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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 Saplings School Mullingar 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 by the Department of Education in September 2013. This policy document supersedes all previous Anti-Bullying policy documents published by the Board of Management.

Saplings School Mullingar believe that our pupils have the right to learn in a supportive, caring and safe environment.

Our Mission Statement includes our aims to enhance pupil's self-esteem and the development of personal independent skills. Bullying is always wrong and will not be tolerated.

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 certain key principles of best practice in preventing and tackling bullying behaviour:

- (a) 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.
- (b) Effective leadership**
- (c) A school-wide approach**
- (d) A shared understanding of what bullying is and its impact**
- (e) Implementation of education and prevention strategies** (including awareness raising measures) that build empathy and respect, address the issues of cyber-bullying.
- (f) Effective supervision and monitoring of pupils & staff.**
- (g) Supports for pupils & staff.**

- (h) Consistent recording, investigation and follow up of bullying behaviour (including use of established intervention strategies); and/or**
- (i) On-going evaluation of the effectiveness of the anti-bullying policy.**

Key elements of a positive school culture

- The school acknowledges the right of each member of the school community to enjoy school in a secure environment.
- The school acknowledges the uniqueness of each individual and his/her worth as a human being.
- The school promotes positive habits of self-respect, self-discipline and responsibility among all its members.
- The school has the capacity to change in response to pupils' needs.
- The school identifies aspects of the curriculum through which positive and lasting influences can be exerted towards forming pupils' attitudes and values.
- The school takes particular care of "at risk" pupils and uses its monitoring systems to facilitate early intervention where necessary and it responds to the needs, fears or anxieties of individual members in a sensitive manner.
- The school recognises the need to work in partnership with and keep parents informed on procedures to improve relationships on a school-wide basis.
- The school recognises the role of parents in equipping the pupil with a range of life-skills.
- The school recognises the role of other community agencies in preventing and dealing with bullying.
- The school promotes habits of mutual respect, courtesy and an awareness of the interdependence of people in groups and communities.
- The school promotes qualities of social responsibility, tolerance and understanding among all its members both in school and out of school.
- Staff members share a collegiate responsibility, under the direction of the principal, to act in preventing bullying any member of the school community.

What is 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.

Bullying behaviour is intentional and deliberate.

See Appendix 1 for examples of bullying behaviour.

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 travelling 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.

Relevant Teachers

The relevant teachers for investigating and dealing with bullying in Saplings School are class teachers, Deputy Principal and Principal.

Any teacher may act as a relevant teacher if circumstances warrant it, but at Saplings Mullingar School, the relevant teacher who will oversee alleged bullying behaviour is the class teacher of the alleged victim of the alleged bullying behaviour.

Rights and Responsibilities

In the daily life and routines of the school the ways in which people interact with each other significantly affect each person's sense of self-worth, belonging and well-being. The fostering of good quality interpersonal relationships among teachers, students, parents and staff is a responsibility shared by everyone.

All members of the school community have a role to play in the prevention of bullying.

Responsibilities of the Board of Management

The Board of Management is responsible for ensuring that all members of the school community are enabled to deal effectively with bullying. The Board is committed to providing time and resources for the implementation of the policy. The Board will ensure that proper supervisory and monitoring measures are in place to prevent bullying and to deal with incidents appropriately as they arise.

Responsibilities of School Staff

- To acknowledge that bullying is a shared responsibility within the school.
- To implement prevention and intervention strategies which build and maintain safe learning environment for the whole school community.
- To empower students to deal with conflict in constructive ways.
- To take all reports of bullying seriously and to report them to the principal if warranted.
- To document any serious bullying incidents using the Bullying Incident Report Form.

Responsibilities of Pupils

- To show consideration, respect and support towards others.
- To be able to identify bullying behavior.
- To not bully others.
- To tell if they are being bullied or if they see someone else being bullied.
- To develop a sense of empathy for targeted members of the school community and as a result take safe and sensible action as a bystander.

Indications of Bullying

- Anxiety about travelling to/from school
- Unwillingness to go to school
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- Patterns of physical illness e.g.
- Unexplained changes in either mood / behaviour
- Visible signs of anxiety / distress
- Unexplained bruising
- Reluctance and/or refuse to say what is troubling him/her.

Responsibilities of Parents

- To support the school in the implementation of the policy.
- To watch out for signs that their child may be being bullied.
- To speak to the class teacher if their child is being bullied or they suspect that this is happening.
- To speak to the class teacher as soon as they are aware that issues are arising which are affecting their child.
- Where appropriate to instruct their children to tell if they are being bullied or if they have seen other pupils being bullied.
- To notify the school if they think that their child is displaying bullying behaviour and to work with the school in addressing this problem. They should not defer letting the school know of any issue, in the hope that the problem will go away.
- To ensure that if their children are online that they are using social media in a safe and responsible manner; parental supervision is very important in this area as there are risks associated with internet/website access.

Strategies

The education and prevention strategies that are used by our school include:

School-wide approach

- A school-wide approach to the fostering of respect for all members of the school community; adults should model the type of behaviours they promote to pupils.
- The fostering and enhancing of the self-esteem of all our pupils through both curricular and extracurricular activities. Pupils are provided with opportunities to develop a positive sense of self-worth through formal and informal interactions.
- Whole staff professional development on bullying to ensure that all staff develops an awareness of what bullying is, how it impacts on pupils' lives and the need to respond to it-prevention and intervention.
- School wide awareness raising and training on all aspects of bullying, including pupils.
- Supervision and monitoring of classrooms, corridors, school grounds, school tours and extra- curricular activities. Non-teaching and ancillary staff are encouraged to be vigilant and report issues to relevant teachers. Supervision also applies to monitoring pupils' use of communication technology within the school.

- The school's Code of Behaviour Policy is discussed with pupils/parents/guardian(s) & they are given a copy as part entry documents to the school.

Ensuring that pupils know who to tell and how to tell, e.g.:

- Direct approach 1:1 talk to the teacher.
- Worry box for older children / circle time.
- Ensure bystanders understand the importance of telling if they witness or know that bullying is taking place. All teachers will teach children to recognise bullying behaviour and encourage them to use their voice to say 'no' to such behaviour. (visual supported)
- Identify clear protocols to encourage parent(s)/guardian(s) to approach the school if they suspect that their child is being bullied.

Implementation of curricula

- The implementation of the SPHE curriculum, according to our school plan, including the RSE and Stay Safe Programmes.
- School wide delivery of lessons on bullying from evidence-based programmes, e.g. Stay Safe Programme and The Walk Tall Programme (integrated); cyberbullying (Webwise teachers' resources) and lessons from www.antibullyingcampaign.ie

Links to other policies

Please refer to the school's policy documents on Code of Behaviour (including mobile phone policy) Child Safeguarding Policy, Child Safeguarding Risk Assessment, Supervision of pupils, Acceptable Use Policy, and Attendance (all available on our website).

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 detailed below. The primary aim 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). Every effort will be made to ensure that all involved (including pupils, parent(s)/guardian(s)) understand this approach from the outset.

Reporting bullying behaviour

- Pupils & Staff are encouraged to report bullying behaviour as soon as possible.
- Any pupil or parent(s)/guardian(s) may bring a bullying incident to the attention of any teacher or Principal in the school.
- All reports, including anonymous reports of bullying, will be investigated and dealt with by the relevant teacher.
- Teaching and non-teaching staff such as secretaries, special needs assistants (SNAs), caretaker and cleaners must report any incidents of bullying behaviour witnessed by them, or mentioned to them, to the relevant teacher.

Investigating and dealing with incidents

- In investigating and dealing with bullying, the (relevant) teacher will exercise his/her professional judgement to determine whether bullying has occurred and how best the situation might be resolved.
- Parent(s)/guardian(s) 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.
- Teachers should take a calm, unemotional problem-solving approach.
- Where possible incidents should be investigated outside the classroom to ensure the privacy of all involved.
- All interviews should be conducted with sensitivity and with due regard to the rights of all pupils & staff concerned. Pupils who are not directly involved can also provide very useful information in this way.
- When analysing incidents of bullying behaviour, the relevant teacher should seek answers to questions of *what, where, when, who and why*. This should be done in a calm manner, setting an example in dealing effectively with conflict in a non-aggressive manner. Teachers who are investigating bullying behaviour should keep a written record of their discussions with those involved.
- It is school policy to request the assistance of another staff member in such investigations.
- Each member of a group should be supported through the possible pressures that may face them from the other members of the group after the interview by the teacher;

It may also be helpful to ask those involved to write down their account of the incident(s) (if appropriate).

- Where the relevant teacher has determined that a pupil has been engaged in bullying behaviour, it should be made clear to him/her how he/she is in breach of the school's Anti-Bullying Policy and efforts should be made to try to get him/her to see the situation from the perspective of the pupil being bullied.
- In cases where it has been determined by the relevant teacher that bullying behaviour has occurred, the parent(s)/guardian(s) of the parties involved will be contacted at an early stage to inform them of the matter and explain the actions being taken (by reference to the school policy). The school will give parent(s)/guardian(s) an opportunity to discuss ways in which they can reinforce or support the actions being taken by the school and the support provided to the pupils.
- It must also be made clear to all involved (each set of pupils and parent(s)/guardian(s)) that in any situation where disciplinary sanctions are required, this is a private matter between the pupil being disciplined, his or her parent(s)/guardian(s) and the school.

The following steps are taken in dealing with bullying behaviour:

- In Saplings School Mullingar we try to enable those involved to engage in a mediated conversation, the purpose of which is to allow for the victim to have a voice and the perpetrator to understand the consequences of their actions. All staff will be made aware of the importance of this practice.
- A verbal warning is given to the perpetrator to stop the offending behaviour. This is done in the presence of the perpetrator's parent(s), the principal and another teacher. The perpetrator is requested to apologise to the victim in the presence of the principal and another teacher and to give an assurance that the offending behaviour will stop.
- While the school supports parents and pupils in dealing with issues that arise outside of school, parents should be aware that the school is limited in its power to deal fully with issues that arise while the children are not under our care.

Follow up and recording

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.
- Whether the relationships between the parties have been restored as far as is practicable.

- Any feedback received from the parties involved, their parent(s)/guardian(s) or the school Principal or Deputy Principal
- Follow-up meetings with the relevant parties involved should be arranged separately with a view to possibly bringing them together at a later date, if the pupil who has been bullied is ready and agreeable.
- Where a parent(s)/guardian(s) is not satisfied that the school has dealt with a bullying case in accordance with these procedures, the parent(s)/guardian(s) will be referred, as appropriate, to the school's complaints procedures.
- If a parent(s)/guardian(s) has exhausted the school's complaints procedures and is still not satisfied, the school will advise the parent(s)/guardian(s) of their right to make a complaint to the Ombudsman for Children.

Recording of bullying behaviour

It is important that all recording of bullying incidents is done in an objective and factual manner. This school's procedures for noting and reporting bullying behaviour are as follows:

Informal- pre-determination that bullying has occurred

- All staff keep a written record of any incidents witnessed by them or notified to them. All incidents should be reported to the relevant teacher, who will then notify the principal.
- While all reports, including anonymous reports of bullying must be investigated and dealt with by the relevant teacher, the relevant teacher must keep a written record of the reports, the actions taken and any discussions with those involved regarding same.
- The relevant teacher must inform the principal of all incidents being investigated.

Formal Stage 1-determination that bullying has occurred

- If it is established by the relevant teacher that bullying has occurred, the relevant teacher must keep appropriate written records which will assist his/her efforts to resolve the issues and restore, as far as is practicable, the relationships of the parties involved.

Formal Stage 2-known as Appendix 3 (From DES Procedures)

- The relevant teacher must use the recording template known **Appendix 3** to record the bullying behaviour. This is available on the school administration system. It will be used only in the following circumstances:

a) in cases where he/she considers that the bullying behaviour has not been adequately and appropriately addressed within 20 school days after he/she has determined that bullying behaviour occurred; and

b) Where the school has decided as part of its anti-bullying policy that in certain circumstances bullying behaviour must be recorded and reported immediately to the Principal or Deputy Principal as applicable.

When the recording template is completed, it will be retained in the principal's office.

Established intervention strategies

- Teacher conversations with pupils.
- Negotiating agreements between pupils and following these up by monitoring progress. This can be on an informal basis or implemented through a more structured mediation process.
- Working with parent(s)/guardian(s) to support school interventions
- Circle Time and similar strategies to address issues.
- Anti-bullying programme and awareness-raising throughout the school year.

Support

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

- All in-school supports and opportunities will be provided for the pupils affected by bullying to participate in activities designed to raise their self-esteem, to develop friendships and social skills and build resilience e.g.
 - a) Group work such as Circle Time
- If pupils require counselling or further supports the school will endeavour to liaise with the appropriate agencies to organise same. This may be either for the pupil affected by bullying or involved in the bullying behaviour.
- Pupils should understand that there are no innocent bystanders and that all incidents of bullying behaviour must be reported to a teacher.

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.

See Supervision Policy.

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 members of the school community 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 reviewed by the Board of Management in September 2024.

This policy has been made available to school personnel. A copy of this policy will be made available to the Department of Education and the Patron if requested.

This policy and its implementation will be reviewed by the Board of Management once every school year, using Appendix 4 of Circ 045/2013.

Written notification that the review has been completed will be made available to school personnel.

Signed: Joe Sullivan

Chairperson of Board of Management

Signed: Sebastian Buckley

Principal

Date: 24th Sept 2024

Date of next review: Sept 2025

Saplings School Appendix 1: Examples of Bullying Behaviours

Harassment based on any of the nine grounds in the equality legislation

General behaviours which apply to all types of bullying:

- Isolation
- Damage to property
- Name calling / verbal abuse
- Slagging
- The production, display or circulation of written words, pictures or other materials aimed at intimidating another person
- Insulting or offensive gestures
- Invasion of personal space

A combination of any of the types listed.

Cyber:

- Denigration: Spreading rumors, lies or gossip to hurt a person's reputation
- Harassment: Continually sending vicious, mean or disturbing messages to an individual
- Trickery: Fooling someone into sharing personal information which you then post online
- Exclusion: Purposefully excluding someone from an online group
- Silent telephone/mobile phone call / texting / web messages
- Abusive posts on any form of communication technology

Identity Based Behaviours

Including any of the discriminatory grounds mentioned in Equality Legislation (gender including transgender, civil status, family status, sexual orientation, religion, age, disability, race and membership of the Travelling community).

Discrimination, prejudice, comments or insults about colour, nationality, culture, social class, religious beliefs, ethnic or traveller background.

This involves manipulating relationships as a means of bullying.

Behaviours include:

Relational

- Malicious gossip
- Isolation & exclusion
- Ignoring
- Excluding from the group
- Taking someone's friends away
- Talking loud enough so that the victim can hear

Sexual

- Unwelcome or inappropriate sexual comments or touching
- Name calling

Special Educational Needs, disability

- 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

Template for Recording Confirmation Bullying Behaviour (known as Appendix 3)

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 tick relevant box(es)*		4. Location of incidents tick relevant box(es)*	
Pupil concerned		Playground	
Other Pupil		Classroom	
Parent		Corridor	
Teacher		Toilets	
Other		School Bus	
		Other	

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

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6. Type of Bullying Behaviour (tick relevant box(es)) *

Physical Aggression		Cyber-bullying	
Damage to Property		Intimidation	
Isolation/Exclusion		Malicious Gossip	
Name Calling		Other (specify)	

7. Where behaviour is regarded as identity-based bullying, indicate the relevant category

Homophobic	Disability/SEN related	Racist	Membership of Travelling community	Other (specify)

8. Brief Description of bullying behaviour and its impact

9. Details of actions taken

Signed _____ (Relevant Teacher) Date: _____

Date submitted to Principal/Deputy Principal _____

Signature of Principal

Date

Notification regarding the Board of Management’s annual review of the anti-bullying policy

To: _____

The Board of Management of _____ wishes to inform you that:

- The Board of Management’s annual review of the school’s anti-bullying policy and its implementation was completed at the Board meeting of _____ [date].

- This review was conducted in accordance with the checklist set out in **Appendix 4** of the Department’s *Anti-Bullying Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools*.

Signed _____
Chairperson, Board of Management

Date _____

Signed _____
Principal

Date _____

Appendix 4 Checklist for annual review of the anti-bullying policy and its implementation

The Board of Management (the Board) must undertake an annual review of the school's anti-bullying policy and its implementation. The following checklist must be used for this purpose. The checklist is an aid to conducting this review and is not intended as an exhaustive list. In order to complete the checklist, an examination and review involving both quantitative and qualitative analysis, as appropriate across the various elements of the implementation of the school's anti-bullying policy will be required.

	Yes /No
Has the Board formally adopted an anti-bullying policy that fully complies with the requirements of the <i>Anti-Bullying Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools</i> ?	Y
Has the Board published the policy on the school website and provided a copy to the parents' association?	Y
Has the Board ensured that the policy has been made available to school staff (including new staff)?	Y
Is the Board satisfied that school staff are sufficiently familiar with the policy and procedures to enable them to effectively and consistently apply the policy and procedures in their day to day work?	Y
Has the Board ensured that the policy has been adequately communicated to all pupils?	Y
Has the policy documented the prevention and education strategies that the school applies?	Y
Have all of the prevention and education strategies been implemented?	Y
Has the effectiveness of the prevention and education strategies that have been implemented been examined?	Y
Is the Board satisfied that all teachers are recording and dealing with incidents in accordance with the policy?	Y
Has the Board received and minuted the periodic summary reports of the Principal?	Y
Has the Board discussed how well the school is handling all reports of bullying including those addressed at an early stage and not therefore included in the Principal's periodic report to the Board?	Y
Has the Board received any complaints from parents regarding the school's handling of bullying incidents?	N
Have any parents withdrawn their child from the school citing dissatisfaction with the school's handling of a bullying situation?	N
Have any Ombudsman for Children investigations into the school's handling of a bullying case been initiated or completed?	N
Has the data available from cases reported to the Principal (by the bullying recording template) been analysed to identify any issues, trends or patterns in bullying behaviour?	N/A
Has the Board identified any aspects of the school's policy and/or its implementation that require further improvement?	N
Has the Board put in place an action plan to address any areas for improvement?	N

Signed Joe Sullivan
Chairperson, Board of Management

Date 24 Sept 24

Signed Seobhan Buckley
Principal

Date 24.9.24