

Guidance note on 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 2017* (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.
- At Board of Management (BOM) 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 BOM meeting. In turn, this will allow the Inspectorate to track a case through the minutes and to request and review the relevant files/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:
 - 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.
 - The initials of the child or other parties relevant to the case should not be used.
- The 2017 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 of a suitable system for assigning codes.
- The DLP shall ensure that the Deputy DLP (DDLDP) is sufficiently familiar with the filing and coding system in place to enable the DDLDP 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.
- 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 is placed clearly on the case file. For ease of access, it is recommended that this list is placed on the inside cover of the case file. This list should also 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

‘Adult B’ is Ms Audrey 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.
- An overall master list/index must also be created by the DLP and maintained of all case files created which links each unique case file number to the child in respect of whom the file was created.
- The overall master list/index must also be stored in a secure location by the DLP.
- 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 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, Apartment 4B, Bridgeview Apartments, Castletown