ST. MARY'S *Catholic High School, Dubai*

CHILD PROTECTION & SAFEGUARDING POLICY

2024-2025

1. Scope and definitions

This addendum applies during the period of school closure due to COVID-19, and reflects updated advice and protocols for safeguarding and child protection in this extended phase of school closure due to the Covid-19 Pandemic.

It sets out changes to our normal child protection policy in light of the changes necessitated by this school closure and must be read in conjunction with the schools policy for Child Protection and Safeguarding.

Unless covered here, our normal child protection policy continues to apply.

Our definition of 'vulnerable children' includes those who:

> Have a key service worker, including children:

- With an IEP

- Assessed as being in need

- Have behavioral issues

2. Core safeguarding principles

We will still have regard to the statutory safeguarding guidance, provided by the UAE government.

Although we are operating in a different way to normal, we are still following these important safeguarding principles:

> The best interests of children must come first

> If anyone has a safeguarding concern about any child, they should continue to act on it immediately

> A designated Child Protection Office (CPO) or deputy should be available at all times

> It's essential that unsuitable people don't enter the school workforce or gain access to children

> Children should continue to be protected when they are online

3. Reporting concerns

All staff must continue to act on any concerns they have about a child immediately. It is still vitally important to do this even though children are at attending online lessons from home.

As a reminder, all staff should continue to work with and support children's key service workers, where they have one, to help protect vulnerable children.

4. CPO (and deputy) arrangements

Our school's CPO (Vice Principal) and Deputy CPO (Head of Student Support Services) continue to be the main

points of contact and they both work in tandem on all issues and concerns.

Our CPO and Deputy CPO can be contacted remotely by: email and these IDs are available on the school website and in every child's school diary. Staff have access to them via telephone as well.

5. Working with other agencies

We will continue to work with the local Child Protection Agency under the CDA in Dubai.

We will continue to update this addendum where necessary, to reflect any updated guidance from:

> CDA or our Education regulators KHDA or the MOE.

6. Monitoring attendance

Since children are attending lessons from home we have adopted a new attendance policy that can be read in conjunction with this policy. The policy is available in the DL section of the school website.

It clearly details the new protocols in place for online attendance marking and the steps to follow up with parents where regular tardiness is being observed.

7. Peer-on-peer abuse

Staff should continue to act on any concerns they have immediately about children attending lessons while at home.

The school has mandated that staff disable the chat function between students during live lessons to minimize the risk of any offensive remarks between students attending live lessons.

We would like to reiterate that chats between participants of a Zoom session must not take place under any circumstances. Any cyber-bullying / inappropriate comments related to faith, race, culture etc will be dealt with severely which will include removal from live sessions and could include reporting to the relevant authorities.

Students are reminded to notify their class teacher or the CPO directly in the event of any cyber bullying from other students.

The CPO or Deputy CPO may sit in on lessons where there have been complaints and will also carry out thorough investigations into any complaints of peer abuse and/or cyber bullying.

Parents will be contacted accordingly once an investigation has been completed.

8. Safeguarding all children

Staff and school leaders are aware that this difficult time potentially puts all children at greater risk.

Staff will continue to be alert to any signs of abuse, or effects on pupils' mental health that are also safeguarding concerns, and act on concerns immediately .

For children at home, they will look out for signs like:

> Not completing assigned work or logging on to school systems

> No contact from children or families

> Seeming more withdrawn during any class check-ins or video calls

Children are likely to be spending more time online during this period – see section 12 below for our approach to online outside school.

See section 13 below for information on how we will support pupils' mental health.

9. Online safety

Outside school

Where staff are interacting with children online, they will continue to follow our existing staff protocols with regard to conduct/IT acceptable use policy etc.

Staff will continue to be alert to signs that a child may be at risk of harm online, and act on any concerns immediately, following our reporting procedures.

We will make sure children know how to report any concerns they have back to our school, and signpost them to other sources of support too.

For local and international child safeguarding purposes, no one to one sessions will be conducted between any student and teacher. For any individual sessions with an LSA an additional school staff or school counsellor will be present. Parents are therefore reminded not to request for a one to one Zoom session with any teacher.

➢ The Zoom link sent for a child's class MUST not be shared with any other individual.

➢ Posting Zoom links on SOCIAL MEDIA like Facebook is a huge security breach.

➢ **It is strictly forbidden to screen shot any frame of a zoom lesson as this violates all local as well as international child safeguarding policies.** Students should at no point capture a picture of the zoom screen frame either through a screen shot or by any other means by which a picture may be captured.

➢ In a similar manner, due to child safeguarding policies and protocols, **no zoom session must ever be recorded by a child or parent. Any recording or attempt to record is in violation of our acceptable terms of use for ZOOM as an e-learning platform.**

➢ All children must join the sessions with the names by which they are officially registered on the school's registration roll. Students must not use different screen names to join any Zoom session. Students must not use any screen image either. **All parents are requested to check their child's zoom login credentials to this effect.**

Teachers have been asked to remove individuals who appear without their officially registered names. This has been done for the safety of all students.

- Students must not attend Zoom sessions while lying or slouching on the bed.
- It would be ideal that the device is set up in as quiet a place of the house as possible and the child is seated at a table so he/she can write as well. All background noise must be avoided. All background noise should be kept to a minimum during a Zoom session (i.e., TV sound, radios, dogs barking, etc.).
- Have a plain and neutral background.
- Other distractions like gaming consoles, mobile phones etc. should be kept away during lessons. Students must stay off their phones, other devices, and social media.
- Students should be modestly and well attired (Pyjamas , night wear, immodest clothing is not acceptable)
- While we understand that children often feel hungry, it is advisable for them to snack in between sessions or before the start of sessions but not during a session. Water may be consumed at all times.
- Students must be ready with all their required materials for their learning sessions.
- Attendance is being taken for all Zoom sessions. This will count towards their overall attendance and so we would like to encourage parents to please make every effort to ensure that your child is present for the learning sessions.
- Teachers have the discretion to disable the video of all participants where his/her professional judgement calls for the same in the best interests of the lesson being productive.
- Students are not mandated to keep their videos on unless an assessment requires the same.
- Students MUST always have their microphones on MUTE and must only UN-MUTE to answer when their name is called upon by the teacher.
- Students who repeatedly and wilfully misbehave, do not follow instructions, hinder the lesson, display disrespectful or inappropriate behaviour will be removed from the session. Parents will be sent an email detailing the incident.
- If necessary, the teacher may ask a student to leave the Zoom class session until all distractions in the student's environment have been addressed
- **Since children are spending a lot of time in front of a screen we recommend the 20-20-20 rule. After every 20 minutes, look 20 feet away from the screen for 20 seconds.**

Working with parents and carers

We will make sure parents and carers:

> ❯ Are aware of the potential risks to children online and the importance of staying safe online through useful updates on the school's website.

> ❯ Know what our school is asking children to do online, including what sites they will be using and who they will be interacting with from our school

> ❯ Are aware that they should only use reputable online companies or tutors if they wish to supplement the remote teaching and resources our school provides

> ❯ Know where else they can go for support to keep their children safe online

Even though we require all parents to frequently monitor their child's online Zoom class, we would like to reiterate that the learning session is strictly between the teacher and the students. We understand that parents might be tempted to communicate something to the teacher right away, but are reminded that this must not be done at all. It must be kept in mind that the situation is already very stressful for the teacher who is aware that parents are also present while lessons are going on and anything a parent says is said in the presence of all the other children and parents. We have instructed the teachers that no communication must take place between them and parents during a Zoom class and we would expect that ALL PARENTS respect the ethics of this virtual space. Parents may email any feedback or queries they have directly to the teacher and if their concerns are more serious, they may continue to email our Vice Principal and CPO on l.pinto-smchs@smgeducation.org.

10. Mental health

Where possible, we will continue to offer our current support for pupil mental health for all pupils. We will also signpost all pupils, parents and staff to other resources to support good mental health at this time.

The school counselors are available to parents and students via email and if necessary in their professional opinion, they will make a telephone call that will be logged.

When setting expectations for pupils learning remotely and not attending school, teachers will bear in mind the potential impact of the current situation on both children's and adults' mental health.

11. Quick Guide Digital Communications Teachers and other School Staff

The internet and other digital tools are incredibly powerful tools, opening up new opportunities for everyone to experience new things. During these unusual times, we can use digital technology and communication tools to stimulate discussion, promote creativity and enhance learning opportunities for pupils.

The pace with which we want to respond to the COVID-19 crisis and support our students has outpaced our existing policies around the use of technology with pupils in a home setting. This guidance exists to provide clarity on what is and is not acceptable practice for school communication with pupils and parents/carers during this period.

This quick guide considers three things:

• How do we ensure that our safeguarding responsibilities towards young people are met?

• How can we help to maintain an appropriate sense of school community during this difficult time?

• How do we ensure that both pupils and staff are adequately protected throughout these interactions?

There are only a few permitted ways in which teachers can communicate with pupils at home:

1. Emails sent from the official email ID to parents and/or students.

2. Academic email correspondence using school accounts between pupils and teachers, which are monitored in line with school policy.

3. Telephone conversations to parents/carers (you may request to speak to a child) which are made to parent phone numbers and properly logged.

4. Video calls/meetings which are never recorded and never 1:1 between a pupil and teacher

5. Messages in Google Classroom and/or whatsapp messages to communicate any urgent information.

12. Links with other policies

This policy links to the following policies and procedures:

> Child protection and Safeguarding policy
> IT acceptable use policy
> Health and safety policy
> Cyber-Bullying Policy
> Anti-bullying Policy