

CHILD PROTECTION POLICY

*"Children have the right to be protected from all forms of violence; they must be kept safe from harm; and they must be given proper care by those looking after them.....
When adults or organisations make decisions which affect children, they must always think first about what would be best for the child".*

Extract from United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1991)

The aim of Dominican College's Child Protection Policy is to help protect all pupils in our care from harm.

Specific Aims

- To increase staff awareness in the area of suspected child abuse.
- The policy will include a definition of child abuse and guidelines for the identification of suspected abuse.
- To give information on accessing consultation agencies regarding specific concerns for a child
- To set out clear procedures to be followed by all teaching and non-teaching staff in the case of suspected abuse including:
 - the role of individual members of staff
 - the role of the designated teacher
 - subsequent referral to outside agencies
- To provide self - protection programmes for pupils

The policy will be monitored and reviewed regularly.

The Children (NI) Order 1995 reinforces the statutory obligation on the education sector to play its part in the reporting and prevention of child abuse. The guidelines, protocols and procedures outlined in this policy have been produced in line with DE circular 1999/10 "Pastoral Care in Schools Child Protection".

Categories of Child Abuse

"Children may be abused by a parent, a sibling or other relative, a carer, an acquaintance or a stranger, who may be an adult or a young person. The abuse may be the result of a deliberate act or of a failure on the part of a parent or carer to act or to provide proper care, or both. The abuse may take a number of forms, including:

neglect: the actual or likely persistent or significant neglect of a child, or the failure to protect a child from exposure to any kind of danger, including cold or starvation, or persistent failure to carry out important aspects of care, resulting in the significant impairment of the child's health or development, including non organic failure to thrive;

physical injury: actual or likely deliberate physical injury to a child, or wilful neglectful failure to prevent physical injury or suffering to a child;

sexual abuse: actual or likely sexual exploitation of a child. The involvement of children and adolescents in sexual activities which they do not truly comprehend, to which they are unable to give informed consent or that violate the social taboos of family roles;

emotional abuse: actual or likely persistent or significant emotional ill-treatment or rejection resulting in severe adverse effects on the emotional, physical and behavioural development of a child. All abuse involves some emotional ill-treatment. This is where it is the main or only form of abuse."

(Extract from "Co-operating to protect Children' (NI) Order 1995 Vol 6)

POSSIBLE INDICATORS OF ABUSE

School staff are particularly well placed to observe untoward symptoms of abnormality or change in appearance, behaviour, learning pattern or development. No list of symptoms can be exhaustive, but below are a number of possible indicators of abuse.

bruises or marks may be apparent particularly when pupils are changing for sports activities.

possible indicators of physical neglect such as inadequate clothing, poor hygiene, deficient nutrition and of emotional abuse such as excessive dependence or attention-seeking.

sexual abuse may exhibit physical signs or lead to a substantial behaviour change including precocity, withdrawal or inappropriate sexual behaviour.

Such symptoms may be due to a variety of other causes medical or social such as bereavement or other disruption in family circumstances or drug, alcohol or solvent misuse.

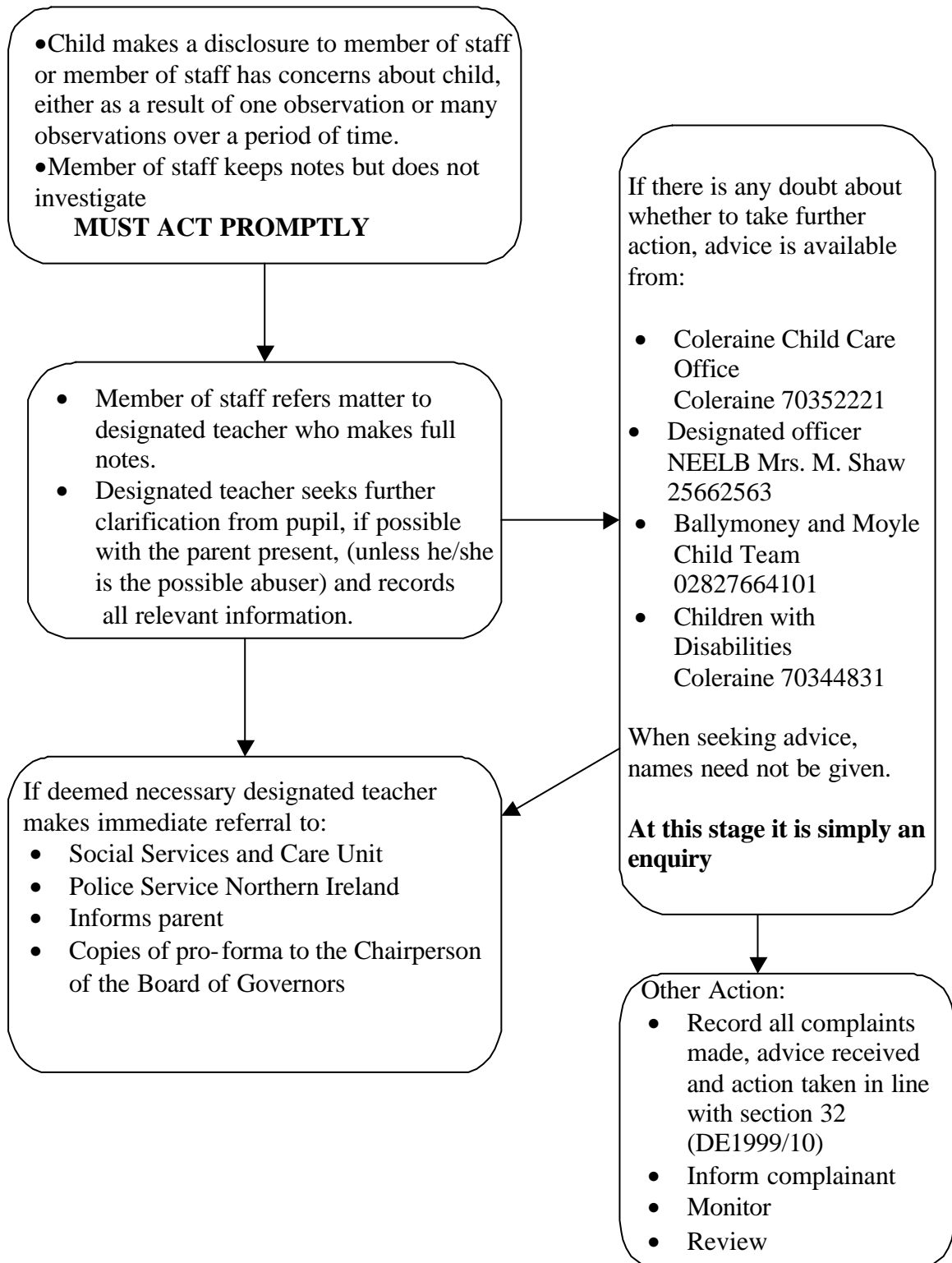
Signs such as those described above, and others, can do no more than give rise to concern - they are not in themselves proof that abuse has occurred. School staff should be aware of the possible implications of, and alert to, all such signs particularly if they appear in combination or are regularly repeated.

PROCEDURE FOR REPORTING AN INCIDENT OF CHILD ABUSE

role of individual members of staff

role of designated teacher

referral to outside agencies



GUIDELINES FOR STAFF

Any allegation by a child that he or she is suffering or has suffered abuse, should be treated seriously. When a child volunteers such information, the chief task at this stage is to listen to the child and make a note of the discussion to pass on to the Designated teacher.

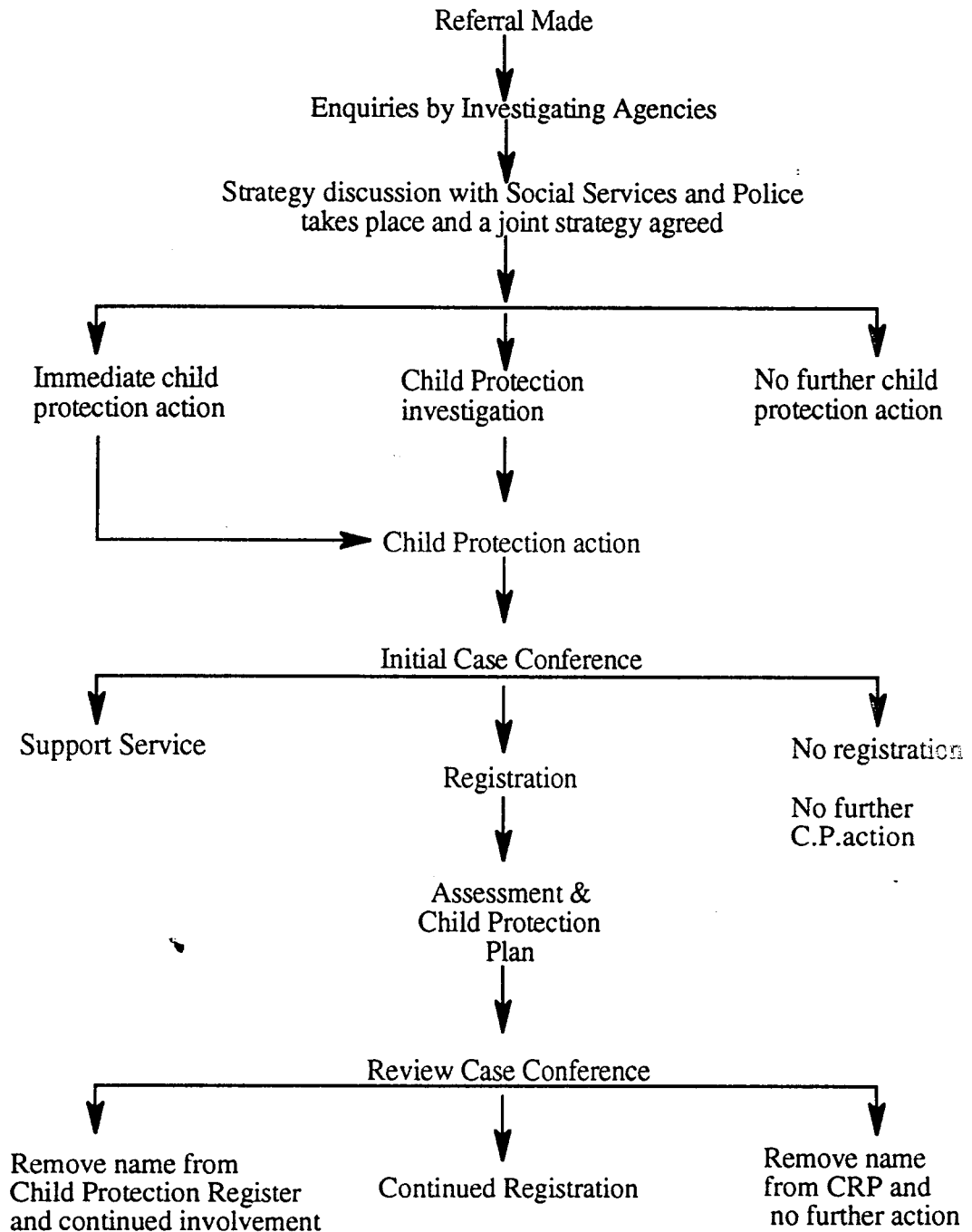
When teachers see signs which cause them concern, they should, as a first step, seek clarification from the child, with tact and understanding. It is not the responsibility of staff to carry out investigations into cases of suspected child abuse.

Any comment by the child or subsequently by a parent or carer or other adult about how an injury occurred, should be written down, as soon as possible afterwards, preferably quoting words actually used. Records made by a member of staff must be objective, factual and detailed; these records to be given to the Designated teacher to be filed in a safe place. Staff should also be aware that their notes may need to be used in any subsequent court proceedings.

Staff should not give the child or young person undertakings of confidentiality, although they can, and should, reassure them that information will be disclosed only to those professionals who need to know.

**WHAT HAPPENS AFTER A REFERRAL IS MADE?
ROLES OF OTHER AGENCIES**

The welfare of the child is paramount and the following interagency procedures are intended to ensure a prompt and co-ordinated response to any referral.



Staff may be called upon to attend the initial Strategy discussion and any subsequent Case Conferences. In more serious cases, staff may be required to assist in the preparation of a Court Report and may be asked to appear in court.

CODE OF CONDUCT FOR STAFF

Schools must safeguard and promote the welfare of pupils in their charge, therefore the conduct of school staff towards their pupils must be above reproach. The following advice is designed to reduce the risk of allegations being made against any member of staff.

Teachers should ensure that their relationships with pupils are appropriate to the age and gender of the pupils, taking care that their conduct does not give rise to comment or speculation.

Teachers must be aware of the dangers which arise from private interviews with individual pupils. There are occasions when confidential interviews must take place, but such interviews should be conducted in a room with visual access, or with the door open, or in a room or area which is likely to be frequented by other people. It is inadvisable to spend undue amounts of time with one pupil, away from other people. Staff need to be aware of the acceptable boundaries of physical contact with pupils, and must bear in mind that even perfectly innocent actions can sometimes be misconstrued. On rare occasions a teacher might have to restrain a pupil physically, to prevent him/her causing injury to himself/herself or others or to property. In such instances, no more than the minimum necessary force should be used.

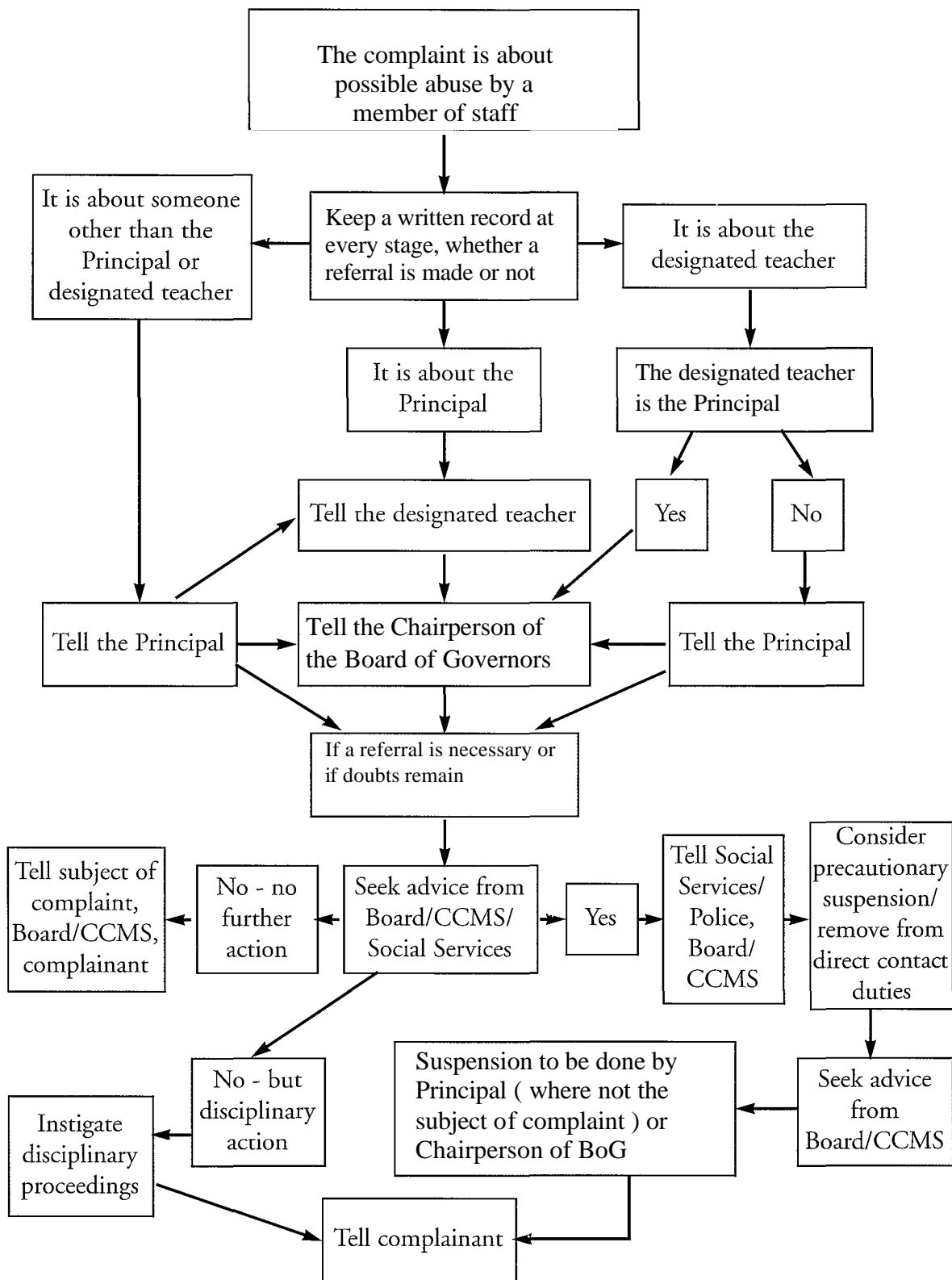
Members of staff should be alert to the risk of emotional abuse, such as persistent sarcasm, verbal bullying or severe and persistent negative comment or actions.

Members of staff should be encouraged to reflect on any aspect of their contact with children which may give rise to perceptions or allegations of this form of abuse.

Teachers should be particularly careful when supervising children in a residential setting such as a ski-trip, outdoor education camp or an extended visit away from home, where more informal relationships tend to be usual and where teachers may be in proximity to pupils in circumstances very different from the normal school environment.

Following any incident where a teacher feels that his/her actions have been, or may be, misconstrued, a written report of the incident should be submitted immediately to the Principal of the school. This would apply especially in a case where a teacher had been obliged to restrain a child physically to prevent him/her from inflicting injury to others or self injury.

Procedure where a complaint has been made about possible abuse by a member of the school's staff



If any allegations are made against a member of staff, or if a colleague is suspected of inappropriate behaviour or abuse, details must be recorded and reported to the Designated Teacher/ Deputy immediately.

The Board of Governors of Dominican College,
Portstewart indemnifies its employees who act in
accordance with these procedures in reporting any
incident of child abuse or suspected child abuse.

Appendix 1 Policy Statement for the Information for Parents' Leaflet

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Extract from United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1991)

The welfare of the pupils in our care is paramount. Dominican College's Child Protection Policy is designed to help protect all pupils in our care from harm.

When abuse is suspected or when a pupil makes an allegation that he or she is suffering, or has suffered abuse, the school has a statutory obligation, under the Children (N.I.) Order 1995, to make a referral either to the social services of the local Health and Social Services Trust, or to the Police.

A Designated teacher and Deputy, with responsibility for Child Protection have been appointed and all members of staff have been made fully aware of the necessary procedures to be followed.

Designated teacher: Dr. B. Cummings
Deputy designated teacher: R. Roman

Appendix II

ROLE OF SOCIAL SERVICES AND OTHER AGENCIES

Social Services have a statutory duty to investigate any case where they receive information suggesting that a child or young person may be in need of care, protection or control unless satisfied that such enquiries are unnecessary. Their objective is to ensure the safety and welfare of the child. They have a lead role in co-ordinating the work of all the agencies and professionals concerned with the child's family. A joint protocol has been established between the Social Services and the Police for investigative purposes. This will involve the police in investigating situations where a crime may have been committed.

When there is suspicion that a child has been abused, Social Services may convene a multi-disciplinary Case Conference which may involve principals or their nominees depending upon who is best placed to contribute effectively to the discussion of the child's welfare.

The objectives of the Case Conference are to:

- (i) share and exchange relevant information on a confidential basis;
- (ii) determine the nature and degree of abuse or risk of abuse and whether to place the child's name on the Child Protection Register;
- (iii) devise a Child Protection plan which identifies the contribution that individual agencies and professionals will make;
- (iv) identify a case co-ordinator (normally from the Social Services Department) and to arrange for the review of the plan on at least six monthly basis.

Decisions of Case Conferences will be forwarded to principals and should be stored separately and securely. If the child transfers to another school, the Social Services Co-ordinator should be informed, and the receiving school should be advised that the child's name is on the Child Protection Register. All Child Protection records held by the school from which the child transfers should be destroyed, including case conference records, the receiving school should approach the Social Services directly for information.

Social Services will send information in writing to the school about any child whose name has been included on the Child Protection Register, including whether the child is in the care of Social Services and what information has been made known to the parents about allegations or suspicions of abuse. Social Services will ask the school authorities to pay particular attention to such children in respect of their attendance record, emotional and social development and any other cause for further concern. A social worker will liaise with the principal and/or other education staff about the child's progress. When a child's name is removed from the Child Protection Register

schools will be informed in writing by Social Services. Records should be destroyed when the child's name is removed from the Child Protection Register.

(Extract from C.C.M.S. Document on Child Protection)