

# *Anti Bullying Policy* *Athlone Mixed National School*

**This policy is in operation for the 2020-2021 school year.**

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 Athlone Mixed National 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.

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.

Key Principles underlying this policy:

- Athlone Mixed National School promotes 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
  - 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
  - explicitly address the issues of cyber-bullying and identity-based 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)
- 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
- 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 Appendix 1 of this policy.

### **The relevant teacher(s) for investigating and dealing with bullying**

The following points inform our procedures for dealing with incidents of bullying.

- As all teachers are engaged, from time to time, in the supervision of pupils of all classes, it is recognised that any teacher may witness or have disclosed to, incidents of bullying behaviour.
- SNAs are also engaged in the supervision of pupils and may also witness or have disclosed to, incidents of bullying behaviour.
- It is a duty of all other staff, (both permanent and sessional), caretakers, secretary, cleaners to be mindful of bullying behaviour. Such members of staff may also witness or have disclosed to, incidents of bullying behaviour.
- An allegation of bullying may be disclosed by a pupil or by a parent/guardian.
- A disclosure of bullying behaviour or the witnessing of bullying behaviour must in all incidences be reported to the class teacher in the first instance and then to the principal.
- Where a parent or a pupil informs the principal of a bullying incident, the principal will inform the pupil's class teacher and the investigation will be commenced by the class teacher.

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

- The initial investigation of bullying behaviour will be carried out by the class teacher of the pupil in question.
- A class teacher carrying out such an investigation will be supported by the principal.
- Where a bullying incident involves pupils from a number of classes, the initial investigation will be carried out by the relevant class teachers and may then be passed on to the principal. The principal may need to coordinate the investigation of pupils from several classes. Any outcomes will be responded to jointly by the class teachers and the principal.
- In certain circumstances it may be appropriate for a relevant support teacher to be involved in the investigation of an incident. The support teacher will work with the relevant class teacher and the principal in such an instance.

### **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:

- The Stay Safe Programme will be taught in each class beginning in the 1<sup>st</sup> week of October
- SPHE
- RSE Programme
- Walk Tall Programme

- Anti-Bullying website (to be set up by the Department of Education & Skills)
- Strategies to prevent Cyber-bullying will be used in accordance with the school Cyber-Bullying policy attached as Appendix 2
- When possible outside agencies (ISPCC, Sticks & Stones Drama, NPC) will be engaged to deliver talks/programmes to classes and/or parents.
- As part of our Respect Statement Strategy each class will draw up their own Respect Policy for the current year. Each class will display their own Respect Policy Statement in their own classroom.
- All Staff members will become familiar with the INTO Working Together Document which will inform the interactions between staff members.
- Teachers and SNAs while supervising, will circulate in the relevant yard/class space to ensure pupils are free to enjoy their break-times without being subjected to bullying behaviours.
- Pupils will be regularly reminded in class, in assembly, in the playground to tell when another pupil hurts them in any way. Pupils will be regularly reminded that aggressive behaviour will never be tolerated.
- Pupils will be reminded regularly that while they are coming to or from school they are subject to the School Anti-Bullying policy and the School Code of Behaviour.
- At various times throughout the year a support programme may be delivered to a class by a resource teacher in order to establish the skills necessary to make and maintain friendships, to avoid unwanted behaviours and to act in an independent manner free from intimidation.
- Parents are asked not to tell their child to hit back if someone hurts them in school.
- Parents will be given appendix 4 as a guide to observe their child's demeanour.
- Teachers can influence attitudes to bullying behaviour in a positive manner through a range of curricular initiatives.
- SEN provision and awareness of anti-bullying.
- Effective practice includes prevention and awareness raising measures across all aspects of bullying and involves strategies to engage pupils in addressing problems when they arise. In particular, such strategies need to build empathy, respect and resilience in pupils.

**The investigation and handling of alleged bullying incidents:**

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:

- i. 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)
- ii. 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.
- iii. All reports, including anonymous reports of bullying will 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.
- iv. All non-teaching staff, school secretary, SNAs, caretakers and cleaners will report any incidents of bullying behaviour witnessed by them, or mentioned to them, to the relevant teacher.
- v. 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.
- vi. Teachers will take a calm, unemotional problem-solving approach when dealing with incidents of alleged bullying behaviour reported by pupils, staff or parents.
- vii. Incidents will be investigated outside the classroom situation to ensure the privacy of all involved.
- viii. All interviews should be conducted with sensitivity and with due regard to the rights of all pupils concerned. Pupils who are not directly involved may also provide very useful information.
- ix. When investigating incidents of bullying behaviour, the relevant teacher will use Restorative Questioning. This will be done in a calm manner.
- x. If a group is involved each member will be interviewed individually at first. Thereafter the group will be interviewed together.
- xi. It will be pointed out to each individual pupil in such a group situation that intimidation or threatening behaviour following questioning will not be tolerated.
- xii. In certain situations (depending on the age level and ability of the child in question) it may be beneficial for a pupil to give a written account of what happened.
- xiii. In cases where it has been determined by the relevant teacher that bullying behaviour has occurred, the parents of the parties involved will be contacted at an early stage to inform them of the matter and explain the actions being taken. Parents will be given 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.
- xiv. Where the relevant teacher has determined that a pupil has been engaged in bullying behaviour, it should be made clear to him how he is in breach of the school's anti-bullying policy and efforts will be made to try to get him to see the situation from the perspective of the pupil being bullied.
- xv. 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 parents and the school.

- xvi. A follow-up restorative practice meeting with the relevant parties involved will be arranged separately with a view to possibly bringing pupils together at a later date if the pupil who has been bullied is ready and agreeable. This can have a therapeutic effect.
- xvii. 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 (Appendix 3)

### **Procedures to be followed when investigating an allegation of bullying behaviour**

1. The teacher will speak to the victim of the bullying behaviour, in a separate place from the rest of the class, to establish the facts of what happened and to establish the impact on the victim. The teacher will establish the number of events that have taken place, their frequency and the circumstances of these events. The principal will facilitate investigations outside of the classroom.
2. As in 1) the teacher will speak to the pupil who has allegedly carried out bullying behaviour and will ask the same questions. The principal will facilitate investigations outside of the classroom.
3. The teacher may need to ask questions of other relevant pupils.
4. If it is established that bullying has taken place the teacher (in consultation with the principal) will discuss the events with the parents of both the victim and the pupil who has bullied.
5. Sanctions may be applied to the pupil who has bullied depending on the severity of the incident and depending on the child's previous behaviour record. In keeping with the school Code of Behaviour a pupil will be given a chance to improve his behaviour if the incident is proven to be his first offence.
6. He/she will be given advice on how to behave and he/she will be informed of sanctions for future bullying behaviour. Sanctions may include removal from the playground and or the issuing of a discipline card, up to and including suspension.
7. If the victim is able, a restorative practice session will be carried out with the victim and the bully. This may be facilitated by the class teacher, a support teacher or the principal.

8. A follow-up contact will be made by the teacher to the parents of the victim within 3 weeks of the establishment of a bullying incident. This follow-up will be used to determine if the bullying behaviours have ceased.
9. It may be necessary to separate a victim and a bullying pupil for a period of time in order to allow the victim time and space to cope with bullying behaviours.
10. Both the victim and the pupil who has bullied will be given opportunities to speak about the behaviours and their impact. This can be facilitated by the class teacher, a support teacher or the principal.
11. Pupils will be supported to establish relationships with each other or with other pupils. This may be facilitated by group sessions with a support teacher, by the class teacher organising 'friend/buddy groups' for the playground.
12. Where it is established that a pupil fabricates an instance of bullying behaviour his parents will be informed. The pupil may be subject to the school Code of Behaviour depending on the circumstances.
13. Where it has been established that bullying has taken place, Appendix 3 will be used to record such instances of bullying behaviour. This record will be kept by the class teacher and a copy given to the principal.
14. A Class Teacher will complete a 20 Day Record Sheet (Appendix 4 – labelled 20 Day Record Sheet) in the case where bullying behaviour has not ceased after 20 days. In such an instance the Principal will sanction the pupil who is carrying on the bullying behaviour. This sanction can range from warning up to and including suspension. A pupil persisting in bullying behaviour at this stage will be dealt with according to the School Code of Behaviour and may receive ongoing suspensions. The 20 day report is a mechanism for reporting to the Principal and the Board of Management and it is understood by the Board that this reporting requirement does not supersede nor interfere with the implementation of the School Code of Behaviour.
15. In the case of a child against whom allegations of bullying behaviour are made but the teacher finds such allegations difficult to substantiate a tracking form (Appendix 5) will be completed. The tracking form will be used to monitor a pupil's behaviour, in so far as he is alleged to engage in bullying behaviour, over the course of his time in Athlone Mixed National School. This form may over time confirm a pattern of behaviour or may be used to prove that a child is being wrongly targeted by his peers.

### **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.

### **Oversight**

At least once in every term the Principal will provide a report to the Board of Management setting out:

1. the overall number of bullying cases reported (by means of Appendix 4) since the previous report to the Board and
2. confirmation that all cases referred to at 1) above have been or are being dealt with in accordance with the school's anti-bullying policy and the Anti-Bullying Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools.

### **Annual Review by the Board of Management**

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 and provided to the Parent Teacher Association. A record of the review and its outcome will be made available, if requested, to the patron and the Department. The standardised checklist (Appendix 8) will be used in undertaking the review.

This policy was adopted by the Board of Management.

This policy has been made available to school personnel, published on the school website and provided to the Parent Teacher Association. A copy of this policy will be made available to the Department and the patron if requested.

Ratified by Board of Management on: 4<sup>th</sup> October 2020

Signed: William F Steacy  
Chairperson, Board of Management