



Bandonbridge NS

Substance Use Policy

A whole-school policy for an Irish primary school

Date ratified	May 2010
Review date	June 2018 and September 2026

Core principle: the welfare, care, protection, health and education of every child are central to this policy. Prevention, early support, proportionate responses and child safeguarding take priority.

Prepared with reference to Irish Department of Education guidance, SPHE/Wellbeing provision, Children First requirements and current public-health legislation.

1. Introductory Statement

This policy sets out the school's approach to the prevention of substance misuse, education about medicines and substances, and the management of substance-related incidents. It applies to pupils, staff, parents/guardians, visitors, contractors and other persons using the school premises or participating in school-related activities.

The policy should be developed and reviewed through consultation with the Board of Management, principal, teaching and support staff, parents/guardians and, in an age-appropriate manner, pupils. It forms part of the school's wider commitment to wellbeing, safety, positive behaviour, inclusion and child safeguarding.

2. Rationale

Schools have an important educational and pastoral role in helping children develop the knowledge, skills, values and confidence needed to make healthy and safe choices. Department of Education guidance on school substance-use policies identifies the welfare, care, protection and education of young people as the central objective and promotes a planned, whole-school response.

- provide a safe, healthy and supportive learning environment;
- ensure a consistent response to substance-related concerns or incidents;
- support age-appropriate learning through SPHE and the Wellbeing curriculum;
- clarify the responsibilities of pupils, staff, parents/guardians and visitors;
- connect substance-use concerns with child safeguarding, health and safety, administration of medicines and the Code of Behaviour where appropriate.

3. Scope and Definitions

For the purposes of this policy, "substances" may include:

- alcohol;
- tobacco, cigarettes, e-cigarettes/vapes, nicotine inhaling products and other nicotine products;
- illegal or controlled drugs;
- solvents, aerosols, gases or other volatile substances used inappropriately;
- medicines, whether prescribed or non-prescribed, when used other than as directed or authorised;
- new or emerging psychoactive or intoxicating substances; and
- any other substance which, when misused, may impair judgement, behaviour, health or safety.

The appropriate possession and use of prescribed or authorised medicines in accordance with the school's Administration of Medicines Policy is not regarded as substance misuse.

4. Policy Aims

- Promote the health, wellbeing and safety of all members of the school community.
- Provide pupils with accurate, developmentally appropriate education that supports healthy decision-making.
- Develop protective factors such as self-esteem, resilience, communication, assertiveness, help-seeking and refusal skills.
- Maintain a school environment in which the possession, supply or misuse of unauthorised substances is not accepted.
- Ensure incidents are managed calmly, fairly, consistently and with due regard to the child's age, needs and circumstances.

- Support pupils who may be affected by substance misuse in their family or community without stigma.
- Ensure that safeguarding concerns are addressed under the school's Child Safeguarding Statement and applicable Child Protection Procedures.

5. Guiding Principles

The school will use an educational, preventative and caring approach. Substance-related behaviour may require a behavioural response, but the needs and welfare of the child will remain central.

- Children will be treated with dignity, fairness and respect.
- Responses will be proportionate and consistent with the Code of Behaviour.
- Confidentiality will be respected, but cannot be guaranteed where information must be shared for safeguarding, safety or legal reasons.
- The school will avoid sensationalised or fear-based approaches to substance education.
- Parents/guardians are recognised as primary partners in their child's health education and welfare.
- Where specialist advice is needed, the school may seek support from relevant health, education, safeguarding or emergency services.

6. Education and Prevention

Substance-use education will be provided primarily through SPHE within the Wellbeing curriculum and will be integrated, where appropriate, with other learning experiences. The emphasis in primary school is on health, safety, medicines, decision-making, managing influences, personal responsibility and knowing how and where to seek help.

Age-appropriate learning may include

- safe and responsible use of medicines and household substances;
- the importance of never taking or sharing unknown medicines or substances;
- health effects associated with smoking, vaping, nicotine, alcohol and other substances, at a level suitable to the pupils' age;
- recognising unsafe situations and identifying trusted adults;
- peer influence, advertising and media messages;
- decision-making, assertiveness and refusal skills;
- emotional regulation, resilience and positive coping strategies; and
- help-seeking and supporting friends safely without taking on adult responsibilities.

The school may use suitable Department/NCCA/HSE-supported materials, including relevant elements of the Walk Tall resources, alongside the school's SPHE planning. Teachers will use professional judgement to ensure resources and discussions are suitable for the age and developmental stage of pupils.

7. School Environment and Rules

The possession, use, consumption, distribution, supply or sale of unauthorised or illegal substances is prohibited on school premises, during the school day, on school transport where applicable, and at school-organised activities, tours, matches and events.

- Smoking and vaping are not permitted by pupils on school premises or at school activities.

- Adults attending the school are expected to support a smoke-free and vape-free environment and to model responsible behaviour.
- Alcohol will not be consumed by pupils. Any adult use of alcohol connected with an exceptional adult-only school/community event must be separately authorised by the Board of Management and comply with law, insurance requirements and safeguarding considerations.
- No pupil may possess medication for self-administration unless this is specifically provided for in the school's Administration of Medicines Policy and agreed arrangements.
- School property must not be used to store, conceal, distribute or promote unauthorised substances.

8. Managing a Substance-Related Incident

Every incident will be considered on its individual facts. The first priorities are immediate safety, medical need, safeguarding and the preservation of relevant information.

Immediate response

1. Remain calm and ensure the safety of pupils and adults.
2. If a person is unwell, unconscious, seriously impaired or at immediate medical risk, contact emergency services (112/999) and provide first aid within staff competence.
3. Inform the principal or, in their absence, the deputy/teacher in charge as soon as practicable.
4. Separate the pupil from any substance or unsafe situation without unnecessary confrontation.
5. Do not taste, smell closely, test, burn or otherwise experiment with an unknown substance.
6. Record objective facts: what was seen, heard, found, by whom, where and when.

If an unknown or suspected illegal substance is found

Staff should minimise handling. The item should be secured away from pupils, where this can be done safely, and the principal should be informed. The school should seek appropriate advice from An Garda Síochána where an illegal substance, suspected supply, significant quantity, threat or other criminal concern is involved. The school will not undertake its own forensic testing or investigation.

Communication with parents/guardians

Parents/guardians will normally be contacted promptly where their child is directly involved, subject to child-protection procedures and any direction or advice from Tusla or An Garda Síochána. Meetings should focus on verified information, the child's welfare, the school response and any supports required.

9. Child Safeguarding

Substance use or misuse may sometimes indicate neglect, exploitation, coercion, unsafe caregiving, exposure to criminal activity or another child welfare concern. Where a staff member has a child protection or welfare concern, the matter must be dealt with in accordance with the school's Child Safeguarding Statement and the Child Protection Procedures for Schools in force at that time.

A substance-related incident does not replace or suspend child-protection duties. Where the threshold for a safeguarding report is met, the relevant Children First and school child-protection procedures apply.

10. Searches, Personal Property and Evidence

Any action involving a pupil's personal property must be reasonable, proportionate, respectful and consistent with school policy and applicable law. Staff should avoid intrusive physical searches. Where there is an immediate safety risk, the principal will determine the safest response and may seek Garda assistance.

Where an item is surrendered or safely secured, a written record should identify the item, date, time, location, persons present and what subsequently happened to it. Potential evidence should be handled as little as possible.

11. Disciplinary and Supportive Responses

Any behavioural consequences will be considered under the school's Code of Behaviour. In primary school, responses should take particular account of age, developmental level, additional needs, intent, understanding, coercion, vulnerability, frequency and seriousness.

- a restorative or educational conversation;
- parent/guardian meeting;
- an individual support or safety plan;
- additional SPHE/wellbeing support;
- referral to appropriate school-based or external supports, with consent where required;
- a proportionate sanction under the Code of Behaviour; and/or
- contact with Tusla, An Garda Síochána or emergency/health services where required.

The school will distinguish, as far as possible, between a child who may be vulnerable or in need of help and behaviour involving deliberate supply, coercion or serious risk to others.

12. Medicines

Prescribed and non-prescribed medicines are governed by the school's Administration of Medicines Policy. Medicines should not be shared between pupils. Any suspected misuse, unauthorised possession or deliberate sharing of medication will be addressed under this policy, with medical advice sought where necessary.

13. Staff, Visitors and Contractors

All adults on school premises have a responsibility to maintain a safe environment. A staff member who believes that another adult is impaired in a manner that may create a safety risk should report the concern immediately to the principal or, where the concern relates to the principal, to the Chairperson of the Board of Management. Employment, safeguarding, health and safety and other applicable procedures will be followed.

Visitors, contractors and persons hiring or using school facilities are expected to comply with this policy and with any conditions set by the Board of Management.

14. Confidentiality, Records and Data Protection

- Records will be factual, dated, securely stored and limited to information relevant to the incident and response.
- Information will be shared only with those who need it for education, safety, safeguarding, legal or management purposes.
- Child-protection records will be created and retained in accordance with the applicable Child Protection Procedures.

- The school will process personal data in accordance with its Data Protection Policy and applicable data-protection law.

15. Roles and Responsibilities

Role	Key responsibility
Board of Management	Ratifies, oversees and reviews the policy; supports a safe school environment; ensures appropriate links with other school policies.
Principal	Leads implementation; coordinates responses to incidents; communicates with parents/guardians and relevant agencies; ensures records are maintained.
Teachers and other staff	Model healthy behaviour, teach relevant curriculum content, supervise pupils, report concerns promptly and follow agreed procedures.
Parents/Guardians	Support the policy, communicate relevant health information, reinforce safe choices and work collaboratively with the school when concerns arise.
Pupils	Follow school rules, do not bring unauthorised substances to school, seek help from a trusted adult and avoid handling unknown substances.

16. Links with Other School Policies

- SPHE / Wellbeing Policy and whole-school plan
- Code of Behaviour
- Child Safeguarding Statement and Risk Assessment
- Administration of Medicines Policy
- Health and Safety Statement
- Anti-Bullying / Bí Cineálta procedures and policy
- Critical Incident Management Plan
- Data Protection Policy
- Acceptable Use / Digital Learning Policy
- School Tours, Events and Supervision procedures

17. Staff Development and External Contributors

The school will support staff to access relevant professional learning and reliable health information. Where an external facilitator is invited to contribute to SPHE or wellbeing learning, the class teacher remains responsible for the educational context, content suitability and pupil welfare. External input should complement, not replace, planned whole-school SPHE provision.

18. Communication of the Policy

Following ratification, the policy will be made available to staff and parents/guardians and, where appropriate, published on the school website. Key expectations will be communicated to pupils in age-appropriate language. Relevant requirements will also be brought to the attention of visitors, contractors and users of school facilities.

19. Monitoring and Review

The policy will be reviewed at least every three years, or sooner where there is a significant incident, a change in legislation or Department guidance, a change in curriculum provision, or where experience indicates that procedures should be revised. The review should consider the views of staff, parents/guardians and pupils as appropriate.

20. Ratification

This policy was adopted by the Board of Management of Bandonbridge NS in June 2010 and has been updated in September 2026 to reflect current trends.

Appendix A — Incident Response Checklist

- ☐ Ensure immediate safety and assess medical need.
- ☐ Call 112/999 if there is an emergency or serious medical risk.
- ☐ Inform the principal/teacher in charge.
- ☐ Supervise and reassure the pupil(s).
- ☐ Secure any substance/item safely; minimise handling.
- ☐ Record objective facts, including time, location and witnesses.
- ☐ Consider whether child-protection procedures are engaged.
- ☐ Contact parents/guardians unless safeguarding procedures indicate otherwise.
- ☐ Seek Garda/health/Tusla advice where appropriate.
- ☐ Apply Code of Behaviour procedures proportionately.
- ☐ Agree educational, wellbeing and follow-up supports.
- ☐ Store records securely and review the incident afterwards.

Appendix B — Substance-Related Incident Record

Date / time of incident	
Location	
Pupil(s) involved	
Staff / witnesses present	
Description of what was observed or reported	
Description of substance/item, if any	
Immediate safety / first-aid action	
Principal informed — date/time	
Parent/guardian contact	
Advice/contact with emergency services / Gardaí / Tusla / health service	

Safeguarding action, if applicable	
Code of Behaviour response	
Support / follow-up agreed	
Record completed by / date	

Appendix C — Key Reference Framework

Reference	Relevance
Department of Education Circular 18/02	Guidelines for developing a school substance use policy; whole-school consultation and the welfare, care, protection and education of young people are central.
Primary SPHE / Wellbeing provision	Age-appropriate health education, decision-making, personal safety, resilience and healthy choices; Walk Tall remains a useful primary-school resource.
Children First Act 2015 and Children First: National Guidance 2017	Framework for recognising and reporting child protection and welfare concerns.
Child Protection Procedures for Schools 2025	Published in 2025; schools must adopt the updated procedures by 31 December 2026.
Public Health (Tobacco Products and Nicotine Inhaling Products) Act 2023	Includes protections relating to nicotine inhaling products and children; sale of vapes to under-18s is prohibited.
Public Health (Alcohol) Act 2018	Public-health framework intended, among other objectives, to delay initiation of alcohol consumption by children and young people.
Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act 2005 / school safety guidance	Supports the Board of Management's responsibilities for a safe and healthy school environment.

Note: This template should be adapted to the school's own context, patron requirements, existing policies and current legal/Department guidance before ratification.