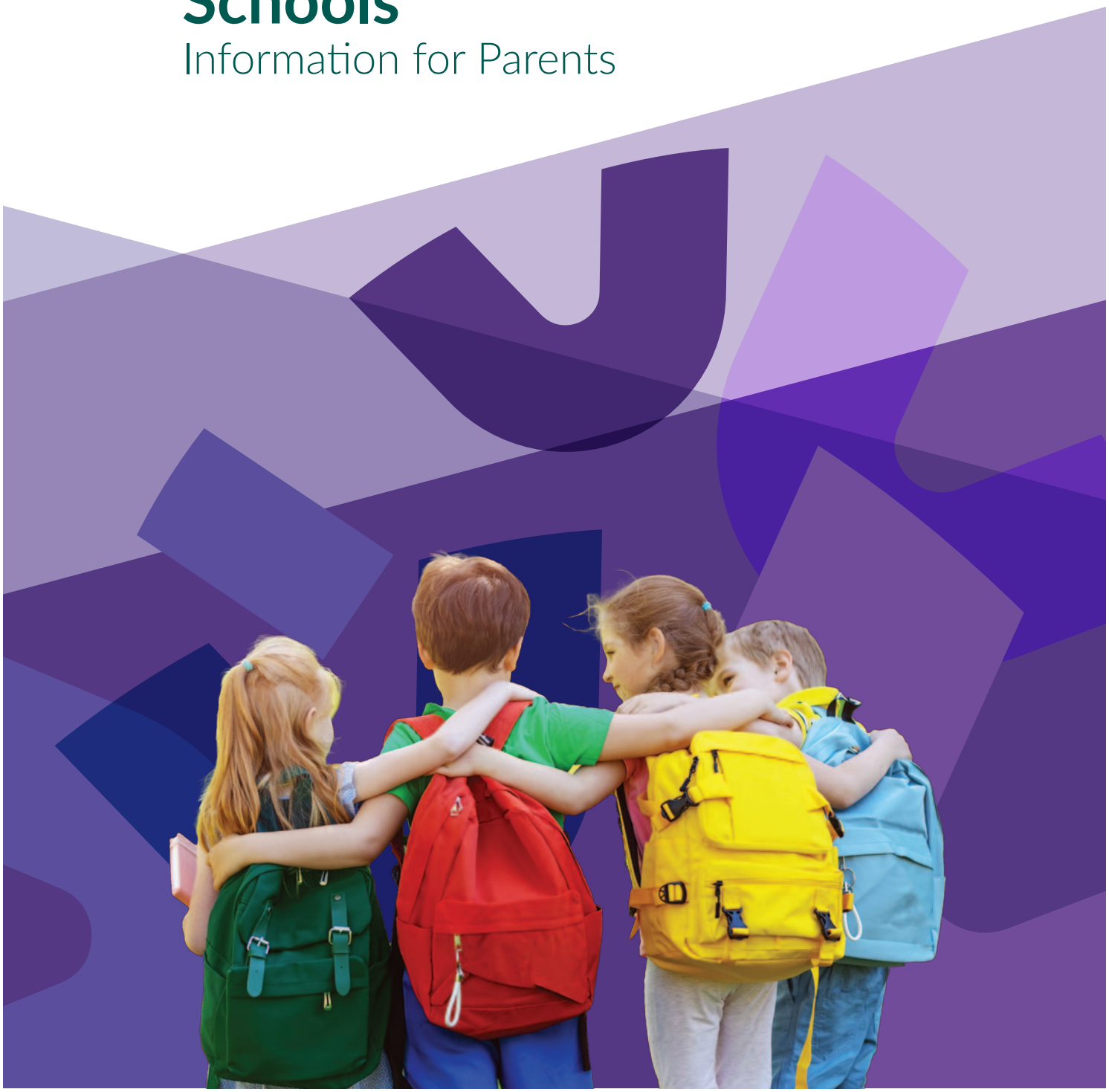
An Roinn Oideachais
agus Óige
Department of Education
and Youth

Understanding Child Protection Procedures in Schools

Information for Parents



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Introduction

The Department of Education and Youth takes child protection very seriously. Keeping children safe and well is one of the most important responsibilities for everyone involved in their care and education.

This document has been developed to help you understand how child protection concerns are dealt with in schools.

In this leaflet 'parent' means the person or people who have the main responsibility for a child's care and welfare – this can include biological parents, foster carers, legal guardians, adults acting in place of a parent (in loco parentis) and adoptive parents.

Child Protection Procedures for Schools 2025

The new Child Protection Procedures for Schools 2025 were published in May 2025. They explain what school management and staff need to do if they have concerns that a child is being abused or neglected or is at risk of being abused or neglected. You can read the procedures here: gov.ie/en/department-of-education/policy-information/child-protection-procedures-in-schools/#child-protection-procedures-2025-and-supports-for-schools

They are based on the Children First Act 2015 and the Children First guidance (2017).

The Children First Act 2015 and the Children First National Guidance (2017) are the main documents detailing individual and organisational legal and best practice responsibilities in relation to child protection and welfare in Ireland. There is more information available on them on the Tusla website: tusla.ie

Are these the first Child Protection Procedures for Schools?

No, these procedures build on the procedures that were already in place in schools. Previous procedures were published in 2017 and 2023. All schools must adopt the 2025 procedures by 31 December 2026 (they may adopt them earlier).

1. What is a Child Protection Concern (CPC)?

A person has a child protection concern when they have reasonable grounds for concern that a child has been, is being, or is at risk of being abused or neglected.

What is a reasonable ground for concern?

There are a number of things that can lead to reasonable grounds for concern. These include:

- An injury or behaviour that is consistent with abuse and is not likely to have been caused in any other way.
- Any concern about possible sexual abuse.
- Consistent signs that a child is suffering from emotional or physical neglect.
- A child saying or indicating by other means that they have been abused.
- Admission or indication by an adult or a child of an alleged abuse they committed.
- An account from a person who saw the child being abused.

What is Abuse?

There are four main types of abuse: neglect, emotional abuse, physical abuse and sexual abuse. The sections below give an overview of these types of abuse. For more detail, please see Children First: National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children (2017).

The descriptions below of abuse have been summarised. For the exact definitions it is important to read the Children First National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children.

What is Neglect?

Neglect happens when a child doesn't get enough care or supervision, leading to harm or problems in their growth and development.

Neglect is usually described as a lack of care – where a child's health, development or welfare is harmed because they are not given enough food, clothing, warmth, hygiene, medical care, mental stimulation, supervision or safety.

What is Physical Abuse?

Physical abuse is when someone deliberately hurts a child physically or puts them at risk of being physically hurt.

Physical abuse may be a single incident or may be a pattern of incidents.

What is Emotional Abuse?

Emotional abuse is when someone repeatedly mistreats a child in ways that damage their emotional or mental wellbeing.

Emotional abuse occurs when a child's basic needs for attention, affection, approval,consistency and security are not met because their parent or carer is not able or not willing to meet them.

Emotional abuse can also happen when adults don't understand or can't meet a child's emotional and developmental needs.

Emotional abuse is not always easy to recognise because its effects are not always obvious.

What is Sexual Abuse?

Sexual abuse occurs when a child is used by another person for his or her gratification or arousal, or for that of others.

When should a Child Protection Concern (CPC) be reported?

Anyone who has reasonable grounds for concern should report the concern to Tusla – the Child and Family Agency. Tusla is the lead agency with responsibility for child protection and welfare in Ireland.

If signs of abuse are ignored, the child may suffer ongoing harm.

A person who is reporting does not need proof that abuse has occurred – all that is required is reasonable grounds for concern.

2. Child Protection Procedures in Schools

Roles and Responsibilities

What are the responsibilities of school personnel?

School personnel are in a good position to notice changes in a child's behaviour, delays in development, or signs that they may have been harmed.

If a member of school personnel is worried that a child has been, is being, or could be abused or neglected, they must report their concern to the Designated Liaison Person (DLP).

Who is the Designated Liaison Person (DLP) and what is their role?

The Designated Liaison Person is usually the principal of the school, but sometimes another senior member of staff may take on this role.

The DLP makes sure that the school's child protection procedures are followed properly. The DLP is also the main point of contact for child protection concerns.

If the Designated Liaison Person is not available, another person (teacher, chaplain, counsellor) will take on this responsibility. This person is called the Deputy Designated Liaison Person (DDLP) and is usually the deputy principal.

Who are mandated persons?

Mandated persons are people who have contact with children and/or families and, because of their training and experience, are in a strong position to help keep children safe from harm. They include professionals such as teachers, doctors, nurses, social workers, youth workers, and others who work in education, health, justice, or childcare.

Mandated persons have a legal duty to report to Tusla if they are concerned that a child has been, is being, or may be harmed. This is called a mandated report.

Registered teachers are mandated persons. There may also be other mandated persons in the school, such as nurses, counsellors or chaplains.

Tusla has more information about mandated persons in their leaflet: Information for Parents and Guardians on Mandated Persons leaflet.

How do I find out the names of the Designated Liaison Person and Deputy Designated Liaison Person?

A document called the Child Safeguarding Statement is available at the school. It is usually on display near the main entrance to the school.

This statement includes the names and contact details for the Designated Liaison Person and the Deputy Designated Liaison Person. It should also be available on the school's website.

If you are not sure who this is, you can ask any member of school personnel and they will tell you.

What happens if the Designated Liaison Person and Deputy Designated Liaison Person are not available?

If the Designated Liaison Person or the Deputy Designated Liaison Person are not available, you can contact the chairperson of the board of management. In an Education Training Board (ETB) school, you can contact the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) or their nominee. That person will ensure the correct child protection procedures are followed.

If you are not sure who this person is, you can ask any member of school personnel, and they will tell you.

What is the role of the board of management?

The board of management is responsible for making sure that the school is a safe place for all children. They oversee and make sure that the school's child protection procedures are fully implemented.

Have the staff in the school been trained on the child protection procedures?

Yes, the Designated Liaison Person and Deputy Designated Liaison Person received specific training for their role. Whole-school training is being provided to schools in 2025 and 2026. Your school will close for the day, so that all staff can take part in the training.

What is the role of Tusla?

Tusla is the national agency with lead responsibility for child protection and welfare. It safeguards children who are not receiving adequate care and protection, or who may be at risk of not receiving adequate care. It also provides services to support families.

When a child protection concern is reported, Tusla looks at the information carefully, together with any other relevant information. If there appears to be a child safeguarding risk to a child, Tusla will carry out a child protection assessment. You can get more information about Tusla and its role from the Tusla website.

3. When there is a Child Protection Concern (CPC)

What happens if someone in the school has a concern about my child?

If someone in the school has a child protection concern about your child they must follow the steps in the child protection procedures. The key thing is that they must tell the Designated Liaison Person as soon as possible.

Does the school have to tell me if there is a Child Protection Concern (CPC) about my child?

In most cases, the school will tell you if there is a child protection concern about your child. The Designated Liaison Person should tell you when a child protection concern arises in relation to your child **as soon as they can** after they become aware of the concern.

The Designated Liaison Person may contact you by phone, in person, or in writing.

When the Designated Liaison Person tells you about the child protection concern, they will need to follow the child protection procedures for schools. They may not be able to share all the details with you because of other procedures such as disciplinary actions and the need to maintain confidentiality.

Are there times when the school does not have to let me know that a Child Protection Concern (CPC) has been raised in relation to my child?

Yes. There are some situations where parents are not told straight away. According to Children First: National Guidance 2017, this can happen if:

- telling you would place the child at further risk;
- knowing about the report could affect Tusla's ability to carry out a proper risk assessment; or
- the person making the report believes that telling you could put them at risk of harm.

Sometimes Tusla may advise the Designated Liaison Person not to inform parents. In that case, the Designated Liaison Person must follow Tusla's advice.

What happens next?

The Designated Liaison Person will decide if there are reasonable grounds for concern that your child may have been, is being, or is at risk of being abused or neglected.

If there are reasonable grounds for concern, the Designated Liaison Person will report the issue to Tusla.

If there are no reasonable grounds for concern, the Designated Liaison Person will not report the issue to Tusla.

If the Designated Liaison Person is not sure if there are reasonable grounds for concern, they will seek advice from from Tusla. A record of this enquiry is kept by the school.

Will the Designated Liaison Person let me know what is happening with the child protection concern?

Yes. The Designated Liaison Person may write to you again to explain what actions the school has taken regarding the concern. This could be to let you know that:

- the matter has been reported to Tusla; or
- Tusla was asked for advice and based on that advice, the matter was not reported; or
- the concern did not meet the threshold for reporting to Tusla, and the reasons for that decision.

The letter will also remind you that you can contact Tusla directly about the matter if you wish. Tusla is responsible for sharing information about its processes.

Will the Designated Liaison Person share my child's concern with anyone else in the school?

Any information about a child protection concern should only be shared where a person has a role in dealing with the issue. Sharing the information should also only be done in the best interests of the child. Other than in those situations, the DLP will not tell other people about the concern.

The Board of Management of the school has a role in oversight of the child protection procedures for schools, which means that they sometimes examine details of child protection concerns that have been brought to the attention of staff. However, in this case, all the identifying details are removed, so that the identity of your child would not be revealed to the Board of Management while they undertake their oversight role. However, if the matter is an allegation against a member of staff, the employer would be informed.

As part of its role in monitoring how schools implement these procedures, inspectors from the Department of Education and Youth may sometime view individual files kept by the school. All information in the files will be kept confidential.

In cases of sexual abuse or serious physical abuse, the school may contact An Garda Síochána and report a concern to them. An Garda Síochána are responsible for investigating any potential crime.

What if I have a Child Protection Concern (CPC)?

If I have a child protection concern about my child or another child, how do I report it?

You can report a child protection concern directly to Tusla through the Dedicated Contact Point for your area. You can find the contact details here. In certain cases you can also contact An Garda Síochána on their confidential line 1800 666 111 or on their Child Sexual Abuse line 1850 555 222.

What if I have a concern about an adult who might cause a risk to children?

If you have a concern about an adult who might pose a risk to children, even if you do not know if there is a specific child at risk, you can still report this to Tusla.

When should I contact An Garda Síochána?

- Immediate Danger: If a child is in immediate danger and Tusla (the Child and Family Agency) cannot be reached, contact An Garda Síochána immediately.
- Suspected Criminal Offence: Contact the Gardaí if you believe a crime has been committed against a child. This includes:
  - Sexual abuse: Any criminal aspect of a sexual abuse case.
  - Physical abuse/assault: This includes physical violence or threats that escalate from bullying.
  - Withholding information: It is a criminal offence for anyone, including a parent, to knowingly withhold information about a serious crime against a child.
- Retrospective Abuse: If you are an adult who experienced abuse as a child and wish to have it investigated, you can contact An Garda Síochána directly. You can reach the Garda National Protective Services Bureau, your local Garda station, or the Garda Confidential Line on 1800 666 111.

How do I report directly to Tusla?

You can report a child protection concern in person, by phone, or in writing to the dedicated contact point for the area where the child lives. Contact information for Tusla's dedicated contact point is available online at tusla.ie/services/child-protection-welfare/contact-a-social-worker/

What if I raise a Child Protection Concern (CPC) with the school?

You can raise a child protection concern directly with the school where the concern is about a child in the school or relates to a student in the school, while they are in the care of the school or participating in a school related event. However, you may also wish to report it to Tusla.

If you are raising a child protection concern with the school, it is best to tell the Designated Liaison person. However, you can tell any member of school personnel. If you tell a member of school personnel, they must pass the concern straight away to the Designated Liaison Person.

If your concern is about a member of school personnel, you should go directly to the Designated Liaison Person yourself. If your concern is about the Designated Liaison Person, you can report it to the chairperson of the board of management. In an Education Training Board school, you can report it to the Chief Executive Officer or their nominee."

What happens if I raise a Child Protection Concern (CPC) with the school that is about a member of school personnel?

If your concern is about a member of school personnel, you should bring it to the Designated Liaison Person. The child protection procedures for schools set out the exact steps the Designated Liaison Person must follow. If your concern is about the Designated Liaison Person, you can report it to the chairperson of the board of management. In an Education Training Board school, you can report it to the Chief Executive Officer or their nominee. In such cases they shall assume the role normally undertaken by the Designated Liaison Person and follow the reporting procedures.

Within five school days of you bringing the concern to their attention, the Designated Liaison Person will let you know that either:

- The matter has been reported to Tusla.
- Tusla was asked for advice and based on that advice, the matter was not reported.
- The concern did not meet the threshold for reporting to Tusla, and the reasons for that decision.

You will also be reminded that you can contact Tusla directly about the concern if you wish.

Because of other procedures, such as disciplinary processes and the need to keep certain matters confidential, the Designated Liaison Person may not be able to share every detail with you.

What if I tell the school of a concern about a child in the school that is not my own child?

You can tell the school if you have a concern about a child in the school that is not your own child. You should also consider reporting the concern to Tusla. The DLP does not have to give you an update on what has happened but will usually let you know that they have received the concern and will follow the child protection procedures.

What should I do if I am not happy with the school's response?

If you are unhappy with the schools response and think there is still a child protection concern, you may contact Tusla directly.

What if I do not hear anything back from the school?

If you have not received a written reply from the Designated Liaison Person within five school days, you can raise the matter directly with them again.

If, after doing this, you still do not receive a written reply within another five school days, you can contact the chairperson of the board of management to let them know.

What happens if I contact the chairperson of the board of management?

If you contact the chairperson of the board of management because you have not received a written reply about your child protection concern the board will require the Designated Liaison Person to make sure you receive a written reply within ten school days of the chairperson receiving your request.

What if the Child Protection Concern (CPC) is about the Designated Liaison Person?

If your concern is about the Designated Liaison Person, you can report it to the chairperson of the board of management. In an Education Training Board school, you can report it to the Chief Executive Officer or their nominee.

You may also wish to report the concern directly to Tusla at the same time.

What happens when a Child Protection Concern (CPC) report has been received by Tusla?

When Tusla receives a report, the information is reviewed. They may then carry out further enquiries and an assessment to decide whether the child needs protection or whether the child and family need support.

Tusla will often speak with both parents and children. Tusla may also work with An Garda Síochána as they also have child protection responsibilities under Children First Act 2015 and the Children First: National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children (2017).

Tusla has produced a short video that explains what happens when it receives a report. You can view it here: tusla.ie/children-first/organisations/what-happens-after-i-report-to-tusla/

What if I am unhappy with Tusla's response?

If you wish to give feedback or make a complaint, you can contact:

E: tellus@tusla.ie **P**: 01 771 8500 (Call 9am to 5pm Monday to Friday)

portal.tusla.ie/feedback

Can I contact the Department of Education and Youth if I am not happy with how the school handled the Child Protection Concern (CPC)?

The Department of Education and Youth does not have the authority to investigate child protection concerns. If you have a specific child protection concern, you should contact Tusla.

If staff in the department receive any child protection concern, they immediately pass it on to the appropriate authority, such as Tusla or An Garda Síochána.

If you have queries about the child protection procedures for schools, you can contact the child protection unit in the Department of Education and Youth at childprotection@education.gov.ie

4. Seclusion and Restraint

Understanding Behaviours of Concern and Responding to Crisis Situations – Guidelines for Schools in Supporting Students were developed by the Department of Education and Youth to address uncertainty for school personnel on how to respond when facing crisis situations where there are concerns regarding physical safety. These guidelines are available at this link: Understanding Behaviours of Concern and Responding to Crisis Situations.

What is seclusion?

Seclusion occurs when a student is kept somewhere against their will, left alone, and physically stopped from leaving. All three conditions must be present for it to be seclusion:

1. The student is kept there involuntarily.
2. They are alone.
3. They are physically prevented from leaving.

If only one or two of these conditions are present, it is not seclusion.

What should I do if I believe my child has been placed in seclusion at school?

Seclusion is not allowed in any school.

If you are concerned that your child has been placed in seclusion, contact the school first to discuss your concerns. A meeting should be arranged, with you and the Designated Liaison Person to identify if seclusion has occurred.

If it is determined that seclusion was used, then it should be reported as a child protection concern by either you or the Designated Liaison Person. For more information click here.

What is physical restraint

Physical restraint describes a wide range of actions that involve the use of direct or indirect force, to limit another person's movement.

What happens if I become aware of physical restraint being used by the school?

If you believe that physical restraint may have been used inappropriately in the school, you should follow the school's complaint procedure. It is envisaged that the majority of complaints will be resolved to the satisfaction of both the parents and the school concerned. However, it is acknowledged that there may be instances in which some parents are still not satisfied despite having followed the school's complaints procedure. In these circumstances, parents will have access to a designated portal from September 2026, which will enable them to bring their complaint to the department for consideration. The group that will consider the parents' complaint will be independent of the department and will include former inspectors and psychologists as well as representatives of education stakeholder and advocacy groups.

Appendix 1 sets out the process that will apply in facilitating parents to access the portal.

If you think the incident is a child protection concern, you should report it to the Designated Liaison Person in the school so the school can follow the correct procedures. You can also report your child protection concern directly to Tusla at any time, whether or not the school has taken action. If the Designated Liaison Person decides the incident is not a child protection issue and you disagree, you can still report it to Tusla yourself. You can also report an alleged assault to An Garda Síochána.

5. Bullying

What do I do if my child is being bullied?

Bí Cineálta Procedures to Prevent and Address Bullying Behaviour for Primary and Post Primary Schools requires all schools to have an anti-bullying policy. You should follow any steps that are in the school's anti-bullying policy.

Is bullying a child protection concern?

Bullying is not usually a child protection concern. Usually, bullying behaviour can be addressed without the involvement of Tusla. However, in cases of serious instances of bullying where the behaviour is possibly abusive, a referral may need to be made to Tusla or An Garda Síochána.

When does bullying behaviour becomes a Child Protection Concern (CPC)?

Bullying can become a child protection concern if it causes serious physical or emotional harm, or if it continues as a severe problem and efforts to stop it are not working.

If there is doubt about whether bullying behaviour is a child protection concern the Designated Liaison Person will seek advice from Tusla.

When they are deciding whether bullying behaviour should be reported to Tusla, the Designated Liaison Person will consider such factors such as:

- The impact on the child.
- What action parents or carers have taken.
- What action the school has taken.
- Whether the child or family is engaging with support services such as the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS).

If bullying escalates to physical violence or threats of violence, it may be considered assault. An Garda Síochána is the appropriate authority to investigate alleged criminal behaviour.

6. Child Safeguarding Requirements

Does the school have to do anything else to make sure the children stay safe from harm?

Yes, the school must produce a document called a Child Safeguarding Statement. This document sets out the principles and procedures that the school will use to make sure that children in the school are safe from harm. It also includes a risk assessment. This involves the school thinking about the potential for harm that might come to children while they are in a school's care, and the actions the school will take to prevent this.

The Child Safeguarding Statement also has the name and contact details of the Designated Liaison Person.

Where can I find the Child Safeguarding Statement?

The school must display the Child Safeguarding Statement at the main entrance to the school. The school will also put a copy on their website. If you want a copy of the Child Safeguarding Statement you can ask the school.

There is also a student friendly version of the Child Safeguarding Statement, which will be displayed near the main entrance of the school. The school might also display the Child Safeguarding Statement in other areas of the school.

Does the school need to ask my opinion about the Child Safeguarding Statement?

Yes, the school must review the Child Safeguarding Statement every calendar year. As part of the review, the school should look for the opinion of parents. The school will also talk to students during the review. The way that they talk to the students will depend on the type of school and the age of the children.

7. Role of the Department of Education and Youth

What is the department's role in relation to Child Protection Concerns?

The department does not have the authority to investigate child protection concerns. Any allegations received by staff in the department are immediately passed on to the appropriate authorities, such as Tusla or An Garda Síochána, for consideration.

What is the role of the Inspectorate?

The Inspectorate checks how schools are putting child protection procedures into practice. It also looks at wider safeguarding measures, including child protection, anti-bullying, and wellbeing.

If a school is not meeting the required standards, the Inspectorate will continue to work with the school until it is fully compliant.

Does the department have any other roles in relation to Child Protection Concerns?

The department:

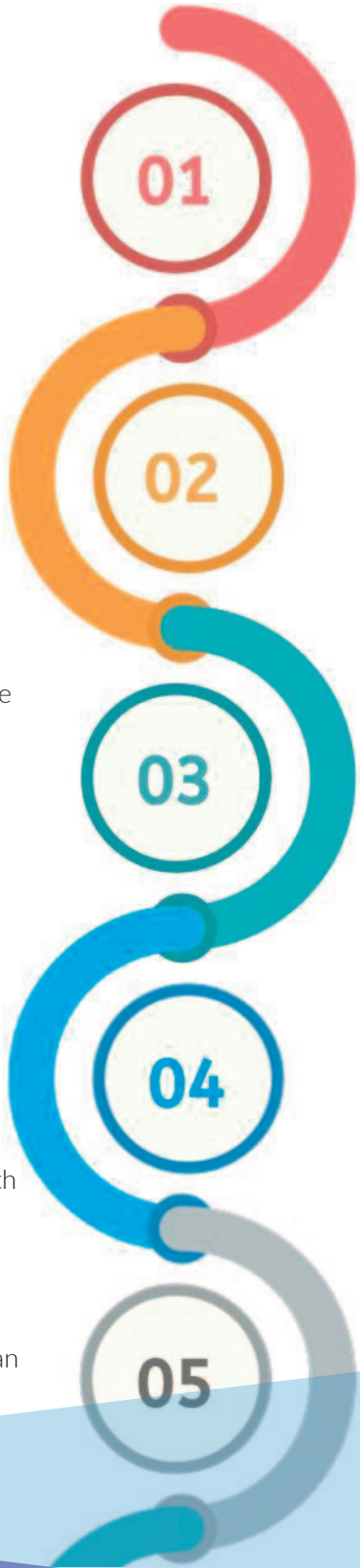
- Develops the child protection procedures for schools and gives guidance and support to schools on implementing the procedures.
- Engages with schools and/or with patrons where there are concerns about compliance with child protection procedures.

Appendix 1

Process for parents/guardians if unhappy with management of an incident of physical restraint

If a parent/guardian has followed the school's complaints process in relation to an incident of physical restraint and remains dissatisfied with the outcome, they may submit a complaint through the DEY Portal. Complaints submitted via the DEY Portal will be examined by an independent review group.

Using the DEY Portal for Complaints concerning Incidents of Physical Restraint



Step 1. The parent/guardian will complete a form which will provide:

- Details of the incident
- Information on the school's response to the incident
- Details of the complaints process followed by the school and parent

Step 2. Department follow-up with school

The school will be asked to confirm:

- How they addressed the incident
- How they followed the complaints process
- The rationale for their outcome

Step 3. Focus of Review Group

The review group will examine:

- Was restraint used? Did the use of restraint comply with the published guidelines?
- If deemed necessary a representative from the review group will engage further with both school and/or the parent/guardian

Step 4. Determination of Outcome Following the review:

If the school followed the correct process:

- The department will inform the parent and confirm this finding with the school

If the school did not follow the correct process:

- The department will outline the shortcomings to the school
- The department will ensure the school understands where errors occurred
- Training from the NCSE may be offered

Step 5. Final Correspondence

The department will send written confirmation of the outcome to both the parent and the school. If the parent remains dissatisfied, the correspondence will also provide information on other possible avenues, such as: Tusla; Ombudsman for Children; Teaching Council