Anti-Bullying Policy

2024- 2025

Mountrath Community School

Ratified by the Board : 19th September 2024

Next Review : September 2025

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Mountrath Community School

The school community believes that each pupil has a right to an education free from fear and intimidation. The school regards bullying as a serious infringement of individual rights and a serious threat to the self-esteem and self-confidence of targeted pupil(s).

All pupils are expected to contribute to the creation and maintenance a safe environment in the school. On becoming aware of any bullying situation, in or outside the school, involving members of the school community they should notify a trusted responsible adult. Bullying behaviour is too serious not to report.

Pupils' participation in school life in general is encouraged through existing school structures. Awareness of bullying, and willingness to take action to prevent or stop it, is part of this participation.

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 Mountrath Community 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* 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;

  × 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)

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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.

This definition includes a wide range of behaviour, whether verbal or written, whether physical or social, whether targeting person or property, whether carried out directly or indirectly or through any electronic or other medium, which could harm a pupil or undermine her/his self-esteem or self-confidence.

Appendix 1 of the *Anti-Bullying Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools* gives a list of specific examples of bullying behaviour. This list is not exhaustive.

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

The 'Relevant Teacher(s)' for investigating and dealing with bullying in this school is/are as follows:

- *Appropriate Year Head*

- *Deputy Principal*

- *Principal*

The education and prevention strategies (including strategies specifically aimed at cyber-bullying, homophobic and transphobic bullying) used by the school are as follows:

- In February 2014 we completed a survey of over 100 Fifth Year students to assess the needs of the school in relation to bullying. The results of this survey have informed our policy and procedures

- The anti-bullying module of the SPHE programme as it applies in each school year,

- The anti-bullying sections of the CSPE programme as it applies in each school year,

- In student journal an outline of the different types of bullying, the psychological impact of bullying, how to report bullying and each student signs a pledge to support our anti- bullying slogan

"Recognise It, Reject It & Report It"

- At the initial assembly at the start of the year, each year group receives a presentation on nature of school bullying, the impact of bullying on the victim and why the victim or witnesses to bullying need to report it.

  At least four awareness-raising exercises per school year for each year group, at least one carried out per half-term, pro-actively explaining the nature and variety, causes, consequences and unacceptability of bullying. Pupils are made aware that the consequences of bullying behaviour are always bad for those who are targeted, even if this is not always obvious at the time. Pupils are encouraged to recognise, reject and report bullying behaviour, either spontaneously or through questionnaires that are regularly used in the school.

- As part of our transfer programme each first year class undertakes a bonding day which helps them to get to know each other in their class group and highlights the principle of respect for everyone.

- Meitheal a group of Sixth Year students work with the first years for the entire year and Senior Prefects are assigned to each other year group as a presence on the corridors and are always encouraged to monitor behaviour and intervene when necessary. The student body are encouraged to approach their specific Meitheal leaders or Prefects to raise any concerns they may have. These students meet on a regular basis with the relevant co- ordinator in the school and Principal.

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- Art, Essay and Poetry competitions may be held to raise awareness of the problem of bullying

- Through presentations or other exercises, the school staff and parents/guardians are made aware of the nature of bullying and the signs that might indicate that a pupil is being bullied. They are encouraged to be vigilant in watching out for signs of bullying and to report any suspicion of bullying they may have to the relevant personnel in the school.

Procedures for investigating and dealing with bullying

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:

- The primary aim in investigating and dealing with bullying is to resolve any issues and to restore, as far as practicable, the relationships of the parties involved (rather to apportion blame)

- In investigating and dealing with bullying, the relevant Year Head will exercise his/her professional judgement to determine whether bullying has occurred and how best the situation might be resolved.

- When a possible bullying incident is reported to a staff member or when a staff member notices such behaviour an Anti-Bullying Record Form is completed and given to the relevant Year Head

- The relevant Year Head investigates all instances of reported or suspected bullying behaviour, whether these take place within the school or outside it, with a view to establishing the facts and bringing any such behaviour to an end.

- The School, through the 'Relevant Year Head reserves the right to ask any pupil to write an account of what happened, as part of an investigation. This will be a standard procedure and does not necessarily imply that a pupil is guilty of misbehaviour. This may also involve asking any eye witnesses to write an account of what they have observed.

- In some situations to ascertain more factual information and to obtain a complete picture of the situation the Year Head may use the "bullying incident class survey form"

- Pupils who are alleged to have been involved in bullying behaviour are interviewed by the relevant Year Head to establish the nature and extent of the behaviour and any reasons for it. In the event that they have been involved in bullying behaviour they are asked to promise that they will treat all pupils fairly, equally and respectfully including the targeted pupil(s).

- The relevant Year Head does not apportion blame but rather treats bullying behaviour as a 'mistake' that can and must be remedied. It emphasises that its intention is not to punish perpetrators but to talk to them, to explain how harmful and hurtful bullying is and to seek a promise that it will stop. If that promise is forthcoming and is honoured there will be no

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penalty and that will be the end of the matter. Pupils who report bullying therefore are not getting others 'in trouble' so much as enabling them to get out of trouble into which they may ultimately get if the bullying continued.

- The relevant Year Head will continue to monitor the situation and liaise with both parties to ascertain if the bullying has ceased

- When an investigation is completed and/or a bullying situation is resolved the relevant Year Head involved will complete a report, to include the findings of his/her investigation, strategy adopted and the outcome of the intervention, as well as any other relevant information.

- If a pupil has made a promise to stop bullying but then chooses to break that promise and continue the bullying behaviour, this can then no longer be considered a 'mistake.' In this event parent(s)/guardian(s) will be informed and both student and parent/guardian will be asked to sign "A Student Behaviour Contract Form" Breach of this additional promise by further bullying behaviour is regarded as a very grave matter and a serious sanction may be imposed by the school authorities (See sanctions below).

- All documentation regarding bullying incidents and their resolution is retained securely in relevant student file in the school.

In cases where the bullying behaviour has not been adequately and appropriately addressed within 20 school days after it has being determined that bullying has occurred the template provided (appendix 3 the *Anti-Bullying Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools*) must be completed and referred to the Principal.

- Serious cases of bullying will be reported to the HSE, Family Social Services and/or Gardai as appropriate

Sanctions:

Where a pupil has been found to be engaged in bullying behaviour, has formally promised to stop and has broken that promise, any of the following sanctions may be imposed:

- × S/he may be required to sign a 'Student Behaviour Promise Contract" countersigned by a parent/guardian;

- × Parent(s)/guardian(s) may be contacted by the relevant Year Head, invited to a meeting and informed of the nature and extent of the bullying behaviour with a view to agreeing a strategy whereby a promise to end the bullying behaviour would be honoured;

- × Parent(s)/guardian(s) may be invited to a meeting with the 'Relevant Year Head and the Principal and the pupil may be suspended from school.

- × The case may be referred to the Board of Management and the pupil may be expelled from

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the school.

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

- Bullied pupils:
  - Ending the bullying behaviour,
  - Changing the school culture to foster more respect for bullied pupils and all pupils,
  - Changing the school culture to foster greater empathy towards and support for bullied pupils,
  - Indicating clearly that the bullying is not the fault of the targeted pupil through the awareness-raising programme,
  - Indicating that the bullying is not the fault of the targeted pupils through the speedy identification of those responsible and speedy resolution of bullying situations,
  - After resolution, enabling bullied pupils to complete a victim-impact statement if they agree,
  - Making adequate counseling facilities available to pupils who need it in a timely manner,
  - Review and discuss the case at Care Team meetings

- Bullying pupils:
  - Making it clear that bullying pupils who reform are not blamed or punished and get a 'clean sheet,'
  - Making it clear that bullying pupils who reform are doing the right and honorable thing and giving them praise for this,
  - Making adequate counseling facilities available to help them learn other ways of meeting their needs besides violating the rights of others,
  - Discuss and review the case at Care Team meetings
  - Using learning strategies throughout the school and the curriculum to help enhance pupils' feelings of self-worth,
  - In dealing with negative behavior in general, encouraging teachers and parents to focus on, challenge and correct the behaviour while supporting the child,
  - In dealing with bullying behaviour seeking resolution and offering a fresh start with a 'clean sheet' and no blame in return for keeping a promise to reform.

- **Supervision and Monitoring of Pupils:**
  The Board of Management confirms that appropriate supervision and monitoring policies and

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

- The Board of Management confirms that the school will, in accordance with its obligations under equality legislation, take all such steps as 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 **11th October 2021.**

- 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 of Education and Skills and to 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 (*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 to the Department of Education and Skills and to the patron if requested.

Signed: *Malachy Molloy*

(Chairperson of Board of Management)

Signed: *Kathryn O'Brien*

(Principal)

Date: **19th September 2024**

Date:**19th September 2024**

Date of next review: **September 2025**

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Appendix 1.

Bullying can take a number of forms. These may include any of the following (this list is not exhaustive):

- **Repeated aggressive behaviour/attitude/body language, for example:**

  Shouting and uncontrolled anger

  Personal insults

  Verbal abuse

  Offensive language directed at an individual

  Continually shouting or dismissing others Public

  verbal attacks/criticism

  Domineering behaviour Open

  aggression

  Offensive gestures and unwanted physical contact

- **Intimidation, either physical, psychological or emotional, for example:**

  Treating in a dictatorial manner,

  Ridicule

  Persistent slagging

  Deliberate staring with the intent to discomfort

  Persistent rudeness in behaviour and attitude toward a particular individual.

  Asking inappropriate questions/making inappropriate comments re. personal life/family Asking inappropriate questions/making inappropriate comments re. social life or schoolwork

- **Interference with property, for example:**

  Stealing/damaging books or equipment

  Stealing/damaging clothing or other property

  Demanding money with menace

  Persistently moving, hiding or interfering with property Marking/defacing property

- **Undermining/Public or private humiliation, for example:**

  Condescending tone

  Deliberately withholding significant information and resources Writing of anonymous notes

  Malicious, disparaging or demeaning comments Malicious tricks/derogatory jokes

  Knowingly spreading rumours

  Belittling others efforts, their enthusiasm or their new ideas Derogatory or offensive nicknames (name-calling)

  Negative remarks regarding gender, sexual identity or orientation Using electronic or other media for any of the above (cyber bullying)

  Disrespectfully mimicking a particular individual in his/her absence,

  Deliberately refusing to address issues focusing instead on the person

- **Ostracising or isolating, for example:**

  Deliberately marginalising an individual

  Deliberately preventing a person from joining a group

  Deliberately preventing a person from joining in an activity, schoolwork-related or recreational

  Blaming a pupil for things s/he did not do

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