

SCHOOL CONFIDENTIALITY POLICY

Rationale

At Enable Ireland Sandymount School we believe that:

- The safety, well-being and protection of our pupils are the paramount consideration in all decisions staff at this school make about confidentiality. The appropriate sharing of information between school staff is an essential element in ensuring our pupils well-being and safety.
- It is an essential part of the ethos of our school that trust is established to enable pupils, staff and parents/guardians to seek help both within and outside the school in order to minimise the number of situations where personal information is shared to ensure pupils and staff are supported and safe.
- Pupils, parents/guardians and staff need to know the boundaries of confidentiality in order to feel safe and comfortable discussing personal issues and concerns.
- The school's attitude to confidentiality is easily understood and everyone should be able to trust the boundaries of confidentiality operating within the school.
- Issues concerning personal information including sex and relationships and other personal matters can arise at any time.
- Management, staff and pupils need to know the boundaries of confidentiality in order to feel safe and comfortable in discussing personal issues and concerns, including sex and relationships. In matters of child protection absolute confidentiality cannot be offered to any individual.

Definition of Confidentially

Confidentiality is defined as "something which is spoken or given in private, entrusted with another's secret affairs".

In essence all information that is obtained through our work with pupils, their families and carers through Enable Ireland Sandymount School is confidential and must not be shared without consent outside of our school unless disclosure is necessary to avoid serious or imminent danger to life, health or well-being of an individual.

The confider is asking for the content of the conversation to be kept secret. Anyone offering absolute confidentiality to someone else would be offering to keep the content of his or her conversation completely secret and discuss with no-one. In practice there are few circumstances where absolute confidentiality is offered in our school. We strive to strike a balance between ensuring the safety, well-being and protection of our pupils and staff, ensuring there is an ethos of trust where pupils and staff can ask for help when they need it and ensuring that when it is essential to share personal information, child protection issues and good practice are followed.

This means that in most cases what is offered is limited confidentiality. Disclosure of the content of a conversation could be discussed with professional colleagues, but the confider would not be identified except in certain circumstances.

Staff should make it clear that there are limits to confidentiality at the beginning of the conversation. These limits relate to ensuring children's safety and well-being. The pupil will be informed when a

confidence has to be broken for this reason and be involved in information sharing. Different levels of confidentiality are appropriate for different circumstances:

- **In the classroom in the course of a lesson given by a member of teaching staff or an outside visitor including health professionals:**
Careful thought needs to be given to the content of the lesson setting the climate and establishing ground rules to ensure confidential disclosures are not made. It should be made clear to pupils that this is not the time or place to disclose confidential personal information. When a health professional is contributing to a school's health education programme in a classroom setting, they are working with the same boundaries of confidentiality as a teacher.
- **One-to-one disclosures to members of school staff:**
It is essential all members of staff know the limits of the confidentiality they can offer to both pupils and parents/guardians and any required actions and sources of further support or help available both for the pupil or parent/guardian, within the school and from other agencies when appropriate. All staff at this school encourage pupils to discuss different issues with their parents/guardians and vice versa. However, the needs of the pupil are paramount and the school staff will not automatically share information about the pupil with his/her parents unless it is considered to be in the child's best interests.

The Legal Position for School Staff

All school staff should not promise confidentiality. Pupils do not have the right to expect they will not be reported to their parent or carers and may not, in the absence of an explicit promise, assume that information conveyed outside the context is private. No member of this school's staff can or should give such a promise.

The safety, well-being and protection of the child is the paramount consideration in all decisions staff at this school make about confidentiality. School staff is NOT obliged to break confidentiality except where child protection is or may be an issue.

Teachers, Special Needs Assistants and Health Professionals

Professional judgement is required by a teacher or Special Needs Assistant is considering whether he or she would indicate to a child that the child could make a disclosure in confidence and whether such a confidence could then be maintained having heard the information. In exercising their professional judgement the teacher or counsellor must consider the best interests of the child, including the need to both ensure trust to provide safeguards for our children and possible child protection issues. All teachers at this school are expected to follow the school's child protection guidelines and procedures.

All staff must make every effort to ensure that notes and computers are secure each evening before leaving school. Children's notes must not be taken out of the building without prior authorisation of the Principal or Deputy Principal and in keeping with our Data Protection Policy. Staff are requested not discuss pupils with their family, friends or acquaintances. Staff should never discuss children with colleagues outside of a formal school meeting in the school building. Conversations on corridors, lunch rooms or outside are forbidden.

Visitors and Non-Teaching Staff

At Enable Ireland Sandymount School we expect all non-teaching staff to report and disclosures by pupils or parents/guardians of a concerning nature to the designated child protection co-ordinator as soon as possible after the disclosure and in an appropriate setting, so others cannot over hear. The designated child protection co-ordinator will decide what, if any, further action needs to be taken.

Parents/Guardians

Enable Ireland Sandymount School believes that it is essential to work in partnership with parents/guardians and we endeavour to keep parents/guardians abreast of their child's progress at school, including any concerns about their progress or behaviour. However, we also need to maintain a balance so that our pupils can share any concerns and ask for help when they need it. Where a pupil does discuss a difficult personal issue with a staff member, they will be encouraged to also discuss the matter with their parents/guardians and may be supported to do so where it is appropriate. The safety, well-being and protection of our pupils is the paramount consideration in all decisions staff at this school make about confidentiality.

Complex Cases:

Where there are areas of doubt and about the sharing of information, Enable Ireland Sandymount School will consult with the Dept. of Education, Enable Ireland, Tusla, the HSE or other bodies.

When Confidentiality should be broken and procedures for doing this:

See the schools Child Protection Policy

Links with other policies

This policy has links with the following school policies:

- Child Protection
- SPHE
- RE
- Substance Misuse
- Bullying

Implementation Date

Implementation of this Policy shall commence with effect from

Signed: _____

(Chairperson of Board of Management)

Signed: _____

(Principal)

Date: _____

Date of next review: _____