

# **URSULINE COLLEGE SLIGO**

## **SUBSTANCE USE POLICY**

### **SECTION 1: INTRODUCTION**

This Substance Use policy applies to the entire school community of Ursuline College, Sligo – including teachers, students, parents/guardians and all users of, and visitors to the school campus.

Ursuline College, Sligo has been educating young people since 1850. The philosophy of Ursuline education is based on the writings of St Angela Merici who founded the Ursuline Congregation in Italy in 1535. Ursuline education aims to nurture a community where Christian values are respected, lived and taught. The philosophy of Ursuline education is holistic, emphasising the uniqueness and dignity of each individual.

The Substance Use policy forms part of a pastoral approach adopted by the school to ensure a healthy, caring and supportive learning environment. This policy is one among many serving to incarnate the school's ethos.

Ursuline College reserves the right to protect and promote its own particular ethos by requiring the highest standards of behaviour.

### **RATIONALE FOR SUBSTANCE USE POLICY**

The world in which our young people grow up in has become increasingly complex. It presents young people with difficult challenges. Exposure to tobacco, alcohol and drugs is part and parcel of this reality. We at Ursuline College strive to provide a safe and healthy learning environment for our students, where each one is respected and can work towards achieving her potential.

The Board of Management recognises and accepts the seriousness of various research findings regarding the problems associated with drug and alcohol misuse. Along with this, the Education Act of 1998 advises schools to promote the social and personal development of students and to provide health education for them. The National Drugs Strategy requires schools to have a substance use policy in place. It is for all of these reasons that this Substance Use policy is in place.

### **SECTION 2: SCHOOL POLICY**

#### **DEFINITION OF DRUGS**

A drug is any chemical which alters how the body works or how a person behaves or feels. Drugs can be both legal or illegal, including alcohol and tobacco.

Ursuline College does not accept or tolerate the possession, use or supply of banned or illegal substances by any student in the school or on school trips or outings, or during any school-related activity.

An exception is made for the use of properly prescribed drugs; in this case, parents/guardians of students taking prescribed medication are obliged to inform the school in writing of this fact.

### **SECTION 3: PROGRAMMES FOR ALCOHOL, VOLATILE SUBSTANCES AND DRUGS EDUCATION:**

At Ursuline College we strive to educate the students in our care in the area of drugs/alcohol education. Through this, we hope to give our students the information, skills and attitudes they need to appreciate the benefits of a healthy life-style and to make informed choices.

The SPHE programme at both Junior and Senior cycle, presents students with opportunities to examine their personal attitudes and values in relation to substance use generally. They examine the consequences and dangers associated with misuse of alcohol, drugs and other substances. Students can consider the choices they are making and the consequences of these choices. Developing life skills which support healthy choices is central to Substance Use Education. SPHE has an important contribution to make in raising awareness and encouraging students to be proactive in relation to healthy attitudes to substance use. The objectives of SPHE in the area of substance use education are to:-

- ≈ Enhance students' knowledge and understanding about substance use and misuse
- ≈ Develop awareness of personal experiences, values, attitudes and feelings which influence lifestyle choices about substance use
- ≈ Develop students' personal and interpersonal skills so that they might have the confidence to act appropriately in the face of social pressure to behave differently
- ≈ Examine life stories associated with the harmful use of substances to develop understanding and empathy with those involved.
- ≈ Examine the external influences of substance use including the media, peers and community.

Visiting speakers reinforce the school's Substance Use policy. Teachers – R.E/. S.P.H.E will liaise with visiting speakers so that any follow-up work can be carried out.

Parents/Guardians can play a supportive role in this regard by

- Acknowledging the importance of alcohol/drugs education
- Recognising that they are partners with the school in relation to educating their children re substance abuse
- Assisting and co-operating fully with the school as it seeks to deal justly and effectively with any incidents that may arise

The school will try to respond to parents/guardians' specific needs for information and support should parents/guardians request this.

#### **SECTION 4: PROCEDURES FOR MANAGING SUBSTANCE ABUSE INCIDENTS**

The school seeks to respond to incidents involving alcohol, tobacco and drug use in a firm but fair and caring manner, taking account of the welfare of the individual(s) involved, and the welfare of the school community as a whole.

The following steps will be taken:

- If it becomes evident that there is immediate danger to students or to the school community as a whole, the school reserves the right to suspend or remove temporarily from the school, any student involved in a suspected abuse incident pending a further and complete investigation of the incident
- An Abuse Incident Form will be filled out
- The school will take all necessary steps to fully investigate and assess any alleged abuse incident
- The school will take possession of any banned or prohibited substances. These will be carefully recorded and retained until completion of the investigation, unless instructed otherwise by outside agencies. An Garda Síochána will be contacted with regard to the disposal of such substances.
- Should an incident occur, 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 inform parents/guardians where an incident is being investigated
- The school will keep a written record of all stages in the investigation of an incident, including communication with other people or agencies involved, the investigation outcome, decisions taken and the rationale for these decisions and any disciplinary measures imposed
- The school will liaise with any appropriate outside agency and will seek advice or assistance as it sees appropriate in relation to the investigation of an incident
- If the circumstances merit, and at the discretion of the school/Board of management, the full particulars of the investigation of an incident will be conveyed to the students involved and their parents/guardians in the following way:
  - Copies of records considered relevant to the student involved in the incident will be made available to the student and her parents – at the discretion of the school – in time to enable the student and her parents to make their response to the matter at issue. The school will take this response into account along with any other relevant information or mitigating circumstances that may be appropriate to the specific incident
  - The school will inform the student and her parents of the school's findings shortly after this. If the school finds that the students have been involved or implicated in an incident, it shall indicate the sanctions that it intends to impose in the circumstances

- In keeping with the Discipline Policy of the school, a graded system of sanctions including suspension and expulsion, will apply to students involved in substance misuse incidents.  
Where an incident is deemed sufficiently serious and in the case of the supply of illegal drugs, expulsion will be recommended to the Board of Management
- The issue of sanctions can, at the discretion of the school, be postponed to take account of mitigating circumstances or representations that it feels should be taken into account.
- Support for students directly involved in incidents of substance misuse will be offered by Year Heads/School Counsellor/Chaplain. Staff dealing with drug related incidents will be offered internal supports and contact with external agencies if appropriate.

In the event of Staff breaches of the policy, issues will be dealt with in accordance with the Professional Code of practice and conditions of employment

## **SECTION 5: THE INVOLVEMENT AND ROLES OF VARIOUS PARTIES IN AN INCIDENT INVESTIGATION**

All incidents of substance misuse must be reported to the Principal who will inform the Year Head and other staff members as appropriate. The Principal may delegate the investigation of an incident to the Deputy Principal/Year Head/Guidance counsellor.

The Principal is responsible for

- Dealing with abuse incidents that may occur in the school
- Making decisions regarding the investigation of an incident; communication with and reporting to relevant parties and disclosure of information regarding an investigation
- The securing and confidential storage of any written documentation and records related to an incident
- Taking possession of banned or prohibited substances or drug paraphernalia
- Securing the help of Deputy Principal/Year Head/Guidance Counsellor/Class Tutor in conducting an incident investigation, where such help is deemed necessary

While the school will conduct an investigation where a substance misuse incident has occurred, the school may contact parents/guardians regarding a **suspected** misuse incident.

## **CONFIDENTIALITY**

While every effort will be made to respect confidentiality, it is not possible to guarantee total confidentiality in relation to alcohol or drug misuse. Information may need to be shared, for example, with certain staff members, with parents/guardians of those involved or with appropriate outside agencies. However, discretion within these limits will be observed.

## **SECTION 6: TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT**

In relation to students, the school will offer programmes relating to alcohol, tobacco and drugs education to all students within the context of Junior and Leaving Certificate programmes and visiting speakers if deemed necessary.

Education programmes will be arranged for staff.

Information sessions will be made available to parents/guardians.

## **SECTION 7: MONITORING AND EVALUATION OF POLICY**

The school will monitor, review and evaluate the Policy on an annual basis to ensure legal compliance and the maintenance of best practices.

