



## Wilson's Hospital School

# Substance Use and Misuse Policy

### 1. Preamble

The world in which we live presents young people with many challenges that affect their health and well-being. Exposure to alcohol, tobacco and illegal drugs is part of this reality. School has an obligation to protect and provide for the needs of the students in our care, to educate them so that they will be adequately prepared to face these challenges, to respond appropriately to what are sometimes sensitive and emotive issues and, where necessary, to discipline students who have breached the rules regarding substance use.

This policy addresses two major areas:

- The education we provide to students regarding tobacco, alcohol and illegal substances
- The management of incidents that relate to the use of, or involvement with, these substances

This policy is applied in conjunction with the other policies of the School, such as the Code of Conduct, Disciplinary Procedures, Admissions Policy, Student Exclusion Procedures and the Health & Safety Policy.

The aim of the school is that each student should develop to his or her full potential and become a constructive and caring member of society. Given this, we feel it is essential to do all that we can to ensure that students are in a safe environment in school. Parents, students and staff should be able to feel that Wilson's Hospital School is a place which is drug free.

### Statement of the School's Views on Substances

While we recognise that drug usage is increasingly common in society as a whole, Wilson's Hospital School clearly states that any involvement with tobacco, alcohol, solvents or illegal substances in school, on school trips and activities, going to and from school, or in a manner which would affect life in school, is strictly forbidden.

### Definition of "Substances" as Understood by the School

Wilson's Hospital School defines the term "substance" in the broadest possible terms to include:

- Tobacco
- Alcohol
- Solvents
- Illegal Drugs
- Other dangerous or mind/mood altering substances
- Look-alike drugs

- Drug Paraphernalia (including vaping)
- Medicines <sup>1</sup>

## 2. Drugs Education in Wilson’s Hospital School

Wilson’s Hospital School, within the resources available to it, will provide appropriate education programmes on substance use and abuse for all its students.

Our aims are to:

- Increase the self-esteem and confidence of our students
- Equip our students with strong personal and social skills
- Enable our students to make informed, healthy and responsible decisions
- Provide clear and age-appropriate information on drugs and other substances
- Minimise the harm caused by substance use by offering supportive interventions

We believe such teaching is most effective when provided within the broader context of the Personal Development Education (P.D.E.) programme, and the main core of substance use/abuse education will be provided in this way. Formal P.D.E. classes (two 40 minute classes per week) are presented in the Junior Cycle, but the programme continues all the way up through the school. Drugs Education forms a significant part of this programme. Education on substance use is also provided in other subject areas, such as Religious Education, Science, Physical Education, Home Economics and Career Guidance.

As well as a formal substance abuse education programme in school, class work will be supported from time to time by inviting outside speakers to address the students on related issues where this is considered appropriate. Such presentations to students will always be done under the supervision of the class teacher or form teacher.

### Role of Parents/Guardians

Wilson’s Hospital School believes that values are formed primarily in the home, and that parents/guardians, by their own actions and attitudes, have the main responsibility for the behaviour and attitudes of their children with regard to drugs. Parents/guardians have a supportive role to play regarding the education programmes offered by the School and in warning their children of the very real dangers associated with use of legal and illegal drugs.

Every year, the School will provide information evenings for 1st Year parents around the area of Alcohol and Substance use.

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<sup>1</sup> It is already the stated policy of the school that everyday medicines e.g. painkillers, cough medicines, will not be given out by any member of staff. If parents wish their children to bring in such medicines, this is acceptable, but students who are taking medicine – prescribed or unprescribed – must bring in a note from their parents stating that they have permission to do so and should alert the Office and their Form Teacher that this is the case.

### **3. Management of Drug/Substance-Related Situations**

Examples of Substance Abuse Incidents include:

- The use, or suspected use, of alcohol, tobacco, illegal drugs or any mind/mood altering substance.
- Intoxicated/unusual behaviour
- Disclosure about use of such substances
- Discovery of such substances or associated paraphernalia
- Possession or supply of such substances
- Failure to cooperate into a School investigation into substance abuse

The above list is not exhaustive.

This applies in school, on school trips or activities, going to and from school, or in a manner which would affect life in school.

#### **Procedures for Management of a Substance Abuse Incident**

1. Substance Abuse, although extremely rare in Wilson's Hospital School, is considered by the School Management Board to be such a serious issue that these rules shall apply to all students, regardless of whether or not they are over 18.
2. Where it is apparent that there is immediate danger to the health of a student, medical intervention may be sought without seeking parental permission. Parents will, however, be notified as soon as possible.
3. Where it is apparent that there is ongoing danger to the health or welfare of a student or the school community, the school reserves the right to suspend or remove temporarily from the school any student involved in a suspected substance misuse incident pending a further and complete investigation of the incident.
4. Where the Principal, Deputy Principal or appropriate Year Head has reasonable grounds for suspicion, a student's locker may be searched without their permission.
5. Where the Principal, Deputy Principal or appropriate Year Head has reasonable grounds for suspicion, a student may be asked to turn out their bag. If a student refuses to do so, their bag will be temporarily confiscated until their parents/guardians can come in to turn out their bag. If this fails to happen, the bag will be turned over to the Gardai.
6. Where the Principal, Deputy Principal or appropriate Year Head has reasonable grounds for suspicion, a student may be asked to turn out their pockets. If a student refuses to do so, they shall be asked to wait in a monitored environment until their parents/guardians can come in to resolve the matter. If it is not resolved, the Gardai shall be called and the matter passed on to them.
7. Where a student and/or their parents fail to cooperate into a School investigation into substance misuse, this shall constitute an admission of guilt on their part and the student shall be dealt with as if they had been proved to have been guilty of the most serious possible substance misuse offence.
8. Any student, parent or member of staff who finds a student in a substance-related situation (see above) must immediately report what they have heard, seen or found to the Principal, Deputy Principal or appropriate Year Head.
9. The reporting student, parent or staff member will be asked to provide a written account of what they encountered.
10. Under the direction of the Principal, the school staff will take all steps necessary to fully investigate and assess any substance misuse incident and will take whatever time it deems necessary to do this. The school will seek statements from all persons

- involved in, concerned with, or having knowledge of the incident and will record these statements.
11. Under the direction of the Principal, the school will take possession of any banned or prohibited substance and paraphernalia associated with the incident. A record will be kept of all such items, and they will be retained pending completion of the investigation, unless otherwise instructed by appropriate outside agency/agencies. Thereafter they will be destroyed or passed on to such outside agency/agencies.
  12. The school will maintain a written record of all stages of the investigation, including records referred to in the above steps, communications with other people or agencies involved or concerned with the matter under investigation, the investigation outcome, decisions taken and the rationale for these decisions, any penalties or disciplinary measures imposed following an investigation, and the management and outcome of any appeal that may arise following an investigation.
  13. The school, at its own discretion, will liaise with An Garda Siochana or any other appropriate outside agency and seek advice or assistance, as it deems appropriate in relation to the investigation of an incident. The school will, as a matter of course, report the possession or selling of illegal drugs to An Garda Siochana.
  14. If the circumstances merit and the investigation is continuing, the Principal/Deputy Principal will put the full particulars of the incident to the student(s) concerned and the parents/guardians in the following manner
    - (i) Copies of all records deemed relevant to the position of the student concerned and to the nature of the complaints or allegations that a student is facing will be made available to the student and his/her parents/guardians, at the discretion of the school, in time to permit the student a reasonable opportunity to make his/her own reply to the matters at issue and any representation that he/she would wish to make or have made on his/her behalf
    - (ii) (ii) The Principal/Deputy Principal will allow the student concerned and his/her parents/guardians reasonable time to respond to the matters at issue. The school will take into account any response made and any other relevant extraneous considerations or mitigating circumstances that may be appropriate to the specific case.
    - (iii) (iii)The Principal/Deputy Principal shall as soon as possible thereafter, inform the student and his/her parents/guardians of the school's findings and the reasons therein. If the school finds that the student has been guilty of or was involved in or implicated in an incident, it shall indicate the penalty or sanctions that it intends to impose in the circumstances.
  15. In relation to a verified and investigated incident, the Principal/Deputy Principal may implement disciplinary actions or sanctions in accordance with the terms of the Wilson's Hospital School Discipline Policy and/or Student Exclusion Procedures. This could include the student standing suspended from School until a meeting of the School Management Board to consider his/her permanent exclusion from the School.
  16. The Board reserves the absolute right to dismiss any student found in possession of, or providing others with, illegal drugs or other substances. <sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> See also the Wilson's Hospital School Admissions Policy and Wilson's Hospital School Disciplinary Procedures

## 17. Sanctions relating to specific products

### Tobacco

The school will normally suspend for two days any student found smoking while in school, on school trips/activities or travelling to and from school. Students found assisting or encouraging other students to smoke may also be suspended.

### Alcohol

The school will normally suspend for five days any student found using alcohol while in school, on school trips/activities or travelling to and from school. Students found assisting or encouraging other students to use alcohol may also be suspended.

### Illegal Drugs

Involvement of any kind with illegal drugs is very serious and sanctions will reflect this.<sup>3</sup>

## **After an Incident**

Following sanctions, the school will endeavour to support and assist students who have breached school policy.

1. The school will provide pastoral supports to the student(s) and parents/guardians affected by an incident of substance abuse. These supports may be provided by the Principal/Deputy Principal, the relevant Year Head, the Guidance Counsellor or Chaplain.
2. Where considered appropriate, the school will provide advice and information in relation to counselling and make contact with relevant agencies if required.
3. A student who is involved in any way with tobacco, alcohol or illegal substances may be requested to attend for professional assessment and/or counselling at an appropriate treatment centre.
4. In the event that it is considered appropriate that a student involved in a substance abuse incident should return to School, the School Management Board reserves the right to request medical evidence to verify that the student is no longer using drugs.

## **Confidentiality:**

Wilson's Hospital School recognises the importance in limiting, as far as is practicable, the number of people involved in investigating and managing a substance abuse incident. We aim only to involve those properly concerned with an incident.

However, the School may be required in a given situation to contact, as appropriate, such authorities/agencies as the Gardaí, HSE, National Educational Psychological Service, etc. The school may also need to engage the expert assistance of an appropriate third party to properly investigate an incident.

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<sup>3</sup> Please note that involvement with illegal drugs is specifically identified as a serious incident of misbehaviour in the Disciplinary Procedures.

If contacted by the media following a substance abuse incident the school will not comment on any individual matter when an investigation is in progress, other than to outline its policy and procedures for managing incidents. The Principal/Deputy Principal will be the designated person for dealing with the media in such instances. However, in the interests of the School's reputation, the Principal/Deputy Principal may clarify the school's position regarding an incident after the investigation has been completely concluded.

#### **4. Conclusion**

While Wilson's Hospital School will do its best to offer pastoral care and support to a student who is involved in a drug related incident in School, the safety and welfare of the whole School community has to be the School's first priority. This objective will be achieved if there is strict observation of the School's rules by the students, support for these rules by parents and fair implementation of the rules by staff and management.

Approved by the School Management Board on 17<sup>th</sup> May 2021