

Anti-Bullying Policy

1. In accordance with the requirements of the Education (Welfare) Act 2000 and the *code of behaviour guidelines* issued by the NEWB, the Board of Management of The Mercy School has adopted the following anti-bullying policy within the framework of the school's overall code of behaviour. This policy fully complies with the requirements of the *Anti-Bullying Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools* which were published in September 2013.

2. The Board of Management recognises the very serious nature of bullying and the negative impact that it can have on the lives of pupils and is therefore 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;
- 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 issues of cyber-bullying and identity-based bullying including in particular, homophobic and transphobic bullying.
- Effective supervision and monitoring of pupils;
- Supports for staff;
- Consistent recording, investigation and follow up of bullying behaviour (including use of established intervention strategies); and
- On-going evaluation of the effectiveness of the anti-bullying policy.

Definition of Bullying

3. In accordance with the *Anti-Bullying Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools* bullying is defined as follows:

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

The following types of bullying behaviour are included in the definition of bullying:

- deliberate exclusion, malicious gossip and other forms of relational bullying;
- cyber-bullying and
- “identity-based bullying” such as homophobic bullying, racist bullying, bullying based on a person’s membership of the Traveller community and bullying of those with disabilities or special educational needs.

Isolated or once-off incidents of intentional negative behaviour, including a once-off offensive or hurtful text message or other private messaging, do not fall within the definition of bullying and should be dealt with, as appropriate, in accordance with the school's code of behaviour.

However, 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 other people will be regarded as bullying behaviour.

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

Additional information on different types of bullying is set out in Section 2 of the *Anti-Bullying Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools*.

Isolated incidents of aggressive behaviour, which should not be condoned, can scarcely be described as bullying. However, when the behaviour is systematic* and ongoing* it is bullying. Bullying can also take the form of racial abuse. With developments in modern technology, children can also be the victims of non-contact bullying, via mobile phones, the Internet and other personal devices.

**Systematic – is characterised by actions that are planned and methodical and designed to undermine and intimidate the individual.*

**Ongoing – remaining in existence, developing, continually moving forward.*

Types of Bullying

- **Physical Aggression:** It includes pushing, shoving, punching, kicking, poking, and tripping people up. It also may take the form of severe physical assault.
- **Damage to Property:** Personal property can be the focus of attention for the bully; this may result in damage to clothing, school books and other learning material or interference with a pupil's personal belongings. The contents of school bags and pencil cases may be scattered on the floor. Items of personal property may be defaced, broken, stolen or hidden.
- **Extortion:** Demands for money may be made, often accompanied by threats, in the event of the victim not promptly "paying up". Victims' lunches may be taken. Victims may also be forced into theft of property for delivery to the bully. Sometimes this tactic is used for the sole purpose of incriminating the victim.
- **Intimidation:** Some bullying behaviour takes the form of intimidation; it is based on the use of very aggressive body language with the voice being used as a weapon. Particularly upsetting to victims can be the so-called 'look' – a facial expression which conveys aggression and/or dislike.
- **Abusive Telephone Calls/Text Messages or On-line Bullying:** The abusive anonymous telephone call is a form of verbal intimidation or bullying. Inappropriate texting and on-line messaging can also be forms of intimidation or bullying. Posting abusive or insulting messages on social media sites is also a form of bullying. The

school's Acceptable Use Policy gives guideline on proper use of the Internet and other electronic media.

- **Isolation:** A certain person is deliberately isolated, excluded or ignored by some or all, of the class group. This practice is usually initiated by the person engaged in the bullying behaviour. It may be accompanied by writing insulting remarks about the victim on blackboards or in public places, by passing around notes about or drawings of the victim or by whispering insults about them loud enough to be heard.
- **Name Calling:** Persistent name-calling directed at the same individual(s), that hurts, insults or humiliates should be regarded as a form of bullying behaviour; most name-calling of this type refers to physical appearance, including race.
Accent or distinctive voice characteristics may attract negative attention. Academic ability can also provoke name calling. This tends to operate at two extremes; first, there are those who are singled out for attention because they are perceived to be slow, or weak, academically. At the other extreme are those who are targeted because they are perceived as high achievers.
- **“Slagging”:** This behaviour usually refers to good natured banter which goes on as part of the normal social interchange between people. However, when this ‘slagging’ extends to very personal remarks, aimed again and again at the one individual about appearance, clothing, personal hygiene or involves references of an uncomplimentary nature to members on one’s family, particularly if couched in sexual innuendo, then it assumes the form of bullying. It may take the form of suggestive remarks about a pupil’s sexual orientation.

4. The relevant teachers for investigating and dealing with bullying are as follows: The class teacher, supervising teacher and, when deemed necessary, the Principal and/or Deputy Principal.

Effects of Bullying:

Pupils who are being bullied may develop feelings of insecurity and extreme anxiety and thus may become more vulnerable. Self-confidence may be damaged, with a consequent lowering of self –esteem. While they may not talk about what is happening to them, their suffering is indicated through changes in mood and behaviour. Bullying may occasionally result in suicide. It is, therefore, important to be alert to changes in behaviour as early intervention is desirable.

Characteristics of Bullying Behaviour: Schools realise that any pupil can be a victim of, or perpetrator of bullying behaviour.

The Victim/The Target: Any pupil, through no fault of their own may be bullied. It is common in the course of normal play for pupils to tease or taunt one another. However, at a certain point, teasing and taunting may become bullying behaviour. As pupils are

particularly quick to notice differences in others, pupils who are perceived as different are more prone to encounter such behaviour. However, the pupils who are most at risk of becoming victims are those who react in a vulnerable and distressed manner. The seriousness and duration of the bullying behaviour is directly related to the pupil's continuing response to the verbal, physical or psychological aggression.

It is of note that some pupils can unwittingly behave in a very provocative manner which attracts bullying behaviour.

The Bully: It is generally accepted that bullying is a learned behaviour. Pupils who bully tend to display aggressive attitudes, combined with a low level of self-discipline. They can lack any sense of remorse; often they convince themselves that the victim deserves the treatment meted out. Pupils who bully can also be attention seeking; often they set out to impress bystanders and enjoy the reaction their behaviour provokes. They tend to lack the ability to empathise. They are unaware of or indifferent to the victim's feelings. Others seem to enjoy inflicting pain. It is of note that many bullies suffer from a lack of confidence and have low self-esteem.

It is not uncommon to find that pupils who engage in bullying behaviour are also bullied. They tend to be easily provoked and frequently provoke others.

The Bystander: Passive bullying includes being a bystander and watching a bullying incident and doing nothing to stop it, or encouraging another to bully. Bullying is a difficult problem that only gets worse when it is ignored. Research clearly demonstrates that bystanders play a significant and pivotal role in the management and addressing of bullying.

- Bystanders are present most of the time (around 85%), where adults are rarely present.
- Most young people feel uncomfortable but very few know what to do to stop it happening.
- Bullying behaviour is reinforced where people watch but do nothing.
- When bystanders do intervene, the bullying is more likely to stop quickly most of the time.

Indications of Bullying Behaviour/Signs and Symptoms:

The following signs and symptoms may suggest that a child is being bullied:

- Anxiety about travelling to and from school – requesting parents to drive or collect them, changing the route of travel, avoiding regular times for travelling to and from school.
- Unwillingness to go to school, refusal to attend, truancy.
- Deterioration in educational performance, loss of concentration and loss of enthusiasm and interest in school.
- Pattern of physical illnesses (headaches, stomach aches).

- Unexplained changes either in mood or behaviour; this may be particularly noticeable before returning to school after weekends or more especially after longer school holidays.
- Visible signs of anxiety or distress – stammering, withdrawing, nightmares, difficulty sleeping, crying, not eating, vomiting, bed-wetting.
- Spontaneous out-of-character comments about either pupils or teachers.
- Possessions missing or damaged.
- Increased requests for money, or stealing money.
- Unexplained bruising or cuts or damaged clothing.
- Reluctance and/or refusal to say what is troubling her/him.

Those signs do not necessarily mean that a pupil is being bullied. If repeated, or occurring in combination those signs do warrant investigation in order to establish what is affecting the pupil.

RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES

In the school's daily and routine life, the ways in which people interact with each other significantly affect each person's sense of self-worth, belonging and well-being. The fostering of high quality interpersonal relationships among teachers, pupils, parents and ancillary staff is a responsibility shared by everyone.

All members of the school community have a role to play in the prevention of bullying.

Responsibilities of Board of Management: The Board of Management is responsible for ensuring that all members of the school community are enabled to deal effectively with bullying. The Board is committed to providing time and resources for the implementation of the policy. The Board will ensure that proper supervisory and monitoring measures are in place to prevent bullying and to deal with incidents appropriately as they arise.

Responsibilities of School Staff:

- To acknowledge that bullying is a shared responsibility within the school.
- To draw upon best practice, taking into account the age of the pupils.
- To implement prevention and intervention strategies which build and maintain a safe learning environment for the whole school community.
- To empower pupils to deal with conflict in constructive ways using Restorative Justice practices.
- To take all reports of bullying seriously and to report them to the principal if warranted.
- To document any serious bullying incidents using the Bullying Incident Report Form (Appendix 1).

Responsibilities of Pupils:

- To show consideration, respect and support towards others.
- To be able to identify bullying behaviour.
- To not bully others.
- To tell if they are being bullied or if they see someone else being bullied.
- To engage in responsible reporting when witnessing or experiencing bullying behaviour.
- To feel empathy for targeted members of the school community and, as a result, take safe and sensible action as a bystander.

Responsibilities of Parents:

- To support the school in the implementation of the policy.
- To watch out for signs that their child may be being bullied.
- To speak to the class teacher if their child is being bullied or they suspect that this is happening.
- To instruct their children to tell if they are bullied or if they have seen other students being bullied.
- To notify the school if they think that their child is displaying bullying behaviour and to work with the school in addressing this problem.
- To never directly approach a student or the parent of a student at the school to intervene in the behaviour issues.

5. The education and prevention strategies (including strategies specifically aimed at cyber-bullying, homophobic and transphobic bullying) that will be used by the school are as follow

- Stay Safe programme (all classes).
- SPHE (all classes).
- SALT (1st-6th).
- Circle Time (all classes).
- Child Protection Policy.
- Visits from Gardaí (Cyber-bullying-Senior classes).
- “Friend-ship Fortnight” (odd years)/Anti bullying week (even years) (all classes).
- Cross curricular lessons on different cultures/religions and raising awareness and celebrating difference. “Culture Day”
- Posters on display around the school with anti-bullying messages.
- Maintaining a positive school culture that encourages respect, trust, care, consideration and support for others, and where children are empowered to deal with bullying in an appropriate manner with the support of their peers and the adults in their lives (Appendix 2).
- “Shield My School” programme from ISPC.

6. The school's procedures for investigation, follow-up and recording of bullying behaviour and the established intervention strategies used by the school for dealing with cases of bullying behaviour are as follows.

In-Class:

Where an alleged incident of bullying takes place during class the teacher will use his/her professional judgement to investigate it by speaking to the parties involved and when necessary looking for witnesses to the incident. The investigation may involve individual conversations with each party and/or a group discussion in order to clarify exactly what happened. On occasion a teacher may ask the principal or a colleague to sit in on these meetings to observe.

If the incident is verified then the teacher will write up a report, including as many relevant facts as possible (Appendix 1). This report will be kept on file by the teacher.

If the incident is deemed to be minor then it will usually be dealt with by the class teacher following the school code of behaviour.

If the incident is on the moderate scale then the class teacher will decide whether to inform the principal and/or the parent/guardian. This decision will be based on the nature of the incident and whether there have been previous incidents involving the same child. Again the incident will be dealt with using the school code of behaviour

If the incident is serious then the principal and parent/guardian will be informed and both will be consulted in relation to how the teacher deals with the incident (within the confines of the school's code of behaviour).

The report on moderate and serious incidents will also be copied into the school "Incident Report" which is kept in the school office.

Class teacher records are kept for 1 year. Office copies and digital copies are kept until the child is 18, in line with the school policy on "Assessment and Record Keeping".

Outside the Class.

Where an alleged bullying incident takes place on the school grounds the supervising teacher will be the first person to try to establish the facts by following the procedures outlined above. It is the responsibility of the class teacher, in consultation with the supervising teacher to write up a report, if it is deemed necessary. Where the incident involves children from more than one class the class teachers will agree on which one writes the report and copies should be given to all teachers concerned.

The actions taken will follow those described under "In-Class" above.

Outside the School.

The type of involvement by the school in incidents which take place outside of school will very much depend on the nature of the incident and any issues that arise out of it that may directly involve the school. This decision will be based on the professional judgement of the teacher(s) and/or principal. When deemed necessary, especially where there is a potential

“Child Protection” issue the school reserves the right to contact the parents of a child who has been the victim of bullying outside of school.

Other Points to Note:

- (i) The primary aim for the relevant teacher in investigating and dealing with bullying is to resolve any issues and to restore, as far as is practicable, the relationships of the parties involved (rather than to apportion blame);
- (ii) In investigating and dealing with bullying, the teacher will exercise his/her professional judgement to determine whether bullying has occurred and how best the situation might be resolved;
- (iii) All reports, including anonymous reports of bullying will be investigated and dealt with appropriately by the relevant teacher. In that way pupils will gain confidence in ‘telling’. This confidence factor is of vital importance. It should be made clear to all pupils that when they report incidents of bullying they are not considered to be telling tales but are behaving responsibly;
- (iv) Non-teaching staff such as secretaries, special needs assistants (SNAs), caretakers, cleaners will be required to report any incidents of bullying behaviour witnessed by them, or mentioned to them, to the relevant teacher;
- (v) Parents 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;
- (vi) It is very important that all involved (including each set of pupils and parents) understand the above approach from the outset;
- (vii) Teachers should take a calm, unemotional problem-solving approach when dealing with incidents of alleged bullying behaviour reported by pupils, staff or parents;
- (viii) Incidents are generally best investigated outside the classroom situation to ensure the privacy of all involved;

7. The school’s programme of support for working with pupils affected by bullying is as follows:

- Maintaining strong links and communications between school and home.
- Using “Circle Time”, SPHE lessons and SALT where appropriate.
- Accessing counselling and/or “Play-Therapy” when appropriate and available.
- Using mentoring and peer-support when appropriate, both in class and at break-times.
- Strong communication between all staff members.
- CPD facilitated by the ISPCC to implement their Shield our School programme
- Anti-Bullying workshops (e.g. Red Moon) on occasion.

8. Supervision and Monitoring of Pupils

The Board of Management confirms that appropriate supervision and monitoring policies and practices are in place to both prevent and deal with bullying behaviour and to facilitate early intervention where possible.

9. Prevention of Harassment

The Board of Management confirms that the school will, in accordance with its obligations under equality legislation, take all such steps that are reasonably practicable to prevent the sexual harassment of pupils or staff or the harassment of pupils or staff on any of the nine grounds specified (i.e. gender including transgender, civil status, family status, sexual orientation, religion, age, disability, race and membership of the Traveller community).

10. This policy was adopted by the Board of Management on _____

11. This policy has been made available to school personnel, published on the school website mercywexford.scoilnet.ie and provided to the Parents' Council. A copy of this policy will be made available to the Department and the patron if requested.

12. 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' Council. A record of the review and its outcome will be made available, if requested, to the patron and the Department.

Signed: _____
(Chairperson of Board of Management)

(Principal)

Date: _____

Date: _____

Date of next review: _____

Appendix 1 :Template for Recording Bullying Behaviour.

1. Name(s) of pupil(s) being bullied and class group

Name(s): _____ Class _____

2. Name(s) and class(es) of pupil(s) engaged in bullying behaviour

3. Source of bullying concern/report.

4. Location of incidents.

Pupil concerned	
Other pupil	
Parent	
Teacher	
Other	

Playground	
Classroom	
Corridor	
Toilets	
Other	

5. Name of person(s) who reported the bullying concern

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6. Type of bullying behaviour (tick relevant box(es))*

Physical Aggression		Cyber-bullying	
Damage to Property		Intimidation	
Isolation / Exclusion		Malicious Gossip	
Name Calling		Other (specify)	

7. Where behaviour is regarded as identity-based bullying, indicate the relevant category:

Homophobic	Disability/SEN related	Racist	Membership of Traveller Community	Other (specify)

8. Brief Description of bullying behaviour and its impact:

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9. Details of actions taken

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Signed: _____ (relevant teacher) Date: _____

Date submitted to Principal / Deputy Principal: _____

Appendix 2 : Key elements of a positive school culture and climate

- The school acknowledges the right of each member of the school community to enjoy school in a secure environment.
- The school acknowledges the uniqueness of each individual and his/her worth as a human being.
- The school promotes positive habits of self-respect, self-discipline and responsibility among all its members.
- The school prohibits vulgar, offensive, sectarian or other aggressive behaviour or language by any of its members.
- The school has a clear commitment to promoting equity in general and gender equity in particular in all aspects of its functioning.
- The school has the capacity to change in response to pupils' needs.
- The school identifies aspects of curriculum through which positive and lasting influences can be exerted towards forming pupils' attitudes and values.
- The school takes particular care of "at risk" pupils and uses its monitoring systems to facilitate early intervention where necessary and it responds to the needs, fears or anxieties of individual members in a sensitive manner.
- The school recognises the need to work in partnership with and keep parents informed on procedures to improve relationships on a school-wide basis.
- The school recognises the role of parents in equipping the pupil with a range of life-skills.
- The school recognises the role of other community agencies in preventing and dealing with bullying.
- The school promotes habits of mutual respect, courtesy and an awareness of the interdependence of people in groups and communities.
- The school promotes qualities of social responsibility, tolerance and understanding among all its members both in school and out of school.
- Staff members share a collegiate responsibility, under the direction of the Principal, to act in preventing bullying/aggressive behaviour by any member of the school community.