

# **Safeguarding & promoting the welfare of children d'Overbroeck's College policy**

## **1. Policy statement**

d'Overbroeck's College is fully committed to its responsibility to safeguard and promote the welfare of all its pupils. We aim to create a caring, secure environment in which young people feel safe, respected and valued, and in which their welfare is of paramount importance. Trust, openness and unfettered communication among pupils, and between pupils and staff are important elements which we value and actively promote.

This Policy is an expression of our commitment to safeguarding the welfare of all pupils within the College and to keeping bullying and all other forms of abuse at bay. It applies to all staff. It also applies to all the constituent parts of d'Overbroeck's College: Leckford Place, the Sixth Form and the International Study Centre (ISC).

This policy is regularly reviewed and updated in the light of experience and of the latest guidance and regulations. It is posted on the College's website, and copies are available on request to parents and anyone associated with the College in order to facilitate open and effective communication between parents, children, teachers and outside agencies responsible for the well being of children.

It is written with regard to the following documents:

- The Children Act 1989
- The Oxfordshire Area Child Protection Committee Procedures (1992)
- Developing the Protective Culture (Oxon ACPC/NSPCC Training Project)
- What To Do If You're Worried A Child Is Being Abused (2003)
- Safeguarding Children in Education (DfES - September 2004)
- Safeguarding Pupils Policy (Oxfordshire County Council, September 2004)
- Safeguarding Children in Education: Dealing With Allegations of Abuse Against Teachers and Other Staff (DfES guidance – November 2005)

## **Review**

The College's Governing Body will undertake an annual review of this policy and of all the College's procedures for dealing with any issues relating to it. This will include, where relevant, a review of the speed and efficiency with which such procedures have been applied in practice.

Given the critical importance of ensuring best practice at all times when dealing with issues of child abuse, any deficiencies or weaknesses in the College's child protection arrangements that may come to light will be remedied without delay.

## **2. What constitutes child abuse?**

It must be borne in mind that child abuse may occur in the family; it may be committed by a member of the school staff; or it may be committed by other children within the school. The definitions given below should help in recognizing abuse

## 2.1 Definitions of abuse

**Physical abuse** - 'actual or likely physical injury to a child. All physically injured children where the nature of the injury is not consistent with the account of how it occurred or where there is definite knowledge, or a reasonable suspicion, that the injury was inflicted (or knowingly not prevented) by any person having custody, charge or care of that child. This includes children to whom it is suspected poisonous substances have been administered. It also includes children whose symptoms or physical signs have been surreptitiously induced by a care giver (Munchausen Syndrome by Proxy). (*Oxon ACPC Procedures, 1996*)

### **Signs that may indicate physical abuse:**

- Bruises and abrasions around the face
- Damage or injury around the mouth
- Bi-lateral injuries such as two bruised eyes
- Bruising to soft areas of the face such as cheeks
- Fingertip bruising to the front or back of torso
- Bite marks
- Burns or scalds (unusual patterns and spread of injuries)
- Deep contact burns such as cigarette burns
- Injuries suggesting beatings
- injuries to the genital areas

Injuries need to be accounted for. Inadequate, inconsistent or excessively plausible explanations or a delay in seeking treatment should signal concern.

### **Sexual Abuse**

'Actual or likely occurrence of a sexual act perpetrated on a child by another person. The key issue in assessing whether sexual abuse has occurred is exploitation. Exploitation is the balance of power between the child and the other person at the time that the sexual activity first occurred. Exploitation is considered to have occurred if the activity was unwanted when first began and/or involved a misuse of conventional age, authority or gender differentials.' (*Oxon ACPC Procedures, 1996*)

### **Signs that may indicate sexual abuse:**

- Sudden changes in behaviour and school performance
- Displays of affection which are sexual and age-inappropriate
- Tendency to cling or need constant reassurance
- Tendency to cry easily
- Regression to younger behaviour
- Distrust of familiar adults; anxiety of being left with relatives, a child minder or lodger.
- Unexplained gifts or money
- Depression and withdrawal
- Bed wetting
- Sleep disturbances or nightmares
- Chronic problems with health such as vaginal discharges
- Fear of undressing for gym activities

- Sexually Transmitted Disease
- Fire setting

### **Emotional abuse**

'Actual or likely persistent or severe psychological ill treatment. These cases may be difficult to identify but we define this category as extreme cases where emotional abuse has resulted in a severe impact upon the child's behaviour and/or physical development.

The child will be denied normal human respect and a sense of personal dignity from his/her carers. It may take the form of persistent verbal denigration, humiliation or negativism in the absence of any unconditional positive interest, concern and affection.

All abuse involves some emotional ill-treatment. This category should be used when it is the main or sole form of abuse.' (*Oxon ACPC Procedures, 1996*)

### **Signs that may indicate emotional abuse:**

- Physical development lags e.g. milestones delayed or underweight, lethargic, etc.
- Over-reaction to mistakes
- Continual self depreciation
- Sudden speech disorders
- Fear of new situations
- Self-harming
- Extremes of passivity and/or aggression
- Compulsive stealing
- Drug, alcohol, solvent abuse
- Fear of parents being contacted

### **Neglect**

Actual or likely persistent or severe neglect of a child, or the failure to protect a child from exposure to any kind of danger including cold or starvation, or extreme failure to carry out important aspects of care resulting in the significant impairment of the child's health or development. Neglect can include situations where children are left unattended or left unattended or unsupervised.' (*Oxon ACPC Procedures, 1996*)

### **Signs that may indicate neglect:**

- Constant hunger
- Poor personal hygiene
- Constant tiredness
- Inadequate clothing
- Frequent lateness or non attendance at school
- Untreated medical problems
- Poor relationship with peers
- Compulsive stealing
- Low self esteem

## **Bullying**

It is important to recognize that in all types of abuse, it is not always an adult abusing a young person. It can occur that the abuser may be a young person, and bullying is a good example of this.

Bullying may be defined as repeated (systematic) aggressive verbal, psychological or physical conduct by an individual or group against another person or persons. It may be deliberate harassment or an aggressive act of omission which causes physical or psychological hurt. Very often bullying is the act of oppressing or dominating by threat or force where the aggressor may persecute or tease physically or morally in order to frighten into action or inaction.

Bullying can include:

- Physical: pushing, hitting, kicking, pinching, etc.
- Verbal: name-calling, spreading rumours, constant teasing and sarcasm
- Emotional: tormenting, ridiculing, humiliating, ignoring
- Racial: taunts, graffiti and gestures
- Religious / cultural
- Sexual, sexist or homophobic: unwanted physical contact or abusive comments
- Cyber-bullying: through social networking websites, mobile phones and text messages, photographs and email.

## **Signs that may indicate bullying**

- Behavioural changes such as reduced concentration, becoming withdrawn, depressed, tearful, emotionally up and down, reluctance to go to school, etc.
- A marked drop off in performance at school
- Physical signs such as stomach aches, headaches, difficulties in sleeping, bingeing on food, cigarettes or alcohol.
- A shortage of money or frequent loss of possessions.

## **Other types of abuse**

Some kinds of abuse are more obvious than others. The following are types of abuse that may not be so obviously recognizable or that are encountered less frequently, but of which it is nevertheless important to be aware:

- Drug/alcohol abusing parents
- Domestic violence
- Child on child abuse – ‘abuse is not just an adult phenomenon’. Children can pose a threat either physical or sexual to other children.
- Child prostitution, female genital mutilation, forced marriages
- Fabricated or induced illness (Munchausen Syndrome by proxy) – this occurs when a parent or carer feigns the symptoms of illness or deliberately causes ill health to a child whom they are looking after, usually as a means of attracting attention to themselves. Children affected by this form of abuse will tend to have a greater frequency of illness normally combined with a significantly higher than average level of absence from school.

## 2.2 Relationships with younger persons

It is an offence under the Sexual Offences Act, 2003, for a person in a position of trust to engage in a relationship with a young person under the age of 18.

Relationships between staff and students at d'Overbroeck's College should remain professional in nature at all times.

Staff should not write personal messages to students in any medium - including letters, notes, text messages, emails, messages left on social networking websites, etc.

## 3. d'Overbroeck's College policy on safeguarding children - Principles

- **The central principle** is that the welfare of the child is the paramount consideration. In any conflict of interest, the child's well being must be the aim of every action or decision.
- **Recording** – full and clear record keeping at all stages of the child protection process is essential.
- **Confidentiality** - where his or her safety is at stake, confidentiality cannot and must not be promised to the child. Confidentiality is always qualified and never absolute when a child is at risk. In this context, it means 'not holding information which should be shared and not sharing information that should not be shared'.
- **Speed of response** - issues of child protection must be dealt with very promptly: delay may be prejudicial to the child's safety.
- **'Do not investigate!'** It is not for the school to investigate a suspicion of abuse, whether it be centered on a member of the school staff or a member of the child's family. The child should not be questioned beyond establishing that there is cause to refer the case to the relevant external agency.

## 4. Designated staff

A number of senior members of staff have designated responsibility for child protection and welfare matters within the College. Currently, the 'designated staff' are:

- Sami Cohen
- Jane Cockerill
- Mark Olejnik
- Helen Wood
- Alasdair MacPherson

The role of the 'designated staff' is to ensure that the school's policy on safeguarding children is reviewed and updated annually, to co-ordinate the procedures for child protection within the school, to ensure that staff have a clear understanding of them, to offer guidance, advice and support where needed, and to take the lead in referring cases of suspected abuse or allegations to the relevant investigating agencies according to the procedures established by the Area Child Protection Committee (ACPC) where this may be necessary.

## 5. Training

All staff have a responsibility to protect children from abuse in all its forms whenever they are in a position to do so. They should be conversant with the school's policy on safeguarding children and with the school's child protection procedures; and they should know how to access and implement them, independently if need be.

Regular training for staff in these matters is therefore very important. The College's policy, which is fully in line with current legislation, is that:

- All designated staff shall receive appropriate child protection training, and this training shall be updated every two years.
- Other staff who have direct contact with children shall receive training on issues relating to safeguarding the welfare of children and this shall be updated *at least* once every three years.
- Our current aim is, in fact, to offer refresher training to all teaching staff once a year. This will usually be done in the course of one or other of our whole-staff training days.

## 6. Staff recruitment

Our procedures for the selection and recruitment of all staff and volunteers are conducted with all due regard to safe recruitment practices, including going through all necessary checks. These are set out in full in the following College policies:

- Policy for the Handling of Criminal Records Disclosure Information
- Policy for the Employment of Ex-Offenders
- Policy for staff recruitment and CRB checking

At the present time, Alastair Barnett, the Academic Co-ordinator, is responsible for co-ordinating all staff recruitment procedures and checks at d'Overbroeck's College.

Details of our procedures for ensuring compliance with current regulations and guidance on this subject are set out in our 'Policy for staff recruitment and CRB checking'.

## 7. Dealing with disclosure

### 7.1 What to do if someone tells you that they or another child is being abused

1. **Always stop and listen straight away** to someone who wants to tell you about incidents or suspicions of abuse. Do so as neutrally as you possibly can, without displaying shock or disbelief.
2. **Write brief notes** of what they are telling you, if possible while they are speaking. Always keep your original notes, however rough. It's what you wrote at the time that may be important later. If you don't have the means to write at the time, makes notes of what was said as soon as possible afterwards.

Record the date, time, place and any noticeable non-verbal behaviour. Wherever possible, record the actual words used by the child. Record statements and observable things rather than your interpretations or assumptions.

3. **Never make a promise that you will keep what is said confidential or secret.** If you are told about abuse you have a responsibility to report it so that action can be taken. However, do your best to reassure the child that the information will be shared only with those who need to know.
4. **Do not ask leading questions** that might give your own ideas of what might have happened (of the type “Did he do x to you?”). Just ask open questions e.g. “what do you want to tell me?” Or “is there anything else you want to say?”

Do not criticise the alleged perpetrator. Do not ask the pupil to repeat his or her account for another member of staff

5. **Explain what you have to do next** and who you have to talk to.
6. **Immediately tell one of the designated members of staff** (Sami Cohen, Jane Cockerill, Mark Olejnik, Alasdair MacPherson, Helen Wood) unless they are themselves accused or suspected of abusing. Don't tell other adults or young people what you have been told.
7. **Discuss** with the designated member(s) of staff whether any steps need to be taken to protect the person who told you about the abuse.
8. **If the allegation is against a designated member of staff**  
Please see section 9 below for details of the procedure to follow in the case of an allegation against a designated member of staff.
9. **Never attempt to carry out an investigation** of suspected or alleged abuse by interviewing people etc. This should be left to Social Services and police staff who are trained to do this.
10. **Try to get some support yourself.** The designated staff should be a good source of such support.

Finally...

**Never think abuse is impossible** in your group, or that an accusation against someone you know well and trust is bound to be wrong.

## 7.2 Practical advice

### Five things to tell a child who decides to confide in a member of staff

- 1) ‘What you are saying to me is important and I will treat it as such.’
- 2) ‘It's not your fault.’ (A child can never be held responsible for abuse received at the hands of others.)
- 3) ‘I'm glad you were able to tell me/someone.’
- 4) ‘I will help you as best I can.’
- 5) ‘This is so important I need to talk to someone about it.’

## **Recording**

- Make any records at the time - while listening if possible – otherwise as soon as possible afterwards. Remember always to keep your original notes, however rough they may be.
- Ensure records are clear and legible and as full as possible; record: date, time, place, what was seen or heard, persons present; what action was taken and by whom. Also note the emotional state the child was in.
- Records should be stored securely and confidentially.

## **To report or not to report**

It can be very difficult to know when to report / refer and when not to, especially with what may appear to be minor issues – for fear that one may be acting too soon, that one is wrong, or that one might be responsible for breaking up a family.

However, even minor concerns may have an unexpected significance when taken in the context of further information and circumstances of which others may be aware. It is, therefore, important to discuss even vague concerns with one of the designated members of staff for guidance and advice on whether a referral needs to be made.

The consequences of not reporting your suspicion if a child has been abused could be far more serious than making a report that proves to be unfounded.

## **8. Informing parents**

How, when and by whom this is best done (after a referral is made to the relevant child protection agency) should be discussed with the responsible person at that agency and a course of action determined in conjunction with him/her.

## **9. Allegations against staff**

9.1 - An allegation of abuse made against a member of staff should, and will, always be treated with the greatest care. Our response needs to be considered and sensitive to all parties. It must aim to strike a balance between the need to protect children from abuse on the one hand, and the need to protect staff from false or unfounded accusations on the other.

9.2- An allegation may be received in one of various ways: it may be a direct complaint made by a pupil or a parent to another member of staff or directly to a relevant external agency; it may come from another party that may have been told about or witnessed abuse; or it may come as an anonymous referral.

9.3 - If a member of staff is informed about a possible allegation, s/he should immediately report the matter to the Principal or, if appropriate, to the Head of Leckford Place or to the ISC Director. Any allegations made to the Head of Leckford Place or to the ISC Director will be referred by them to the Principal of d'Overbroeck's College immediately so a joint response can be formulated.

9.4 - If the allegation is against one of the staff with designated responsibility for child protection, but not against the Principal himself, then it needs to be reported as soon as possible to the Principal.

If the latter is absent, then the allegation must be reported without delay to the Chairman of the College's Governing Body whose contact details are given in the final section of this policy.

9.5 - If this allegation is against the Principal, then you should report it directly to the Chairman of the Governing Body (see the final section of this document for his contact details) without informing the Principal first.

9.6 - If the Chairman of the Governing Body can't be contacted immediately, then the allegation should be reported to the Oxfordshire County Council Children, Young People and Families Safeguarding Team (tel: 01865 815956 / 815186) or, if they are unavailable, the Oxford City Assessment Team (tel: 01865 323048). Out of office hours, you may contact the Emergency Duty Team on 0800 833408.

### **9.7 What happens next?**

Each situation must be assessed on its own merit and with due regard to the welfare of the child in question. Suspension of the member of staff concerned should not be an automatic response.

The pupil concerned should not be left alone or with other children until there has been consultation with the Lead Officer for Child Protection and a course of action agreed with them, including on the appropriateness of the child remaining in school.

Under no circumstances should the school's senior management conduct its own investigation before agreement is reached with the Lead Officer for Child Protection.

### **9.8 – Action to be undertaken by the school**

If the allegation is not patently false and there is cause to suspect that a child is suffering or is likely to suffer significant harm, then the Principal will make contact with the relevant child protection agency to discuss the situation, seek advice and agree a course of action.

If, after initial consideration and discussion with the relevant agencies, it is concluded that the allegation does not involve a possible criminal offence, it will be for the College to deal with it. This should be done quickly and with due regard to the College's disciplinary procedures as and where appropriate. DCSF guidance (November 2005) recommends that: "if the nature of the allegation does not require formal disciplinary action, the Head teacher should institute appropriate action within 3 working days. If a disciplinary hearing is required and can be held without further investigation, the hearing should be held within 15 working days."

Where further investigation is required to inform consideration of disciplinary action, then the advice of the relevant agency should be sought on how such an investigation should be carried out, and by whom. In some settings and circumstances, it may be appropriate for the disciplinary investigation to be conducted by a person who is independent of the school.

### **9.9 - Suspension**

The possible risk of harm to the child needs to be effectively evaluated and managed, both in respect of the child involved in the allegations and of any other children who may be directly or indirectly involved. In some cases, this will lead the school to consider suspending the person until the case is resolved.

Suspension will be considered in any case where there is cause to suspect a child is at risk of significant harm, or the allegation warrants investigation by the police, or is so serious that it might be grounds for dismissal.

However, a member of staff should clearly not be suspended automatically or without very careful thought. In such circumstances, we would aim to weigh up as fully as possible whether the circumstances of the case as they are known to us at the time warrant a suspension. In most cases, we would also seek the advice of the relevant external agency before reaching a decision.

#### **9.10 – Suspension of boarding staff**

If a member of boarding staff is suspended pending an investigation of a child protection nature, then the College will make arrangements for the member of staff concerned to be housed away from the boarding house such that s/he will have no direct contact with students until the matter is resolved.

#### **9.11 – False allegations**

If an allegation is determined to be false, the Principal will refer the matter to the Oxfordshire County Council Children, Young People and Families Safeguarding Team to determine whether the child concerned is in need of services or may have been abused by someone else.

In the rare event that an allegation is shown to have been deliberately invented or malicious, the Principal should consider whether any disciplinary action is appropriate against the pupil who made it, or, if the person concerned was not a student, whether the police should be asked to consider if any action might be appropriate.

#### **9.12 - Reporting staff departures to the ISA**

The College is under a strict obligation, in common with all other schools in the UK, to report to the Independent Safeguarding Authority (ISA), within one month of their leaving the College, any person, whether employed, contracted, a volunteer or a student, whose services are no longer required because s/he is considered unsuitable for work with children. This would include instances of dismissal or non-renewal of a fixed-term contract; instances where the school is unwilling to engage a supply teacher provided by an employment agency; the termination of the placement of a student teacher or other trainee; no longer using staff employed by contractors; no longer using volunteers; and resignation or voluntary withdrawal from supply teaching, contract working, a teacher training course or volunteering.

#### **The ISA's address for referrals is as follows:**

The Independent Safeguarding Authority  
PO Box 181  
Darlington  
DL1 9FA

#### **10. Confidentiality of child protection records**

Child protection records must be kept secure and confidential, separately from other school records. They are made available to other staff only on a 'need to know' basis.

### **11. Family members**

If we become aware that a member of a child's household may have been guilty of child abuse in the past, then the relevant child protection agency will be informed. It must not be assumed that they already have knowledge of this.

### **12. Whistleblowing**

A member of staff or a student reporting a child protection issue, allegation or concern will suffer no adverse consequences whatever, regardless of the status of the person against whom the allegation was made and of whether the allegation or concern prove founded over time, provided the report was made in good faith.

### **13. Contact details for the Chairman of the College's Governing Body**

James Noel  
25 Broomhouse Road  
London SW6 3QU

Tel: + 44 (0 )20 7736 5492

\*

Policy last reviewed: August 2009