



American International School of Freetown
Child Protection & Safeguarding Policy
2025 - 2026

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Version: 2025–26

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1. Introduction and Safeguarding Principles

The American International School of Freetown (AISF) is committed to providing a safe, caring, and respectful environment in which all students can grow, learn, and thrive. We believe that the welfare of every child is paramount and that all children, without exception, have an equal right to protection, regardless of age, gender, disability, language, religion, ethnic origin, or background.

Safeguarding is a shared responsibility. Protecting children from harm requires the active commitment of all members of the AISF community — staff, students, parents, volunteers, contractors, and visitors — working in partnership with families and external agencies.

Early intervention, open communication, and an unwavering commitment to the best interests of each child underpin our safeguarding practice.

This policy sets out the guiding principles, responsibilities, and procedures that ensure safeguarding is embedded in all aspects of AISF life. It is designed to meet the requirements of the Middle States Association (MSA) Standards for Accreditation, Sierra Leone child protection legislation, and recognised best international practice.

2. Purpose and Scope

The purpose of this policy is to define the school's approach to safeguarding and child protection, to provide clear guidance on recognising and responding to concerns, and to outline the responsibilities of all members of the AISF community.

The policy applies to:

- All AISF employees, Board members, volunteers, contractors, and visitors.
- All school activities, whether on campus or off-site, including school trips, extracurricular programmes, and online learning.
- All interactions between AISF representatives and students, whether in person or via digital communication.

3. Legal and Accreditation Framework

AISF's safeguarding framework is informed by:

- The **MSA Standards for Accreditation**, which require schools to have effective safeguarding policies, clear governance oversight, and robust implementation procedures.
- Sierra Leone's child protection laws and relevant statutory guidance.
- The **United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child** (UNCRC), which sets out the rights of children to safety, education, and protection from harm.
- Established best practice from recognised international safeguarding bodies.

4. Definitions

For the purposes of this policy:

- A **child** is any person under the age of 18.
- **Safeguarding** refers to the broader actions taken to promote the welfare of children and to protect them from harm.
- **Child protection** refers specifically to the actions taken to protect a child suffering, or at risk of suffering, significant harm.
- The **Child Protection Officer (CPO)** is the school's designated lead for safeguarding, equivalent to the Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) in international safeguarding terminology.
- The **Deputy CPO** acts when the CPO is unavailable to ensure continuous safeguarding coverage.
- **Abuse** includes physical abuse, emotional abuse, sexual abuse, neglect, online harm, exploitation, trafficking, grooming, female genital mutilation (FGM), and forced marriage.

5. Roles and Responsibilities

Board of Directors

The Board of Directors holds ultimate responsibility for ensuring that AISF meets its safeguarding obligations.

The Board approves this policy, ensures adequate resources are allocated for safeguarding, and receives an **annual anonymised safeguarding report** from the Director. This report, prepared by the CPO and reviewed by the Director, enables the Board to carry out its governance oversight role in line with MSA Standards.

Director

The Director has overall strategic responsibility for safeguarding within the school and is directly accountable to the Board for its effective implementation.

The Director ensures that the school complies with all relevant legislation and accreditation standards, allocates sufficient resources, supports the work of the CPO, and promotes a culture of safety and respect throughout the school community.

The Director is the **custodian of all safeguarding records**, ensuring they are stored securely and accessed only by authorised personnel. While the Director does not manage individual cases day-to-day, they must ensure that all concerns are handled in accordance with policy and that appropriate follow-up actions are taken.

The Director reviews and endorses the annual anonymised safeguarding report prepared by the CPO and presents it directly to the Board.

Child Protection Officer (CPO)

The CPO is responsible for receiving and managing safeguarding concerns, maintaining secure and accurate records, liaising with external agencies, leading safeguarding training, and ensuring that the policy is implemented in practice.

The CPO compiles the annual anonymised safeguarding report, detailing the number and nature of cases, actions taken, training completed, and policy implementation status. This report is submitted to the Director for review before presentation to the Board.

Deputy Child Protection Officer

The Deputy CPO supports the CPO and acts in their absence to ensure continuous safeguarding coverage.

All Staff, Volunteers, and Contractors

Every adult in contact with AISF students has a duty to protect them from harm. This includes completing safeguarding induction and refresher training, following this policy, and reporting any concern immediately to the CPO or Deputy CPO.

Parents and Guardians

Parents and guardians are expected to work in partnership with AISF to support safeguarding measures and to maintain open and honest communication with the school regarding their child's welfare.

6. Prevention

AISF works to prevent harm through:

- Safe recruitment and background checks.
- A clear Safeguarding Code of Conduct (Appendix F).
- Student safeguarding education (including online safety).
- Fostering a culture of openness and trust.

7. Recognising Abuse

All staff are trained to recognise the signs and indicators of abuse, which may include but are not limited to:

- **Physical abuse:** unexplained injuries, reluctance to be touched, repeated accidents.
- **Emotional abuse:** withdrawal, low self-esteem, extreme behaviours.
- **Sexual abuse:** knowledge or behaviour beyond age-appropriate levels, avoidance of certain individuals.
- **Neglect:** persistent hunger, poor hygiene, inappropriate clothing, frequent absence.

- **Other forms:** evidence of grooming, exposure to online exploitation, risk of FGM or forced marriage, indicators of trafficking.
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8. Reporting Procedures

Any safeguarding concern must be reported **immediately** to the CPO or Deputy CPO.

A written Safeguarding Concern Form must be completed and submitted within **24 hours** of the concern arising.

The CPO will acknowledge receipt of the concern within **48 hours** and will take appropriate action, which may include consultation with external agencies.

All actions will be documented, and records will be maintained under the custodianship of the Director.

9. Whistleblowing and Protected Disclosure

AlSF is committed to creating a culture in which concerns about safeguarding can be raised without fear of reprisal.

All safeguarding concerns must be reported **internally first** — to the CPO, Deputy CPO, or Director.

If the concern involves the CPO or Director, or if there is **immediate and serious risk to a child**, the matter may be reported directly to the Board Chair or to the appropriate statutory authority.

No person will suffer discrimination or retaliation for raising a concern in good faith through the correct channels.

10. Confidentiality

Safeguarding information will only be shared with those who have a legitimate need to know, and solely for the purpose of protecting the child. Unauthorised disclosure of safeguarding information is a disciplinary matter.

11. Training

Safeguarding training is compulsory for all staff, volunteers, and contractors:

- Induction training must be completed before working with students.
- Annual refresher training is required for all.
- The CPO and Deputy CPO will undertake advanced safeguarding training and receive regular updates.

The CPO is responsible for maintaining a **central log of all safeguarding training**.

12. Record Keeping

The CPO compiles and updates safeguarding records; the Director holds these records securely as custodian.

Access is strictly limited to authorised personnel. Records are retained and disposed of in line with AISF's Data Protection and Records Retention Policy.

13. Parent and Community Awareness

AISF will share key safeguarding information annually with parents and guardians via the Parent Handbook, dedicated safeguarding briefings, and the school website.

The full safeguarding policy is available on request.

14. Monitoring and Review (Refined Draft)

This policy will be reviewed annually by the Child Protection Officer (CPO) and Director to ensure it remains aligned with Sierra Leonean legislation, MSA Standards for Accreditation, and international best practice.

The review process incorporates:

- An **Annual Safeguarding Audit** using Appendix K of the Handbook, completed jointly by the CPO and Director.
- Updates to the **Safeguarding Training Log and Training Matrix** (Appendices G and G.1).
- **Anonymised safeguarding data** compiled by the CPO and reported annually to the Board by the Director.
- **Lessons learned** from safeguarding concerns, disclosures, or near misses, ensuring continuous improvement.

The effectiveness of safeguarding is evaluated through this annual audit process, supplemented by case reviews, staff feedback, and training evaluations. Revisions are submitted to the Board for approval.

Appendices: AISF Safeguarding Toolkit (A–K)

This Policy is implemented through the *AISF Child Protection & Safeguarding Handbook* (2025–26), which provides the operational tools, forms, and checklists that guide daily safeguarding practice.

- **Appendix A – Safeguarding Concern Form**
- **Appendix B – Contact List (Internal & External Safeguarding Agencies)**
- **Appendix C – Reporting Procedure**
- **Appendix D – Indicators of Abuse & Neglect**
- **Appendix E – Responding to a Disclosure**
- **Appendix F – Safeguarding Code of Conduct**
- **Appendix G – Safeguarding Training Log**
- **Appendix G.1 – Safeguarding Training Matrix**
- **Appendix H – Emergency Contact & Escalation Chart**
- **Appendix I – School Trip / Off-Site Safeguarding Checklist**
- **Appendix J – Staff Declaration of Understanding**
- **Appendix K – Annual Safeguarding Audit Checklist**

Together, these appendices form AISF's Safeguarding Toolkit, ensuring that safeguarding principles in this Policy are consistently applied, monitored, and improved in practice.