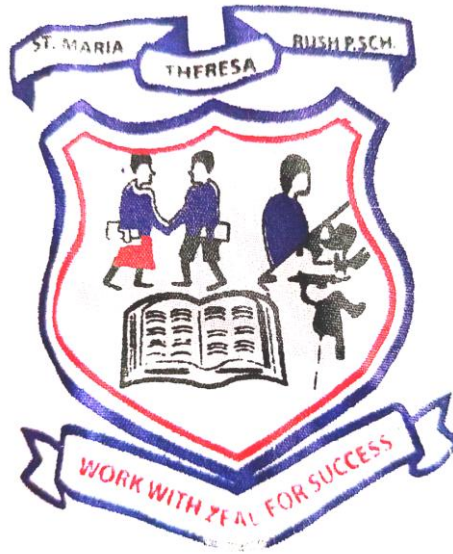


ST. MARIA THERESA – SPECIAL NEEDS UNIT, RUSHOROZA



SAFE GUARDING POLICY

MAY 2025

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

On behalf St. Maria Theresa – Special Needs Unit, Rushoroza and in my personal capacity, I extend our heartfelt gratitude to the leadership and staff of the school for recognizing the critical importance of safeguarding and taking the initiative to adopt and implement a comprehensive Child Safeguarding Policy. This effort reflects our shared commitment to the protection and well-being of every learner entrusted to our care.

We are especially grateful to ARU-CCCU for providing valuable training in Child Safeguarding, which has equipped our team with the knowledge and tools to create a safer learning environment.

Special thanks go to Mr. Sam Bernard Gumisiriza for his outstanding support in customizing and developing our Child Safeguarding Policy. His expertise ensured that the policy is practical, context-specific, and aligned with national and international safeguarding standards.

Together, we affirm our duty to protect and empower all children, and we remain committed to upholding safeguarding principles in all aspects of our work at St. Maria Theresa – Special Needs Unit, Rushoroza.

Sr. Elizabeth Kabarwani

Administrator.

St. Maria Theresa – Special Needs Unit, Rushoroza

Child Safeguarding Policy Statement

St. Maria Theresa – Special Needs Unit, Rushoroza affirms that every child and vulnerable adult has an inherent right to respect, care, nurturing, and protection from all forms of harm.

These rights are rooted in our core values and upheld by both international and national laws. Each child and vulnerable adult is a unique and precious gift from God, deserving of dignity, safety, and bodily integrity that must be safeguarded at all times.

In this regard, St. Maria Theresa – Special Needs Unit, Rushoroza —through its administration, staff, and all collaborators—is fully committed to promoting the welfare, protection, and well-being of every learner and vulnerable individual entrusted to our care. We are dedicated to creating and maintaining a safe and supportive environment in which all can thrive.

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ACRONYMS

AIDS	Acquired immune deficiency Syndrome
O.L.G.C	Our Lady of Good Counsel Sisters
CDF	Congregation of Doctrine of Faith
CSC	Child Safeguarding Committee
HIV	Human Immuno-Deficiency Virus
UNCRC	United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child
NOP	National Orphans and Vulnerable Children Policy
NSPPI	National Strategic Programme Plan of Interventions for Children
OVC	Orphans and Other Vulnerable Children
MGLSD	Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development

DEFINITIONS OF TERMS

Unless otherwise defined in the text of a provision, the following listed terms have the following meanings:

Child	Anyone under the age of 18
Child abuse	Child abuse includes various forms of ill-treatment such as physical, emotional, verbal, sexual, financial, spiritual, neglectful behaviour, or exploitation, all of which can cause actual or potential harm to the child's health, survival, development, or dignity.
Child protection	Prevention and response to abuse of children and vulnerable adults
Child safeguarding	A framework of internal policies, procedures, and practices implemented by members of O.L.G.C. to ensure that the Institute operates as a child-safe organization.
Institutions	Organizations owned or managed by the O.L.G.C Sisters, including; schools, health units, pastoral centers, childcare institutions, and others.
O.L.G.C	Our Lady of Good Counsel
Personnel	Encompass members, staff, volunteers, interns, and individuals engaged in short-term contracts, such as consultants, researchers, communicators, and photographers, serving St. Maria Theresa – Special Needs Unit, Rushoroza
Safeguarding Policy	A set of principles, guidelines, rules, and procedures governing actions, decisions, and behaviors within the context of safeguarding children and vulnerable adults.
Sub Recipient	Partners executing funded programs on behalf of St. Maria Theresa – Special Needs Unit, Rushoroza
Superior General	The Executive head of O.L.G.C Institute.
Vulnerable Adult	Any person aged 18 years and over who may require assistance for their care, or protection from significant harm or exploitation.

SECTION ONE:

1.0 INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

1.1 INTRODUCTION

St. Maria Theresa – Special Needs Unit, Rushoroza managed by the Sisters of Our Lady of Good Counsel (O.L.G.C), is a faith-based institution dedicated to empowering marginalized youth—including the special needs children—through inclusive, skills-based education since..... Rooted in Christian values and biblical teachings, the school upholds the dignity and protection of vulnerable individuals. In line with this mission and in response to global concerns about child abuse and exploitation, the school introduced a Safeguarding Policy in 2025. This policy outlines the shared responsibility of all stakeholders to safeguard and promote the welfare of all children, create a safe and respectful environment, and ensure that victims of abuse—particularly sexual violence—receive proper support, protection, and justice.

1.2 PURPOSE OF THE POLICY

- i) To safeguard children and vulnerable adults from all forms of abuse, neglect, exploitation, and harm within the St. Maria Theresa – Special Needs Unit, Rushoroza school environment.
- ii) To protect all stakeholders—including students, staff, Sisters, and co-workers—engaged in the day-to-day operations and training activities of St. Maria Theresa – Special Needs Unit, Rushoroza.

1.3 ADOPTION OF THE POLICY

This current version of St. Maria Theresa – Special Needs Unit, Rushoroza Safeguarding Policy was formally adopted onby

1.4 POLICY APPLICATION

- i) The Safeguarding Policy applies to all learners and vulnerable adults at St. Maria Theresa – Special Needs Unit, Rushoroza, regardless of gender, age, ethnicity, disability, religion, or socio-economic background.
- ii) It is binding on all Sisters of O.L.G.C, full-time and part-time staff, instructors, and administrative workers, as well as those on fixed-term contracts.
- iii) The policy remains in effect both during and outside of working hours, including school-sponsored extracurricular and outreach activities.

- iv) It also applies to volunteers, contractors, consultants, interns, donors, guests, and any other representatives acting on behalf of the school.
- v) All the aforementioned stakeholders may raise safeguarding concerns in accordance with the complaint procedures detailed in this policy.

1.5 STATEMENT OF COMMITMENT

- (i) St. Maria Theresa – Special Needs Unit, Rushoroza, through the leadership of the Sisters of Our Lady of Good Counsel, is committed to collaborating with learners, families, community leaders, government entities, the Uganda Episcopal Conference, NGOs, and development partners to ensure the safety and well-being of children and vulnerable adults.
- (ii) St. Maria Theresa – Special Needs Unit, Rushoroza team pledges to implement and periodically review this policy, ensuring its continued relevance and effectiveness in the unique educational and social context of St. Maria Theresa – Special Needs Unit, Rushoroza.
- (iii) Our school commits to always prioritize the best interests of all children in our school as well as all children who we come into contact with.
- (iv) We do uphold children’s rights (including the right to protection from sexual abuse) as articulated in international instruments such as the UN CRC and national legislations such as the Constitution and the Children Act (Amended) 2016.
- (v) We commit to proactively keep children safe and respond to concerns and disclosures in line with the international standards and national legislations
- (vi) We recognize that sexual and other forms of abuse can take place anywhere. It can be face-to-face and online; current or non-recent; the perpetrators can be adults in positions of trust or fellow children. This policy underlines the responsibility of all members of the school community to offer targeted support to children who are experiencing risk of sexual and other forms of abuse; as well as children at risk of the same.
- (vii) School staff, volunteers and associates will as much as possible take the responsibility to prevent any possible risk of harm to children before they occur
- (viii) School staff, volunteers and associates will take the responsibility to report in time any suspected, actual or disclosed sexual abuse and other forms of harm and/or exploitation to the responsible authorities either in school or in the community as appropriately guided by this policy.
- (ix) Where concerns and disclosures of sexual and other forms of abuse against a child occur, we prioritize the well-being of children and act in accordance with the school code of conduct and the national legislation and guidance on dealing with incidences of child sexual abuse and exploitation

- (x) We take child safeguarding concerns by our staff, volunteers and associates extremely seriously. These are viewed as a breach of our safeguarding policies and procedures
- (xi) We take extremely seriously any child safeguarding concerns identified, observed, suspected or reported in the communities we serve even when such concerns are not as a result of the conduct of our staff, volunteers or associates and not as a result of our school programmes/operations
- (xii) We value and prioritize listening to and empowering children to express themselves
- (xiii) We commit to creating and maintaining an open culture in which to discuss any ideas, risks, issues or concerns
- (xiv) We uphold a zero-tolerance policy against any forms of sexual abuse and other forms of abuse against children regardless of whether they are in our school or in the community.

1.6 CORE VALUES

This policy is guided by the specific ethos of St. Maria Theresa – Special Needs Unit, Rushoroza:

- **Integrity** – Upholding honesty and ethical conduct.
- **God-fearing** – Rooting actions in Christian values.
- **Transparency** – Promoting openness and accountability.
- **Inclusivity** – Welcoming all learners regardless of background or ability.
- **Respectful** – Valuing each person’s dignity and worth.
- **Team spirit** – Fostering collaboration and unity.
- **Compassion** – Demonstrating care, empathy, and support.
- **Self-control** – Encouraging responsible and disciplined behavior.
- **Sustainability** – Building long-term impact through skills and character formation.

1.7 POLICY OBJECTIVES

The Safeguarding Policy aims to:

- (i) Clearly define abuse and neglect, especially in the context of learners with disabilities, refugees, and school dropouts.
- (ii) Clarify the roles and responsibilities of Sisters, staff, volunteers, and trainers in promoting safe and respectful relationships with learners.
- (iii) Ensure timely, appropriate, and consistent responses to any cases of abuse or neglect. Establish a well-defined **Code of Conduct** for everyone involved with St. Maria Theresa – Special

Needs Unit, Rushoroza —including Sisters, instructors, administrative staff, volunteers, and external partners.

- (iv) Promote a safe and protective learning environment across the institution, ensuring that every learner, regardless of background or ability, can thrive and be empowered for self-reliance.

1.8 REFERENCE TO OTHER POLICIES, PROCEDURES AND STANDARDS

The safeguarding standards underlined by this policy are in reference to safeguarding aspirations by:

- a) International Child rights frameworks such as: the UNCRC, the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child
- b) National legislations including among other: The Constitution of the Republic of Uganda, the Children Act (Amended) 2016, The Persons with Disability Act (Amended) 2019.
- c) School based regulation such as the School Code of Conduct

1.9 SAFEGUARDING PERSONNEL

The designated senior persons for child safeguarding protection in this school is:

Lead Safeguarding Focal Person	Name:
	Contact:
	Email:
Deputy/Assistant Safeguarding Focal Person	Name:
	Contact:
	Email:

The school will take the responsibility to ensure that the designated safeguarding focal persons are trained in child safeguarding. The safeguarding focal person/s will in turn perform the following roles:

- a) Act as a source of support and expertise to the school community in the area of safeguarding
- b) Keep a safeguarding risk register i.e. keep written records of all safeguarding concerns when noted and reported by staff or any other person or when disclosed by a child
- c) Ensure that such safeguarding records are stored securely and reported to the appropriate authority within school as guided by this policy

- d) Engage with (guide) school management on the nature of safeguarding cases that can be addressed internally within school as well as the cases that given their criminal nature need to be referred to public structures such as the PSWO and/or police
- e) Coordinate the school's child safeguarding plans and activities
- f) Ensure that all school programmes/operations are designed in a manner that keeps children safe
- g) Ensure that the school environment guarantees children safety from sexual and other forms of abuse. This includes guiding other members of the school community to map and respond to identified safeguarding risks
- h) Develop effective links with relevant statutory and voluntary agencies which serve as referral points
- i) Source appropriate safeguarding training opportunities for staff, volunteers and associates
- j) Ensure that all staff are oriented/trained about child safeguarding, taken through the safeguarding policy and thus sign the policy as a commitment to adhering with this policy
- k) Ensure that the child safeguarding policy is updated regularly. The school could determine whether they will be reviewing/updating the policy every 2 years or so.
- l) Keep a record of staff attendance at child safeguarding and protection trainings or sensitization
- m) Make the policy available to all staff and associates.
- n) Prepare and share an annual safeguarding report with the school management/board. The report will include among other things, data on the numbers and types of disclosures and safeguarding reports (on suspected or actual abuse)
- o) Share relevant policy, procedure and relevant legislative updates with staff, volunteers and associates
- p) Share safeguarding best practice and key learnings in safeguarding with staff and volunteers.

1.10 SAFE RECRUITMENT

All potential new candidates for hire by the school will be interviewed. The interview question will cover both job competence questions as well as safeguarding questions so as to determine the candidate's eligibility to work with children. Candidates will be required to furnish the school administrator (in charge of recruitment) with two references and referee's contacts. These will be contacted so that they inform about the candidates' character, work history of child abuse and criminal record at large. Where possible an independent criminal record check will be conducted by the school administration

1.11 TRAINING AND CAPACITY BUILDING

Child safeguarding will constitute one of the induction topics for all new members of staff - teaching, administrative or support staff. During staff meetings, staff will be reminded about their safeguarding

responsibilities. Deliberate safeguarding sessions for staff, volunteers and associates will be organized regularly, e.g., biannually.

All associates prior to signing a contract, offer letter or any other document that symbolizes a formal engagement with the school will be oriented about the school's safeguarding standards. They will be guided about their safeguarding obligations. They will also be taken through this safeguarding policy and if they agree with the safeguarding obligation upon them, they sign the policy and one of the copies is kept on their files while they keep the other copy.

1.12 PHOTOS, VIDEOS AND MEDIA INCLUDING SOCIAL MEDIA

All staff, volunteers and associates shall never take photos or videos of children in school or in community unless they have obtained informed consent of the caregiver and assent of child to do so. Preferably, the informed consent should be written. The photos and videos involving children and their families shall always prioritize the best interests of the child. Whether the children's photos, videos and stories are for internal or public use/consumption, obtaining written consent must be ensured as a minimum standard. This includes use of children's photos in school magazines, updating school website, social media pages or in mass media-print and non-print.

At all times, photos, videos and stories involving children must be sexually appropriate. They should never depict the child as a sex object or sexually exposed or make the child appear sexually seductive. Where children's photos, videos or stories are to be shared with the public, the school staff responsible for external publication is:

Name	
Contact	
Email:	

1.13 STORING CONFIDENTIAL SAFEGUARDING INFORMATION

The school stores all electronic sensitive, confidential information including information on suspected, reported or disclosed cases of child sexual and other forms of abuse in password-protected files on the computers accessed by only the child safeguarding focal person/s. Paper files are kept under lock and key in locked cabinets. It is a breach of this policy for any school staff, volunteer or associate to keep sensitive

confidential information on their personal work or home laptops, computers, phones, or tablets or hard copy files beyond the duration of their support towards addressing the case at hand. This information must be surrendered to the child safeguarding focal person/s for safe/confidential storage and backup.

1.14 REPORTING A SUSPECTED OR ACTUAL CHILD SAFEGUARDING CONCERN OR DISCLOSURE BY THE CHILD

- a) It may happen that a child tells a staff or volunteer that he/she is worried, is undergoing or has been abused. It is also possible that you observe or are told about a child safeguarding concern.
- b) Upon receiving a disclosure or a report of abuse, it is an obligation upon everyone as a must to report all such safeguarding concerns and disclosures about a child.
- c) The first step is to establish if the child is in immediate danger
 - i) If the child is in immediate danger, contact school authorities right away or even police, depending on the nature of the case and where the abuse has happened e.g., in the community.
 - ii) If the child is not in immediate danger, contact the designated safeguarding focal person at school within 24 hours.
- d) It may happen that the safeguarding concern allegation is being leveled against the designated safeguarding focal person. The case should be reported to one of the administrators or board member.

1.15 INVESTIGATION FOLLOWING A REPORT/DISCLOSURE OF A SAFEGUARDING CONCERN

Once the safeguarding focal person or another member of the administration receives safeguarding concern reports or disclosures, confidential investigation should follow. This should not be a one-man investigation but an investigation by the committee. The committee could be a standing-by child safeguarding committee or a committee constituted on the basis of need, as and when. The committee members should be impartial with no known interest or bias in the parties involved. If there is any unknown interest/bias by any member, they must declare a conflict of interest. The investigation must be confidential, and the accused party must be given a fair hearing. While investigation is ongoing, contact between the child survivor and the accused/perpetrator must be minimized. Where possible it should not happen. Investigation must be expedited and the outcomes made known to the parties involved. If the alleged perpetrator is not satisfied with the findings and resolutions/decision of the committee, he/she has the right to appeal to higher authorities.

1.16 WHISTLEBLOWING

Our school recognizes that reporting of safeguarding concerns by staff where fellow staff or board members are implicated may be jeopardized where the right-intended staff feel they will be identified, victimized and thus are insecure or feel that their reporting may complicate their relationship with fellow staff or even put their position in school hang in balance. On that note, our stance is that our school upholds whistle-blowing as a good practice. Anyone who whistle-blows in good faith will have his or her identity and position in the school protected. Revealing the identity of a whistle blower where there is clear suspected threat to the safety of the reporter will be a breach of this policy.

1.17 REVIEW OF THE POLICY

This policy shall be reviewed every 3 (three) years.

1.18 BREACH OF THE POLICY

Any breaches of this policy will be taken seriously and may result in dismissal and/or

legal action. For teachers and administrative staff whose recruitment comes through the District/Education Service Commission, the school will recommend to the appointing authority to take necessary action against such a staff that breaches this policy. The School Code of Conduct will be invoked to guide further on the disciplinary action to take against an errant staff, volunteer or associate.

1.19 COMMITMENT

I (name) have read and internalized this policy. I clearly understand the obligation upon me as a staff/volunteer/associate to: a) do no harm to children that I work with, come into contact with or impact on; b) respond to any safeguarding concern that I may observe, suspect, or reported or disclosed to me. I am aware that my obligation to safeguard applies to children that attend this school as well as children in the community served by this school as well as all children that I come across.