



21 January 2019

Dear Principal/Chairperson,

I am writing to inform you that, following a process of consultation with the relevant education partners under the provisions of Section 13(8) of the *Education Act 1998*, the Minister for Education and Skills, Joe Mc Hugh T.D., has approved the **commencement of Child Protection and Safeguarding Inspections** in schools, centres for education and other learning settings with effect from **01 February 2019**.

Child Protection and Safeguarding Inspections will be carried out by the Inspectorate of the Department of Education and Skills in a sample of schools annually. The inspections focus in an in-depth way on how school boards and staff members are fulfilling their legal responsibilities in relation to the protection and safeguarding of children.

As you will be aware, mandatory reporting of child protection concerns by teachers and greater oversight of child protection arrangements in schools were among a range of changes that came into effect with the introduction of the *Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools* in December 2017. The *Child Protection and Safeguarding Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools 2017* provide for the inspection by the Department of Education and Skills Inspectorate of the implementation of child protection procedures in schools.

Two levels of Inspectorate checks on school implementation of *Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools 2017* were introduced into school inspections in December 2017 and March 2018. Child Protection and Safeguarding Inspections provide a further level of checks in relation to school implementation of the 2017 Procedures.

The aims of Child Protection and Safeguarding Inspections are:

- To promote best practice in the implementation of child protection arrangements in schools
- To monitor the implementation of the *Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools 2017* in a sample of primary and post-primary schools annually
- To publish written reports on the implementation of *Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools 2017* in the sample of schools inspected
- To report to the Child Protection Oversight Group of the Department of Education and Skills and the Minister on the extent to which the *Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools 2017* are implemented in the sample of schools inspected
- To gather information to inform the further development of child protection and safeguarding requirements by the Department of Education and Skills and by other government departments and agencies involved in child protection.

Child Protection and Safeguarding Inspections are based on an inspection framework that is informed by the *Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools 2017*. The inspections comprise ten overarching checks, each of which has a number of sub-checks. The inspection framework is set out in the published *Guide to Child Protection and Safeguarding Inspections* available at www.education.ie.

Normally, a school will receive between 24 hours and 48 hours' notice of a Child Protection and Safeguarding Inspection. The Inspectorate also reserves the right to conduct the inspections without any notice.

In each school selected for a Child Protection and Safeguarding Inspection, two inspections will be conducted – an **Initial** Child Protection Inspection and a **Final** Child Protection Inspection. Usually, the inspections will take place within four to six weeks of each other.

Separate reports from both inspections, incorporating any school responses, will be published. Having two inspections provides the school with the opportunity to address any omissions or weaknesses identified in the Initial Inspection by the time the Final Inspection is completed. Both inspection reports will be published at the same time.

During the inspections, inspectors will:

- Engage in a focused discussion with primary school pupils about their learning in Social Personal and Health Education (SPHE) and Stay Safe and with post-primary students about SPHE and Relationship and Sexuality Education (RSE). The written consent of parents and of post-primary students will be obtained in advance of the learners' participation in focus groups with the inspectors
- Invite all parents in the Initial Child Protection Inspection to complete an online parent survey that explores issues relevant to school climate and parents' awareness of the school's child protection procedures, and the school's anti-bullying procedures
- Hold a meeting with members of the school's parents' association in the Final Child Protection and Safeguarding Inspection
- Hold meetings with:
 - The Designated Liaison Person (DLP) and/or Deputy Designated Liaison Person in the school
 - The chairperson of board of management
 - A sample of school personnel
 - The teacher who is the coordinator for SPHE in the school (if relevant)
- Review the following documents:
 - Board of management minutes
 - The school's Child Safeguarding Statement and Risk Assessment
 - Relevant school plans, monthly progress records (primary schools) and timetable data (post-primary schools)
- Review child protection records.

Following the inspection:

- Each inspection will result in oral feedback to relevant school personnel and a written report on the inspection findings which will outline the level of school compliance with each of the ten overarching checks
- All Child Protection and Safeguarding Inspection reports, from both the Initial Inspection and Final Inspections, will be published on the website of the Department of Education and Skills.

Child Protection and Safeguarding Inspections are carried out in accordance with Section 7(2)(b) and Section 13(3)(a)(i) of the *Education Act 1998* and the *Code of Practice for the Inspectorate* (Department of Education and Skills 2015) which is available at www.education.ie. During the inspection, a school's board and its staff are obliged to accord the inspectors 'every reasonable facility and co-operation' in the performance of their duties (Section 13(7), *Education Act 1998*).

The *Guide to Child Protection and Safeguarding Inspections* sets out how the inspections are conducted and is available at www.education.ie.

I am pleased to inform you that the Inspectorate will be holding a series of regional seminars on Child Protection and Safeguarding Inspections for primary and post-primary school principals over the coming weeks and is planning further briefings on the inspections in May and June 2019. Arrangements have also been made to make presentations about Child Protection and Safeguarding Inspections at national conferences organised by school management authorities and principals' organisations. We will also make available podcasts on the Department's website which will provide information on the inspections to teachers, principals and school board members.

I hope you will find this information helpful.

Yours sincerely,

Harold Hislop
Chief Inspector

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