



**Mercy Secondary School, Inchicore.**

**SUBSTANCE ABUSE POLICY  
2024/2025**

Mercy Secondary Inchicore is a co-educational Catholic school in the heart of Inchicore, Dublin 8. Just as our founder Catherine McAuley imagined and created a world, in which education empowered and provided opportunities for all; we continue that vision of realising all that our students and our learning community can become.

At the heart of our mission is the belief that each and every member of our community is a valued and treasured child of God. We are committed to creating opportunities for our students. We hold the belief that we have a duty to dream big for each and every person within our learning community.

**Ratified:**

**To be Reviewed:**

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## Introduction

Mercy Secondary School's Policy on Substance Misuse is primarily concerned with the welfare, health, care and protection of every person in the school community in accordance with the Education Act 1998 and the Education (Welfare) Act 2000. The policy is formulated in the context of our Code of Behaviour, Children First – National Guidance for the Protection of Children (2011) and other relevant school policies.

## Definition

For the purpose of this policy, a Substance/Drug is any material, legal or illegal, which acts on the central nervous system to affect intoxication, stimulation, sedation, change of mood, perception, or behaviour. These include alcohol, tobacco, vapes, nitrous oxide, all illegal drugs and the illicit use of over-the-counter and prescribed medication.

A substance abuse incident is defined as any incident relating to banned or prohibited substances that occurs in the school or during school functions or outings, or any such incident that may be deemed damaging to the health or welfare of the student concerned, or to other students.

Mercy Secondary School reserves the right to determine whether or not a specific incident constitutes an abuse incident to be addressed under the terms of this policy.

Mercy Secondary School does not allow smoking or vaping in the school or on the school grounds.

## Scope of the Policy

This policy applies to all students enrolled in Mercy Secondary School, at all times during the school day and during school organised activities or events. It applies whether these activities or events are held on or off the school premises and grounds. The policy extends to students travelling to and from organised school activities and events.

## Aims of the Policy

The overall aims of the policy are:

- to uphold the ethos of Mercy Secondary Secondary School and in accordance with our Mission Statement
- provide a safe and secure environment within which each student can develop to her full potential
- to provide clear guidelines on the respective roles and responsibilities of students, staff, management and parents in relation to substance use
- to outline procedures for managing incidents related to substance misuse.

## Schools Position on Substance Misuse

Mercy Secondary School does not accept or tolerate:

- the possession, use or supply of banned or prohibited substances
- the possession, use or supply of drug paraphernalia
- the supply or organisation of supply of banned substances or drug paraphernalia by a student to any other party, or parties, on or in the vicinity of the school grounds, on school trips and outings, or during any school-based or school related activity
- the possession or consumption of alcohol, cigarettes, vapes, lighters and matches on the school premises, its vicinity or during school functions or activities

The Board of Management considers substance misuse or the possession and/or supply of any of the materials listed above (but not limited to these materials), either on the school premises or on school-related activities, to be an extremely serious infringement of Mercy Secondary School's Code of Behaviour.

## Use of Prescribed Medication

Mercy Secondary School recognises that students are prescribed a range of medication which may need to be taken during the school day. The school should be informed via email/letter of any students who are on regular prescribed medication and these students are expected, in their normal course of events, to be independent managers of their own medicines. Staff are not personally responsible or obliged to administer students medication.

Students are not permitted, under any circumstances, to share with others, medication.

## Substance Education Programme

The school acknowledges that it has a vital role to play in education on drugs, especially in the prevention of substance misuse.

Our educational aims in relation to Substance Use are:

- to foster the self-esteem and confidence of all students
- to equip students to make healthy, informed and responsible choices
- to increase students' understanding of the implications and possible consequences of substance use and misuse
- to provide honest and age-appropriate information on alcohol and drug use
- to educate students on the legal position in relation to the misuse of drugs, alcohol and tobacco.

Mercy Secondary School shall endeavour to meet these aims through:

- in Social Personal and Health Education (SPHE) classes
- the development of responsible attitudes across the curriculum and in areas such as RE, CSPE, PE, Science and Home Economics
- providing resource materials and availing of the support of relevant outside agencies and visiting speakers
- facilitating relevant staff to attend relevant in-service
- providing information to parents on issues relating to substance misuse

## Managing Substance Misuse Incidents

In all situations involving substance misuse, there must be a balance between the needs of the student or students involved, and the welfare of the school community as a whole. In dealing with any alcohol, tobacco (including vapes) or drug-related incidents, the school will seek to combine its necessary disciplinary response with an appropriate pastoral response. Such a response may include in school counselling, the support of staff and/ or referral to an outside support agency.

The school will consider each substance misuse incident individually and recognise

that a variety of responses will be necessary to deal with incidents.

All members of staff have a responsibility to report all known incidents of substance misuse on the school premises or on school related activities to the Principal. The Principal/Deputy Principal has the overall responsibility for managing substance misuse incidents. Where it is considered that there is an immediate danger, the Principal, Deputy Principal or person acting on the authority of the Principal will contact the Emergency Services immediately. Parents/Guardians will be informed as soon as possible.

The Principal shall reserve the right to suspend any student involved in a substance misuse incident pending a further and complete investigation.

Where a decision is taken to suspend a student as a consequence of a substance misuse incident, the Board of Management may specify certain conditions to be met by the student and her parent(s)/guardian(s) prior to the student returning to school. Where such conditions are not met and/or the student is again found to be in breach of rules regarding substance misuse, a proposal for expulsion may ensue.

In all instances and having regard to its statutory obligations, the Board of Management reserves the right to proceed to expulsion procedures where the readmission of a student is considered a threat to the safety, health and welfare of others in the school.

The rules of natural justice will apply and the procedures outlined in the schools Code of Behaviour will be followed.

### ***Confidentiality***

The prime focus in any incident relating to substance misuse is the well-being and safety of the students and staff, as well as the orderly running of the school. It is important that in all suspected or confirmed drug incidents, a limited number of people will be involved in managing the incident. The Principal, Deputy Principal, and some of the following: Guidance Counsellor, Year Head, Tutor and persons directly involved in the case, may be informed as appropriate.

### ***Parents/Guardians***

If there is a substance misuse incident in the school, the Parents/Guardians of the student concerned will always be involved. Situations will be handled in a sensitive manner and whenever possible support will be offered. Notwithstanding that substance misuse is a very serious infringement of the schools Code of Behaviour

and must be treated as a serious disciplinary matter.

### ***Gardaí***

The Principal or designated mandated person may contact the Gardaí and/ or the Juvenile Liaison Officer (JLO) in the event of a suspected or confirmed incident involving illicit substances.

### ***The Media***

If contacted by the media, the Principal will act as spokesperson. No comment will be offered on individual cases but a brief response where necessary will be given, for example “The school has a policy in place to deal with any substance misuse related incidents and that policy will be implemented in this instance”.

## **External Support Agencies**

- C.A.M.H.S (Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services)
- TUSLA (Child and family Agency)
- Meitheal (Tusla Support)
- N.E.P.S (National Educational Psychological Service)
- Core Youth Service (Inchicore Youth Project)
- Our Lady’s Children’s Hospital
- Canal Communities Regional Addiction Service

## **Training and staff development relating to substance use**

### ***Staff***

The school facilitates (P.D.S.T. or other approved organisations) training for staff involved in the teaching of S.P.H.E. All staff will be offered drug information and information on awareness training where possible. Specific guidance will be made available to staff in relation to managing drug related incidents. Management are committed to upholding our Child Protection responsibilities and the appropriate training and certification is offered to staff. First Aid Officers are trained and this training will remain up to date.

### ***Parents/Guardians***

The school will provide information regarding support in the local area, opportunities for parents to attend drug workshops and information evenings.

**Ratification**

This policy was ratified on:

Signature:

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(Chair of the Board of Management)