

Anti-Bullying Policy

2023-2024



Bullying is not acceptable in St. Finian's College and will not be tolerated.

Introduction.

1. The Board of Management of St. Finian's College, Mullingar is committed to providing all students with an environment that is free from any form of bullying. This commitment is expressed in the College Charter. The school has a central role in our students' social, moral development just as it does in their academic progress. In school, we work towards standards of behaviour based on the basic principles of honesty, respect, consideration, responsibility, truthfulness and courtesy. The individuality of each student needs to be accommodated while at the same time acknowledging the right of every student to an education in an environment free of disruption.

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 St. Finian's College 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.

Aims of the Policy

- To foster a school ethos of mutual and self-respect
- To raise awareness of bullying as a form of unacceptable behaviour
- To outline, promote and raise awareness of preventative approaches that can be used in response to reported incidences of bullying
- To develop a programme of support for those affected by bullying behaviour and for those involved in bullying behaviour
- To outline procedures for noting and reporting instances of bullying behaviour

- To outline procedures for investigating and dealing with incidents of bullying behaviour

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; involves collaboration among and between staff & pupils and promotes respectful relationships across the school community; encourages the work of the student council in this area
- 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 ongoing evaluation of the effectiveness of the anti-bullying policy.
- Ongoing evaluation of the effectiveness of the anti-bullying policy.

The following are some practical tips for immediate actions that can be taken to help build a positive school culture and climate and to help prevent and tackle bullying behaviour.

- Model respectful behaviour to all members of the school community at all times
- Explicitly teach pupils what respectful language and respectful behaviour looks like, acts like, sounds like and feels like in class and around the school
- Display key respect messages in classrooms, in assembly areas and around the school. Involve pupils in the development of these messages
- Catch them being good - notice and acknowledge desired respectful behaviour by providing positive attention
- Consistently tackle the use of discriminatory and derogatory language in the school – this includes homophobic and racist language and language that is belittling of pupils with a disability or SEN
- Give constructive feedback to pupils when respectful behaviour and respectful language are absent
- Have a system of encouragement and rewards to promote desired behaviour and compliance with the school rules and routines
- Explicitly teach pupils about the appropriate use of social media
- Positively encourage pupils to comply with the school rules on mobile phone and internet use
- Follow-up and follow through with pupils who ignore the rules
- Actively involve parents and/or the Parents' Association in awareness raising campaigns around social media
- Actively promote the right of every member of the school community to be safe and secure in school

- Highlight and explicitly teach school rules in pupil friendly language in the classroom and in common areas
- All staff can actively watch out for signs of bullying behaviour
- Ensure there is adequate playground/school yard/outdoor supervision
- School staff can get pupils to help them to identify bullying 'hot spots' and 'hot times' for bullying in the school
 - Hot spots tend to be in the school grounds/ outdoor areas, changing rooms, corridors and other areas of unstructured supervision
 - Hot times again tend to be times where there is less structured supervision such as when pupils are on break time or moving between classrooms.
- Support the establishment and work of student councils

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

'Unwanted negative behaviour, verbal, psychological or physical, conducted by an individual or group against another person (or persons) and which is repeated overtime'.

In other words, bullying can be defined as repeated aggression whether it is **verbal**, **psychological** or **physical**, which is conducted by an individual or a group against others.

It is behaviour which is intentionally **aggravating** and **intimidating**. It includes behaviour such as **teasing**, **taunting**, **threatening**, **hitting**, **exclusion** or **extortion** by one or more pupils against a victim. Bullying behaviour also includes **cyber bullying**, **abusive calls/texts**, **abusive emails**, and **abusive website comments**. Bullying behaviour thrives in an atmosphere of uncertainty and secrecy in which the victim often feels a sense of hopelessness.

Isolated instances of aggressive behaviour, which would be dealt with under the Code of Behaviour, would not be described as bullying. However, when the behaviour is systematic and ongoing, it is bullying.

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

What is psychological bullying?

Psychological bullying is similar to playing mind games and can be particularly intimidating for its victim. Malicious rumours are an insidious form of this bullying which attacks a person's self-image, while hurtful facial looks expressing aggression and/or dislike are subtler but equally damaging. This type of bullying is intended to cause severe emotional distress.

Psychological bullying includes:

- Excluding

- Isolating
- Gossiping
- Spreading rumours or lies
- Demeaning
- Ridiculing
- Passing notes or drawings
- Writing remarks in public places
- Using peer pressure to intimidate
- Threatening gestures or looks

What is verbal bullying?

Verbal bullying is highly personal in nature and leaves its victim feeling angry, frightened and powerless. It is typically directed at the young person's family, culture, race or religion or indeed at any small thing that makes them slightly different such as a physical trait or perceived academic ability. Due to technological advances, **cyberbullying** is a new dynamic which engages the internet, mobile phones and other technology to abuse its victims.

Verbal bullying includes:

- Name-calling
- Teasing
- Jeering
- Taunting
- Slagging/insulting
- Threatening
- Dangerous dares
- Abusive anonymous phone calls

What is physical bullying?

What may be written off as "horseplay" or "mess fights" within the context of bullying can often be a disguise or precursor of more serious physical assaults. While both boys and girls participate in physical bullying, boys are more prone to it given stronger tendencies towards physical aggression. Young children especially are vulnerable to extortion bullying where things such as money, possessions, equipment, lunch vouchers or even food, are demanded from them and threats for not "paying up" are made.

Physical bullying includes:

- Hitting, beating or punching

- Pulling or pushing
 - Kicking
- Tripping
- Pinching
- Choking
- Spitting
- Stealing
- Damaging property or possessions
- Demanding money or possessions
 - Forcing into theft
- Locking in or out of a space
 - Throwing objects
- Threatening with a weapon
 - Inflicting bodily harm
- Humiliating acts (e.g. “wedgies” or pulling up of skirts)

What is cyber bullying?

Cyberbullying is **bullying** that takes place using electronic technology. Electronic technology includes devices and equipment such as mobile phones, computers, and tablets as well as communication tools including social media sites, text messages, chat, and websites

- Denigration: Spreading rumours, lies or gossip to hurt a person’s reputation
- Harassment: Continually sending vicious, mean or disturbing messages to an individual
- Impersonation: Posting offensive or aggressive messages under another person’s name
- Flaming: Using inflammatory or vulgar words to provoke an online fight
- Trickery: Fooling someone into sharing personal information which you then post online
- Outing: Posting or sharing confidential or compromising information or images
- Exclusion: Purposefully excluding someone from an online group
- Cyber stalking: Ongoing harassment and denigration that causes a person considerable fear for his/her safety
- Silent telephone/mobile phone call
- Abusive telephone/mobile phone calls
- Abusive text messages
- Abusive email
- Abusive communication on social networks e.g. Facebook/Ask.fm/ Twitter/You Tube/ Instagram/Snapchat/WhatsApp or on games consoles
- Abusive website comments/Blogs/Pictures
- Abusive posts on any form of communication technology

What is Identity Based Bullying?

Including any of the nine discriminatory grounds mentioned in Equality Legislation (gender including transgender, civil status, family status, sexual orientation, religion, age, disability, race and membership of the Traveller community).

Homophobic and Transgender

- Spreading rumours about a person's sexual orientation
- Taunting a person of a different sexual orientation
- Name calling e.g. Gay, queer, lesbian...used in a derogatory manner
- Physical intimidation or attacks
- Threats

Race, nationality, ethnic background and membership of the Traveller community

- Discrimination, prejudice, comments or insults about colour, nationality, culture, social class, religious beliefs, ethnic or traveller background
- Exclusion on the basis of any of the above

Relational

This involves manipulating relationships as a means of bullying. Behaviours include:

- Malicious gossip
- Isolation & exclusion
- Ignoring
- Excluding from the group
- Taking someone's friends away
- "Bitching"
- Spreading rumours
- Breaking confidence
- Talking loud enough so that the victim can hear
- The "look"
- Use or terminology such as 'nerd' in a derogatory way

Sexual

- Unwelcome or inappropriate sexual comments or touching
- Harassment

Special Educational Needs, Disability

- Name calling
- Taunting others because of their disability or learning needs
- Taking advantage of some pupils' vulnerabilities and limited capacity to recognise and defend themselves against bullying
- Taking advantage of some pupils' vulnerabilities and limited capacity to understand social situations and social cues.
- Mimicking a person's disability
- Setting others up for ridicule.

Some indications of bullying

- Anxiety about attending school.
- Deterioration in educational performance.
- Pattern of physical illness.
- Unexplained changes in mood/behaviour.
- Visible signs of anxiety or distress.
- Possessions missing.
- Increases requests for money.
- Unexplained bruising.
- Reluctance to say what is troubling him/her.

These are all signs of a variety of problems as well as bullying.

The school acknowledges that there are three parties involved in bullying – those who bully, those who are bullied and those who witness the bullying. Staff and teachers bear this in mind when dealing with bullying incidences and try to support and work with all parties involved.

Procedures for noting and reporting incidents

Student to Student Bullying

4. The relevant teacher(s) for investigating and dealing with bullying are as follows:

- The Year Heads in conjunction with the Principal and Deputy Principals will investigate and deal with bullying issues.

5. Prevention of Bullying

- Teachers try to establish **supportive, respectful relationships** with students so that if a pupil is in difficulty, they will be more likely to feel comfortable in approaching a teacher. Caring Aspects classes and class tutors with a teaching group support this.
- The **SPHE** programme, including R.S.E., is taught to all Junior Certificate classes to build self-esteem and raise awareness about bullying. These are personal safety skills programmes which seek to enhance students' self-esteem and self-protection skills including their ability to recognise and cope with bullying. Various other social, health and media education programmes can further help to address the problem of bullying behaviour.
- **Teachers reminding students frequently** that they can talk to them if they have concerns, including concerns about bullying.
- **Posters** displayed in corridors, classrooms and cloakroom areas with clear guidance about what steps to take if you are being bullied.
- **Mentor System**
- **Guest Speakers** including the Community Garda and former targets of bullying behaviour.
- **Raising awareness** through the school **website and social media platforms**.

- **Good relationships and communication** amongst members of staff means that all teachers and SNAs are aware if a bullying issue arises, and all staff monitor the situation, particularly during break times.
- Prevention and awareness raising measures focusing on **cyber-bullying** by educating pupils on appropriate online behaviour, how to stay safe while online. Digital Media Literacy classes.
- The work could be extended into many other areas such as **Art, Drama, Religious Education, and Physical Education**. Co-operation and group enterprise can be promoted through team sports, school clubs and societies.
- **Sporting activities** in particular can provide excellent opportunities for channelling and learning how to control aggression and for instilling the principles of fair play.
- **Promotion** of lunch time activities.
- **Information Evenings** for Parents.
- **Specific Induction** of 1st Years: What is acceptable/ unacceptable behaviour?
- **Staff Training**
- **Zero tolerance approach** to negative behaviour of any kind.
- **Enable Students** to talk out against bullying behaviour and to support students at risk.

6. Procedures for Investigation

The primary aim 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).

With this in mind 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:

STAGE 1

(i) In investigating and dealing with bullying, **the investigating teacher(s)** will exercise his/her/their **professional judgement** to determine **whether bullying has occurred**, what **type** if it has and how best the situation might be resolved.

(ii) All **reports**, including anonymous reports of bullying **must be investigated and dealt with by the investigating teacher(s) initially**. In that way, students will gain confidence in reporting. This confidence factor is of vital importance. It should be made clear to all students that when they report incidents of bullying, they are behaving responsibly.

(iii) **Non-teaching staff** such as secretaries, special needs assistants (SNAs), bus drivers, caretakers, cleaners must be encouraged to **report any incidents** of bullying behaviour witnessed by them, or mentioned to them, to the **relevant investigating teacher**.

(iv) **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. All incidents of bullying reported, will be noted, taken seriously and dealt with promptly, appropriately and effectively. If parents have concerns about their child being bullied they should inform the school immediately.

(v) It is very important that **all involved** (including students and parents) **understand the above approach** from the outset

(vi) The investigating teacher(s) should take a **calm, unemotional problem-solving approach** when dealing with incidents of alleged bullying behaviour reported by students, staff or parents.

(vii) All **interviews** should be conducted with **sensitivity** and with due regard to the rights of all students concerned. Students who are not directly involved can also provide very useful information in this way.

(viii) When **analysing incidents** of bullying behaviour, the **investigating teacher(s)** should seek answers to questions of **what, where, when, who and why**. This should be done in a calm manner, setting an example in dealing effectively with a conflict in a non-aggressive manner.

(ix) If a **group is involved**, **each member** should be **interviewed individually** at first. **Thereafter**, if necessary, all those involved could be met as a group. At the **group meeting**, each member should be asked for his/her account of what happened to ensure that everyone in the group is **clear** about **each other's statements**.

(x) **Each member of the group** should be **supported** through the possible pressures that they may face from the other members of the group after interview by the teacher.

(xi) Where the investigating teacher(s) has/have determined that a **pupil has been engaged in bullying behaviour**, it should be **made clear** to him/her how he/she is **in breach of the school's anti-bullying policy** and efforts should be made to try to get him/her to see the situation from the perspective of the pupil being bullied.

(xii) It may also be appropriate or helpful to ask those involved to **write down their account of the incident(s)**.

(xiii) In cases where it has been **determined by the investigating teacher** that **bullying behaviour has occurred**, the **parents** of the parties involved should be **contacted at an early stage** to inform them of the matter and explain the actions being taken. The school should give parents an opportunity of discussing ways in which they can reinforce or support the actions being taken by the school.

(xiv) It must also be **made clear to all involved** (each set of students and parents) that in any situation where **disciplinary sanctions** are required, this is a **private matter between the pupil being disciplined, his or her parents and the school**.

(xv) **Follow-up meetings** with the **relevant parties involved** may be **arranged separately** with a view to **possibly bringing them together at a later date** if the student who has been bullied is ready and agreeable

(xvi) An **additional follow-up meeting** with parents of the students involved may take place after an appropriate time to ensure that the matter has been **resolved satisfactorily**.

(xvii) The situation will be monitored on an ongoing basis by the **Year Head** to ensure that those who were involved in bullying behaviour **continue to behave appropriately**.

(xviii) **The Principal/Deputy Principals** will be fully briefed on serious incidents of bullying behaviour. Other **relevant staff** will be alerted to ensure vigilance in terms of ongoing monitoring.

(xviii) Counselling by our school Guidance counsellor may be arranged for all parties involved to offer continued support.

STAGE 2

(xix) Where a **parent is not satisfied** that the school has dealt with a bullying case in accordance with these procedures, the parents must be referred, as appropriate, to the **school's complaints procedures**.

(xx) In the event that a parent has **exhausted the school's complaints** procedures and is still not satisfied, the school must advise the parents of their right to make a complaint to the **Ombudsman for Children**.

(xxi) It is the **duty of the school to provide a safe environment** for all the children. Should the above interventions fail and the bullying continue, a programme of appropriate sanctions may be implemented by the Principal in consultation with the parents and Board of Management. Sanctions implemented will aim to encourage positive behaviour and support the esteem of the student. In **extreme cases** of bullying these sanctions may include **expulsion** or a period of **suspension** during which there will be ongoing consultation with the parents to decide on appropriate action(s) to be taken in the best interests of the student. **Suspension** for any period of time will be reported in writing by the Principal to the Chair of the Board of Management.

(xxii) The school reserves the right to apply its anti-bullying policy in respect of bullying behaviour that occurs at a location, activity, function or program that is not school related if in the opinion of the principal and/or the BOM the alleged bullying behaviour has created a hostile environment at school for the victim, has infringed on the rights of the victim at the school and/or has materially or substantially disrupted the education process or the orderly operation of the school.

Bullying by Adults

The Board of Management of St. Finian's College is committed to promoting **positive working relations** amongst staff, with parents and with outside visitors. It formally adopts the HSA Dignity in the Workplace Charter, endorsed by ICTU and IBEC and adopted by the JMB and ASTI.

RECORDING

Noting and reporting of bullying behaviour is to be documented using the *template for recording bullying behaviour (Appendix 3)*. All records must be maintained in *accordance with relevant data protection legislation*. The school's procedures for noting and reporting bullying behaviour will adhere to the following:

(i) While all reports, including anonymous reports of bullying must be investigated and dealt with by the investigating teacher(s), the investigating teacher(s) will use his/her/their professional judgement in relation to the records to be kept of these reports, the actions taken and any discussions with those involved regarding same.

(ii) If it is **established by the investigating teacher**(s) that bullying has occurred, the investigating teacher(s) **must keep appropriate written records** which will assist his/her efforts to resolve the issues and restore, as far as is practicable, the relationships of the parties involved.

(iii) The investigating teacher(s) **must use the recording template** to record the bullying behaviour (Appendix 3).

(iv) **Two copies** of these recordings will be made. One will be given to the **Principal/Deputy Principals** and the other will be kept by the relevant **Year Head**.

Support Programme

7. The school's programme of support for working with pupils affected by bullying involves a **whole school approach**. Given the complexity of bullying behaviour, **no one intervention/support programme works in all situations**. Therefore, various approaches and intervention strategies may be used involving **teachers, mentors, year heads, tutors, the school chaplain and the school counsellor**. It is also **suggested** that if necessary **parents seek referrals to appropriate outside agencies** in order to **receive further support** for the pupils and their families if needed.

Supervision and Monitoring of Pupils

8. 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.

Prevention of Harassment

9. 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.

Availability of Policy

10. This policy upon ratification has been supplied to all parents, has been made available to school personnel, published on the school website, is readily accessible to parents and pupils on request and provided to the Parents' Association. A copy of this policy will be made available to the Department and the patron if requested.

Review of Policy

11. 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 parents, school personnel, published on the school website, will be readily accessible to parents and pupils on request and provided to the Parents' Association. A record of the review and its outcome will be made available, if requested, to the patron and the Department.

Reviewed:

October 2023

Student Council 12th October 2023

The Student Council of St Finian's College wishes to inform you that their annual review of the school's anti-bullying policy and its implementation was completed at the Student Council meeting of October 2023 [date].

Signed Eabha Wallace Date 12/10/2023

Signed Brian Gaffney Date 12/10/2023

School Captains

Board of Management: October 2023

The Board of Management of St Finian's College wishes to inform you that:

The Board of Management's annual review of the school's anti-bullying policy and its implementation was completed at the Board meeting of October 2023.

This review was conducted in accordance with the checklist set out in Appendix 4 of the Department's Anti-Bullying Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools.

Aidan Farrell

Signed Aidan Farrell Chairperson, Board of Management

John Mc Hale
Signed John Mc Hale Principal