

8.0 Confidentiality

8.1 Guidance and Counselling

In the course of their lives, people are faced with the need to make significant decisions that affect both themselves and those around them. For second level students, these choices are focused on three key areas:

- a) personal and social;
- b) educational;
- c) career.

In second level schools, guidance and counselling may be broadly defined as the full range of interventions which assist students to make such choices about their lives. Guidance Counsellors, because of their specialist training, have a formal role in each of the main areas of guidance: personal and social, educational and career.

[Source : *Guidelines for the Practice of Guidance and Counselling in Schools* -- A report for the Minister for Education published by the Department of Education in association with the National Centre for Guidance in Education,. February 1996].

In each school there is a need for clarity in respect of the role of the Guidance Counsellor. This is particularly important in respect of confidentiality. Guidance Counsellors, especially because of their involvement in counselling individual students on personal, social or other matters, are in the way of learning about sensitive matters such as drug usage by students. There is a serious question if such information, although given under the assumption of confidentiality, can be withheld from the Principal or Deputy Principal. Clearly, there is an obligation to pass on to the relevant authority certain information, such as information on child abuse. In this regard, Guidance Counsellors and, indeed, all counsellors, should be careful about entering into contracts of absolute confidentiality with students.

It is recommended that the Board of Management, in consultation with the Principal, the Guidance Counsellor and the teaching staff, draw up a policy on confidentiality in the area of guidance and counselling.

8.2 Confidential Material

8.2.1 Computer Stored Data

Personal data which is stored on computer is covered by the Data Protection Act, 1988. The school, as the custodian of such data, has a legal obligation to:-

- a) keep it securely;
- b) make it available on demand to the person to whom it relates and to correct any errors which that person may point out.

8.2.2 References

References contain a confidential assessment of a person's suitability for a position. The referee, who writes a reference, does so in confidence and is usually candid in her/his assessment of the subject.

Any breach of the confidentiality of a reference by the recipient is entirely unacceptable.

8.2.3 Board of Management Business

The Deed of Trust commands confidentiality of all Board business. In practice much of Board business is routine and decisions are conveyed to staff and parents by their Board nominees. However, comments of individual members at Board meetings or accounts of how individual members voted should not be reported under any circumstances. (See 2.17 above).

8.2.4 Addresses and Telephone Numbers of Staff and Students

The addresses or telephone numbers of teachers or students should not be divulged to third parties. If a third party wishes to contact a teacher or a pupil, they should be asked to write to them at the school. If necessary, such letters can be re-addressed and forwarded.