



## ANTI-BULLYING

### Policy

The Board of Management (BOM) recognises the very serious nature of bullying and the negative impact that it can have on the lives of pupils and their families. We do not tolerate bullying of any kind. We are therefore fully committed to complying with the Department of Education and Skills' 2013 publication 'Anti-Bullying Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools' and to implementing best practice in preventing and tackling bullying behaviour.

We note that good leadership, a shared understanding of all types of bullying, and a school-wide approach to managing bullying, are essential components of an effective anti-bullying strategy. We strive for a positive school culture and an environment that is never threatening in any way. We actively welcome diversity and promote respectful relationships across our school community. We implement a range of education and prevention strategies to build empathy, respect and resilience in pupils. We ensure that pupils are supervised at all times and encourage them to disclose and discuss incidents of bullying behaviour if they witness or experience them. We use established intervention strategies and ensure the consistent recording, investigation and follow-up of any bullying behaviour. We monitor the effectiveness of our policy on an ongoing basis.

This policy addresses bullying between pupils only, and must be understood in the broader context of our behaviour policy. Any issues relating to the potential for bullying between other members of the school community are addressed in other school policies.

## Procedures

### 1. Definition of bullying

Bullying is unwanted negative behaviour – verbal, psychological or physical – conducted by an individual or a group against another person or persons and which is repeated over time. These are examples of bullying:

- **Physical aggression**, including unwanted physical contact
- **Intimidation**, for example using the voice as a weapon or using menacing body language/facial expressions
- **Relational bullying**, including deliberate isolation/exclusion and malicious gossip
- **Cyber-bullying**, which is carried out through the use of information and communication technologies such as phone, text, social networking sites, email, instant messaging, apps, gaming sites, chatrooms and other online means
- **Persistent name-calling** which hurts, insults or humiliates

#### **Interference with/damage to personal property**

- **Extortion**, including demands for money or forcing theft to be carried out, likely accompanied by threats
- **Identity-based bullying** such as homophobic bullying; racist bullying; bullying based on gender, family status or religion; and bullying of those with disabilities or special educational needs.

Negative behaviour that does not meet this definition of bullying, including isolated incidents of intentional negative behaviour, will be dealt with in accordance with the school's behaviour policy.

Specifically in the context of cyber-bullying, a once-off offensive or hurtful text, email or other private message, does not fall within the definition of bullying. As such, it will be dealt with in accordance with the school's behaviour policy. However, placing a once-off offensive or hurtful public message, image or statement on a social network site or other public forum where that message, image or statement can be viewed and/or repeated by other people, will be regarded as bullying behaviour.

## **2. Responsibilities**

### **2.1 BOM**

It is the responsibility of the BOM to ensure that this document is kept up to date and that the policy is upheld. The BOM seeks to ensure that staff members are able to avail of training and development opportunities for dealing effectively with bullying issues that they might come across during the course of their work.

### **2.2 Staff**

#### **2.2.1 Principal**

The Principal is responsible for ensuring that these procedures for preventing, challenging and responding to bullying are implemented. The Deputy Principal will assume her duties in her absence. As leaders in the school community, they are in a strong position to influence attitudes and set standards in relation to bullying behaviour. The Principal has a particular role in making sure that all staff members are familiar with the anti-bullying policy and how this policy is implemented in practice in the school.

#### **2.2.2 Teaching staff**

Teaching staff must always act as good role models and must never misuse the authority that they have. Children should be able to feel that they can go to any member of the teaching staff about any issue relating to bullying (this includes the Special Educational Needs (SEN) teachers and the Principal).

The member of staff who has responsibility for investigating and dealing with any alleged incidents of bullying (the 'Relevant Teacher' – see section 4) will ordinarily be the child's class teacher, but this role may be assumed by SEN teachers or the Principal in certain cases.

### **2.2.3 Other staff**

All other staff of the school, including new recruits, substitute teachers and support staff such as Special Needs Assistants and classroom assistants, are expected to be familiar with the anti-bullying policy and to report any incidents of bullying or potential bullying behaviour to the Relevant Teacher.

## **2.3 Parents and Guardians**

We recognise that parents and guardians can play a vital role in terms of modelling anti-bullying behaviour and ensuring that their children are equipped with key life skills. We offer parents and guardians opportunities to be involved in policy development around bullying and also in practical initiatives that prevent bullying from taking place. We ask parents and guardians to be vigilant about any possible bullying that may be occurring and to understand that this may be happening outside of school (any behaviour outside of school that impacts on school life can become a school issue). They are requested to report any such suspicions to the Principal, regardless of whether their own child is involved. If their child is suspected of engaging in bullying behaviour, parents and guardians are requested to cooperate fully with any investigation, so that the matter can be resolved as quickly as possible in the best interests of all concerned. Furthermore, we believe that the Parents' Association is well placed to organise general talks on preventing and dealing with bullying and we will aim to support them in doing this if they so choose.

## **2.4 Pupils**

Pupils were consulted in the drawing up of this policy. Pupils may not bully each other. If they feel that they are being bullied, they should tell an adult that they trust about it, who will then ensure action is taken to stop the bullying from happening. If they witness or become aware of someone else being bullied, they must also tell a trusted adult about it, who will then ensure action is taken to stop the bullying from happening. If children feel able to, they are encouraged to let those who are engaging in bullying behaviour know that this is not acceptable.

### **3. Bullying prevention**

We accept that eliminating bullying behaviour in its entirety is a challenging and complex task. The school environment is only one of a range of environments in which our pupils find themselves. The interplay between these environments is complex and we acknowledge that there is scope for bullying to occur. However, we will do the very best we can as a school to prevent bullying from happening in the first place.

We have a range of strategies in place to prevent bullying:

- Pupils are supervised at all times and behaviour amongst and between pupils is monitored closely.
- We emphasise positive behaviour, as described in detail in our behaviour policy.
- We have weekly assemblies where positive behaviour is promoted. Our Learn Together programme, taught in all classes, promotes the values of justice, equality and human rights and helps children realise that bullying behaviour is morally wrong.
- We have a team of trained Breaktime Buddies comprising pupils from fifth and sixth class. They raise awareness of bullying and help to build positive relationships within the school in order to create an atmosphere in which bullying is unacceptable.
- We deliver our Social Personal Health Education programme each year, which contains an anti-bullying module.
- We include lessons on cyber-bullying as part of our work on Safer Internet Use.
- We undertake a range of awareness-raising exercises with all classes, proactively explaining the nature, variety, causes, consequences and unacceptability of bullying.
- We help pupils to examine the issue of bullying in a calm, rational way, outside of the tense context of particular bullying incidents and we encourage them to recognise, reject and report bullying behaviour.
- We discuss bullying prevention on a regular basis as part of staff meetings, including the signs that might indicate that a pupil is being bullied and the action to be taken if so.
- We inform parents and guardians on a regular basis about the initiatives that we have put in place to combat bullying. We ask for their vigilance about signs of bullying and request that they support the school in its anti-bullying work.

- We are proactive in working with external agencies and external service providers to manage the issue of bullying as effectively as we can (for example, the National Educational Psychological Service).

## **4. Bullying intervention**

### **4.1 Early intervention**

If bullying does occur, we intervene as early as possible to put a stop to the behaviour, using the following approach:

- The Relevant Teacher investigates all instances of reported or suspected bullying behaviour that impacts on school life, whether these take place within the school or outside it, with a view to establishing the facts and putting in place an action plan involving all relevant parties (children, parents/guardians and staff) to resolve the situation.
- The Relevant Teacher should inform the Principal (or Deputy Principal in her absence) that this step is being taken, so that she can assist and support the Relevant Teacher if necessary.
- The school, through the Relevant Teacher, reserves the right to ask a pupil to write an account of what happened, as part of an investigation. This does not necessarily imply that a pupil is guilty of bullying.
- Pupils who are alleged to have been involved in bullying behaviour are interviewed by the Relevant Teacher to establish the nature and extent of the behaviour and any reasons for it.
- In the event that it is concluded that they have been involved in bullying behaviour, they are asked to promise that they will treat all pupils fairly, equally and respectfully, including the targeted pupil(s).
- The Relevant Teacher will emphasise setting things right and remedying the situation rather than apportioning blame. Children will be encouraged to take ownership of their actions and commit to stopping any negative behaviour. The emphasis will be on positive strategies for future behaviour and restorative practices (e.g. write a reflective journal/write a letter of apology) rather than blame.
- It may also be helpful at this stage to bring the child(ren) who was/were bullying together with the child(ren) who was/were bullied, for a meeting, in order to fully resolve the process.
- It may also be helpful to notify parents/guardians at this stage, in order to fully resolve the process.
- When an investigation is completed and/or a bullying situation is resolved, the Relevant Teacher will complete a report, to include the findings of the investigation, the strategy adopted and the outcome of the intervention, as well as any other relevant information.

- All documentation regarding bullying incidents and their resolution is retained securely in the child's class folder.

## **4.2 Dealing with repeated or very serious bullying behaviour**

It is possible that the early intervention procedure described above may not stop the bullying behaviour, or that the initial bullying is so serious that the above procedure is not appropriate. If a pupil has made a promise to stop bullying, but then chooses to break that promise and continue the bullying behaviour, further action will be necessary. This is regarded as a grave matter requiring the imposition of any of the sanctions below, which will involve the Principal and/or her Deputy:

- The school may contact the pupil's parents or guardians with a view to agreeing a strategy whereby a promise to end the bullying behaviour would be honoured (this may, for example, involve signing a formal promise, countersigned by a parent or guardian).
- The school's suspension procedure may be enacted (see behaviour policy).
- The school's expulsion procedure may be enacted (see behaviour policy).

Other sanctions outlined in the Behaviour policy may also be employed (e.g. loss of privileges/ temporary separation from peers)

## **5. Managing the aftermath of bullying**

We recognise that all children who have been affected by bullying behaviour require subsequent support. The approach we adopt is one of setting things right and then devising strategies to promote positive behaviour in the future.

### **5.1 Pupils who are bullied**

Taking immediate steps to resolve bullying situations is our priority. We will ensure that pupils who are bullied are treated with empathy throughout the process. After the situation has been resolved children may benefit from completing a written account. If necessary, we will encourage parents/guardians to ensure their children access adequate and timely counselling support. We will also help the pupils to raise their self-esteem by encouraging them to become involved in activities that develop friendships and social skills. Furthermore, we will endeavour to ensure that our school ethos is fully implemented in all situations and, in particular, we will ensure all children are reminded that bullying is not the fault of the targeted pupil(s).

## **5.2 Pupils who bully**

We will make it clear that pupils who bully but reform are doing the right thing. The emphasis will be on restorative practices and making a fresh start, balanced with acknowledging the rights of pupils who have been bullied.

We will help them to enhance their feelings of self-worth using a range of learning strategies; this may also include raising their self-esteem by encouraging them to become involved in activities that develop friendships and social skills. If necessary, we will encourage parents/guardians to ensure their children access adequate counselling to help them to learn to meet their needs in positive, constructive ways that acknowledge the rights of all in the school community.

## **6. Review**

The implementation of these procedures will be monitored on an ongoing basis. The policy will undergo an annual review by the board of management. If necessary, this policy and these procedures will be amended as a result of changed circumstances, and shall in any case undergo full review in 2017.

Approved by the BOM on 14<sup>th</sup> April, 2015