

Anti-Bullying Policy Colaiste Mhuire CBS Mullingar

Scope of Policy

This policy is intended to counter bullying behaviour by or against students attending Colaiste Mhuire the policy applies to all students in the school, to their parents and to all members of the school staff and management.

Relationship to Mission Statement

‘Colaiste Mhuire is committed to excellence. We provide a caring and disciplined environment in which all students are challenged to reach their academic and personal potential’. This our Mission Statement in Colaiste Mhuire. It follows that we as a school community deem bullying a very serious offence and contrary to the ethos of our school. Every possible action will be taken to prevent and eradicate bullying from our school.

Rationale

Section 23.2(c) of the Education Act, 1998 places an onus on the principal of a school to

“be responsible for the creation, together with the board, parents of students and the teachers, of a school environment which is supportive of learning among the students and which promotes the professional development of the teachers”.

Furthermore, the Education (Welfare) Act, 2000 requires that every school should have a Code of Behaviour through which this school environment may be promoted and sustained. Bullying behaviour by any member or members of the school community will, by its very nature, undermine the necessary secure and safe teaching and learning environment to which all schools aspire.

Aims of the Policy

It is important to note that the aim of this policy is to prevent and stop bullying occurring, not to gain satisfaction from punishing the perpetrator. The objectives of the policy are:

- To create a school ethos that is respectful, in which people feel safe and which encourages children to disclose and discuss incidents of bullying behaviour.
- To raise awareness that bullying behaviour will not be tolerated in Colaiste Mhuire.
- To develop procedures for noting, reporting, investigating and dealing with incidents of bullying behaviour.
- To develop a programme of support for those affected by bullying behaviour and for those involved in bullying behaviour.

Policy Content

Definition

The Department of Education and Science in its own ‘Guidelines on Countering Bullying Behaviour in Primary and Post Primary Schools’ defines bully behaviour as *“repeated aggression, verbal, psychological or physical, conducted by an individual or group against others”.*

Bullying refers to any repeated behaviour which makes other people feel uncomfortable or threatened, whether it is intended or not.

Bullying can be:

- **Cyberbullying is defined as**
actions that use information and communication technologies to support deliberate, repeated, and hostile behaviour by an individual or group, that is intended to harm another or others.
- use of communication technologies for the intention of harming another person
- use of internet service and mobile technologies such as web pages and discussion groups as well as instant messaging or SMS text messaging with the intention of harming another person.
- Examples of what constitutes Cyberbullying include communications that seek to intimidate, control, manipulate, put down, falsely discredit, or humiliate the recipient. The actions are deliberate, repeated, and hostile behaviour intended to harm another. Cyberbullying has been defined by The National Crime Prevention Council: "When the Internet, cell phones or other devices are used to send or post text or images intended to hurt or embarrass another person."

School Community Bullying

- Calling names, teasing or spreading rumours
- Hitting, kicking, pushing, pulling, or spitting at another person.
- Belittling another person's abilities and achievements
- Taking or damaging another persons bag or other possessions, or forcing someone to hand over money/possessions
- Writing offensive notes, text messages, email, or graffiti about another person, or making offensive phone calls
- Using mobile phones to take, display or circulate offensive images of another person
- Ignoring and/or leaving a person out of a group activity
- Attacking someone because of their religion, race, colour, gender sexual orientation (homophobic bullying), way of speaking or personal mannerism

Possible signs and symptoms of bullying

- Anxiety about travelling to and from school – requesting parents to drive or collect them, changing route of travel, avoiding regular times of travelling to and from school.
- Unwillingness to go to school, or refusal to attend.
- Deterioration in educational performance, loss of concentration, loss of enthusiasm and interest in school.
- Pattern of physical illness, such as headaches, stomach aches, etc.
- Unexplained changes either in mood or behaviour, it may be particularly noticeable before returning to school after weekends or more especially after longer holidays.
- Visible signs of anxiety or distress – stammering, withdrawing, nightmares, and difficulty in sleeping, crying, not eating, vomiting, bedwetting.

- Spontaneous out-of character comments about either students or teachers.
- Possessions missing or damaged.
- Increased requests for money or stealing money.
- Unexplained bruising, cuts or damaged clothing.
- Reluctance and/or refusal to say what is troubling him/her.

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

Support Programme

“An active school policy is most effective when integrated in a school climate which encourages respect, trust, caring, consideration and support”

(Department of Education & Science)

This reminds us of the need to develop a support programme, which includes initiatives designed to prevent bullying behaviour taking place in the first instance. In addition the system should meet the immediate needs/concerns of both victim and bully and also provide ongoing assistance for all involved thereafter.

Reporting incidents of bullying

The teachers, staff and management of hold the belief that every young person has the right to pass safely through education, free from fear and intimidation. Therefore, the school encourages students and parents to talk and tell about incidents of bullying, sooner rather than later, and before the bullying is given the opportunity to escalate. Colaiste Mhuire guarantees that the school will act effectively and quickly to protect them. Parents and/or students may notify the principal or any member of staff whom they feel comfortable talking to about the issue.

Role of parents in preventing bullying

- Lead by example. Address the issue of bullying in your own children. Your child can be either the victim or the bully. We all have the ability to bully others within us. Make them aware that bullying is not simply ‘physical’ and discuss what kind of effects it can have. Challenge every incident of bullying that you witness in your home. Where you see negative behaviour, highlight it.
- Use every opportunity to praise your child and boost their confidence in order to foster high self-esteem in your child.
- Always take an active role in your child’s education. Inquire how their day has gone, who they spent time with, how lunchtime was spent, etc. Allow your child to invite friends home. Encourage your child to have friends. Show an interest in your child’s friends.
- Encourage your child to practice confident body language. A submissive stance often provokes more bullying. Check that your child is not inviting the bullying by some anti-social habit, such as spitting.
- Together identify those places where the bullying takes place and work out a way to avoid them. If this is not possible, advise them to ensure that there

are other trusted people about. Advise your child not to try and buy the bullying off with sweets or other 'presents', and not to give in to demands of money.

- Encourage your child to seek help or to 'tell on' the alleged bullying.

What can you do if your child is found guilty of bullying?

Every bully is somebody's child. If you suspect or know that your child is bullying, you must investigate it thoroughly and act immediately. Like all behavioural patterns, bullying is learned and practiced repeatedly. Early intervention is vital if the destructive pattern is to be broken. Explaining it away or refusing to believe it is happening simply allows the behaviour to become more ingrained. Inevitably, the incidents become more and more serious as do the consequences.

1. Your child must accept responsibility for his/her behaviour. If you can get the child to admit to bullying, and agree to stop the bullying behaviour, all will be well. Then, if apologies are necessary, you can help your child to make them, and start afresh.

2. If you get a report from the school that your child is bullying, parents should consider:

- The school is not happy about having to tell you that your child is engaging in bullying behaviour.
- Question your child as soon as possible to unravel the facts.
- Visit the school with the answers to the questions about the incident.
- If the situation is clear-cut, sort it out quickly and amicably.
- At all times, indicate that you want your child to accept responsibility for his/her own behaviour.
- Continue the investigation and try to work together to get to the bottom of what is alleged to have happened. Work with the school, and ensure that you are familiar with the Code of Behaviour and, in particular, the Anti-Bullying Code. Make it clear to the school that you do not want, or will you accept, your child's behaviour.

3. By talking with your child all of the time, you will succeed in keeping the lines of communication with your child open. Talk to and listen to him/her. Try now and again, to manoeuvre the conversation towards bullying, or telling you what is happening in their lives. It helps them to understand the point of view of their victim.

4. Get them to step into their victim's shoes, how the victim might feel, how they might feel if they were put in that position.

School and parents working together can, and do, sort out the majority of these problems. However, please bear in mind that solving these types of problems often takes time.

What can you do if you are being bullied?

- Tell yourself that you do not deserve to be bullied and it is WRONG.
- Be proud of who you are. Focus on your own self worth.

- Try not to show you are upset. It is hard, but a bully thrives on someone's fear.
- Stay with a group of friends or other people. There is safety in numbers.
- Tell an adult or other student whom you can trust.
- Fighting back may make things worse.

Teachers will take you seriously and will deal with the bullies in a way that will end the bullying and will not make things worse for you. Remember that your silence is the bully's greatest weapon.

If you know someone is being bullied or suspect they are being bullied

- Inform an adult immediately! Watching and doing nothing looks as if you are on the side of the bully. It makes the victim feel more unhappy and on their own.
- You, as a member of the student body, have a responsibility to ensure that others are physically safe, are free from emotional bullying, are free from any hurtful remarks and all forms of verbal bullying, and that the property of others is safe.

Responding to complaints/observations of bullying behaviour ~ roles/responsibilities

Preventing bullying is the responsibility of adults. To prevent the cycle of bullying from one generation to the next, adults, in all possible situations must intervene. Failure to act gives a silent but powerful message that bullying behaviour is appropriate and acceptable. Most bullying is behaviour that children learn from adults through physical punishment, humiliating treatment, bad example and from violent images and messages conveyed through the media. As parents, teachers and carers, we must by our own behaviour and approach, give young people a clear message that bullying and intimidating behaviour in any form, is an infringement of their rights and as such totally unacceptable. We must keep young people safe by teaching them of their total bodily integrity and their right to talk or tell about any problem to parents, teachers, and other carers.

Role of teachers/staff in dealing with complaints/observations of bullying

All staff in the school have a duty of care for their students. Any student who discloses bullying is expressing a cry for help, which needs a robust response from the teacher they have chosen to tell. A bullied student may pick any teacher, or member of ancillary staff to be their first confidant, so it is worthwhile for *all* staff members to be familiar with the basic steps for providing support.

Dealing with the Victim:

- All interviews should be conducted in private, with sensitivity and with due regard to the rights of all students concerned. Having a colleague present is usually recommended if possible, although some pupils may insist on talking to a teacher alone. A useful strategy in this case would be to leave the door open so that the teacher can be seen by passers-by, while the victim of the bullying remains unseen inside the room.

- Teachers are best advised to take a calm, objective, unemotional problem-solving approach when dealing with incidents of bullying, whilst allowing the student time to tell their story in their own words.
- Complete the Bullying Record Form. This is essential to ensure that patterns of such behaviour is observed and appropriately dealt with. The victim should be asked to give a written account of the incident. This information is later used in dealing with the incident of bullying and subsequently kept on file.
- Give reassurance to the victim that reporting the incident is the right option, they will receive help, and they will be kept informed. No guarantee of confidentiality should be given to any person making a complaint. However, explain that you will tell only the people who need to know, and give a reason why they have to be told.
- Make an intervention by reporting to the principal.

Structure of Referral

Once the Principal has received the Bullying Report Form:

- The principal will then talk with your child to discuss the issue. Any additional necessary notes will be kept.
- The principal will also listen to and talk with, any other student(s) alleged to be involved in this incident of bullying, in private and with due consideration to the rights of all students concerned. Students will be asked to write down their account of the incident.
- It may be necessary at this stage, to highlight a breach of the Code of Behaviour.
- The principal will inform the parents if deemed necessary.
- If appropriate, the principal may arrange that both parties to the alleged bullying incident, together, discuss the issue with the principal.
- Depending on the nature and severity of the bullying incident, the principal may consult with other key personnel in the school as appropriate.
- The principal may impose a disciplinary sanction, or in consultation with the parents of the perpetrator of the bullying behaviour, refer the child to the school psychologist.
- The principal will implement the support programme. This may involve the principal or other key personnel meeting with the victim and the bully on a regular basis afterwards in order to ensure that no other bullying is taking place.

Key Personnel

Reported incidents of bullying are generally referred to the principal, who is the person designated in the school to deal with bullying behaviour. However, depending on the nature and severity of the bullying, the Principal may consult with any of the following key personnel within the school, in dealing with the issue:

- Subject Teachers
- Class Teacher
- Year Head
- Counter Bullying Strategies Officer

- Chaplain
- Guidance Counsellor
- Board of Management
- External Agencies, such as the school psychologist, Gardaí

Disciplinary Sanctions

It would not normally be the policy of Colaiste Mhuire to exclude a student found guilty of bullying. The objective of this policy is to provide support, advice and guidance, through means of dialogue, to both the perpetrator and the victim. However, persistent refusal to respond to this policy may lead to detention, or in more serious incidents, to suspension or expulsion, but only when dialogue has failed to produce the desired results, as it is recognised that these sanctions may be counter productive. Incidents of bullying may also be passed on to the Gardaí.

External Agencies

In some situations, it may be necessary to get in touch with external agencies, or parents might request contact numbers, such as the school's psychologist.

Initiatives to Counter Bullying Behaviour

- Sporadic Anonymous questionnaires/surveys
- SPHE programme
- Anti Bullying Week (Awareness)
- Curricular Initiatives (Drama, English, Religious Education, etc)
- Learning Support (where appropriate)
- Staff Days/In-service/Staff Meetings
- Whole Community Approach (seminars/talks/Information Booklets)

Dissemination of the Anti-Bullying Policy

A copy of the Anti-Bullying Policy will be provided to all students enrolling in Colaiste Mhuire and to all staff at the school. Parents and students are welcome to view the Anti-Bullying Policy at any time in the school.

Modification Clause

This policy has a 'modification clause' reserving the right of the school principal to modify details of this policy, to allow for some discretion in dealing with the complex and contentious issue of bullying on a case by case basis.

Online privacy and Code of Behaviour

Circulating, publishing or distributing (including on the internet) material associated with school activities including, but not limited to material in relation to staff and students where such circulation undermines, humiliates or causes damage to another person is considered breach of school discipline and may result in disciplinary action. As part of such disciplinary action, the Board of Management reserves the right to suspend or expel a student or students where it considers the actions to warrant such sanctions.

Insertion of 'online privacy and Code of Behaviour' 2012

Date _____ **Time** _____

Teacher _____

Class _____

Names of those involved

Details _____ **of** _____ **Incident**

Action Taken (Warning, Agreement, Mediation, Sanctions, Referral, Other)

Suggestions for follow up _____

Signed:

Student _____

Teacher _____ (if applicable)

Parent _____ (if applicable)

Principal _____ (if applicable)