

**Our Lady of Mercy Secondary School,
Waterford**

**Substance Misuse Policy
(Revised November 2019)**

INTRODUCTION

Our Lady of Mercy Secondary School is a voluntary Catholic girls only secondary school under the trusteeship of CEIST, grant-aided by Department of Education and Science.

MISSION AND VISION

Mission Statement

To educate our students to achieve their full potential in an inclusive and Christian environment

Vision

- To promote a holistic development of all members of the school community
- To promote excellence in Teaching and Learning
- To show respect, care and compassion for every member of the school community
- To share in the ongoing search for a more loving, just and peaceful world.

Rationale

Inspired by its Mission Statement and Vision, Our Lady of Mercy Secondary School, Waterford wishes to provide a safe, caring and healthy environment which is drug free. It seeks to adhere to a consistent and inclusive policy, mindful of the support, safety and protection of the entire school community.

Scope

This policy will apply at all times during which students and those who accompany them are involved in school related activities.

The term ‘school related activities’ applies to any activities on the school premises, on the way to and from school and during any school related activities in any location outside the school where students are participating in school related events, representing the school or working as part of a school programme.

General statement of school policy in relation to prohibited substances

Our Lady of Mercy Secondary School does not accept or tolerate the possession, misuse, or supply of banned/prohibited substances and/or drug paraphernalia by any student in the school, or during ANY school related activity.

Prescribed Medication

Parents should notify the school in writing if students are taking prescribed medication during the school day.

This policy contains three key elements:

1. Student education and staff development

- Drug Education: All students will be provided with education on alcohol, tobacco and other drugs within the resources available while attending Our Lady of Mercy Secondary School, Waterford (hereinafter referred to as 'the school').
- Provision of Training and Staff Development: In the implementation and application of this policy all staff of the school will be provided with the initial information and instruction from the Health Service Executive (South). The school authorities will always consider the necessity of further training where appropriate.

2. Management of drug related issues

- Management of alcohol/tobacco/vaping and other drug related issues: In the event of a substance misuse 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 also considering the reputation of the school. The school shall follow the steps outlined in Appendix 1.

Incidents involving alcohol, tobacco and drugs use might include:

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

This list is not exhaustive.

3. Staff guidelines for dealing with substance misuse

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

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

- Class tutors.
- Year heads.
- Counselling personnel, internally and externally.
- Parents/Guardians.
- Juvenile Liaison Officers (JLO) and An Garda Síochána.
- Community Based Drug Workers/Youth Services
- HSE Substance Misuse Services

Reporting procedures:

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

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

Review and evaluation:

Responsibility for the successful implementation of the policy lies with every member of the school community, acting with the authority of the board of management. This policy will be the subject of occasional review and evaluation. The review will be carried out by representatives of the school community. This policy will be made available to all members of the school community.

Appendix One:

Procedures:

- The member of staff who encounters a student involved in a suspected substance misuse incident and where there is an apparent immediate danger to the students and/or school community, will accompany the student to the principal's office and stay with pupil until the principal (or in his/her absence, the deputy principal) arrives.
- The principal should inform parents/guardians unless home circumstances warrant disclosure in a more appropriate manner.
- Where it is apparent that there is immediate danger to the students and/or school community, the school reserves the right to suspend or remove temporarily from the school any student involved in a suspected misuse incident pending further and complete investigation of the incident.
- A substance misuse Incident Report Form will be completed.
- The school will take all steps required to fully investigate and assess any misuse incident and take whatever reasonable time it deems necessary to do this.
- The school will take possession of any banned or prohibited substances and drug paraphernalia associated with a misuse incident, carefully recording all such items and retaining them pending completion of the investigation, unless otherwise instructed by the appropriate outside agencies.
- In the event of an incident, the school will seek statements from all persons involved in, concerned with, or having knowledge of the incident and will record all these statements.
- The school will maintain a written record of all stages of the investigation of an incident.
- The school, at its own discretion, will liaise with any appropriate outside authority and seek advice or assistance as it deems appropriate to its investigation of an incident.

If the circumstances merit it and the investigation is continuing, the school will put forward particulars of the incident to the students concerned and their parents/guardians in the following manner:

1. Copies of all records deemed relevant to the position of the student concerned and to the nature of the complaints or allegations that a student is facing will be made available to the student and his/her parents/guardians in time to permit the student a reasonable opportunity to make her own reply to the matters at issue and have any representations that she would wish to make or have made on her behalf.
2. The school will allow the student concerned and parents/guardians reasonable time to respond to the matters at issue. The school will take into account any response so made and any other relevant extraneous considerations or mitigating circumstances that may be appropriate to the specific case.
3. The school shall as soon as is convenient thereafter inform the student and the parents/guardians of the school findings and their reasons for these. If the school finds that the student has been guilty of, or involved in a substance misuse incident, it shall indicate the penalty or sanctions that it intends to impose in the circumstances.

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

- (i) Oral Warning.

- (ii) Written Warning.

- (iii) A suspension of three days duration.

- (iv) A suspension of more than three days duration.

- (v) Other sanctions short of expulsion.

- The school can, at its sole discretion, postpone the issue of sanctions to take account of mitigating circumstances or representation that it considers should be taken into account.

- The school will also ensure that pastoral supports are offered to the student/students and families affected by an incident of substance misuse. These incidents can sometimes be traumatic for those involved and the services of a tutor, counsellor, chaplain, juvenile liaison officer, social worker etc. would demonstrate the school's Christian commitment at a time of personal crisis.

The Role of the Principal:

- The school principal is responsible for dealing with any misuse incidents arising at the school.

- All reports of substance misuse incidents or suspected incidents must be reported to the principal.

- The principal makes all decisions regarding investigation of an incident, communication with, liaison with, and reporting to relevant parties, as well as disclosure of information regarding an investigation.

- The principal is responsible for keeping all relevant parties properly informed regarding investigation developments.

- The principal is responsible for the secure and confidential storage of any written documentation and records associated with the incident.

- The principal is responsible for taking possession of any banned or prohibited substances or drug paraphernalia and deciding what should be done with same upon appropriate advice.

- The principal may seek the assistance of the deputy principal, year head, and/or guidance counsellor in conducting an incident investigation.

It is school policy that it will not comment on any individual matter. 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.

Appendix Two:

Definitions

Definition of School

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

Definition of a Drug

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

Definition of Drug Paraphernalia

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

A Misuse Incident

A misuse incident is any incident that involves prohibited drugs that occurs in the school or during school related activities, or any incident that may be deemed damaging to the health and welfare of the student concerned, to other students or to the policy or reputation of the school.

Parents/Guardians

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

The Principal

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

Appendix Three:

Relevant Legislation

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

Education Act 1998

The Misuse of Drugs Act 1977-1984

Safety and Welfare at Work Regulations Act 1993

Non Fatal Offences against Persons Act 1997

Education Welfare Act 2000