

## International School Ghent Child Protection Policy

The ITFCP (International Task Force on Child Protection) statement of commitment to child protection:

**“All children have equal rights to be protected from harm and abuse. Everyone has a responsibility to support the protection of children. All schools have a duty of care to children enrolled in the school and those who are affected by the operations of the school. All actions on child protection are taken with consideration for the best interests of the child, which are paramount”.**

International School Ghent (ISG) recognises that every child has the right to develop physically, mentally, and socially in a safe and secure environment. Children cannot develop and learn effectively if their physical and mental health are being undermined.

At ISG our priority is to create a warm environment, both inside and outside the class where students feel safe and cared for.

### What is abuse?

Child abuse constitutes all forms of physical and emotional ill treatment, sexual abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, or other exploitation resulting in actual or potential harm to the child’s healthy survival, development or dignity.

### Child abuse has four recognised categories

**Physical Abuse:** This involves intentionally causing physical harm or injury to a child. It may include actions such as hitting, kicking, punching, burning, or any form of violence that results in physical suffering or injury.

**Emotional Abuse:** Emotional abuse is the systematic use of verbal and non-verbal tactics to undermine a child's self-esteem, emotional well-being, or mental health. It often includes constant criticism, belittling, humiliation, manipulation, or threats.

**Sexual Abuse:** Sexual abuse involves any non-consensual sexual activity imposed on a child. This can range from inappropriate touching and exposure to more severe forms such as rape and exploitation.

**Neglect:** Neglect occurs when a caregiver fails to provide the necessary care, attention, and basic needs required for a child's well-being, such as food, shelter, medical care, supervision, or emotional support.

### **Responsibility of school leaders/ Management/ Board of directors**

- Guarantee that the policies, procedures and training opportunities in the school are effective and comply with the law at all times.
- Ensure all new members of staff have provided an International Child Protection Certificate or local Belgian equivalent before taking up their post. If not ISG will insist they complete a child safe guarding course as soon as possible.
- Guarantee that there are effective child protection policies and procedures in place together with a Staff Code of Conduct policy.
- Appoint a member of staff to the role of DSL (Designated Safeguarding Lead).
- Ensure all staff, and members of our community, are aware of the school's safeguarding arrangements.
- Make sure that students are taught about safeguarding, including protection against dangers online (including when they are online at home), through teaching and learning opportunities, as part of providing a broad and balanced curriculum.
- Adhere to best practice by conducting appropriate preemployment checks before hiring.

### **The school's Designated Safeguarding Leads (DSL) are:**

- ISG: Mia van Cauwelaert – Deputy Head: [mia.vancauwelaert@isg-ghent.org](mailto:mia.vancauwelaert@isg-ghent.org)
- ISG+: Arline Martens – ISG+ Coordinator: [arline.martens@isg-ghent.org](mailto:arline.martens@isg-ghent.org)

All concerns and disclosures are shared with Maija Lusher – Head of School – [headofschool@isg-ghent.org](mailto:headofschool@isg-ghent.org)

### **The DSL has a responsibility to:**

- Ensure each member of staff has access to and understands the school's Child Protection Policy and procedures.
- Make sure the Head of School is informed of, and up to date, on any safeguarding issues. All relevant information and documents are saved in a safeguarding folder on the server viewable for management only.
- Be aware of local safeguarding arrangements and know where to seek help.
- Make the necessary child protection referrals to appropriate internal support and if necessary to outside agencies.
- Understand when they should consider calling the police.
- Be alert to the specific requirements of children in need of additional support including those with SEN (Special Educational Needs) and EAL (English as an additional language).
- Keep detailed, accurate and secure records of concerns. These accounts should include a summary of the concern raised, details on how the concern was followed up and a note of any action taken, decisions reached and the ultimate outcome.
- Attend any relevant courses.
- Encourage an atmosphere of listening to children and being aware of their feelings.
- Be the confidentiality person for ISG+ students.
- Ensure the school's Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy is reviewed annually and updated if necessary.

- Ensure the school's Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy is available publicly, and parents are aware that the school may make referrals for suspected cases of abuse or neglect, as well as the role the school plays in these referrals.
- Making sure staff are aware of any students that may be at risk.
- Be available during school hours to discuss any safeguarding concerns.

#### **Safeguarding contacts in Belgium**

- ☎ 1712 – a free and discrete helpline for all citizens with a question about abuse
- Further advice (currently only available in Dutch):

[www.vertrouwenscentrum-kindermishandeling.be](http://www.vertrouwenscentrum-kindermishandeling.be)

<https://www.klasse.be/260149/kindermishandeling-aanpakken-in-4-fasen/>

#### **Staff members have a responsibility to**

- Always take the children in our care's wellbeing into consideration.
- Provide a happy and safe environment in which students can learn and thrive.
- Take students feelings into account, do not judge them.
- Set the example of how to treat others.
- Don't think 'what if I'm wrong', think 'what if I'm right'.
- Be aware of the signs of abuse and neglect.
- Be aware of and understand the procedure to follow if a child confides they are being abused or neglected.
- Respect privacy when dealing with individual cases, and always act in the best interests of the child.

#### **Safeguarding procedures at ISG for all staff**

1. Recognise possible abuse
2. Respond appropriately
3. Report concerns
4. Record observations

#### **Recognize possible abuse**

Signs of possible abuse:

- Frequent, unexplained absence from school, regularly being late and not being prepared for the day.
- Changes in behaviour, being withdrawn.
- Disengaging from their normal social group.

- Sudden changes in academic performance.
- Unexplained bruises, burns or injuries on a child.
- Aggressive or violent behaviour towards others.
- Fear of the caregiver and reluctance to go home.
- Wearing clothing that conceals injuries even in hot weather.
- Low self-esteem, depressed.
- Using language that is not child appropriate.
- Knowledge ahead of their age, e.g., sexual knowledge.
- Spending longer than normal in the bathroom or toilet.
- Sudden unexplained gifts or new possessions.
- Regularly coming to school hungry.
- Dirty clothing, poor hygiene, inappropriately dressed for cold weather (missing a coat).

### **Respond Appropriately**

- If a child comes to make a disclosure, don't jump in to respond, first listen, show understanding.
- Make no judgements.
- Only ask open questions, do not suggest answers to your questions.
- Reassure the child and tell them they did the right thing to share.
- Go to designated child protection lead for next steps to be taken.

### **Record your observations**

- Record the child's name, the date and time of disclosure or incident, or when you first had concerns.
- Record exact words of child.
- Note if anyone else was present.
- Make sure to note how the child was feeling at the time of talking to you.
- Do not press the child for more information.
- Respond to immediate priorities and then record everything you can.
- Speak with the DSL.

### **Report concerns**

- Do not wait to report concerns.
- Write down all the details of your concerns, you don't need evidence to report to the DSL.
- You might be asked to contribute to a report for a meeting about the child.
- You might be asked to attend the meeting to say what your concerns are.
- The DSL will tell you what action they are going to take. This may involve providing the child with extra support, making a report to parents, child services, medical agencies, or the police (depending on the severity of the case).
- Report any changes in the child's situation.

## Preventing abuse

- Creating a safe environment for all pupils – make sure children are happy and safe both inside the school and outside the school while on trips, going swimming or doing other activities.
- A safe recruitment process – making sure we have a strong supportive team working together with each child's best interests at heart.
- Class meetings, circle time and school assembly – learning about school values, acceptable behaviour, giving children a voice, having open conversations, knowing the children and understanding each child.
- Opportunities in the school curriculum for students to learn about safeguarding. Being taught to recognise when their safety is being threatened and have the knowledge of where to go for help.
- Students being taught about safety online.
- Staff should not be alone with a child with the door closed.

Created: October 2023  
Effective from: January 2024  
Reviewed again: January 2025

