St Maelruain's Church of Ireland School

Anti-Bullying Policy

Introductory Statement
This policy applies to the whole school community (pupils, teachers, parents, Board of Management and all ancillary staff) in their relationships with pupils.

The following procedure was adopted in the drawing up of this policy -

- An Anti Bullying Week was run as a Whole School Event where pupils, staff and parents were involved in workshops, presentations and activities in order to raise awareness and develop knowledge and insight into the issue of bullying. A sub-committee consisting of Ms Daly and Ms Morrow prepared a draft policy based on review and research of bullying materials and on current situation in the school
- Consideration of draft policy by representatives of whole school community
- Ratification of draft policy as policy by Board of Management
- Communication of Policy to whole school community
- It is intended to review this policy during the school year 2014/15
- Implementation of Policy on an on-going basis.

Definition of Bullying

Bullying is repeated aggression - verbal, psychological, physical or cyber - conducted by an individual or a group against others. Bullying is systematic and ongoing. Bullying may take many different forms such as physical aggression, damage to property, theft of property, extortion, intimidation, abusive telephone calls, isolation, name calling and writing notes.   It is deliberate and persistent over time and makes it difficult for those being bullied to defend themselves. Bullying is still bullying even when the perpetrator is not aware of the impact on the victim.

It is important not to confuse bullying with isolated incidents of aggressive or antisocial behaviour, which must not be condoned. However when the behaviour is systematic and on-going it becomes bullying.

 Cyber bullying
The use of the internet or electronic technology to intimidate or comment unfavourably upon another person. Common methods would be through mobile phones (texts or abusive calls), social networking sites e.g. Facebook, Twitter and Bebo, MSN, emails and web pages. This form of bullying can take place at any time and can intrude into "safe" personal spaces. The audience can be very large and reached rapidly and the bully can often remain anonymous. Teachers have also been targets. It is really important that children learn how to protect themselves online and learn how to respond if they are being bullied. If your child is being cyber-bullied it is possible that they are feeling powerless and isolated.

Please note that networking sites have a minimum age limit in order to register. We strongly recommend that children under the age of 13 do not register on social networking sites as directed by Children's Online Privacy Protection Act (COPPA)

Identity Based Bullying

Slagging or slandering any child on the basis of race, religion or sexual orientation will be recorded and dealt with as a bullying incident.

Rationale

The Code of Behaviour and the Child Protection Policies had been recently reviewed and it was felt that an Anti Bullying Policy was also required as an adjunct to both of these core policies.

- A piecemeal approach to bullying is ineffective and a whole school approach is needed due to the complexity of the issue
- The Department of Education and Skills requires schools to have a written policy on bullying.
- To ensure the Health &Safety of the whole school community

Relationship to School Ethos

The vision of St Maelruain's School is to -

- Enable the child to live a full life as a child
- To equip him/her to avail of further education so that he/she may go on to live a full and useful life as an adult in society.

As a school community committed to the realisation of these goals, our aim is to create a happy secure environment for our pupils in which there is a sense of respect and a reasonable approach to discipline. Bullying behaviour is contrary to this ethos as it undermines and dilutes the quality of education and has an adverse effect on the child and the whole school community. It is also seen as a violation of the child's rights.

Aims of this Policy

1. To promote a school ethos which encourages children to disclose and discuss incidents of bullying behaviour.
2. To raise awareness of bullying as a form of unacceptable behaviour with school management, teachers, pupils, parents/guardians (the whole school community)
3. To endeavour to provide adequate supervision and monitoring measures through which all areas of school activity are kept under observation.
4. To develop procedures for noting and reporting incidents of bullying behaviour.
5. To develop procedures for investigating and dealing with incidents of bullying behaviour
6. To develop a programme of support for those affected by bullying behaviour and for those involved in bullying behaviour.
7. To work with and through the various local agencies in countering all forms of bullying and anti-social behaviour.
8. To evaluate the effectiveness of the school policy on anti-bullying behaviour.

Content

1. Creation of a Culture of "Telling".

- Teachers should repeatedly reinforce the message that if anyone is the victim of bullying behaviour, they should not retaliate in any way, but they should tell an adult. Victims should be reassured that if they tell, something will be done about the bullying in a safe manner and all reported incidents will be dealt with.
- Class lessons to be provided to enable pupils "how to tell" (telling protocol).

- Bystanders can be the key to resolving bullying and if anyone witnesses bullying behaviour, they should always tell a teacher. This is not telling tales but a means of protecting victims.
- **A "concerns box" to be put in the back hallway beside the yard door so pupils can tell anonymously. All worry box concerns recorded will be transferred to the yard book.**

2. Raising the awareness of bullying as a form of unacceptable behaviour by -
- Regularly raising awareness on different aspects of bullying at Thursday Assemblies. (What is bullying? What is cyber bullying? What is not bullying? What to do if you feel you are being bullied? What to do if you see somebody else being bullied?)
- Engaging in formal teaching within the class setting through SPHE and RE programmes.
- Creating an annual Awareness Week for the school community about bullying. (The date for this week to be decided at September Staff meeting).
- Create and distribute an information booklet re bullying and procedures for dealing with bullying in the school, to parents. (PTA)

3. To endeavour to provide adequate supervision and monitoring measures through which all areas of school activity are kept under observation by -
Ensuring that **all** activities (including extra-curricular activities) are adequately supervised by school personnel.

4. Procedures for Recording Bullying Behaviour and Reporting Incidents of Bullying Behaviour
- All incidents/reports of bullying behaviour (no matter how trivial) are recorded and maintained by the class teacher. A copy of the report is made in the Yard Book and also on a Critical Incident Sheet if a pattern of bullying behaviour is noted.
- Non-teaching staff should note any incidents of bullying behaviour witnessed by them and report to the appropriate teacher. Extra vigilance is important in relation to children with special needs and newcomer children who may not have the skills/language to report that they are being bullied.
- All cases of bullying should be reported to the Principal.

5. Procedures for Investigating and Dealing with Bullying within the shortest time frame possible:
- When a pupil tells a teacher s/he is being bullied, it is important to gather all of the facts from both sides (What, where, when, who, why?).
- The Teacher should take a calm, unemotional, problem-solving approach.
- Instances are investigated outside the classroom to avoid public humiliations.
- Where possible, a witness is present. All sides are listened to separately and notes are taken.
- The notes are brief, factual and should be void of emotional or judgemental language.
- Information spoken about should not become available, so that the victim would be further tormented. (Need to know basis)
- Parents/Guardians of victims should be informed of the nature of the incident(s).

Once all of the facts have been acquired and it has been established that bullying has indeed taken place, suitable sanctions should be imposed on the bully. In accordance with the school's Code of Behaviour these sanctions vary, depending on the seriousness of the infringement, and may include some or all of the following-

- Temporary separation in classroom
- Temporary withdrawal from class
- Formal meeting with parents / guardians. During this meeting discussion with those involved as to how problem may be resolved will occur. Children may be asked to sign a contract or agreement about future behaviour.
- Informing BOM (if situation is not resolved)
- Suspension (refer Code of Behaviour)
- Expulsion (refer Code of Behaviour)

Following imposition of the appropriate sanction/s, the teacher monitors closely the relationships between those involved. Reconciliation of all is seen as the ultimate goal.

6. Programme of Support with Peers, Victims, Bullies and Parents

Peers
- Formal programmes of work are a vital element in raising children's self-esteem and equipping children to cope with bullying behaviour e.g. Walk Tall, RSE, Follow Me, Stay Safe, Restorative Practice Approaches.
- Positive reinforcement by teachers in classroom setting.
- Modelling of respectful behaviour and language by teachers and staff.
- Promotion of extra-curricular activities which encourage co-operation among pupils.
- Rewarding of incidents of good behaviour at class level and whole-school through Student of the Week.
- Encouraging students to look out for each other and to be responsible for their own behaviour.
- Immediate affirmation of children who report incidents of bullying which they have witnessed.
- Circle time Sessions, Role-play, Socially Speaking Programme and Puppetry are methodologies which are used to discuss and explore issues of bullying.

Victims
- Victims are reassured from the outset that they are not to blame.
- Strategies for restoring self-esteem are explored between teacher and parents/guardians
- Where deemed necessary, the child in consultation with parents may be referred for counselling
- Staged approach - class support, school support (as per Continuum - Behavioural, Emotional and Social difficulties- NEPS)

Bullies
- Where deemed necessary, the child in consultation with parents may be referred for counselling. They may need to learn other ways of meeting their needs without violating the rights of others. The Empathy Awareness Programme is to be developed through School Completion Funding.
- Clinical referral and assessment may be necessary.
- Staged approach - class support, school support (as per Continuum - Behavioural, Emotional and Social difficulties - NEPS).
- If parents fail to engage with the School and/or Outside Agencies then the child is referred to the HSE as a child protection issue.

7. School working with and through the various local agencies in countering all forms of bullying as an anti-social behaviour

- Incidents of bullying can extend beyond the school and the journey to and from school is one which can provide particular opportunities for bullying to occur.
- In certain cases it may be necessary to invite assistance from formal agencies such as Gardai, (J.L.O.), HSE.
- The school will constantly remind parents of the dangers of "cyber- bullying" as can happen with the use of social networking sites and mobile phones.
- The school however cannot be held responsible for disagreements between pupils that happen outside the school grounds.

8. Evaluation of Effectiveness of School Policy on bullying behaviour
The evaluation of the policy will happen on both an informal (through staff observation) and formal basis (review every year).

Success Criteria -
- Positive feedback from teachers, parents and pupils.
- Well-being and happiness of the whole school community in the light of incidents of bullying behaviour encountered.
- Increase in numbers of children reporting.
- Fewer problems in yard.

9. Action Plan September 2013 to June 2014:
- Each class to have a set of class rules which complement the school's Code of Behaviour.
- A signed Anti- Bullying Contract is to be stapled into the Homework Journal. "I was only" messing will not be tolerated at any time in this school.
- A Children's Survey to be carried out in Term 2 (See Appendix)
- A "worry box" to be placed in the back hallway.
- A Friendship/Respect day/week to be held during the year
- Revamp the parent's booklet and parents must sign to say they have received this.
- All bullying incidents to be recorded on Critical Incident Forms
- Ensure supervision at all times when pupils can access the internet.
- Staff face-book accounts should be private.
- To focus on the topic of bullying in at least one School Assembly per term as per the recommendations from "Dealing with Bullying in Schools" (Office of the Ombudsman for Children 2013).

Roles and Responsibilities
The Staff and Board of Management are responsible for ensuring that the policy is implemented.

Review and Evaluation Procedures
A full review of the policy will take place in School year 2014/15.

Signed: _____
Dr David Hutchinson Edgar, Chairperson, BOM

Date: