



Stepping Stones

Special School for Children
with Autism & Complex Needs

Anti- bullying Policy



Anti-bullying Policy

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 Stepping Stones Special School for Children with Autism and Complex Needs 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.

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;
- Encourage 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.

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.

Dealing with bullying

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

All class teachers in the school have this responsibility.

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 follows (see Section 6.5 of the Anti-Bullying Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools):

Prevention and awareness through SPHE, RSE programmes, as well as, the use of social stories helping to promote and build resilience and empathy.

As self-esteem is a major factor through both, curricular and extra-curricular activities, we can provide pupils with opportunities to develop a sense of self-worth.

Some curricular programmes will be done through SPHE like: growing and changing, Stay safe and tailor made individual social stories.

Extracurricular programmes/activities: Yoga, football. Music etc.

When the need arises, initiatives and programmes that are specifically tailored to homophobic and transphobic bullying should be available.

School procedures

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:

A pupil or parent may bring a bullying concern to any teacher in the school. The relevant teacher (the class teacher) must take appropriate measures regarding reports of bullying behaviour in accordance with the school's anti-bullying policy.

Considerations must be taken of the individual needs and abilities of our pupils as all present with a diagnosis of autism and complex needs. Therefore, all the procedures listed below may need to be adapted to the level of understanding on a case by case basis.

The school's procedures must be consistent with the following approach:

- 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);
- 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;
- All reports, including anonymous reports of bullying must be investigated and dealt with 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;
- Non-teaching staff such as secretaries, special needs assistants (SNAs), bus escorts, caretakers, cleaners must be encouraged to 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 resolving any issues and restoring, as far as is practicable, the relationships of the parties involved as quickly as possible;

- It is very important that all involved (including each set of pupils and parents) understand the above approach from the outset;
- Teachers should take a calm, unemotional problem-solving approach when dealing with incidents of alleged bullying behaviour reported by pupils, staff or parents;
- Incidents are generally best investigated outside the classroom situation to ensure the privacy of all involved;
- All interviews should be conducted with sensitivity and with due regard to the rights of all pupils concerned. Pupils who are not directly involved can also provide very useful information in this way;
- When analysing incidents of bullying behaviour, the relevant teacher 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;
- If a group is involved, each member should be interviewed individually at first. Thereafter, all those involved should 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;
- Each member of a group should be supported through the possible pressures that they may face from the other members of the group after interview by the teacher;
- It may also be appropriate or helpful to ask those involved to write down their account of the incident(s);
- In cases where it has been determined by the relevant 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 (by reference to the school policy). The school should give parents an opportunity of discussing ways in which they can reinforce or support the actions being taken by the school and the supports for their pupils;
- Where the relevant teacher has 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;

- It must also be made clear to all involved (each set of pupils 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;
- Follow-up meetings with the relevant parties involved should be arranged separately with a view to possibly bringing them together at a later date if the pupil who has been bullied is ready and agreeable. This can have a therapeutic effect;
- In cases where the relevant 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, it must be recorded by the relevant teacher in the recording template at Appendix 1;
- 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 is practicable; and
 - Any feedback received from the parties involved, their parents or the school Principal or Deputy Principal;
- 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;
- 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.

Programme of support

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

- Consistent investigation, follow up and recording of bullying behaviour.
- To establish intervention strategies, taking into consideration the individuality of each case, as no one intervention works in all situations. Waiting for the national anti-bullying website as recommended in the Action Plan on Bullying.
- To follow the process for investigating and dealing with bullying as per procedures.
- To record bullying behaviour
- Considering bullying as part of a continuum of behaviour
- To refer serious cases to the HSE
- To seek supports for pupils affected by bullying
- On-going evaluation of the effectiveness of the antibullying policy.

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.

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.

This policy was adopted by the Board of Management on _____ [date]. This policy has been made available to school personnel, published on the school website (or where none exists, is otherwise readily accessible to parents and pupils on request) and provided to the Parents' Association (where one exists). A copy of this policy will be made available to the Department and the patron if requested.

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 (or where none exists, be otherwise readily accessible to parents and pupils on request) and provided to the Parents' Association (where one exists). A record of the review and its outcome will be made available, if requested, to the patron and the Department.

Signed: Date:
Please print and sign or add a digital signature
(Chairperson of Board of Management)

Signed: Date:
Please print and sign or add a digital signature
(Principal)

Date of next review:

Appendix 1. – Record of bullying behaviour

Name of pupil being bullied and class group:	
Name:	Class:
Name(s) and class(es) of pupil(s) engaged in bullying behaviour:	

Source of bullying concern report: <small>Tick relevant boxes</small>	Location of Incidents: <small>Tick relevant boxes</small>
Pupil Concerned	Playground
Other Pupil	Bus
Parent	Classroom
Teacher	Other
SNA	
Behaviour Team	
Other	
Name of person(s) who reported the bullying concern:	

Type of bullying behaviour:

Tick relevant box(es)

Physical aggression	<input type="checkbox"/>	Cyber bullying	<input type="checkbox"/>
Damage to property	<input type="checkbox"/>	Intimidation	<input type="checkbox"/>
Isolation/exclusion	<input type="checkbox"/>	Malicious gossip	<input type="checkbox"/>
Name calling	<input type="checkbox"/>	Other (specify below)	<input type="checkbox"/>

When a behaviour is regarded as identity-based bullying, indicate the relevant category:

Homophobic disability/SEN related	<input type="checkbox"/>	Membership of the travelling community	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other (specify below)	<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>

Brief description of bullying and it's impact:

Details of actions taken:

Signed: Date:
Please print and sign or add a digital signature
(relevant teacher)

Date submitted to Principal/Deputy Principal:

Policy Review

It is fully acknowledged by all parties that this enrolment policy will be reviewed from time to time to ensure that it is kept up to date and that it retains its relevance. On-going evaluation and new approaches to education, Ministry guidelines, and DES agreements may require this document be modified.

Next review period: annually



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Stepping Stones School

Harristown

Kilcloon

Co. Meath

Tel: 01 5054398

Email: info@steppingstoneschool.ie