full and mature life.

Scope

The Substance Use Policy applies to the entire school community including teachers, students, parents/guardians and users of the school building.

Rationale

- Drugs and their misuse is an area of concern for parents, teachers and students.
- The Education Act 1998 requires schools to promote the social and personal education of students and provide health education for them.
- The School 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 School recognises and accepts its responsibility in providing drug awareness and education in the use and misuse of drugs.

School Position on Drugs

- St. Louis Community School does not accept or tolerate the possession, use or supply of banned or prohibited substances or drug paraphernalia by any student in the School, on school trips and outings or during any school-related activity.
- Properly prescribed drug may be used provided that parents of students taking prescribed medication inform the School in writing of the fact.

Education Programmes

The School will provide, in so far as its resources will allow, appropriate education in the area of health education and substance use for all students.

This education will be provided in the context of S.P.H.E., Religious Education, Science, C.S.P.E., Home Economics and other relevant subject areas.

Contributions from parents, parties with relevant expertise and experience and relevant outside agencies will be encouraged and facilitated by the School, provided that such contributions complement the School's approach, values and ethos.

Drug Awareness and other relevant programmes will be offered to parents and teachers of the School when opportunities to do so arise and the School's resources permit.

Guidelines and agreed procedures for the management of drugs related incidents will be issued to all staff members.

Role of Parents

Parents are expected to:

- Acknowledge the importance of the School's Substance use Policy.
- Recognise that they are in partnership with the School in relation to informing and educating their children regarding substance use.
- Assist and co-operate fully with the School as it seeks to deal with drugs and alcohol related incidents.
- Contribute to the formation and review of the School's Substance Policy.

Managing Drugs and Alcohol Related Incidents

In the event of a substance abuse incident, the School will seek to strike a balance between the welfare of the student(s) involved and the welfare of the school community as a whole and the reputation of the School.

Procedure

- 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.
- An 'Abuse Incident Report Form' will be completed.
- 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.
- The School will take possession of any banned substances and drug paraphernalia associated with an abuse incident, carefully recording all such items and retaining them securely pending completion of the investigation, unless otherwise instructed by appropriate outside agencies.
- 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.

Record Keeping

The School will maintain a written record of all stages of the investigation of the incident, including records referred to in the above steps, communications with other people or agencies involved in 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.

Confidentiality

It is the aim of the School to involve, as far as is practicable, only those persons properly concerned with an incident when investigating and managing an abuse incident. It is important that students and parents accept that:

- The duties of teachers and staff to the 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 to contact an appropriate outside authority such as the Gardai, Health Board, Probation Service or officers of the Courts.
- The School may need to engage 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 D.E.S. guidelines.

Keeping Parties Informed

If the circumstances merit and an investigation is continuing, the School will put the full particulars of the incident to the students concerned and their parents in the following manner:

- Copies of all records deemed relevant to 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 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.
- The School will allow the student concerned and his/her parents reasonable time to respond to the matters at issue. The School 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.
- The School shall shortly thereafter inform the student and his/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 it intends to impose in the circumstances.
- In the case of a suspected abuse incident, the School will inform parents, particularly where there is concern regarding the health and welfare of a student, and share any information that may help parents to attend to the health and wellbeing of their child/children.
- The School will keep students informed of what is happening and why.
- Such actions will be undertaken without prejudice to the School's separate and independent obligation to investigate and manage any abuse incident.

Disciplinary Procedures and Sanctions

In relation to a verified and investigated incident, the Board of management may implement disciplinary actions or sanctions in accordance with the School's code of Conduct.

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 will endeavour to offer pastoral supports to the students and parents affected by an incident of substance abuse.

Media Enquiries

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 incidents. 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 completed.

The Role of the Principal

The Principal or his/her nominee is responsible for dealing with abuse incidents arising in the School.

- All reports of abuse incidents or suspected incidents must be reported to the Principal.
- The principal makes all decisions regarding investigation of the incident, communication with, liaison with and reporting to relevant parties and disclosure of information regarding investigation.
- The Principal is responsible for keeping all relevant parties properly informed regarding investigation developments.
- The Principal is responsible for the secure and confidential storage 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 assistance of the Deputy Principal, Year Head, Guidance Counsellor or other relevant school personnel in conducting an incident investigation.

Monitoring and Review

The School will monitor and review the policy on an ongoing basis.

Appendix:

Definitions:

'The School'

'The School' includes school buildings, grounds, play/sports areas and public areas where students congregate coming to and going from school.

'Banned/Prohibited'

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

'Paraphernalia'

This includes any banned or prohibited substance as defined above, any items that may be deemed to be used in the taking of illicit substances and any written or printed material promoting the use of illicit substances.

'Abuse Incident'

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