



## Anti-Bullying Policy

### 1. Introduction

In accordance with the requirements of the *Education (Welfare) Act 2000* and the *Code of Behaviour Guidelines* issued by the National Education Welfare Board (now TúsIa), the Board of Management of St. Finnachta's NS Sixmilebridge has adopted the following anti-bullying policy within the framework of the school's overall Code of Behaviour. This policy replaces the previous policy which was published in early 2014.

This revised policy fully complies with the requirements of the national *Anti-Bullying Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools* which were published in September 2013. In developing this revised policy a comprehensive consultation process took place involving: the support and guidance of the National Anti-Bullying Centre at DCU; a focus group meeting of parents and teachers involving representatives of both the Parents' Association Committee and School Anti-Bullying Committee; and presentation of the policy to whole parent body and teaching staff for comments which were considered in detail by the Board of Management before this revised policy was ratified.

### 2. Key Principles

The Board of Management recognised the very serious nature of bullying and the negative impact that it can have on the lives of pupils. It is fully committed to the following key principles of best practice in preventing and tackling bullying behaviour:

- ✚ A positive school culture and climate which
  - Is welcoming of difference and diversity and is based on inclusivity
  - Encourages pupils to disclose and discuss incidents of bullying behaviour in a non-threatening environment and
  - Promotes respectful relationships across the school community
- ✚ Effective leadership including that of the senior leadership and management team, the Anti-Bullying Committee and mainstream class teachers
- ✚ A school-wide approach
- ✚ A shared understanding of what bullying is and its impact
- ✚ Implementation of education and prevention strategies (including awareness raising measures) that:
  - Build empathy, respect and resilience in pupils and
  - Explicitly address the issue of cyber-bullying and identity-based bullying
- ✚ Effective supervision and monitoring of pupils
- ✚ Investigations and responses to bullying reports will happen as soon as is practicably possible
- ✚ Supports for staff
- ✚ Consistent recording, investigation and follow-up of bullying behaviour and
- ✚ On-going evaluation of the effectiveness of the anti-bullying policy.

### 3. Defining Bullying

The school defines bullying as follows:

***"Bullying is unwanted negative behaviour, verbal, psychological or physical conducted by an individual or group against another person and which is repeated over time".***

For behaviour to be considered bullying it must also be:

- **Intentional** (e.g. there is an intention to hurt someone) and
- **Power imbalanced** (e.g. the child bullying has more power (e.g. physical, social) than the child being bullied).

Negative behaviour that does not meet this definition of bullying will be dealt with in accordance with the school's Code of Behaviour.

\*Cyberbullying can be part of a wider pattern of 'traditional' bullying. Cyberbullying most commonly occurs through social networking sites, for example Facebook, Snapchat, Twitter, Pinterest, YouTube, Google+, Flickr, group text/picture/instant messaging, chat rooms, gaming sites, email etc.

In the context of this policy, 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 others will be regarded as bullying behaviour.

A once-off offensive or hurtful private text message or other private media message, does not fall within the definition of bullying and should be dealt with, as appropriate, in accordance with the school's Code of Behaviour.

## **4. Roles and Responsibilities**

### ***4.1 Responsibility of Teaching Staff***

The relevant member of the teaching staff who has responsibility for investigating and dealing with bullying is the class teacher of the alleged victim of bullying behaviour. Where the alleged bully and victim are in two different classes, the responsibility for investigating and dealing with the matter will be the alleged victim's teacher with the assistance and support of the alleged perpetrator's teacher.

As the use of mobile devices are not allowed while pupils are under the school's care, it is the school's experience that cyber bullying, and inappropriate use of the internet, occurs outside of school hours when children are not under the care or authority of the school.

As a result, some responses to bullying, particularly sanctions, as set out in this Anti-Bullying Policy, and the School's Code of Behaviour, are generally not applicable.

However, teaching staff and school management can assist in the following ways: raising awareness of the details of specific incidents of cyber-bullying with the parents of relevant pupils; informing the school community about cyber-bullying generally; offering guidance and advice on the prevention and control of cyber-bullying to pupils and parents; ensuring the controlled use of ICT at school; facilitating the provision of appropriate supports to victims of cyber-bullying; referring relevant cases to the relevant services and/ or authorities (e.g. Túsla/ An Garda Síochána).

Ms. Carmel McNulty (Deputy Principal) is the school's Anti-Bullying Co-ordinator and will oversee the overall implementation of the policy.

The School's Anti-Bullying Committee comprises of a group of teachers and will assist with: the implementation and ongoing review of the policy; following up bullying reports in conjunction with the relevant class teacher(s); building the professional capacity of staff to enable them to respond effectively to the evolving nature of bullying in schools; co-ordinating the provision of relevant supports to victims of bullying, and their parents, where required; and the co-ordination of whole-school anti-bullying initiatives.

## **4.2 Responsibility of Parents**

Parents have a responsibility to report any suspected bullying to the relevant teacher without delay.

Parents should provide a written account of all relevant details on the Parent Report Form to assist the school in investigating the alleged bullying.

Parents are expected to provide for effective supervision and management of their children's internet and social media usage at all times outside of school.

Parent(s)/guardian(s) and pupils are required to co-operate with any investigation and assist the school in resolving any issues and restoring, as far as is practicable, the relationships of the parties involved as quickly as possible.

Parents are also expected to accept the actions/ sanctions outlined in this policy which may be imposed on their children where they have been found to have engaged in bullying behaviour.

## **4.3 Responsibility of Pupils**

Pupils will have the responsibility of complying with the anti-bullying policy. Pupils will also have the responsibility of reporting incidents of bullying that they are subject to or have witnessed as bystanders.

Pupils will also have the responsibility to participate actively in anti-bullying initiatives. In responding to any investigations they must be wholly honest and their accounts must be truthful.

## **5. Education and Prevention Strategies**

The education and prevention strategies that will be used by the school are as follows:

- ✚ Implementation of effective prevention and awareness raising measures involving strategies to engage pupils in addressing problems when they arise. In particular, such strategies are aimed at building empathy, respect and resilience in pupils
- ✚ Providing tips to pupils and parents on how to deal with bullying
- ✚ Through the provision of the SPHE curriculum, RSE programme curricular and extra-curricular activities the school will provide pupils with opportunities to develop a positive sense of self-worth
- ✚ Initiatives and programmes focused on developing pupils' awareness and understanding of bullying will be implemented periodically such as: Anti-Bullying & Friendship Week; and Guest speakers and facilitators of anti-bullying workshops for pupils, parents and teachers
- ✚ As a means of preventing, investigating and resolving bullying behaviour the following may be used by teaching staff: confidential questionnaires administered periodically; and class observations.
- ✚ Delivery of classroom-based lessons and programmes.

\*Note: The **Stay Safe Programme** is the primary Anti-Bullying programme which is delivered by class teachers as per SPHE Policy.

The aim of the Stay Safe programme is to reduce vulnerability to child abuse and bullying through the provision of a personal safety education programme for children at primary school level.

The Stay Safe programme itself is a personal safety skills programme designed for use with primary school children from Junior Infants through to 6th class. The programme seeks to enhance children's self-protective skills by participation in lessons on safe and unsafe situations, bullying, inappropriate touch, secrets, telling and stranger danger.

The programme aims to give children the skills necessary to enable them to recognise and resist abuse/victimisation and teaches them that they should always tell (an adult that can help) about any situation which they find unsafe, upsetting, threatening, dangerous or abusive.

Lessons and/ or lessons from the Anti-Bullying Campaign Programme developed by Seán Fallon may be used to supplement the Stay Safe lessons.

## 6. Responding to Reports of Bullying Behaviour

### 6.1 Step 1

A pupil, parent or other relevant person will bring the bullying concern to the relevant class teacher. The primary aims for the class teacher in investigating and dealing with bullying are to gather the relevant facts; resolve any issue; and stop bullying behaviour if it is determined to be such.

Parents should provide a written account of the bullying allegations on the **Parent Bullying Report Form**, with as many specific details as possible, to assist in the investigation.

The relevant class teacher will document the allegation and relevant details on page 1 of the **Teacher Bullying Report Form**.

### 6.2 Step 2

In investigating and dealing with bullying, the relevant teacher will carefully consider the information gathered, exercise his/ her professional judgement to determine whether bullying has occurred and how best the situation might be resolved. The action taken by the relevant teacher will be recorded on page 2 of the **Teacher Bullying Report Form**.

All reports, including anonymous reports of bullying must be investigated and dealt with by the relevant class teacher. In that way pupils can gain confidence in telling.

### 6.3 Step 3

- Step 3A

- i. Where bullying behaviour is reported or suspected but not substantiated, the relevant class teacher will notify the parents of all parties that the matter has been investigated and is being monitored. This will normally be done via telephone call.

- Step 3B

- i. In cases where it is the first substantiated occurrence of bullying behaviour conducted by a pupil, the relevant teacher will notify the parents of both parties (victim and perpetrator) of his/ her findings via telephone or by meeting in person.
- ii. The perpetrating pupil(s) will be assigned a reflective exercise during lunch-time detention which must be returned to the relevant class teacher.
- iii. The perpetrator(s) will be given a verbal warning by the relevant teacher with the expectation that the bullying behaviour will cease immediately.  
He/she must also complete a written reflection at home with his/ her parents, signed by his/ her parents, and return it to the relevant teacher.
- iv. An apology to the victim(s) will normally be expected, where appropriate.
- v. The conduct of the perpetrating pupil's behaviour will be closely monitored for a period and any concerns will be notified to the pupil's parents.

- Step 3C

- i. Where a pupil continues to perpetrate bullying behaviour the relevant teacher will notify both parties (victim and perpetrator) of his/ her findings via telephone or by meeting in person.
- ii. The parents of the perpetrator(s) will be expected to attend a meeting with the school principal.
- iii. The perpetrator(s) will be given a written warning by the school principal with the expectation that the bullying behaviour will cease immediately.
- iv. An apology to the victim(s) will normally be expected, if appropriate

- v. A formal sanction, to reflect the severity of the behaviour and the impact on the victim, will be imposed on the perpetrating pupil(s) by the principal e.g. imposition of additional tasks, isolation from peers, detention, being placed on behaviour monitoring report, alternative and/or extra work, temporary separation from friends/peers, removal from field/game/group/class, restriction of participation in selected activities/ projects or outings, loss of privileges, temporary placement to another classroom, temporary or permanent exclusion (e.g. shortened school day, suspension, expulsion).
- Step 3D  
Where it has been determined that bullying behaviour conducted by a pupil has continued even further, additional sanctions (as per Step 3B above) will be imposed and the matter will be subject to disciplinary proceedings at Phase 3 (Suspension/ Expulsion) as set out in the school's Code of Behaviour.

### **Notes:**

- Non-teaching staff should report any incidents of bullying behaviour witnessed by them, or mentioned to them, to the relevant teacher;
- Parents and pupils are required to co-operate with any investigation and assist the school in in any attempts to investigate and resolve any allegations of bullying;
- In any situation where a formal response to bullying behaviour, or disciplinary sanctions, are imposed by the school, this is a private matter between the child engaged in bullying behaviour, his/ her parents and the school;
- In cases where the relevant class teacher considers that the bullying behaviour has not been adequately and appropriately addressed within 20 school days after he/ she has determined that bullying behaviour has occurred, this must be reported to the principal. In determining whether a bullying case has been adequately and appropriately addressed the relevant teacher must, as part of his/ her professional judgement, take the following factors into account:
  - Whether the bullying behaviour has ceased;
  - Whether any issues between the parties have been resolved as far as is practicable;
  - Whether the relationships between the parties have been restored as far as it is practicable; and
  - Any feedback received from the parties involved, their parents or the school Principal/ Deputy Principal.

## **7. Grievances**

Where a parent/ guardian is not satisfied that the school has dealt with a bullying case in accordance with these procedures, the parent/ guardian should refer, as appropriate, to the school's complaints procedures.

## **8. Support for victims of bullying**

The programme of support for working with victims of bullying may include:

- ✚ Opportunities for pupils/ parents to discuss concerns with the class teacher
- ✚ Development of friendship and social skills and resilience to raise self-esteem
- ✚ Opportunities to develop increased feelings of self worth
- ✚ Teachers' monitoring of pupils at risk and providing opportunities for pupils to discuss and report bullying
- ✚ Some pupils may require a referral for counselling
- ✚ Serious instances of bullying behaviour may be referred to *Túsla: Child and Family Service* with a view to drawing up an appropriate response.

Pupils who engage in bullying behaviour may need counselling and/ or behaviour management interventions to help them learn other ways of meeting their needs without violating the needs of others.

A follow-up mechanism of support for pupils/ parents will operate where the relevant teacher will maintain direct contact with the parents of pupils who have been, or are suspected to have been, victims of bullying. This will normally take the form of telephone calls for a specific period of time after the bullying report has been dealt with.

The Anti-Bullying Committee will have an important role in supporting class teachers with the implementation of anti-bullying procedures and practices, including how best to support victims of bullying.

## **9. Supervision and Monitoring of Pupils**

Appropriate supervision and monitoring practices are in place to both prevent and deal with bullying behaviour and to facilitate early intervention where possible.

## **10. Prevention of Harassment**

Harassment of any pupil who makes a report of bullying behaviour in good faith shall be considered serious misbehaviour under the school's Code of Behaviour and will be dealt with as such.

The school will take all steps that are reasonably practicable to prevent the harassment of pupils or staff on any of the nine specified grounds e.g. gender, civil status, family status, sexual orientation, religion, age, disability, race and membership of the Traveller community.

## **11. Communication of Policy**

This policy has been made aware to school personnel, published on the school website and provided to the Parents' Association Committee. A hard copy will be issued to all parents at the beginning of each school year. A copy will be made available to the school patron, Bishop Kieran O' Reilly, and the Department of Education and Skills as requested.

## **12. Review**

This policy and its implementation will be reviewed by the Board of Management once in every school year. Written notification that the review has been completed will be made available to school personnel, published on the school website and provided to the Parents' Association. A record of the review and its outcome will be made available, if requested, to the Patron and Department.