



## **Ballinahinch National School**

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# **Bí Cineálta**

## **Procedures to Prevent and Address Bullying Behaviour**

### **Section A: Introduction**

The Board of Management of Ballinahinch National School has adopted the following policy to prevent and address bullying behaviour. This policy fully complies with the requirements of *Bí Cineálta: Procedures to Prevent and Address Bullying Behaviour for Primary and Post-Primary Schools 2024*.

The board of management acknowledges that bullying behaviour interferes with the rights of the child as set out in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. We all, as a school community, have a responsibility to work together to prevent and address bullying behaviour and to deal with the negative impact of bullying behaviour. We are committed to ensuring that all students who attend our school are kept safe from harm and that the wellbeing of our students is at the forefront of everything that we do. We recognise the negative impact that bullying behaviour can have on the lives of our students and we are fully committed to preventing and addressing bullying behaviour.

We confirm that we will take all steps that are reasonably practicable to prevent all bullying or harassment of our students in whatever form and however motivated.

Catholic schools have a distinctive understanding of the human person, recognising that every person is created in God's image and likeness and has inherent dignity as a child of God. This is the basis for ensuring that everybody in our school is treated with respect and care, in accordance with the Catholic Schedule.

As a Catholic school, we are committed to respecting the dignity of every individual. No human person is to be devalued and everybody has a part to play in the school community, regardless of difference.

We confirm that we will, in accordance with our obligations under equality legislation, take all such steps that are reasonably practicable to prevent the harassment of students or staff on any of the nine grounds specified: gender, civil status, family status, sexual orientation, religion, age, disability, race and membership of the Traveller community.

### **Responsibilities of School Community**

The school community has a responsibility to prevent and address bullying behaviour. Our school will work in partnership with their patron, board of management, staff, students and their parents to implement this Bí Cineálta policy.

The **Board of Management** will have oversight of the development, implementation and review of the Bí Cineálta policy and ensure that the appropriate preventative strategies are in place and are effective.

**School staff** can prevent and address bullying behaviour by promoting empathy, intervening promptly and implementing policies that create a positive and inclusive environment that fosters kindness among students. **The primary aim in addressing bullying behaviour is to stop the bullying behaviour and to restore, as far as practicable, the relationships of the parties involved.**

**Students** have an important role to play by supporting their peers, reporting incidents of bullying behaviour and working in partnership with their school community.

**Parents** also have an important role to play. Collaboration between parents and school staff is essential to effectively prevent and address bullying behaviour. Our school promotes active partnership with parents which can help reinforce values that discourage bullying behaviour.

### **Definition of Bullying Behaviour As Outlined in *Cineáltas*: Action Plan on Bullying**

Bullying is **targeted** behaviour, online or offline that causes harm. The harm caused can be physical, social and/or emotional in nature. Bullying behaviour is **repeated** over time and involves an **imbalance of power** in relationships between two people or groups of people in society.

There are many different methods of bullying behaviour, including physical, verbal and relational forms, and it can take place online and offline. There are also many different motives for bullying behaviour which can be understood on an individual level (for example, desire for dominance, status, revenge) and/or on a societal level (for example, identity-based bullying such as racist, disablist, sexist or LGBTQ+ bullying). Bullying behaviour in schools is often strongly influenced by attitudes, behaviours, norms and power dynamics that are deeply engrained in our society.

When attempting to determine whether or not particular behaviours are considered to be bullying behaviours, our school will ask the following three questions:

1. Is the behaviour **targeted** at a particular student or group of students?
2. Is the behaviour **intended** to cause physical, social or emotional harm?
3. Is the behaviour **repeated**?

If the answer to **all of these questions** is yes, then we will consider the behaviour to be bullying behaviour.

If the answer to any of these questions is no, then we will not consider the behaviour to be of a bullying nature. However, the school may refer to its Code of Behaviour when dealing with the issue.

### **Examples of Bullying Behaviour**

#### **General behaviours which apply to all:**

- Harassment based on any of the nine grounds in the equality legislation e.g. sexual harassment, homophobic bullying, racist bullying etc.
- Physical aggression
- Damage to property
- Name calling
- Slagging
- The production, display or circulation of written words, pictures or other materials aimed at intimidating another person
- Offensive graffiti
- Extortion
- Intimidation
- Insulting or offensive gestures
- Invasion of personal space
- A combination of any of the types listed.

#### **Cyber**

- **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 or on games consoles
- Abusive website comments/Blogs/Pictures
- Abusive posts on any form of communication technology

### **Identity Based Behaviours**

**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).

### **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
- Spreading rumours
- Breaking confidence
- Talking loud enough so that the victim can hear

### **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

### **Homophobic and Transgender**

- Name calling e.g. Gay, queer, lesbian...used in a derogatory manner
- Physical intimidation or attacks/threats rooted in homophobic/transphobic bullying

### **Behaviour That is Not Bullying Behaviour**

A one off instance of negative behaviour towards another student is not bullying behaviour.

However, a single hurtful message posted on social media can be considered bullying behaviour as it may be visible to a wide audience and has a high likelihood of being shared multiple times and so becomes a repeated behaviour.

Disagreement between students, or instances where students don't want to be friends or to remain friends, is not considered bullying behaviour unless it involves deliberate and repeated attempts to cause distress, exclude or create dislike by others including deliberate manipulation of friendship groups.

Some students with special educational needs may have social communication difficulties which may make them communicate their needs through behaviours that can hurt themselves or others. It is important to note that these behaviours are not deliberate or planned but, in certain situations, they are an automatic response which they can't control.

Bullying is not accidental or reckless behaviour. If the repeated harm is real for the student experiencing the behaviour but unintended by the other student, this is not bullying. These behaviours, while not defined as bullying can be distressing.

Strategies to deal with inappropriate behaviour are provided for within the school's Code of Behaviour.

### **Criminal Behaviour**

Bullying behaviour can be considered criminal behaviour under certain circumstances and legal consequences can apply. The age of criminal responsibility in Ireland is 12 years.

Some online behaviour may be illegal, and students need to be aware of the far reaching consequences of posting inappropriate or harmful content online. In cases of intimate imagery, the Harassment, Harmful Communications and Related Offences Act 2020, also known as Coco's Law, criminalises the nonconsensual sharing of intimate images and also criminalises threatening to share these images.

If bullying behaviour involves physical violence or threats of violence, it may be considered assault.

If bullying behaviour involves discrimination or hate speech targeting a student based on their race, religion, nationality, ethnicity, sexual orientation or membership of the Traveller community, it may be considered a hate crime under the Prohibition of Incitement to Hatred Act 1989, and those engaging in such behaviour may face criminal charges.

An Garda Síochána is the appropriate authority to investigate alleged criminal behaviour.

### **How Bullying Behaviour Occurs**

Bullying behaviour can take many forms, which can occur separately or together. These can include the following, which is not an exhaustive list:

- Direct Bullying Behaviour:

- Physical Bullying Behaviour
- Damage to property
- Verbal Bullying Behaviour
- Written Bullying Behaviour
- Extortion

- Indirect Bullying Behaviour

- Exclusion
- Relational (e.g. 'silent treatment' or "Do this or I won't be your friend anymore!")

### **Online Bullying Behaviour**

Online bullying behaviour (cyberbullying) is carried out through the use of information and communication technologies such as text or direct messaging/instant messaging, social media platforms, email, apps, digital gaming sites, gaming consoles, chatrooms and other online technologies.

This form of bullying behaviour can include:

- sending or sharing nasty, insulting, offensive, and/or intimidating messages or images via text messages, emails, direct messages or other websites or apps
- posting information considered to be personal, private and sensitive without consent
- making and/or participating in fake profiles on a social network to impersonate and/or humiliate other students
- excluding or disrupting access to a student on purpose from online chat groups, access to accounts or from an online game

Even though a message may be posted online just once by a student it can be considered bullying behaviour as it may be seen by a wide audience where it is intended to be shared or has a likelihood of being shared multiple times and is thus repeated.

### **Section B: Development of This Policy**

This section sets out the prevention strategies that will be used by this school to address all forms of bullying behaviour, in whatever form and however motivated, including online bullying behaviour, homophobic and transphobic behaviour, racist bullying behaviour, sexist bullying behaviour and sexual harassment.

In developing the preventative strategies which this school will use to prevent all forms of bullying behaviour, we come from the context of our Catholic ethos, where inclusivity permeates our school in a real way.

This school takes positive steps to ensure that the culture of the school is one which welcomes a respectful dialogue and encounter with diversity and difference by ensuring that prevention and inclusivity strategies are given priority and discussed regularly at our board of management and staff meetings.

The dignity and the wellbeing of the individual person is of paramount concern in our Christian response. This school will listen closely to and dialogue with parents, thereby building a relationship of mutual understanding, respect, trust and confidence.

In continuing to develop prevention strategies, this school will listen to young people and parents, to help establish their particular context and needs. Frequent periods of reflection and further engagement by the school, young people and parents, will be used to discern appropriate supports for young people in this school and to help inform future prevention strategies.

All members of our school community were provided with the opportunity to input into the development/review of this policy.

	Date Consulted	Method of Consultation
School Staff	20/01/2025	Surveys and Staff Meeting Presentation and Discussion
Students	Several times in 2025	Pupil Questionnaire
Parents / Guardians	Several times in 2025	Parental Questionnaire via the Aladdin App
Board of Management	19/02/2025	Policy document brought to BOM for discussion, alteration and approval.
Wider School Community	September 2025	Outside agencies who work within our school will be introduced to the new policy ahead of the new school year.
Date Policy was Approved by BOM	19/01/2026	
Date of Next Review	Jan 2027	

### **Section C: Preventing Bullying Behaviour**

Attempting to prevent bullying behaviour is a key component to ensuring the wellbeing of all members of our school community. The Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework for Practice from the DES provides four key areas that are essential for a holistic, whole-school approach to wellbeing promotion. These four areas are also pertinent to the prevention of bullying behaviour:

#### **1. Culture and Environment**

A positive and inclusive school culture and environment is essential to prevent and address bullying behaviour. The school environment should be a space where students and school staff experience a sense of belonging and feel safe, connected and supported.

Relationships between all members of the school community should be based on respect, care, integrity and trust.

Each member of school staff has a responsibility to develop and maintain a school culture where bullying behaviour is unacceptable and to take a consistent approach to addressing bullying behaviour.

Students can shape the school culture by promoting kindness and inclusion within their peer group and maintain a positive and supportive school environment for all. Parents,

as active partners in their child's education, can help foster an environment where bullying behaviour is not tolerated through promoting empathy and respect.

The school creates an environment that assists in the prevention of bullying behaviour through the following means:

- Creating a "telling environment"
- Providing "trusted adults" to all students and specifically to children who may need a trusted adult to speak with about their wellbeing.
- Creating safe physical spaces in school.
- Adequate and appropriate supervision
- Annual Anti-Bullying/Friendship Week
- The use of "Conferencing" by class teachers
- An "Open-Door Policy" that encourages open and honest dialogue between parents and staff.
- Creating an inclusive school that caters for all needs and excludes no one.

## 2. Curriculum (Teaching and Learning)

Teaching and learning that is collaborative and respectful is promoted. Students have regular opportunities to work in small groups with their peers, which can help build sense of connection, belonging and empathy among students. The curricular subjects offered to students provide opportunities to foster inclusion and respect for diversity.

The Social Personal and Health Education (SPHE) curriculum aims to foster students' wellbeing, self-confidence and sense of belonging and to develop students' sense of personal responsibility for their own behaviour and actions. Students' social and emotional learning (SEL) skills can be improved through the SPHE curriculum.

Ballinahinch NS provides opportunities for students to develop a sense of self-worth through both curricular and extracurricular programmes.

## 3. Policy and Planning

The wellbeing of the school community is at the heart of school policies and plans. There are a range of other policies such as the school's acceptable use policy, supervision policy, special education teaching policy and Code of Behaviour that support implementation of our BÍ Cineálta policy.

## 4. Relationships and Partnerships

Strong interpersonal connections are a vital part of effectively preventing and addressing bullying behaviour. These interpersonal connections are supported through a range of formal and informal structures such as student councils, school clubs, parents' associations and student support teams.

## **Preventing Cyberbullying Behaviour**

Technology and social media have provided many positive opportunities for entertainment, social engagement and education. Technology is a part of life that can impact even the youngest members of society.

However, the increase in the use of technology has led to students becoming increasingly vulnerable to cyberbullying or unacceptable online behaviour.

Ballinahinch NS proactively addresses these challenges by promoting digital literacy, digital citizenship, and fostering safe online environments. Strategies to prevent cyberbullying behaviour include the following, which is not an exhaustive list:

- implementing the SPHE curriculum
- implementing the Digital Media Literacy curriculum which teaches students about responsible online behaviour and digital citizenship
- having regular conversations with students about developing respectful and kind relationships online
- developing and communicating an acceptable use policy for technology
- referring to appropriate online behaviour as part of the standards of behaviour in the Code of Behaviour
- promoting or hosting online safety events for parents who are responsible for overseeing their children's activities online
- incorporating internet safety and online behaviour as part of our annual Friendship/Anti-Bullying Week.

The digital age of consent is the minimum age a user must be before a social media or internet company can collect, process and store their data. In Ireland the digital age of consent is 16.

For the purposes of data collection, students between the age of 13 and 16 years old must have parental permission to sign up to social media services where companies use the legal basis of consent to collect process and store users' data. Most social media platforms and services have a minimum age requirement and for the majority of these services it is 13 years' old. Therefore technically, children under the age of 13 should not have a social media account.

It is important for their child's safety, that parents are aware of their children's use of technology including smartphones and gaming consoles and are aware of legislation around this.

## **Preventing Discriminatory Bullying Behaviour**

All students, regardless of sexual orientation, colour, ethnic/cultural background, religious beliefs are entitled to feel safe and supported at school.

Strategies to prevent discriminatory bullying behaviour include the following, which is not an exhaustive list:

- maintaining an inclusive physical environment
- challenging gender stereotypes
- encouraging students to speak up when they witness discriminatory behaviour
- fostering a school culture where diversity is celebrated and where students “see themselves” in their school environment
- having the cultural diversity of the school visible and on display
- providing supports to school staff to respond to the needs of students for whom English is an additional language and for communicating with their parents
- providing supports to school staff to support students from ethnic minorities, including Traveller and Roma students, and to encourage communication with their parents
- ensuring that library reading material and textbooks represent appropriate lived experiences of students and adults from different national, ethnic and cultural backgrounds

## **Section D: Addressing Bullying Behaviour**

The teachers with responsibility for addressing bullying behaviour are as follows:

- Principal
- Deputy Principal
- Class teachers

When bullying behaviour occurs, the school will:

- ensure that the student experiencing bullying behaviour is heard and reassured
- seek to ensure the privacy of those involved
- conduct all conversations with sensitivity
- consider the age and ability of those
- listen to the views of the student who is experiencing the bullying behaviour as to how best to address the situation
- take action in a timely manner
- inform parents of those involved

## **Identifying if Bullying Behaviour has Occurred**

Bullying is **targeted** behaviour, online or offline that causes harm. The harm caused can be physical, social and/or emotional in nature. Bullying behaviour is **repeated** over

time and involves an **imbalance of power** in relationships between two people or groups of people in society.

When attempting to determine whether or not particular behaviours are considered to be bullying behaviours, our school will ask the following three questions:

Is the behaviour **targeted** at a particular student or group of students?

Is the behaviour **intended** to cause physical, social or emotional **harm**?

Is the behaviour **repeated**?

If the answer to **all of these questions** is yes, then we will consider the behaviour to be bullying behaviour.

If the answer to any of these questions is no, then we will not consider the behaviour to be of a bullying nature. However, the school may refer to its Code of Behaviour when dealing with the issue.

Answering these questions involves trusting the professional judgement of school staff. Matters of this nature will always be discussed with the pupils in question and with parents, with a view to determining if the behaviour in question can be defined as bullying behaviour or not.

### **When Bullying Behaviour has Occurred**

The main purpose of any action taken when it becomes clear that bullying behaviour has occurred, is to support the children in question and work out a plan to ensure that the bullying behaviour ceases and that relationships, where possible, are repaired. The following steps will be taken by the school once it has become clear that bullying behaviour has occurred:

1. A record will be taken of the behaviours and this will be filed by the Deputy Principal. This record will include the type of bullying behaviour, where and when it took place and the date the matter was initially brought to the attention of the school.
2. Staff will meet with the victims of bullying behaviour and their parents and the child who has been engaging in the bullying behaviour and their parents.
3. A record will be taken of this meeting where the views of the child and parents are documented.
4. This meeting will end with a set of agreed actions between the child, school and parents as to how best to address the bullying behaviour. These actions will be recorded.

5. No more than 20 school days after this meeting, there will be a further meeting to evaluate the effectiveness of the agreed actions.
6. If it is agreed that bullying behaviour has ceased and all parties are happy, this will be recorded. It is important to note here that even if bullying behaviour has ceased, children involved may still require support from the school.
7. If the bullying behaviour has not ceased the school will review the strategies used in consultation with the students involved and their parents. A timeframe should be agreed for further engagement until the bullying behaviour has ceased.
8. If it becomes clear that the student who is displaying the bullying behaviour is continuing to display the behaviour, then the school will give consideration to using the strategies to deal with inappropriate behaviour as provided for within the school's Code of Behaviour. If disciplinary sanctions are considered, this is a matter between the relevant student, their parents and the school
9. If a parent(s) is not satisfied with how the bullying behaviour has been addressed by the school, in accordance with the Bí Cineálta Procedures to Prevent and Address Bullying Behaviour for Primary and Post-Primary Schools. they should be referred to the school's complaints procedures
10. If a parent is dissatisfied with how a complaint has been handled, they may make a complaint to the Ombudsman for Children if they believe that the school's actions have had a negative effect on the student

Given the complexity of bullying behaviour, it is generally acknowledged that that no one approach works in all situations. International and national research also continues to evolve in this area and the effectiveness of particular approaches continues to be reviewed. Our school will therefore decide on an approach that is best suited to each individual set of circumstances and do this in conjunction with children and parents involved.

The school is not expected to deal with bullying behaviour that occurs when students are not under the care or responsibility of the school, as per national guidelines.

However, where this bullying behaviour has an impact on a child's school life, Ballinahinch NS will support the student involved. Where the bullying behaviour from outside school continues in school, Ballinahinch NS will deal with it in accordance with this Bí Cineálta policy.

Where the student displaying the bullying behaviour is not a student in the school, but the student who is experiencing the bullying behaviour is a student in the school, the school will support the student who is experiencing the bullying behaviour as appropriate and engage with them and their parents to determine what steps can be taken to support them.

The school is not expected to deal with bullying behaviour that occurs online, when children are not under the care or responsibility of the school, as per national guidelines. However, where this bullying behaviour has an impact on a child's school life, Ballinahinch NS will support the student involved. Where the online bullying behaviour continues in-person in school, Sacred Heart BNS will deal with it in accordance with this Bí Cineálta policy.

All bullying behaviour will be recorded. This will include the type of behaviour, where and when it took place, and the date of the engagement with students and parents. The actions and supports agreed to address bullying behaviour will be documented. If the bullying behaviour is a child protection concern the matter will be addressed without delay in accordance with Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post Primary Schools.

### **Section E: Oversight**

The principal will present an update on bullying behaviour at each board of management meeting. This update will include the number of incidents of bullying behaviour that have been reported since the last meeting, the number of ongoing incidents and the total number of incidents since the beginning of the school year.

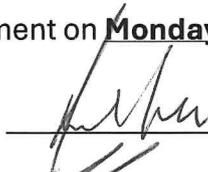
Where incidents of bullying behaviour have occurred, the principal will also provide a verbal update which will include where relevant, information relating to trends and patterns identified, strategies used to address the bullying behaviour and any wider strategies to prevent and address bullying behaviour where relevant. This update does not contain personal or identifying information.

This policy is available to our school community on the school's website and in hard copy on request. A student friendly version of this policy is displayed in the school and is also available on our website and in hard copy on request.

This policy and its implementation will be reviewed, following input from our school community, each calendar year or as soon as practicable after there has been a material change in any matter to which this policy refers.

This policy was ratified by the Board of Management on **Monday 19/01/2026**

Signed by Chairperson



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Signed by Principal



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