

# **Our Lady of Mercy Secondary School**

## Substance Misuse Policy

*Looking towards a policy of healthy living,  
focusing on drug use/misuse.*

**Scope:**

The entire school community, including staff, students, parents/guardians and all users of the school buildings.

**School Mission:**

This policy serves to promote and support the school ethos in providing a Christian education in a changing society. The school strives to create an environment where all students feel safe and cared for, where the individual is respected both as a person in his or her own right and also as an integral part of the larger learning community and where justice and fairness are mediated in its structures and procedures.

Our Lady of Mercy Secondary School asserts its right to protect and promote its particular ethos by requiring certain standards of behaviour and prohibiting certain practices.

**Rationale:**

The school community wishes to provide a safe, caring and healthy environment which is drug free. It seeks to adhere to a consistent and all-inclusive policy, mindful of the support, safety and protection of the entire school community.

**School Policy:**

**School Position on Drugs:**

The Mercy Secondary School does not accept or tolerate the possession, use, or supply of banned/prohibited and/or drug paraphernalia by any student in the school, on school trips and outings or during ANY school related activity. Students will be permitted to take prescribed medications during the school day if the principal is notified in writing by the parents/guardians where the need arises.

**This policy contains three key elements:**

**1.**

- Drug Education; A student will be provided with education on alcohol, tobacco and other drugs on an ongoing basis and within the resources available while attending Mercy Secondary School.
- Provision, Training and Staff Development; in the development of a healthy living policy all staff of the school will be provided with the initial information and instruction from the South Eastern Health Board. The school authorities will always consider the necessity of further training where appropriate.

**2.**

- Management of alcohol/tobacco and other drug related issues; In the event of an abuse incident the Mercy Secondary 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 including the reputation of the school. The school shall follow the steps outlined in appendix 1.

*In the case of a permanent exclusion the usual right of appeal will apply.*

Incidents involving alcohol, tobacco and drugs use might include (this list is not exhaustive);

- Use or suspected use of alcohol, tobacco or other drugs on the school premises or during school related activity.
- Intoxication/unusual behaviour.
- Disclosure about use.
- Finding of substances or associated paraphernalia.
- Possession and/or supply on the school premises or during school related activity.

**3.**

**Staff Guidelines for Dealing with Substance Abuse;**

- No absolute confidentiality can be offered to the students.
- Staff cannot hold a confidence in relation to illegal substances or actions.
- Teachers who are in a position where they are likely to receive such confidences because of the nature of their subject should inform pupils in advance of these guidelines.

In introducing the following guidelines for personnel involved in the care and management of pupils who have been involved in substance abuse, the school believes that from time to time, a range of people will be involved in their care and management. Such personnel would include:

- Class tutors.
- Year heads.
- Counselling personnel, internally and externally.
- Parents/Guardians.
- Juvenile Liaison Officers (JLO) and An Garda Siochana.

### **Reporting Procedures:**

Our Lady of Mercy Secondary School is a caring school and welcomes and encourages reporting of all incidents affecting the positive well being of any member of its community. While individual cases will be handled with discretion on a 'need to know' basis, due to possible criminal liability absolute confidentiality cannot be guaranteed, if such confidentiality threatens the welfare of anyone within the school. It is policy of the school that any illegal drugs found on the premises will be passed on, through the Principal, to the Gardai for destruction.

Our duty of care to the school community precludes any public disclosure of any drug related incidents within the community.

### **Review and Evaluation:**

Responsibility for the successful implementation of the policy lies with every member of the School Community, acting with the authority of the Board of Management. This policy will be the subject of an annual review and evaluation during the first term of each school year. The review will be carried out by representatives of the school community. This policy will be made available to all members of the school community.

## **Appendix One:**

### **Procedures.**

- The member of staff who encounters a student involved in a suspected abuse incident and where there is an apparent immediate danger to the students and/or school community will accompany pupil to the Principals office and stay with pupil until Principal (or in his/her absence, the deputy principal) arrives.
- The Principal should inform parents/guardians unless home circumstances warrant disclosure in a more appropriate manner.
- Where it is apparent that there is immediate danger to the students and/or school community, the school reserves the right to suspend or remove temporarily from the school any student involved in a suspected abuse incident pending further and complete investigation of the incident.
- The completion of an Abuse Incident Report Form.
- The school will take all steps required to fully investigate and assess any abuse incident and take whatever time it deems necessary to do this.
- 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 the 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 all these statements.
- The school will maintain a written record of all stages of the investigation of an incident including; records referred to it 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.
- The school at its own discretion will liaise with any appropriate outside authority and seek advice or assistance as it deems appropriate to its investigation of an incident.
- A statement that if the circumstances merit, and the investigation is continuing, the school will put forward particulars of the incident to the students concerned and their parents/guardians in the following manner:

1. 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/guardians-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 have any representations that he/she would wish to make or have on his/her behalf.

2. The school will allow the student concerned and parents/guardians 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.

3. The school shall shortly thereafter inform the student and the parents/guardians of the school findings and their reasons for these. If the school finds that the student has been guilty of, or involved in an incident, it shall indicate the penalty or sanctions that it intends to impose in the circumstances.

- In relation to a verified and investigated incident, the Board of Management may implement disciplinary actions or sanctions, including, but not limited to:

- (i) Oral Warning.
- (ii) Written Warning.
- (iii) A suspension of three days duration.
- (iv) A suspension of more than three days duration.
- (v) Other sanctions short of expulsion.

- The school can, at its sole discretion, postpone the issue of sanctions to take account of mitigating circumstances or representation that it considers should be taken into account. The school asserts the right to exercise an appropriate show of mercy.
- The school should also ensure that pastoral supports are offered to the student/students and families affected by an incident of substance abuse. These incidents can sometimes be traumatic for those involved and the services of a tutor, counsellor, chaplain, juvenile liaison officer, social workers etc. would demonstrate the school's Christian commitment at a time of personal crisis.

#### **The Role of the Principal:**

- The school 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 decisions regarding investigation of an incident, communication with, liaison with, and reporting to relevant parties, as well as 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 storage of any written documentation and records associated with the 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 counsellor in conducting an incident investigation.

It is school policy that we will not comment on any individual matter. In the interests of the schools reputation, the Board of Management may clarify the schools position regarding an incident after the investigation has been completely concluded.

## **Appendix Two:**

### **Definitions**

#### **Definition of School.**

The school includes school buildings, grounds, playing fields or the immediate environs of the school and while on any school related activities.

#### **Definition of a Drug.**

Any substance including alcohol, tobacco, volatile substances covered under the Misuse of drugs Act 1977-1984 that changes the way the body feels, acts and thinks.

#### **Definition of Drug Paraphernalia.**

Any items that may be deemed to be used for taking of any illicit substances including hash pipes, bongos, lungs and any other written or printed materials promoting the use of any illicit substances or any banned or prohibited substances.

#### **An Abuse Incident.**

An abuse incident is any that occurs in the school or during school functions, outings or any incident that may be deemed damaging to the health and welfare of the student concerned, to other students or to the policy or reputation of the school.

#### **Parents/Guardians.**

Includes natural parents, foster or step parents or any person having guardianship of the students concerned or any person acting instead of a parent on a temporary basis for the time being at the date of an abuse incident in question.

#### **The Principal.**

The Principal for the time being as appointed by the school and as defined in the Education and Welfare Act 2000 and for the purposes of this policy also includes the deputy Principal where the Principal is not available, or any member of staff to whom the role of deputy Principal has been temporarily appointed.

## **Appendix Three:**

### **Relevant Legislation.**

The policy is underpinned by the following pieces of legislation, all of which are available for inspection at the school office:

Education Act 1998

The Misuse of Drugs Act 1977-1984

Safety and Welfare at Work Regulations Act 1993

Non Fatal Offences against Persons Act 1997

Education Welfare Act 2000