

St. Columba's College Stranorlar



Substance Use Alcohol, Tobacco, Volatile Substances & Illegal Drugs Policy

March 2023

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1. St. Columba's College Mission Statement

St. Columba's College is a Catholic Voluntary Secondary School in the trusteeship of CEIST and is committed to the pursuit of excellence in a caring environment.

The policy is part of a general pastoral approach being adopted by the school to ensure a healthy, caring and supportive learning environment. The Substance Use policy is one among many that serve to incarnate the school's ethos.

The school asserts its right to protect and promote its particular ethos by requiring certain standards of behaviour and prohibiting certain practices. The school does not accept or tolerate the possession, use, supply of, or organisation of supply of banned or prohibited and/or drug paraphernalia by any student in the school, on school trips and outings, or during any school-related activity.

Parents of students taking prescribed medication should inform the school in writing of that fact. (Please see Administration of Medicines Policy)

2. Goals and Objectives of Substance Use Policy

The goals and objectives of this policy are:

- to provide a comprehensive programme of education for all students in substance use issues
- to equip the school to deal with issues relating to substance use in a planned and considered way and in accordance with its statutory responsibilities
- to reinforce the role of the school in contributing to local and national strategies in relation to substance use education & prevention
- to minimise the dangers caused to young people by substance misuse within schools/communities
- to manage incidents of substance misuse in a clear and consistent manner
- to support parents and pupils in understanding and addressing substance misuse

3. Rationale

The world in which we live presents young people with many challenges that affect their health and well-being. Exposure to alcohol, tobacco/vapes and drugs is part of this reality. Schools

need to reflect upon how they might provide for the needs of their students in this regard and how they might respond to issues appropriately that can be both sensitive and emotive.

The Education Act, 1998 provides that schools should promote the social and personal development of students and provide health education for them. The most recent National Drug Strategy, “Reducing harm, supporting recovery: a health led approach to drug & alcohol use in Ireland” (2017-2025), sets out a detailed programme of action to combat the problem of substance misuse in society in Ireland. The strategy document, which is government policy, highlights the important contribution that schools can make in the area of education and prevention and require that a substance use policy be put in place.

Section IV of the Rules and Programme for Secondary Schools states that all schools should be actively engaged in the process of developing and agreeing a Substance Use Policy in line with Action 43 of the National Drugs Strategy and Circular 18/02.

St. Columba’s College considering the above requirements, has designed a policy and a programme for substance use and misuse that suits the needs of our school with a particular focus on our own mission statement and school ethos.

The prevalence of tobacco, vapes, alcohol, and drug misuse is a serious issue and challenges the school community in its role as an important social partner in providing drug awareness and education.

The Board recognises and accepts the seriousness of various research findings regarding the problems associated with the misuse of substances including alcohol, tobacco and other drugs.

4. Scope of this policy

4.1 To what substances does this policy apply?

The term ‘substance’ will be interpreted in a broad sense to include alcohol, tobacco, vapes, legal/illegal drugs and any other dangerous substances, which may in themselves not be unlawful such as glue, aerosols over-the-counter pain medication such as paracetamol, etc.

Note: medication, which has been prescribed by a medical person for a student, should only be taken by that student.

4.2 To whom will the policy apply?

This policy addresses substance use issues mainly in respect of students. However, it also applies to all people employed by the school.

4.3 When will the policy apply?

This policy is in effect during school time (including break times), and at all school related events such as team training, sporting events, international/national school tours, day trips etc...

5. Educational measures relating to substance use

5.1 Subject-based learning in a classroom setting

- Social Personal and Health Education (S.P.H.E.).
- Relationship and Sexuality Education (R.S.E.)
- Leaving Certificate Applied (L.C.A.) Social Education module
- Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (L.C.V.P.) Link Modules
- The school's Religious Education (R.E.) programme at Senior Cycle
- Leaving Certificate English, French, Spanish, German and Irish in preparation for oral examinations and opinion questions
- Leaving Certificate Economics in understanding the social and economic effects of substance abuse on the state
- Classroom rules for subjects using certain dangerous substances such as Construction Studies, Science, Chemistry, Art etc
- Wellbeing programme - Know the Score – Ireland's first national evidence based resources on alcohol & drugs for Senior Cycle for 15-18yrs
<https://www.hse.ie/eng/about/who/healthwellbeing/hse-education-programme/training-and-resources-for-post-primary-school-teachers/know-the-score-substance-use-resource-materials-sphe.pdf>

5.2. Visiting speakers

While the DES Guidelines on external facilitators state that 'the qualified classroom teacher is the best placed professional to work sensitively and consistently with students and she/he can have a powerful impact on influencing students' attitudes, values, and behaviour in all aspects of wellbeing education', it is important to draw on external resources from time to time. All guest speakers/external agencies to the school are approved by the principal and are

undertaken in the presence of a teacher. Guest speakers and/or external agencies are made aware of the school ethos and are asked to ensure that the material is age appropriate. The programme must be provided in line with this ethos.

From time to time, the school, a subject department, and/or an individual teacher may invite a group or guest speaker to address issues relating to substance use. Such groups will deliver a talk or will organise an activity to support the school and its students in creating awareness of the dangers of substance use. Some examples of external agencies/guest speakers are listed below:

- An Garda Síochána
- Donegal Youth Service
- HSE Drug and Alcohol Service
- Alcohol Forum
- Foroige Drug and Alcohol worker
- Jigsaw
- Pieta House

5.3 Pastoral Care in support of substance use and hidden harm

This includes:

- 1:1 support through the school pastoral care / counseling
- Referral / engagement to Foroige (parental consent)
- Referral / guidance from HSE Drug & Alcohol service – (parental consent for under 16)

5.4 Communication and/or support via:

- Weekly assemblies
- Year Head and Tutor system
- Student Support meetings
- Guidance and counselling services
- Extra-curricular activities

6. Management of substance use related incidents

The school offers a range of educational and preventative measures relating to substance use/misuse. From time to time, incidents of substance use/misuse may occur. A student who is found to be engaging in substance use/misuse will be referred to a Principal/Deputy Principal.

Incidents involving alcohol, tobacco and drug use might include:

- Use or suspected use of alcohol, drugs, tobacco, vapes or other dangerous substances on the school premises or during a school related activity
- Possession or supply of the above substances and/or associated paraphernalia on the school premises or during a school related activity
- Disclosure about the use of the above substances
- Hidden harm - the term used when a child or young person is subjected to harm because of someone else's drinking or drug use. This could be parental, sibling or even peers. All who are subjected to parental drug or alcohol misuse need to feel safe and need to be able to report this freely to get the support that they need.

This policy is to be read in conjunction with the school's Code of Behaviour in its entirety. Specifically related to this topic it states that:

- students will agree not to smoke or vape anywhere on the premises and in particular in the toilets. Smoking and Vaping in the toilets represents a serious health and safety issue. It interferes with the fire alarm, which is an offense and students who vape in the toilets are preventing others from using the facilities. To ensure the smooth running of the school, students who persist in congregating in the toilets will be subject to the Code of the Behaviour
- students will agree not to bring any prohibited substances such as drugs, alcohol, tobacco and vapes into the school
- smoking and vaping on the school premises is illegal and prohibited
- smoking and vaping seriously damages health
- banned/prohibited substances pose a risk to the health and safety of all

7. Procedures for Managing Substance Abuse Incidents

7.1 School Management and the Investigation of an Abuse Incident

In the event of an abuse incident, the 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 the reputation of the school.

In the interests of students' safety and wellbeing, the school reserves the right to investigate thoroughly suspicions of possession of, and/or use of substances (including alcohol and/or other drugs), in school or at school events/outings. A student found to be in possession of, and/or under the influence of any such substances may be subject to immediate suspension. For a very serious breach of the Code of Behaviour regarding the possession, sale or consumption of an illicit drug in the college, the matter may be referred to the Board of Management to consider sanctions up to and including expulsion.

7.2 Right to suspend pending investigation

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 student involved in a suspected abuse incident pending a further and complete investigation of the incident.

7.3 Incident Report

An Abuse Incident Report will be kept.

7.4 Investigation

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.

7.5 Concerns in relation to illegal/banned substances

The school will isolate any suspected banned or prohibited substances and drug paraphernalia associated with an abuse incident, carefully recording all such items and retaining them until parents/Gardai are present. Where Gardai are called to an incident, the school will take advice on how the situation on suspected substances may be dealt with.

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.

7.6 The Involvement and roles of various parties in the event of a substance related incident

7.6.1 The Role of the Principal

The Principal or his delegate is the person responsible for all matters relating to this area. He may nominate the Deputy Principal or Year Head or other nominated staff to act on his behalf in the investigation of a substance abuse incident.

The duties and responsibilities of the Principal (hereafter to be understood as meaning the Principal or his 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 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 the secure and confidential storage of any written documentation and records associated with an incident
- The Principal is responsible for isolating 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 and /or any staff member conducting an incident investigation

7.6.2 Duty of Staff

The Board of Management requires all staff to report immediately to the principal any incidents where:

- students/employees/visitors encounter the use /suspected use of alcohol drugs on the school premises in the school grounds or during a school related activity
- Exhibit symptoms/behaviour that may suggest the use of alcohol/drugs
- Are involved or are suspected of being involved in the distribution, purchase or use of alcohol/drugs
- Discover suspect substances /paraphernalia in the school

- The school personnel will seek to establish the facts and to be clear about the nature of the incident before deciding on a course of action. There will be no assumption of guilt at this stage
- The student should not be confronted openly before his/her peers. There should be no assumption of guilt regarding substance misuse/ abuse, as there are a variety of conditions, which might mimic the suspected misuse of substances. The possession of tablets might be for medicinal use
- The teacher is entitled to request the surrender of a suspicious substance or paraphernalia
- This should be handed over without fuss. The teacher should not seek to search the pupil or his/her possessions. Where there is a refusal to co-operate the pupil should be brought to the Deputy Principal/Principal whose responsibility it is to proceed with the matter
- On Health and Safety grounds the Principal / Deputy Principal can request the student in question to surrender the suspicious substance and to cooperate in revealing the contents of bags, clothing and personal possessions if necessary
- In the case of lack of cooperation from the student, the parents should be informed of the situation and that the Gardai may also have to be notified. The student's bags and personal property should be isolated until the parents/Gardai arrive
- St. Columba's College reserves the right to search school property including lockers and toilets at any time
- The Principal /Deputy Principal will recognise that the Health and Safety and the wellbeing of the student/students are paramount and will seek medical aid if deemed necessary. The student will be provided with the appropriate guidance and support they need
- A student may be asked to provide a medical certificate to indicate they are drugs free and are not a threat to Health and Safety before they return to school

7.7 Record of Incident

The school will maintain a written record of all stages of the investigation of an 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.

7.8 Outside Authority Involvement

The school, at its own discretion, will liaise with any appropriate outside authority and seek advice or assistance as it deems appropriate in relation to its investigation of an incident.

7.9 Keeping Parties Informed

If the circumstances merit and the investigation is continuing, the school will provide full particulars of the incident to the students concerned and their parents as per the college Code of Behaviour.

8. Disciplinary Procedures and Sanctions

In relation to a verified and investigated incident, the Principal/Board of Management may implement disciplinary actions or sanctions as per the college Code of Behaviour.

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 asserts the right to exercise an appropriate show of mercy. For serious incidents of substance use, sanctions up to and including expulsion may be considered. (Please refer to our school's Code of Behaviour for more detailed information on sanctions, the ladder of referral, suspensions, expulsions, and appeals).

9. Confidentiality

If a teacher becomes aware that a student is (or may be) at risk, the school's Designated Liaison Person (D.L.P) should be notified immediately. It is important that students are made aware of the limits of confidentiality. The wellbeing and welfare of the teacher and of the student must

be the primary focus. The school recognises the importance of limiting, as far as is practicable, the number of people involved in investigating and managing an abuse incident and that it is the aim of the school only to involve those properly concerned with an incident. However, it should ensure that students and their parents accept that:

- The duty 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 in a given situation to contact, as appropriate, such authorities as the Gardaí, Health Board, Probation Service, or Officers of the Courts
- The school may need to engage the 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 DES guidelines

The school

- Will not comment on any individual matter when an investigation is in progress
- 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

10. Training and staff development relating to substance use

In relation to staff, the school will provide information and training for staff in relation to alcohol, tobacco, and drugs and specific training on the role of staff in relation to the management and investigation of an abuse incident. The school facilitates (through P.D.S.T. or other approved organisations) training for staff involved in the teaching of S.P.H.E.

Management are committed to upholding our Child Protection responsibilities and the

appropriate training and certification is offered to staff. Fetac Level 5 First Aid training courses and updates are also offered to staff regularly.

SAOR (Support, Ask, Offer, Refer) is now available on-line from the HSE. It is an evidenced based brief intervention for alcohol & other drug use. This training is suitable for teachers, coaches etc.

11. Other relevant policies

Our School Code of Behaviour, Administration of Medicines and Child Protection Safeguarding Statement may also contain important information regarding this policy. Please also familiarise yourself with these school policies.

12. Monitoring, Reviewing and Evaluation of Substance Abuse Policy

This policy was drafted by the policy co-ordinator in conjunction with the Principal. This policy was then sent to staff who had the opportunity to add any relevant information (including S.P.H.E. teaching staff, the school Care Team, Programmes Co-ordinator, sports coaches, and the school Guidance Counsellors). It was also shared with the Parents' Council and Students' Council before presenting to the Board of Management for adoption.

In relation to **Parents & the Board of Management**, the school:

- Will provide opportunities to attend information sessions in relation to drugs.
- Will provide appropriate information, to the board regarding issues relating to investigation of and adjudication on incident investigations.

In relation to the **students** the school will:

- Offer all students programmes relating to alcohol, tobacco, and drug education within the context of the Junior Cycle and Leaving Certificate programmes.

We are committed to evaluating the effectiveness of this policy. Specifically, important to that process is:

- Student feedback
- Staff feedback
- Parental feedback

Ongoing Review

The school will monitor, evaluate and review the policy and all related work and procedures to ensure legal compliance and the maintenance of best practices.

The Substance Use will be reviewed on a regular basis by the Board of Management, staff, parents and the student body.

This policy was formally adopted by the Board of Management on 13th March 2023.

Signature: P. J. McGowan
(Chairperson, St. Columba's Board of Management)

Date: 13/3/23

Signature: S. Ryan
(Principal)

Date: 13/3/2023

Date for Review: **By December 2025**

Appendix of Definitions

The School

The “School” includes school buildings, grounds, play areas, public areas where students congregate coming to and going from school and any other specific area that might apply. Any behaviour outside school that damages the school, interferes with its workings, is detrimental to other students, or undermines school discipline and good order is subject to the school’s sanction.

Banned or Prohibited Substances

This includes all substances covered by the Misuse of Drugs Act, non-validated prescription medication, all alcohol, and tobaccos as well as vaping substances 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 should include 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 material, printed material or material in electronic form promoting the use of illicit substances.

An Abuse Incident

This is any incident relating to banned or 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, of other students, or to the policies or reputation of the School. It should also state that 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

For the purposes of the policy, parents include natural parents, foster parents, step parents, or guardian of 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

In the policy, reference to the Principal should be taken to mean the principal defined in the Education (Welfare) Act 2000 or the deputy principal where the principal is either unavailable or has delegated to the deputy principal.