



**Policy on  
Crisis Situations,  
Flight Risk &  
Physical Intervention**

## **Introduction:**

This policy was drafted by the staff and Board of Management of Kilmacanogue National School to provide clarity on the roles and responsibilities of the school in the event of:

- students experiencing crisis situations and/or displaying behaviours of concern.
- a child who absconds or attempts to abscond from a class or from the school premises or while on a school trip
- a serious incident of physically/verbally aggressive behaviour which occurs in school or on a school trip.

## **Rationale and Relationship to school ethos**

Kilmacanogue National School is an inclusive primary school providing primary education to pupils from Junior Infants to Sixth Class. As outlined in our Mission statement, Kilmacanogue National School strives to provide a safe, secure, and supportive environment for all pupils and staff, where each individual is valued and difference is respected. The health, safety and wellbeing of all our pupils and staff are of paramount importance.

This policy was formulated by consultation with staff, parents and the Board of Management of our school and reflects the need for clarity around the procedures relating to behaviours of concern, including serious incidents of physically/verbally aggressive behaviour and incidents of flight risk / attempt to abscond. This policy and its associated procedures have been developed to address uncertainty for staff on how to respond when facing a crisis situation where there are concerns regarding physical safety. This policy supports the principle that all staff must take reasonable steps to ensure the safety of all students under their care at all times.

*Note re Behaviours of Concern: All behaviour is communication. Behaviours of concern can be defined as “behaviours that indicate a risk to the safety or wellbeing of the people who exhibit them or to others”. “Behaviours of concern” replaces the term “challenging behaviour” which has over time served to stigmatise those who engage in such behaviours.*

## **Aim**

To ensure that procedures around behaviours of concern, serious incidents of physically/verbally aggressive behaviour, physical intervention and absconding are understood by all stakeholders.

## **Responsibility for implementation of this policy**

It is the responsibility of the Board of Management to write, approve, adopt and review this policy as per its review frequency requirements. It may be necessary to update the Policy in advance of its

planned review date, if the school management and/or Board of Management recommend improvement following a serious incident.

It is the responsibility of all staff in the school to implement this policy, with support provided by the Board of Management via specific training for relevant staff.

### **Resources**

This policy has been drawn up with reference to the following sources:

- Department of Education (2024): *Understanding Behaviours of Concern and Responding to Crisis Situations - Guidelines for Schools in Supporting Students*.
- Government of Ireland (2022): *Autism Good Practice Guidance for Schools Supporting Children and Young People*
- Department of Education (2019): *Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework for Practice*
- School's own policies: Code of Behaviour Policy, Anti- Bullying Policy, Supervision Policy, Health & Safety Statement, Child Safeguarding Statement and Risk Assessment
- Guidance received from external agencies or during the course of staff training e.g. NEPS Psychologist, NCSE advisors, SENO, Behaviour Therapist, Primary Care Psychology, CPI, Dynamis.

### **Documentation**

- Individual Risk Assessments will be carried out as deemed necessary.
- Staff will use the 'Continuum of Support' to put in place support plans for all children who may pose a risk of absconding or physical/verbal aggression, in consultation with parents/guardians. This support plan will be signed by relevant staff and parents.
- A separate Crisis Response Plan may also be put in place. This may involve student-specific plans for foreseeable crisis situations, including the identification of appropriate spaces within the school and the recording of procedures agreed with parents. This plan may also note which members of staff are likely to be best equipped to meet an individual student's needs. This plan will be signed by relevant staff and parents.
- Appropriate responses to known sequences of behaviours of concern should be recorded in the Student Support Plan and/or Crisis Response Plan.
- Incident Report Forms are completed after all crisis situations and are kept on file by the School Principal.

## **Section 1: Crisis Situations**

The term 'Crisis Situations' refers to times when behaviours of concern present serious risk of imminent physical harm to the student concerned and/or others within the school environment.

Different pupils can present with various needs, which can cause them to behave in a way that is a threat to their own safety or that of others. While every measure will be taken to prevent crisis situations, the safety of pupils and staff will be prioritised if and when incidents occur.

### *Prevention and De-escalation*

- Prevention and de-escalation strategies will be prioritised. Common de-escalation techniques include:
  - Active listening.
  - Acknowledging what the student is experiencing emotionally.
  - Reducing the communication load on the student.
  - Using a preferred mode of communication by the student, e.g. objects of reference, choice board, augmentative and alternative communication (AAC).
  - Physical redirection to an alternative activity.
  - Problem solving if appropriate (if the student is able).
  - Offering clear simple choices, which would include self regulation options.
  - Allowing adequate personal space.
  - Adopting non threatening body language such as hands by your sides or in pockets.
  - Avoiding direct or sustained eye contact in most cases.
  - Going to an alternative space with the student that is less stimulating or which removes access to the triggers.
- Environmental alterations are in place.
  - The two side access points of the school are locked during the school day, outside of arrival and dismissal periods.
  - The blue front door of the school is the only access point in use during the school day, with access in and out via keypad.
  - There is a telephone in every classroom and support room, to allow staff to phone for support.
  - All staff working with children on a 1-1 basis outside the classroom environment should carry their mobile phone with them at all times.
- Other resources: sensory resources available in classrooms, sensory/quiet room separate from the classroom, support teaching, access to SNA support, mindfulness and relaxation techniques, movement breaks.

*Actions which may heighten agitation in a student whose behaviour is escalating includes:*

- Loud or aggressive tone of voice.
- Disagreeing with the student's statement.
- Moving closer into the student's personal space.
- Crouching in a threatening way.
- Embarrassing the student.
- Giving either/or scenarios with only one right option leads to confusion.
- Any form of physical contact when the student is already highly agitated.
- Correcting the behaviour in crisis situations.
- Asking for an apology.
- Removal of communication systems.

Staff must immediately cease any action that escalates the situation.

#### *Crisis Response Team*

- The school has developed a procedure for responding to crisis situations as soon as possible, which can be used as deemed necessary. The school's 'Crisis Response Team' (CRT) consists of the Principal, Deputy Principal, Secretary, SNA team and SENCO.
- When called, the relevant members of staff will gather in the staff room or other central space and make a plan in response to the emerging situation. Staff may be assigned to different areas of the school grounds to ensure adequate supervision.
- Staff will notify parents when possible and/or deemed appropriate.
- If deemed necessary, the school secretary will arrange for a member of staff to lock the main black gates, as an extra security measure.
- If deemed necessary, all staff will be informed of an ongoing crisis situation and may be asked to keep away from a particular area of the school (e.g. the front lobby) until the situation is resolved.

#### *Seclusion*

Seclusion is placing a student involuntarily in any environment in which they are alone and physically prevented from leaving. Students in our school are never left alone or unsupervised during crisis situations. On very rare occasions and with parent agreement, staff may provide supervision and observation from the other side of a door / external window. This may apply to students who require time and space to self-regulate, where the presence of other staff and students is deemed to be unhelpful and/or presents a very high risk of personal injury. In this instance, parents are informed immediately.

## **Section 2: Physical Intervention**

- During crisis situations, verbal de-escalation strategies will be used in the first instance. However, in rare circumstances there may be a requirement for a staff member to intervene in a physical manner to protect a student in crisis or other students or staff.
- Physical intervention / restraint is any procedure where one or more adults restrict a student's physical movement or normal access to his or her own body. It is an intervention used in crisis situations when not to do so could result in serious physical harm or injury to the student or others.
- A staff member may intervene physically to prevent a pupil from harming him or herself, another pupil or a staff member.
- Staff must use professional judgement to decide if the unique situation constitutes a serious and imminent risk to the safety of the individual and others. If it appears that a behaviour is escalating to the point that it is placing the student or others at imminent risk of serious physical harm, this is a crisis situation that may require physical intervention.
- Physical restraint must not be used to punish a student for unacceptable behaviour under any circumstances.
- Physical interventions should be carried out by appropriately trained persons, if at all possible. Continuing Professional Development (CPD) / Teacher Professional Learning (TPL). Specialist training will be sought for staff as required around how to deal with situations involving high risk of physical violence or absconding. Recent examples of this training include Crisis Prevention Institute (CPI) training and Dynamis Positive Handling training.
- Staff intervening with children will seek assistance from other members of staff at as early a stage as possible, since single-handed intervention increases the risks of injury to both parties and does not provide a witness.
- Staff should send for assistance from the ISM (in-school management) team as deemed necessary. The school's CRT (Crisis Response Team) can also be called as deemed necessary.
- All staff who become aware that another member of staff is intervening physically with a pupil will have a responsibility to provide a presence, and to offer support and assistance should this be required.
- Where possible, staff who have not been involved in the initial confrontation leading up to an incident, may be in a better position to de-escalate and/or physically intervene if this proves necessary.
- A pupil's behaviour may be adversely affected by the presence of an audience e.g. the rest of the children in the class. If this is the case, the audience may be redirected to another area. If this is not possible, the pupil will be redirected to another area. When possible, the pupil and member(s) of staff will aim to withdraw to a quieter space.

### *Best Practice when using Physical Intervention*

- Taking action immediately before, or, as behaviour escalates can be highly effective in reducing the student's distress and minimising behaviours that may lead to a crisis situation. Wherever possible, verbal de-escalation techniques should be used before any other responses are considered.
- Staff will view physical intervention or restraint of pupils as a last resort to maintaining a safe environment, with the intention of responding to a clear or developing danger of injury or harm.
- Physical intervention may reasonably be required in the following situations:
  - Student putting themselves in danger e.g. throwing furniture, climbing to a dangerous height, breaking glass, attempting to abscond or trying to self-harm.
  - Student with a weapon and perceived intent to use it.
  - Student physically attacking another student(s), staff and/or visitor(s) to the school, or attempting to do so.
- Staff will be aware of the need to communicate in a calm, gentle manner and that the reason for an intervention is to keep the pupil and others safe. Staff will explain that as soon as the pupil is calm, the intervention will no longer be needed.

### *Outline of procedures when choosing physical intervention:*

ACT	BALANCE	CHOOSE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Adopt a calm, non threatening stance and posture</li><li>- Allow the child space</li><li>- Use a slow controlled voice</li><li>- Give clear verbal directions, limited language</li><li>- Pause and allow time for compliance</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- The likely outcomes if physical intervention is used against the likely outcomes if it is not</li><li>- Short term risks versus long term risks</li><li>- Best interests of the child against the best interests of other children and staff</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Persons who are most likely to succeed</li><li>- Best place available; ie remain in/exit the room with the child or remove other children</li><li>- Minimum use of physical intervention necessary to achieve the desired result</li></ul>

### **Section 3: Absconding (Flight Risk)**

- All staff will be made aware of pupils who have been identified as a 'flight risk'.
- A staff member may attempt to intervene physically to prevent a pupil from absconding from the school, if verbal strategies have proven unsuccessful.
- If physical intervention is deemed impossible or likely to result in injury to the pupil or the staff member, it may not be possible to intervene physically.
- The staff member present will attempt to contact the principal or class teacher using their mobile phone, making them aware of the situation and the pupil's current location.
- The principal and/or office staff will communicate further with relevant staff members, in response to crisis situations. This may include phoning for support and/or using the school intercom to call for assistance.
- In the event of a pupil managing to abscond from the school building, the school will attempt to keep track of the location of the pupil within the grounds. This may include following and observing from a distance, balancing the risk of engagement/further escalation against the safety of the pupil.
- In the event that a pupil manages to leave the school grounds entirely, the school will contact the Gardaí and the pupil's parents. Staff will attempt to keep track of the location of the pupil.
- When parents arrive at the scene of a crisis situation, the responsibility for the welfare and wellbeing of their children falls to the parent/guardian and not the school, from that point onwards.
- If a parent/guardian cannot attend the school in a timely manner, staff may request guidance or instruction over the phone. In this scenario, where staff are following the explicit instructions of the child's parent or guardian, the responsibility for the welfare and wellbeing of their children falls to the parent/guardian and not the school.



### **Communication**

The school seeks to engage positively with parents/guardians regarding all aspects of their child's education, care and management. Parents/guardians of pupils who engage in high-risk behaviours of concern are prioritised for meetings/phone calls etc. with the Class Teacher, S.E.T teacher, Principal or Deputy Principal. The school will endeavour to keep parents informed in a manner that is reasonable and in the best interests of the child. This may take the form of face-to-face conversations, meetings, phone calls, Aladdin messages or emails.

This policy will be shared with all parents after its initial ratification. It will also be available on the school website and a hard copy can be requested from the school office.

### **Debriefing and Review**

A structured review process, without apportioning blame, is required to restore wellbeing and calm and to prevent it happening again.

- Students are expected and required, where appropriate, to reflect on crisis situations at a later stage.
- Students, parents and staff should seek to understand the possible triggers for the incident in question and to work with the student to prevent a repeat incident.
- Staff will complete an Incident Report Form, where they will be asked to reflect on the crisis situation, review the outcome and examine strategies to prevent a repeat incident.
- School Support Plans, Risk Assessments and Crisis Response Plans will be updated as needed.

### **School Records and Procedure**

Any serious incidents of physical/verbal aggression by a student or any incidents of absconding or attempted absconding will be documented using the school's Incident Report Form, which will be kept on file by the School Principal.

Serious incidents will also be communicated to the parent/guardian. The school's Code of Behaviour may be invoked for an incident if deemed necessary and appropriate. Communication and follow up support will be provided in line with the school ethos, to support students and their families.

### **Complaints**

- Parents wishing to make a complaint should in the first instance contact the Principal, who will furnish the parent with a copy of the [Parental Complaints Procedure](#)
- Staff wishing to make a complaint should in the first instance contact the Principal, who will furnish the staff member with a copy of the [Working Together](#) document.

- All parties involved are expected to use a solution-focused approach to resolving complaints, taking into account the needs of the student(s) and all relevant parties.

### **Implementation**

This draft policy was shared with staff in draft form in March 2025 and after feedback from parents and staff was ratified by the Board of Management in June 2025. The school management team and staff will implement this policy and will also ensure particular support and guidance is given to new members of staff or substitutes. The Board of Management ratified this policy on the below date:

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Chairperson

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Date

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Acting Principal

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Date