

# ANTI-BULLYING POLICY



Mercy College Sligo  
BOM Ratified

### **1. Education (Welfare) Act 2000**

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 Mercy College, Sligo 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* which were published in September 2013.

### **2. Mercy College Mission Statement**

Mercy College is an all girls Voluntary Catholic Secondary school with a co-educational AONAD under the trusteeship of CEIST. Mercy College is dedicated to the provision of quality Catholic education, academic, spiritual, global, moral, physical, social, aesthetic and vocational which will enable students to achieve their maximum potential in a caring and nurturing environment.

### **3. Aim of the Anti-Bullying policy**

The primary aim of the Anti-Bullying Policy is primarily to prevent bullying incidents arising and where one does arise, to resolve the issue with the best possible outcome for all parties involved.

### **4. Key principles in best practice**

Mercy College 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) that
  - build empathy, respect and resilience in pupils; and

- explicitly address the issues of 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.

## 5. Definition of Bullying

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.

### Types of Bullying

- Physical aggression: This behaviour includes pushing, shoving, punching, kicking, poking and tripping people. It may also take the form of severe physical assault. While pupils often engage in ‘mess fights’, they can sometimes be used as a disguise for physical harassment or inflicting pain.
- Intimidation: Some bullying behaviour takes the form of intimidation: it may be based on the use of very aggressive body language with the voice being used as a weapon. Particularly upsetting can be a facial expression which conveys aggression and/or dislike.
- Isolation/exclusion and other relational bullying: This occurs where a certain person is deliberately isolated, excluded or ignored by some or all of the class group. This practice is usually initiated by the person engaged in bullying behaviour and can be difficult to detect. It may be accompanied by writing insulting remarks about the pupil in public places, by passing around notes about or drawings of the pupil or by whispering insults about them loud enough to be heard.
- Relational bullying occurs: when a person’s attempts to socialise and form relationships with peers are repeatedly rejected or undermined. Non-verbal gesturing; malicious gossip; spreading rumours about a person or giving them the “silent treatment”.

- **Cyber-bullying:** This type of bullying is increasingly common and is continuously evolving. It is bullying carried out through the use of information and communication technologies such as text, social network sites, e-mail, instant messaging (IM), apps, gaming sites, chat-rooms and other online technologies.

- **Verbal bullying:** Persistent name-calling directed at the same individual(s) which hurts, insults or humiliates should be regarded as a form of bullying behaviour. Jeering, taunting, teasing, threatening and slugging are all forms of verbal bullying.

- **Damage to property:** Personal property can be the focus of attention for bullying behaviour. This may result in damage to clothing, mobile phone or other devices, school books and other learning material or interference with a pupil's locker or bicycle. The contents of school bags and pencil cases may be scattered on the floor. Items of personal property may be defaced, broken, stolen or hidden.

- **Extortion:** Demands for money may be made, often accompanied by threats (sometimes carried out in the event of the targeted pupil not delivering on the demand). A pupil may also be forced into theft of property for delivery to another who is engaged in bullying behaviour.

- **Identity-based bullying:** including in particular, Lesbian, Gay, Bi-sexual, Transgender (LGBT) bullying, a person's membership of the Travelling community, race, religion or disability.

## **6. Once-off Incidents**

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.

## **7. Anti-Bullying Co-Ordinator**

The school has a dedicated Anti-Bullying Co-Ordinator whose role is to oversee the implementation of the Anti-Bullying Policy, review any incidents of bullying behaviour reported and evaluate the schools approach to bullying behaviour.

## **8. Reporting a bullying incident**

Reports of bullying incidents can be made to any staff member or student mentors. We then have a ladder of referral beginning with:

Year Heads –Ms Kiernan, Mr Kearins, Mrs Lynch, Mrs Mc Donagh, Ms Filan, Ms Clifford

Guidance Counsellor - Ms N. Moran, Mr B. Waters

Deputy Principal - Ms L. Sherlock

Principal - Ms A. Gorby

Depending on the nature of the incident it may be referred directly to the Principal.

Reports of bullying incidents can be made by:

- Verbal/Written report
- SPHE Monthly Check-In
- School website 'Stand Up Bullying Report Tool'

## **9. Education and prevention strategies**

The education and prevention strategies (including strategies specifically aimed at cyber-bullying and identity-based bullying that will be used by the school are as follows:

- Shine A Light Campaign: Workshop run with all first years, the objective being to create awareness on the types and effects of bullying and the systems in place at Mercy College to deal with all types of bullying including Cyber Bullying and LGBT Bullying. These workshops will also identify for the students who they can talk to in respect of any of these issues.
- Peace Police: A student led approach – a group of six students from every class, who volunteer to be specifically trained in the OARS approach:

○ - Observe

- A - Approach
- R - Report
- S - Support

- Student Mentors - 5<sup>th</sup> Year students assigned a group of 1st year students to help them settle in to life at Mercy College
- SPHE Curriculum: Cyber Bullying/LGBT  
Monthly 'Check-In' Sheet
- CSPE Curriculum: Rights & Responsibilities
- Senior Cycle R.E: R.E. Curriculum & RSE
- Tutor/Year Head Assemblies
- Whole School Approach: Visiting professionals specialising in this area give talks/workshops to all the partners in education i.e. Staff, Parents & Students
- Positive Mental Health Week – Visiting Professionals Workshops
- Care Team Interventions - The Care Team comprises of the Principal, Deputy Principal, Guidance Counsellor, Behaviour for Learning Teacher, HYLO, SCO & Year Heads. Students identified as needing extra support are assigned to a Care Team member.
- Talkabout: A student lunch time drop-in service.

#### **10. Investigating bullying incidences**

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:

- It will be the responsibility of all members of staff including ancillary staff to report incidents of bullying immediately to the relevant teacher using *Appendix 1* template (Incident Report Sheet). All incidents recorded are reviewed at regular intervals throughout the school year by the Anti-Bullying Co-Ordinator and the Care Team.
- Bullying will be on the agenda for all Board of Management meetings.

#### **Investigation Process:**

- Interview student(s) to ascertain the exact nature of bullying incident. The student is invited to give a written account as well as provide whatever evidence they may have e.g. screenshots, social media comments, notes etc. This is carried out in a non-judgemental manner and with sensitivity to the situation. The teacher will engage in a problem solving approach. The investigating teacher will record meeting and keep copies of the above.
- Interview other student(s) who may be involved and offer same opportunities as above.

- After we have heard the full account of the incident from all sides and ascertained who the victim/bully/witness are, parents are contacted and invited to the school for a meeting where they are informed of the allegations.
- Appropriate sanctions and supports are then put in place. In serious cases e.g. physical assault the Gardai may be informed by the school and/or parents.
- Restorative Justice Procedures are put in place once the victim is ready and agreeable in order to put closure to the incident.

In cases where the relevant teacher considers that bullying behaviour has not been adequately and appropriately addressed within 20 days after he/she has determined that bullying behaviour has occurred it must be formally brought before the Board of Management (*Form Appendix 2* must be filled out and given to the Principal/ Deputy Principal).

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;
- Any feedback received from the parties involved, their parents or the school Principal or Deputy Principal;

### **11. The role of the parent:**

What a parent can do if they know that their daughter is being bullied:

- Contact the school and arrange an appointment with the Year Head
- Assure the child that the issue will be dealt with
- Prepare for the meeting by getting your child to document the bullying events
- Work with the school to develop a strategy to resolve the issues and restore relationships in as far as is practicable.

In the event of a bullying incident reported in school, parents are contacted and invited to the school for a meeting where they are informed of the allegations and their support is sought in resolving the issue.

Where a parent is not satisfied that the school has dealt with a bullying case in accordance with these procedures, the parents will 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.

## 12. Education and Prevention Strategies:

The education and prevention strategies (including strategies specifically aimed at cyberbullying and identity-based bullying including in particular, homophobic and transphobic bullying) in place in the school include:

- Education Strategies:
  - To create the positive school environment in which an anti-bullying ethos and culture is maintained, it is important to ensure that all members of the school community are made aware and are prepared to meet the challenges and issues presented by bullying incidents. In this light, the following educational strategies form part of the Mercy College anti-bullying approach. Anti-bullying policy to be included in the Information pack issued to all incoming First Years and is available on the school website for all Parents/Guardians.
  - All students to be informed of the anti-bullying policy and procedures. 1<sup>st</sup> years to be informed of these during Belonging Plus Induction Week.
  - Policy and strategies to be outlined to parents/guardians of incoming first years at the Information meeting in May. SPHE programme (includes material on cyber bullying, identity bullying), RSE programme (includes material on cyber, identity bullying).
  - Anti-bullying workshops take place during Mental Health Week in September each year.
  - Acceptable use of the internet policy (includes material on cyber bullying).
  - Guest speakers for parents, students and staff (CPD).
  - School clubs, teams etc highlight interdependence.
  - Support programmes for those affected by bullying include SCP, HYLO, Guidance Counselling, SEN, BFL Classroom.
  - Collation and dissemination of background information from primary schools to teaching staff.

- Prevention Strategies:

At Mercy College, it is imperative that the anti-bullying message is kept to the forefront of everyone's mind and an anti-bullying ethos is maintained.

The following measures are undertaken to raise awareness of the need of positive school climate among the student body.

- Anti-Bullying Week
- SPHE programme.
- Reinforcing positive student efforts.
- Building student self confidence.
- Mental Health Week
- Welcome ceremony for 1st years.

- Graduation ceremony for 6th years/Ty Students and Repeats
  - School tours / bonding trips
  - Inclusive & Anti-bullying posters / leaflets.
  - Plasmas screen messages.
  - Mentor Programme for 1st years.
  - Stand Up Report Tool on school website
  - SPHE Monthly Check-In
  - Student-designed Friendship/Mindfulness Walls
  - Visible teacher presence.
  - Support programmes from SCP / HYLO / SEN / RSE /Guidance Counsellor
  - Clear instructions regarding Reporting Procedures
  - AWARE: Beat the Blues Awareness event for Senior Students
  - Retreats/Bonding Days for all year groups
  - Mentor-led Fun Days e.g. Santa Dash, Sports Day, Easter-egg Hunt, Whole-school Walk
  - Review of Anti-Bullying Policy
- Staff:
    - This process of raising awareness among all staff members in the school community is achieved in the following ways.
    - Staff meetings
    - Training for new members in Belonging Plus Induction Programme
    - C.P.D: LGBT Stand Up Awareness, Pieta House Self Harm Inservice, Personal Safety, SPHE/RSE Inservice.
    - Review of Anti-Bullying Policy
    - All staff have a copy of the policy and procedures.
    - Whole staff participation in awareness raising events eg. Mental Health Week.

### **13. 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.

### **14. 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.

**15. Availability of Anti-Bullying Policy**

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: \_\_\_\_\_  
(Chairperson of Student Council)

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_  
(Chairperson of Parents Association)

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_  
(On behalf of the Staff of Mercy College)

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_  
(Chairperson of Board of Management)

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Date of next review: \_\_\_\_\_

### Appendix 1: Incident Report Sheet

<b>Name of student(s) involved:</b>	<b>Date:</b>
<b>Detailed account of incident:</b>	
<b>Name of Teacher:</b>	
<b>Action taken:</b>	
<b>By whom:</b>	<b>Date:</b>

**Appendix 3: Form for Recording Bullying Behaviour and Report to Principal/D. Principal from Staff Member if the staff member considers the bullying incident HAS NOT been adequately and appropriately addressed within 20 school days after it has been determined that bullying has occurred.**

1. Name of pupil being bullied and class group

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Class \_\_\_\_\_

2. Name(s) and class(es) of pupil(s) engaged in bullying behaviour

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

3. Source of bullying concern/report (circle as relevant)

Pupil concerned

Teacher

Other Pupil

Other Parent

4. Location of incidents (circle as relevant) Please give further details/notes

Outdoor area

Classroom

Corridor/Common area

Toilets

School Bus

Other

5. Name of person(s) who reported the bullying concern \_\_\_\_\_

6. Type of Bullying Behaviour (circle as relevant)

Physical Aggression

Isolation/Exclusion

Cyber-bullying

Malicious Gossip

Damage to Property

Verbal bullying

Intimidation

Other (specify) \_\_\_\_\_

