

St Benildus College

May 2014

School Substance Misuse Policy

Introduction

The school community of St Benildus College recognises that a Substance Misuse Policy is a necessary part of school development planning. Exposure to alcohol, illegal substances, drugs and tobacco is part of the reality that young people face in today's society. The school acknowledges that it has an important role to play in both substance misuse education and prevention. This has been reiterated in the National Drugs Strategy 2009-2016. The College policy on substance misuse aims to protect the health and welfare of the individual student and of the wider school community.

The ethos of St. Benildus College is built around:

- Enabling students to develop their talents to the full by providing a balanced, challenging curriculum which fosters intellectual, spiritual, emotional and physical growth.
- Fostering an atmosphere that promotes self-esteem, honesty, justice and respect for others.
- Creating a safe, healthy, learning environment that nurtures self-discipline and encourages students to take responsibility for their own learning.
- Promoting co-operation, respect and commitment within the College so that all are unified as partners in learning for life.

Educational aims concerning substance misuse

The Social Personal Health Education Programme (SPHE) in schools is a key element of the overall national substance misuse prevention strategy in relation to young people. This is set out in the Government's National Drug Strategy (which also encompasses alcohol misuse). It is a mandatory part of the junior cycle curriculum.

The College's educational aims in relation to substance misuse are:

- To increase the self esteem and confidence of young people.
- To equip young people with personal and social skills.
- To enable young people to make informed, healthy and responsible choices.
- To provide honest and age appropriate information on drugs, alcohol and other substance.
- The school will offer supportive intervention in any substance-related incident.

These aims will be met through the following actions:

- Teachers involved in SPHE and RE will be given the opportunity to avail of the necessary training.
- School staff will endeavour to provide a duty of care to all students in the school.
- Periodically it may be appropriate to engage an outside speaker to re-enforce the educational work done in class.
- Parents will be made aware and informed of what is happening in the school in regard to drug education.

Policy

All students are entitled to a safe and healthy environment.

St Benildus College actively discourages the use and possession of drugs, substances, alcohol and cigarettes by pupils both inside and outside school. Any use of or possession of illegal or dangerous substances within the school will be regarded as a serious disciplinary matter.

This policy applies to the entire school community, primarily students but also to staff, school visitors and anyone using the school building.

Statement of Practice

The substances covered by this policy include any agent used (legal or illegal) that alters the way the body functions - mentally, physically or emotionally. This includes illegal drugs, controlled drugs, alcohol, solvents and other dangerous or mind-altering substances, and inappropriate use of prescription medication. (Categories of substances include OTC painkillers, sedatives, stimulants, hallucinogens, headshop drugs, opioids, and solvents.)*

Students who are required to take prescription medication on school premises must adhere to the school policy on this.

The following are some examples of what would be deemed a substance misuse incident by the College:

- Intoxication/unusual behaviour.
- Person seeking help from member of staff.
- Suspicion/rumour of drug use, possession or dealing.
- Disclosure by another person.
- Emergencies when the person may be unconscious.
- Possession of a legal/illegal drug on the school premises or on a school related activity.
- Selling/supplying legal/illegal drugs.
- Drug paraphernalia found on school property.
- School grounds being used for drug activity.

Use of tobacco is banned in the school or grounds. Under the Tobacco Control Act 2003, smoking is now illegal in any public place. Appropriate sanctions will occur in relation to students found smoking within the school grounds.

** In May 2010 certain groups of drugs were added to the banned list under the Misuse of Drugs Act 1977: synthetic cannabinoids (alternatives to cannabis), BZP and derivatives (party pill alternatives to ecstasy and amphetamines), mephedrone and derivatives ('bath salts' or 'plant foods')*

Procedures:

Substance misuse incidents are complex. In situations where the school rules regarding these are broken, the sanctions and punishments will be implemented depending on the nature and severity of the offence. These will be consistent with school rules regarding other breaches of conduct as set out below. The College's response will seek to find a balance between a disciplinary and a pastoral approach based on the individual circumstances.

College Code of Behaviour in relation to prohibited substances:

Habitual alcohol or prohibited drug/substance use is incompatible with general well-being and academic progress. Possession and trafficking in illegal drugs is against the law. Students may not come to school under the influence of or in possession of alcohol or prohibited substances. Students may not use, possess or traffic in alcohol or prohibited substances while under the care of the school.

The school retains the right to search a student's locker, school bag or to issue an instruction that a bag, locker or pockets be emptied in the event that the Principal or designated person has reasonable cause to believe that a substance in breach of school substance misuse policy is present. This will be handled in a sensitive and practical way.

Students who use, possess or traffic in alcohol or prohibited substances, while under the care of the school, will be immediately suspended and may be permanently excluded from the school.

Return to the school may depend on particular conditions as deemed appropriate such as student guarantees, counselling, and parental guarantees regarding the student's behaviour.

Any breach of the Code of Behaviour will result in appropriate sanctions being applied which may include the following:

- Reasoning with a student.
- Verbal rebuke/warning.
- Extra work.
- Complaint to Year Head.
- Complaint to parent.
- After school detention.
- Saturday morning detention.
- Internal Suspension.
- Suspension.
- Expulsion.

The School Authorities are duty bound in the interests of the school and the wider community, to investigate any information received about any student's involvement with illegal/controlled substances. This will usually involve interviewing students who may be involved in an incident or who may be able to provide information about it. Parents will be involved as appropriate to the needs of their son. In certain circumstances, Gardai involvement may become necessary.

The individual circumstances and well-being of all students involved will be taken into account. This is always done in the context of the safety and security of the wider school community.

The school will work closely with the Gardaí in all matters concerning illegal/controlled substances. It is important in all suspected or confirmed incidents of this nature that a limited number of people are involved in managing the incident. The Principal, Guidance Counsellor and person/s directly involved in the case will be informed, and all written documentation will be held confidentially by the Principal.

Supporting the student

For some young people involvement with illegal substances may be masking some underlying difficulties and for others it may be a phase of experimentation, through which they may pass. In response to all incidents, pastoral support will be offered. If the person has a serious drug problem then referral to an appropriate service will be recommended.

The College recognises that the issue of confidentiality is complex and information received concerning a possible drug incident will be treated sensitively and discretely.

The Principal or a nominated spokesperson will handle all media queries in the event that such a situation arises. The school will not comment on individual cases but will refer to the school policy and the procedures in place to manage any drug-related incident.

Useful resources

www.drugs.ie (HSE drugs and alcohol information site)

HSE Drug and Alcohol Helpline 1800 459 459