

St. Columba's College Stranorlar



Substance Use Policy

February 2026

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1. Introduction and Rationale

1.1 Mission Statement and Ethos (CEIST)

St. Columba's College is committed to **'The pursuit of excellence in a caring environment.'** This policy reflects the commitment to the **holistic development** and well-being of every student, seeking to create a secure, nurturing, and disciplined environment where students can make responsible choices and pursue their potential, free from the harm associated with substance abuse.

The school asserts its right and duty to prohibit the possession, use, or supply of illegal or prohibited substances, including alcohol, tobacco, and vaping products, as these behaviours fundamentally undermine the health and discipline required for the school's ethos.

1.2 Rationale for the Policy

The use, possession, or supply of prohibited substances (including illegal drugs, alcohol, and tobacco/vaping products) by students:

- **Endangers the safety and welfare** of the student themselves and the wider school community.
- **Undermines the quality of teaching and learning** by disrupting the educational process.
- **Contradicts the core values** of the school's ethos, including mutual respect, responsibility, and the pursuit of excellence.

The implementation of this policy is a necessary measure to protect students and proactively manage risks associated with substance abuse, thereby upholding the standards set out in the **Code of Behaviour**.

1.3 Legal Context and Support

This policy is informed by best practice guidelines from the **National Drug Strategy, "Reducing harm, supporting recovery: a health led approach to drug & alcohol use in Ireland" (2017-2025)**, and the school's obligations under the **Education Act (1998)** and related health and safety legislation. The school will provide ongoing support, resources, and guidance to all students and staff regarding this policy.

2. Aims, Scope, and Prevention

2.1 Aims and Objectives

The primary aims of this policy are:

- To promote a healthy, drug-free, and safe school environment for all members of the school community.
- To provide a **comprehensive educational and preventative programme** that empowers students to make responsible decisions about substance use.
- To establish **clear, consistent, and fair procedures** for managing incidents involving prohibited substances, focusing on student welfare and disciplinary requirements.
- To provide **support and guidance** for students who may have substance-related problems, facilitating access to professional help when necessary.

2.2 Scope and Application of the Policy

This policy covers the use, possession, or distribution (supply) of **Illegal Drugs** (Misuse of Drugs Acts), **Alcohol, Tobacco/Vaping Products** (any e-cigarette or associated paraphernalia regardless of nicotine content), and **Misused Legal Substances** (e.g., solvents, prescribed medication used inappropriately).

The policy applies to all students:

- **On school property** and at **all school-related activities** (breaks, tours, sports, etc.).
- **Travelling to and from school** while representing the college.
- **Outside of school**, where behaviour involving substances impacts the school environment or the health and well-being of any member of the school community.

2.3 Education and Prevention Measures

The school adopts a proactive, educational approach to prevention, delivered across multiple platforms:

- **Curricular Delivery:** Substance awareness, health education, and the development of refusal skills are integrated into **S.P.H.E.**, **R.S.E.** and the **Wellbeing Programme**, and are also addressed across other areas of the curriculum.

- **Parent/Guardian Engagement:** Providing information and opportunities for dialogue with parents/guardians on the issue of substance abuse, including signs to look for and external support resources.
- **Pastoral Support:** The Pastoral Care System (Year Head, Tutor, Guidance Counsellor) provides a confidential setting for discussing lifestyle choices and seeking advice.
- **Guest Speakers and Campaigns:** Engaging external agencies (e.g., HSE, Gardaí) to provide relevant, non-judgmental information.

3. Incident Management and Procedures

3.1 Management of Suspected Incidents

The safety and welfare of the student is the first priority. A student who is suspected of being under the influence of a substance, or is found to be in possession of a prohibited substance, will be referred **immediately** to the **Principal or Deputy Principal**.

3.2 Immediate Safety Protocol

1. **Assessment:** Staff must ensure the student's immediate physical safety and the safety of others.
2. **Medical Attention:** If a student appears ill, unconscious, or requires immediate medical attention, **emergency services (Ambulance/Doctor) will be called immediately**, and parents/guardians will be informed.
3. **Supervision and Notification:** The student must be supervised by a staff member at all times until the parent/guardian arrives to collect them. The Principal or Deputy Principal will immediately contact the parent(s)/guardian(s) to inform them of the situation.

3.3 Search Procedure and Confiscation

- **Search Procedure:** Where there is reasonable suspicion that a student is in possession of a prohibited substance, the Principal or Deputy Principal may conduct a search of the student's property (e.g., bag, locker). Any search must be carried out by **two members of the school management team** and be conducted in the presence of the student.

- **Illegal Substances:** If an illegal substance is found, the **school will inform the Gardaí** immediately. The substance will be secured and documented.
- **Legal Substances:** Legal substances (alcohol, tobacco/vaping) will be **confiscated** and retained by the Principal until collected by parents/guardians during the follow-up meeting.

4. Disciplinary Procedures and Support

4.1 General Disciplinary Principles

The school will apply sanctions under the **Code of Behaviour** for any breach of this policy. Sanctions will be determined on a case-by-case basis, taking into account the seriousness of the offence, previous history, and the student’s level of cooperation. The school will seek to combine disciplinary action with a mandatory requirement for the student to engage with external professional support services. An **Abuse Incident Report** will be kept.

4.2 Sanctions for Alcohol, Tobacco, or Vaping Products (Use or Possession)

Offence Level	Action (Minimum Sanction)
First Offence	Formal warning, immediate suspension (usually 1-3 days), mandatory meeting with parents/guardians, and required engagement with the Guidance Counsellor or support services.
Second and Subsequent Offence	Increased suspension period , mandatory referral to the Board of Management (BoM) for review.

4.3 Sanctions for Illegal Drugs or Supply of Any Prohibited Substance

- **Supply of Any Prohibited Substance:** This is considered a **grave breach** of the Code of Behaviour. Action includes **immediate suspension** and referral to the BoM. The incident will be reported to the Gardaí.
- **Possession of Illegal Drugs:** Immediate suspension pending a full review by the BoM. The incident will be reported to the Gardaí.

5. Confidentiality, Review, and Definitions

5.1 Confidentiality and Record Keeping

All reports and details related to substance abuse incidents will be handled with discretion. However, **confidentiality cannot be guaranteed** when required by law (e.g., Gardaí involvement) or where there is a clear and serious risk to the safety and welfare of the student or others.

Detailed records will be maintained in a confidential file by the Principal/Deputy Principal, including the nature of the incident, parental notification, sanctions, and recommended support services.

5.2 Other Relevant Policies and Staff Training

This policy must be read in conjunction with the **Code of Behaviour**, the **Administration of Medicines Policy**, the **Child Protection Safeguarding Statement**, and the **Wellbeing Policy**. The school is committed to providing ongoing Continuing Professional Development (CPD) for staff on the recognition, intervention, and support procedures related to substance abuse.

5.3 Monitoring, Review, and Evaluation

The effectiveness of this policy will be monitored through analysis of reported incidents, feedback from all school partners, and review of the effectiveness of the educational and prevention programmes.

This Substance Use Policy will be monitored, evaluated, and reviewed annually by the Board of Management, or more frequently if required by changes in legislation or a significant incident.

6. Ratification and Review

6.1 Implementation of Policy

St. Columba's College Substance Use Policy has been ratified by the Board of Management and formally adopted on 5th February 2026.

We commit to ensuring its implementation in a manner that upholds the College's Catholic identity while fully respecting the rights and dignity of every student.

Signature: P. J. McGowan

(Chairperson, Board of Management)

Date: 5/2/26

Signature: Don Reave

(Principal)

Date: 05/02/2026

6.2 Review of Policy

The school will monitor / review on a regular basis, and evaluate the policy and all related work and procedures to ensure legal compliance and the maintenance of best practices.

Date for Review: February 2028