



Mercy College Woodford

Substance Use Policy

Scope of Policy

This policy applies to the entire school community - students, teachers, auxiliary staff members, all users of the school premises, visitors, i.e. every person who enters the building. It is applicable during school-time – including breaks and to ALL school related activities.

It applies to the school building and grounds and the complete campus and to any area where a school related activity takes place, e.g. School Tour and school bus to and from school. It applies during school hours and to all school related activities both inside and outside school hours and while under the care of the school or while in school uniform.

Any exceptions must be discussed with the principal/ and or the Board of Management. Substances in question include alcohol, tobacco (and any smoking related products, i.e. vaping products), solvents, aerosol deodorants, illegal drugs and prescribed drugs.

Aims of Policy

The aim of the substance use policy of Mercy College is primary prevention. We aim to protect our pupils from the harmful effects of substance misuse and try to prevent them from using tobacco, alcohol, solvents, and illegal substances. We aim to develop in our pupils' better self-esteem, through providing a positive school climate and atmosphere and through giving our pupils age-appropriate information from educational programmes.

Rationale of Policy

The world in which we live presents young people with many challenges, which affect their health and well-being. The most important consideration taken into account in this policy is the protection of our students. Schools need to reflect upon how they might provide for the needs of their student cohort and respond appropriately to what are sometimes sensitive and emotive issues.

- The Education Act 1998 provides that schools should promote the social and personal development of students and provide health education for them.
- The National Drugs Strategy 'Building on Experience' is now government policy and it requires schools to have a substance use policy in place.
- The recent report from the National Advisory Committee on Drugs entitled 'Drug Use Prevention' (November 2017) underlines the importance of schools developing substance use policies.
- The prevalence of tobacco, tobacco related products, vapes, alcohol and drug misuse poses challenges for all school communities.
- We do not accept or tolerate the possession, use, or supply of banned or unprescribed drugs and/or drug paraphernalia, alcohol, vapes or tobacco by any student in the school, on school trips and outings, or during any school related activity. The school reserves the right to act on any information it may receive regarding the possession, use, sale, or distribution of illegal substances.

Policy Content

1. Education concerning substance abuse

Mercy College Woodford is committed to providing an age-appropriate substance use education programme for all students which is incorporated into the Social, Personal & Health Education Programme, Science, C.S.P.E., Home Economics and other relevant subject areas. The Programme is developed & delivered in the context of a supportive whole school environment.

Contributions from parents, local Gardai, other parties with relevant expertise and experience and relevant outside agencies are encouraged and facilitated wherever possible and within the remit of the school's own programme, while supplementing or reinforcing the work we carry out. Drug Awareness and other relevant programmes/workshops are offered to parents and all school personnel when opportunities to do so arise and the school's resources permit. The school supports staff in the delivery of substance use education by providing resource materials and by facilitating in-service training in group facilitation skills and personal development. The school will endeavour to provide any training necessary for the continued development of the SPHE programme by involving outside agencies to provide appropriate training.

Our school welcomes consultation with parents/guardians on the best use of available resources in the community to support the school in its programme and policy implementation.

Our educational aims in relation to substance use education are:

- To increase the self-esteem and confidence of the students
- To equip students with personal and social skills
- To enable students to make informed, healthy & responsible choices
- To provide honest & age-appropriate information on substance use
- To minimise the harm caused by substance use by offering supportive interventions

Parents/Guardians are asked to recognize that they are in partnership with the school in relation to informing and educating their children regarding substance abuse. They are encouraged to approach the school if they are concerned about any issue related to substance use and their child. The school will refer parents/guardians to other sources of help. They are required to assist and co-operate fully with the school as it seeks to deal justly and effectively with any incidents that may arise. In any incident involving unauthorised substances the school will normally involve the student's parent/guardian and explain how the school intends to respond to the incident and to the pupil's needs. In exceptional circumstances, where the school suspects that a factor exists to put the student's safety at risk or if there is any other cause for concern for the student's safety at home then the school should exercise caution when considering involving parents/guardians.

All incidents involving illegal Substance Use are of a criminal nature and are automatically referred to An Garda Síochána who has responsibility for investigating criminal matters. In the event of substances/ substance use paraphernalia being found on the school's property, the principal or a designated staff member has the right to contact An Garda Síochána. The substance/paraphernalia will be stored in a container, with date and time written on the outside and stored in a secure place until An Garda Síochána arrive to remove the container/offending paraphernalia. All incidents involving visiting adults on the school property, suspected of being under the influence of alcohol

/illegal drugs will be brought to the attention of An Garda Síochána. Where visiting adults are suspected of being in possession of /using illegal drugs anywhere on/near the school property, An Garda Síochána will be contacted immediately.

2. Management of Alcohol, Tobacco and Drug Related Incidents Alcohol

Alcohol

The school is an alcohol-free zone.

Students are not permitted to drink or possess alcohol on the school premises or on any school related activity. Members of staff who present for work in an intoxicated state will be asked to excuse themselves from work for the day and the Chairperson of the Board of Management informed.

Any parents collecting a child while clearly under the influence of alcohol and intending to drive home, will be advised that the school will seek the other parent or guardian listed on the school enrolment form, to drive the child home.

Tobacco and related products e.g. vapes

The school is a non-smoking zone. Students are not permitted to smoke or possess tobacco products on the premises or on any school related activity. Staff and visitors are not permitted to smoke on the premises or in the school grounds.

Illegal Drugs/Solvents/Food/Beverages

Illicit drugs, solvents, certain food and certain beverages which affect the behaviour of students are not allowed on the premises, nor should students be on school premises after consumption.

3. Procedures for Managing Substance Use Incidents

The school's shared understanding of a 'drug related incident' is:

- Any unusual or unbecoming behaviour resulting from intake or use of alcohol, tobacco (and any smoking related products, i.e. vaping products) or illegal drugs
- The sale or passing on of any illegal substance
- The possession of alcohol, tobacco and any smoking related products, i.e. vaping products or illegal drugs on school grounds or at school related activities
- Disposal of drugs or related items (e.g. syringes) found on school property.

Should a member of staff think that a student is under the influence of an illegal substance, the principal should be informed immediately and further action will then be decided. If any staff

member or visitor to the school continuously violates the rules, the Board of Management and all relevant external authorities will be informed. The Gardaí will be informed if it is suspected that any member of the school community is dealing in illegal drugs within the school campus and surrounds.

As it is not possible to plan for all eventualities the steps that the school will take in managing & investigating a substance abuse may include the following:

- Where it is apparent that there is immediate danger to students or the school community, the school reserves the right to suspend or remove temporarily from the school any student involved in a suspected substance abuse incident pending a further investigation of the incident.
- The school will take all the steps required to fully investigate & assess any Substance Use incident & will take whatever time it deems necessary to do this.
- The school will take possession of any banned or prohibited substances and drug paraphernalia associated with a substance use incident, carefully recording all such items and retaining them pending completion of the investigation, unless otherwise instructed by 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 these statements.
- The school will maintain a written record of all stages of the investigation of an incident, including records referred to in the above steps, communications with other people or agencies involved or concerned with the matters under investigation, the investigation outcome, decisions taken & the rationale for these decisions, any penalties or disciplinary measures imposed following an investigation, & the management & outcome of any appeal that may arise following an investigation.
- The school, at its discretion, will liaise with any appropriate outside authority & seek advice or assistance, as it deems appropriate in relation to its investigation of an incident.
- In relation to a verified and investigated incident, the Board of Management may implement disciplinary actions or sanctions, including but not limited to: an oral warning, a written warning, a suspension of three days duration, a suspension of more than three days duration, other sanctions short of expulsion, and expulsion.
- The school can, at its sole discretion, postpone the issue of sanctions to take account of mitigating circumstances or representations that it considers should be taken into account.
- The school will endeavour to provide pastoral supports to the student(s) and parents/guardians affected by an incident of substance use except where a student has been expelled from school. Such support where expulsion is warranted may be provided by outside agencies.

4. Pastoral Care/Counselling

For some young people, their involvement with substance use may be masking some underlying difficulties and for others it may be a phase of experimentation, which they will pass through safely. In response to all incidents, the school shall ensure that counselling/ pastoral supports are offered to the student involved, and to students and parents affected by an incident of substance use. If the person has a substance use problem, then referral to external services will be recommended.

Appendices:

The DES Position

As part of its role as a government agency committed to implementing the National Drugs Strategy 2001-2008—Building on Experience, the Department of Education and Science now requires that all schools have a Substance Use policy in place. Research has shown that schools that have a developed strategy for responding to the issue of drug misuse, in all its forms, are best equipped to respond to drug-related incidents as they arise and are most successful in terms of drug prevention and education. Given this fact, the best approach to developing such a strategy is through a formal policy formulated within the context of the school ethos and the framework of the school plan.

Circular 18/02

Circular 18/02 and the Guidelines (October 2002) set down the rationale, objectives and the process to be observed in regard to formulating a policy on Substance Use. 'The world in which we live presents young people with many challenges which affect their health and well-being. Exposure to alcohol, tobacco and drugs is part of this reality. Schools need to reflect upon how they might provide for the needs of their student cohort and respond appropriately to what are sometimes sensitive and emotive issues' (Guidelines, P1).

Banned or Prohibited Substances

Banned or prohibitive substance includes all substances covered by the Misuse of Drugs Act, non-validated prescription medication, all alcohol, and tobaccos used contrary to the law of the land. It should also state that the school reserves the right to determine that a substance found at the school qualifies as a banned or prohibited substance this includes any substance that compromises the health and safety of a student(s).

Drug Paraphernalia

Drug paraphernalia includes any banned or prohibited substance as defined above, any items that may be deemed to be used in the taking of illicit substances, and any written or printed material promoting the use of illicit substances.