Guidance Note 3: The use of unique codes or serial numbers

This note is intended to provide guidance to DLPs and boards of management in relation to the use of unique codes or serial numbers for child protection files and parties referenced in files. This guidance note should be read in conjunction with the Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools (revised 2023) (hereinafter referred to as "the procedures")

- To allow for the effective recording and tracking of relevant records and actions, the procedures require that all child protection case files and any parties referenced in such files shall be assigned a unique code or serial number by the DLP.
- In this context "parties" means any party (including the child) whose identity, if disclosed, might lead to the identification of a child or a person against whom an allegation has been made.
- In this note, "code" is used to refer to a unique code or serial number.
- For good file management, consideration should be given to creating
  - **An index** in each file with the unique code or serial number assigned to each party and,
  - **A master list** of files which links each unique case file number to the child or, where applicable, to the member of school personnel in respect of whom the file was created.

  These should be stored in a secure location by the DLP.

The index

- The index is essentially a list of all the codes used in the file which clearly links each code with the child or party to whom it has been assigned. It is best placed on the inside cover of the case file and should be updated as required as further records referring to any new parties are placed on the file.
  - The list on the file will look like this:

List of codes in case file 0001
The following codes have been assigned to child(ren)/parties in this file –
'Child A' is Ann Adams
'Adult A' is Mr Adam Adams

- The codes are used by the Principal where confidentiality is required in referring to a case at a BOM meeting. **The codes are always used in recording any references to a case or party in the minutes of the BOM meeting**. For example, the minutes can refer to 'Case file 0001' and/or 'Child A (case file 0001)' or 'Adult B (case file 0001)' etc. as applicable.

The master list

The following is an example of such a master list/index:

Master List of Child Protection Case file numbers	
Case file number	**Details of Child/Member of School Personnel in respect of whom the file was created**
0001	Ann Adams, 4 Main Street, Castletown
0002	Barry Brown, 22 Orchard View, Castletown
0003	Colin Collins, Bridgeview Apartments, Castletown

- At board of management meetings, the use of codes will, where confidentiality is required, allow the principal to refer to a case/party by reference to the code. The codes must be used for any recording of a child protection case or parties involved, in the minutes of the board meeting. In turn, this will enable the Inspectorate to track a case through the minutes and to request and review the relevant files and records where necessary.
- It should be noted that not all persons named or referred to in a file or record will need to be assigned a code. The test is whether the person's identity if known or disclosed, could, in the particular circumstances of the case, lead to the identification of the child(ren) or person against whom an allegation has been made.
- The codes assigned should be such as not to allow for identification of the parties. In this regard, it should be noted that:
  - o The POD or P-POD number should not be used by the DLP when assigning a code or number to children as that number could potentially identify the child in question.
  - o The initials of the child or other parties relevant to the case should not be used.
- The 2023 procedures do not specify that a particular method or system of assigning codes must be used. Provided that the above requirements are met, schools are free to use existing systems or develop and use their own codes.
- Alternatively, schools may choose to use the example set out below as a suitable system for assigning codes.
- The DLP shall ensure that the Deputy DLP (DDLP) is sufficiently familiar with the filing and coding system in place to enable the DDLP access records and undertake the recording and other duties of the DLP where required to do so, in the absence of the DLP.

Example of a coding system

- A numerical system starting with '0001' is used to assign a unique number to each child protection case file. The first file created is numbered '0001' and as further files are created they are numbered '0002', '0003' and so on. Files are stored in the relevant secure filing cabinet/storage area in this numerical order.

- When a file is created, the child(ren) concerned and other parties are assigned codes as follows:
    - Each child is assigned a code as follows – 'Child A', 'Child B' and so on.
    - Each adult party in the file is assigned a code as follows – 'Adult A', 'Adult B' and so on.