Mercy College Sligo

Bí Cineálta Policy to Prevent and Address Bullying Behaviour

Mercy College, Sligo is dedicated to the provision of quality education-catholic, academic, spiritual, global, moral, physical, social, aesthetic & vocational in a caring & nurturing environment.

In accordance with the requirements of the Education (Welfare) Act 2000 and Bí Cineálta: Procedures to Prevent and Address Bullying Behaviour for Primary and Post Primary Schools, the Board of Management of Mercy College has adopted the following policy to prevent and address bullying behaviour in conjunction with and within the framework of the school's overall Code of 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.

This policy fully complies with the requirements of *Bí Cineálta: Procedures to Prevent and Address Bullying Behaviour for Primary and Post-Primary Schools* 2024.

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, 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.

Signed: _____ Date: 11 July 2025
(Chairperson of Board of Management)

Signed: Anne Foley Date: 11th July 2025
(Principal)

Link to Mission Statement & Key Principles of Best Practice

The Board of Management recognises the very serious nature of bullying and the negative impact that it can have on the lives of pupils. It is therefore fully committed to ensuring that policy and practice in the school is guided by the four key principles of Cineáltas:

1. Prevention
2. Support
3. Oversight and
4. Community

The Board of Management Mercy College 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 of Mercy College 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, 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.

School Context & Characteristic Spirit

Mercy College is an all-girls, voluntary secondary school and co-educational Aonad with a Catholic ethos under the trusteeship of CEIST (Catholic Education an Irish Schools Trust), In accordance with S. 15. (2) (b) of the Education Act, 1998. The Board of Management of Mercy College shall uphold, and be accountable to the patron for so upholding, the characteristic spirit of the school as determined by the cultural, educational, moral, religious, social, linguistic and spiritual values and traditions which inform, and are characteristic of, the objectives and conduct of the school.

The school's motto 'A Place to Belong' forms the basis of the school's community daily interaction as the student progresses through their educational experience in Mercy College. In all of this the school community is guided by the values espoused by the patron (CEIST) and the school's mission statement.

Mercy College draws on the richness of the religious and cultural heritage of the past, interpreted and lived out for students living in today's world. Catherine McAuley, foundress of the Mercy Order, had a vision around a compassionate and inclusive approach to education and that is of very significant importance in the life of the school.

As a CEIST school, Mercy College values teaching as one of the most important of all human activities. Our school seeks to build a quality learning community that welcomes, and bears witness to the Gospel values of Jesus Christ expressed through the lens of the CEIST Charter. These are encapsulated in the core values, which are intended to support and nourish the lives of the people who are at the heart of our schools;

- Promoting Spiritual and Human Development
- Achieving Quality in Teaching and Learning
- Showing Respect for Every Person
- Creating Community
- Being Just and Responsible

Definition of Bullying

Bullying is defined in *Cineáltas: Action Plan on Bullying* and *Bí Cineálta: Procedures to Prevent and Address Bullying Behaviour for Primary and Post-Primary Schools* as 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. The detailed definition is provided in Chapter 2 of the Bí Cineálta procedures.

Each school is required to develop and implement a Bí Cineálta policy that sets out how the school community prevents and addresses bullying behaviour. Strategies to deal with inappropriate behaviour that is not bullying behaviour are provided for within the school's Code of Behaviour.

The core definition above sets out clear criteria to help school communities to prevent, correctly identify and address bullying among students. Alleged incidents of bullying are however often complex and must be considered on a case-by-case basis.

The core elements of the definition are further described below:

- **Targeted behaviour**

  Bullying is deliberate, unwanted behaviour that causes harm to others, and where the student displaying bullying behaviour knows that their behaviour is or will be perceived as harmful by the child or young person experiencing the behaviour. Bullying is not accidental or reckless behaviour. The harm can be physical (for example, personal injury, damage to or loss of property), social (for example. withdrawal, loneliness, exclusion) and/or emotional (for example, low self-esteem,

depression, anxiety) and can have a serious and long-term negative impact on the student experiencing the bullying behaviour. If the repeated harm is real for the student experiencing the behaviour but unintended by the other student, this is not bullying but, importantly, must still be addressed under the school's code of behaviour.

- **Repeated behaviour**

  Bullying takes the form of a systematic pattern of behaviour which is repeated over time. Single offline incidents of intentional negative behaviour involving an imbalance of power are not considered bullying but must still be addressed under the school's Code of Behaviour. Posting a single harmful message/image/video online, and which is highly likely to be reposted or shared with others can therefore be seen as bullying behaviour.

- **Imbalance of power**

  In incidents of bullying, the student experiencing the bullying behaviour finds it hard to defend themselves as a result of the abuse of a real or perceived imbalance of power. This imbalance of power may manifest itself through differences in size, strength, age, ability, peer group power, economic status, social status, religion, race, ethnic origin including membership of the Traveller communities, sexual orientation, family circumstances, gender, gender identity, gender expression, experience of the care system, disability or the receipt of special education. In incidents of online (or cyber) bullying, the imbalance of power may relate to online anonymity, technical proficiency and possession of information/images/video, and the inability of the targeted student to remove offensive online material or escape the 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 non-consensual 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 198911, and those engaging in such behaviour may face criminal charges.

If bullying behaviour ***involves sexual harassment or sexual assault***, this may also be ***considered criminal behaviour.***

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

Types of Bullying behaviour deemed to be inappropriate:

(this list is not exhaustive)

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 • The "look" • Invasion of personal space • A combination of any of the types listed. • Exclusion • No innocent bystander
Cyber	• **Denigration**: Spreading rumors, 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/Instagram/Tik Tok/Be Real/Twitter/You Tube etc. 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).

Homophobic and Transgender	• Spreading rumours about a person's sexual orientation • Taunting a person of a different sexual orientation • Name calling e.g., gay, queer, lesbian ... used in a derogatory manner • Physical intimidation or attacks • Threats
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 • "Bitching" • Spreading rumours • Breaking confidence • Talking loud enough so that the victim can hear • The "look" • Use of terminology such as "nerd" in a derogatory way
Sexual	• Unwelcome or inappropriate sexual comments or touching • Harassment
Special Educational Needs, Disability – Learning Difficulties and Gifted	• 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

This Policy Applies

- In class, between classes and while on the school premises
- While in school uniform
- On the way to and from school
- On school-based activity, school tours etc.
- To anything done in the school name
- To any behaviour that adversely affects the school reputation or the education of any student in the school

The Mercy College Anti-Bullying Charter below is printed in student journals and every student and parent are asked to sign it at the beginning of each academic year.

I have the **RIGHT** to:	I have a **RESPONSIBILITY** to ensure that:
• Be physically safe & free from harm	• Others are physically safe & free from harm
• Expect that my property is safe & secure	• The property of others is safe & secure
• Be free from all forms of verbal abuse	• Others are not subjected to any form of verbal abuse
• Be free from hurtful remarks regarding person, culture, sexuality, ethnicity, religion	• Others are free from hurtful remarks regarding person, culture, sexuality, ethnicity,religion
• Feel safe online	• Others feel safe online
• Be free from derogatory comments posted online	• Others are free from derogatory comments posted online •
• Be different	• Others are treated fairly and with respect
• Seek help when I am bullied	• My information is honest & accurate
• Tell a responsible adult if I am, or if someone I know is being bullied	• I tell a responsible adult if I am, or if someone I know is being bullied

The Mercy College Digital Safety Pledge below is printed in student journals and students are asked to sign it at the beginning of each academic year.

MERCY COLLEGE DIGITAL SAFETY PLEDGE

- We will not share **personal information** carelessly.
- We will not share **passwords** and will change them every six months.
- We will **THINK** before posting to social media : is it **T**rue, is it **H**urtful, is it **I**llegal, is it **N**ecessary, is it **K**ind.
- We will seek **permission** before sharing images or information online about other people.
- We will never share any **inappropriate** or **sensitive images** of ourselves or others.
- We will never arrange a face to face meeting with a **stranger**.
- We will tell a **trusted adult** if we see something that makes us uncomfortable
- We will turn off our **location settings** on social media platforms that ask for it.

Signed:

Development/review of our Bí Cineálta policy to prevent and address bullying behaviour

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	6/1/25	Half-Day Closure Bí Cinealta Workshop Microsoft Forms Survey
Students	14/1/25	Microsoft Forms Survey
Parents	28/3/25	Microsoft Forms Survey
Board of Management	28/3/25	Microsoft Forms Survey
Wider school community as appropriate, for example, bus drivers		Consultation as deemed necessary
Date policy was approved:		
Date policy was last reviewed:		

Preventing Bullying Behaviour

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

The Board of Management acknowledges the importance of respect as a key value in the creation of a positive and inclusive school culture and environment. This 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. Class teachers, Tutors, Year Heads, Middle Leadership and Management Team, Senior Leadership Team (SLT), Special Needs Assistants, Guidance Team and Ancillary Staff all promote a positive culture in the school and work collaboratively.

In developing 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 the 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 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 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.

Bullying Prevention aligned with Key Areas of Wellbeing Promotion

Culture & Environment
• We have a Restorative school climate where all feel safe, respected and valued. • Promote diversity and inclusion in all aspects of school life. • Each class group is assigned a tutor. Every morning, class groups spend 12 minutes of "Wellbeing" with their tutor where wellbeing-based activities are carried out – Motivated Monday, Chatty Tuesday etc. During this time tutors touch base with their students and help them start their day off on a positive note. • Establish clear expectations for behavior and enforce them consistently • Promote respectful relationships across the school community • School clubs, teams etc. highlight interdependence • Display our Mercy College Anti-Bullying Charter and the posters explaining the definition of bullying (See page 8) • Display our Digital Safety Pledge (See page 9)

- Display our student friendly Bí Cineálta Policy (Appendix C)
- Display positive messages that promote friendship and caring attitudes
- Use circle practice in the classroom to build a positive culture and environment.
- Encourage open communication between students, staff, and parents
- Encourage pupils to disclose and discuss incidents of bullying behaviour
- Belong To Quality Mark (March 2025) recognising a safe and inclusive environment for all students regardless of their sexual orientation, gender identity etc.
- Stand Up Club for LGBTQ+ and Allies
- Reinforce positive student efforts & the important role that by-standers play
- Building student self-confidence
- School tours / bonding trips
- Inclusive & Anti-bullying posters /leaflets.
- Plasma screen messages promoting kindness
- Mentor Programme for 1st years
- Welcome Pack for First Year students
- Student-designed Friendship/Mindfulness Walls
- Visible teacher presence
- Support programme from SCP / HYLS / AEN /Guidance Counsellor
- Initiative Retreats/Bonding Days/Well-being days for all year groups
- Mentor-led Fun Days
- Homework Club
- Student Council
- Participating in NCSE Create 2025/26

Curriculum

- Integrate anti-bullying messages across all subjects in the school curriculum
- The programme Webwise in incorporated into SPHE on a basis. This programme teaches safe and responsible internet use
- Other programme's that Mercy College offers through SPHE are Tackle Your Feelings, Mind Out, Activating Social Empathy NUIG, Lockers, Be in Ctrl & Growling UP LGBT
- Our CSPE curriculum provides education on rights and responsibilities as both students in the school and members of the community
- Teach students about bullying and its effects
- Provide opportunities for students to develop social and emotional skills
- Incorporate lessons on respect, empathy, and diversity into the curriculum
- An annual Anti-Bullying Week, Friendship Week, Stand Up Awareness Week, Reaching Out Week, Digital Safety Week and a Wellbeing Week, one at the start and one at the end of the year
- Classroom expectations co-constructed by teachers and students in every subject
- Sensory Room available and sensory walks for emotional regulation breaks

Relationships & Partnerships

- Encourage open communication between students, staff, and parents/guardians
- All students to be informed of the anti-bullying policy and procedures. 1st years are 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.
- Student Mentors -TY students assigned to a group of 1st year students to help them settle in to life at Mercy College
- Build positive relationships with students and families
- Effective leadership allows the ladder of referral and the correct channels to be used in order to deal will bullying incidents effectively
- Collaborate with community organisations to provide additional support and resources
- Invite guest speakers to address students, staff and parents/guardians on bullying issues e.g Jackie Fox explaining Coco's Law
- Clear protocols are in place to encourage parents/guardians to approach the school if they suspect that their child is being bullied
- Student Support Team Interventions - The Team comprises of the Principal, Deputy Principal, Guidance Counsellor, HYLS, SCO, AEN Teacher, Attendance Coordinator & Year Heads. Students identified as needing extra support are assigned to a Team member.
- Collation and dissemination of background information from primary schools to relevant staff.

The 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 Belong To LGBTQ+ Programme
- CPD: Pieta House Self Harm Inservice, Personal Safety, SPHE/RSE Inservice, Webwise Internet Safety course, Restorative Practice and any other relevant courses.
- Review of Anti-Bullying Policy
- All staff have a copy of the policy and procedures.
- Whole staff participation in awareness raising/Wellbeing events e.g. through daily Well-being time and Well-being Week.

Policy & Planning

- A clear and consistent Bí Cinealta policy that is followed by all staff members
- Annual review and update of the Bí Cinealta policy
- Provide training for staff on how to recognise and respond to bullying e.g. Restorative Practice
- Establish clear procedures for reporting and responding to bullying incidents.
- School Policies: The following policies, practices and activities that are particularly relevant to bullying include - Code of Behaviour, Child Safeguarding Statement, Risk Assessment, Supervision of Pupils, Acceptable Use Policy, Attendance, Communication

Policy, SPHE, RSE, PE, ALN/Inclusion Policy

- The Acceptable Use Policy was developed in the school to include the necessary steps to ensure that access to technology within the school is strictly monitored as is the use of student mobile phones: No phones between 8.30am-4pm, use only under the direction of a teacher in class, phones left on desk if students are going to the bathroom.
- The school's approach to tackling and preventing bullying takes particular account of the needs of pupils with disabilities/ ALN
- Approaches to decrease the likelihood of bullying for pupils with ALN include improving inclusion, focusing on developing social skills, paying attention to key moments such as transitioning from primary to post-primary and cultivating a school culture that is deeply rooted in respect

Supervision & Monitoring

In addition to all the practices identified above under Culture and Environment, Curriculum, Relationships & Partnerships and Policy & Planning, Mercy College has the following supervision and monitoring policies to prevent and address bullying behaviour:

- Staff are assigned designated areas in which to supervise before school begins, during breaktime and lunchtime. Our Supervision & Substitution system is designed to ensure that all areas are adequately patrolled. This supervision rota is emailed out and explained to all staff. Staff are constantly reminded at staff meetings of the importance of supervision.
- Class teachers remain in the classroom for the full duration of the lessons and always remain vigilant.
- Visitors to the school sign in at reception, wear a "Visitor" badge and are supervised at all times.
- The Acceptable Use Policy in the school includes the necessary steps to ensure that the access to technology within the school is strictly monitored, as is the pupils' use of mobile phones.
- All staff are watchful and observe relationships between students in class, note absence patterns and let it be known that high standards of behaviour are always expected
- Student Support Team – the student support team meet weekly and operate a check and connect system where teachers meet students where concerns may have been brought to their attention

Addressing Bullying Behaviour

The teacher(s) with responsibility for addressing bullying behaviour is (are) as follows:

Class teachers, Tutors, Year heads, Senior Leadership Team

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 involved
- 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

The steps that will be taken by the school to determine if bullying behaviour has occurred, the approaches taken to address the bullying behaviour and to review progress are as follows (see Chapter 6 of the Bí Cineálta procedures):

Initial Disclosure: Students are encouraged to report bullying in a safe, non-threatening environment to any member of staff or student mentors.

Definition Check: The detailed definition is provided in Chapter 2 of the Bí Cineálta procedures. To determine whether the behaviour reported is bullying behaviour, the following questions (Appendix A) must be considered:

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

- Ensuring that pupils know who to tell and how to tell, this is a core message that we explicitly teach during Wellbeing time & Year group assemblies
- Ensure bystanders understand the importance of telling if they witness or know that bullying is taking place.
- Where a member of the teaching staff and non-teaching staff such as secretaries, special needs assistants (SNAs), caretakers & cleaners have a concern about a student being bullied, either as a

result of a personal observation or as a result of receiving a report from a third party, they should without delay refer the matter to the Year Head, Deputy Principal or Principal.

- The primary aim for the relevant teacher/year-head 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).
- Parents and pupils are required to co-operate with any investigation and assist us in resolving any issues and restoring, as far as is practicable, the relationships of the parties involved as quickly as possible. This involvement should be positive and understanding in the context of the case being investigated.
- Incidents will be investigated outside the classroom situation to ensure the privacy of all involved.
- All interviews will be conducted sensitively and with due regard to the rights of all pupils concerned. Pupils who are not directly involved can also provide very useful information in this way. Students will be encouraged to write out their reports outlining the nature of the incident.
- The rights of all parties are to be safe-guarded during and after the investigation process.
- 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 a conflict in a non-aggressive manner
- Staff will use a restorative approach when interacting with students. They will use the following Restorative Practice questions while interviewing the parties involved:
    - What happened?
    - What were you thinking at the time?
    - What have you thought about it since?
    - Who has been affected and in what way?
    - How could things have been done differently?
    - What do you think needs to happen next?
- If a group is involved, each member will be interviewed individually at first. Thereafter, all those involved may be met as a group, if it is deemed appropriate. At the group meeting, each member will be asked for their account of what happened.
- 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. We will give parents an opportunity of discussing ways in which they can reinforce or support the actions being taken by the school and the supports for our pupils.
- Where the relevant teacher has determined that a pupil has been engaged in bullying behaviour, it should be made clear to the student how they are in breach of the school's Bí Cineálta policy and efforts should be made to try to get them to see the situation from the perspective of the pupil being bullied.
- It must also be made clear to all involved (each set of pupils and parents) that in a situation where disciplinary sanctions are required, this is a private matter between the pupil being disciplined, their parents and the school.

Recording of bullying behaviour

Those involved in investigating and resolving bullying behaviour will note and report developments as follows and, in doing so, they will comply with relevant Data Protection legislation. It is imperative that all recording of bullying incidents must be done in an objective and factual manner.

The school's procedures for noting and reporting bullying behaviour are as follows:

- Record all incidents of bullying behaviour (using appendix B and H)
- Document the following details:
    - Type and form of bullying behaviour (if known).
    - Where and when it took place.
    - The date of the first engagement with the students and their parents.
- Include the views of students and parents on actions to address the bullying.
- Track the review process with students and parents to check if the bullying behaviour has stopped and get their feedback.
- Record the date of each engagement and when it is confirmed that the bullying has ceased.
- Note any involvement with external services or supports.
- Keep the records and place them in the students file in order for the support team to provide consistent help for the student's wellbeing. (Appendices B, G, H)

Follow up where bullying behaviour has occurred

Engagement with Students and Parents:

- The Year Head/Deputy Principal/Principal will engage with the students involved in the bullying and their parents.
- This engagement should occur no later than 20 school days after the initial contact.

Factors to Consider:

- During this engagement, important factors to consider include:
    - The nature of the bullying behaviour.
    - The relationship between the students involved.
    - The strategies used to address the bullying

Review of Actions

In determining whether a bullying case has been adequately and appropriately addressed the relevant teacher will as part of his/her professional judgement, take the following factors into account:

- Has the bullying behaviour ceased?
- Have issues between the parties been resolved as far as is practicable?
- Have the relationships between the parties been restored as far as is practicable?

- Any feedback received from the parties involved, their parents or the school Principal or Deputy Principal.
- Follow-up meetings with the relevant parties involved will 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.

Further Action if Bullying Continues:

- If the bullying behaviour continues, the school should consider using strategies from the school's Code of Behaviour to address the inappropriate behaviour.

Disciplinary Sanctions:

- If disciplinary sanctions are necessary, the matter should be handled between the student, their parents, and the school.

If Parents Are Unsatisfied:

- If a parent is not satisfied with how the bullying has been addressed, they should refer to the school's complaints procedures, as outlined in the Bí Cineálta Procedures to Prevent and Address Bullying Behaviour for Primary and Post-Primary Schools.

Complaint to Ombudsman for Children:

- If a parent remains dissatisfied after the complaint process, they can contact the Ombudsman for Children if they believe the school's actions negatively affected the student.

Requests to take no action

A student reporting bullying behaviour may ask that a member of staff does nothing about the behaviour other than "look out" for them. The student may not want to be identified as having told someone about the bullying behaviour. They may feel that telling someone might make things more difficult for them. Where this occurs, it is important that the member of staff shows empathy to the student, deals with the matter sensitively and speaks with the student to work out together what steps can be taken to address the matter and how their parents will be informed of the situation. It is important that the student who has experienced bullying behaviour feels safe.

Parents may also make schools aware of bullying behaviour that has occurred and specifically request that the school take no action. ***Parents should put this request in writing to the school or be facilitated to do so where there are literacy, digital literacy or language barriers. However, while acknowledging the parent's request, schools may decide that, based on the circumstances, it is appropriate to address the bullying behaviour.***

Support

The school will use the following approaches to support those who experience, witness and display bullying behaviour (see Chapter 6 of the Bí Cineálta Procedures):

Students who experience Bullying or Witness Bullying:

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

- Pupils may need counselling and/or opportunities to participate in activities designed to raise their self-esteem, to develop their friendship and social skills and thereby build resilience whenever this is needed.
- In this regard the relevant Student Support Team will work closely with the student to ensure they are actively supported in the school and to engage in school-based activities they enjoy. They may be placed on our school's zone in/out support list and/or engage in check and connect.
- The schools' guidance department may also put in place a program of support in conjunction with the Year Head
- The learning strategies applied within the school will also allow for the enhancement of the pupil's self-worth
- Restorative conversations help rebuild confidence and relationships.
- Regular check-ins ensure the student feels safe and supported over time.

Students who display bullying Behaviour:

- Pupils who engage in bullying behaviour may need counselling to help them learn other ways of meeting their needs without violating the rights of others.
- The Year Head in conjunction with the relevant Student Support Team will work closely with the student in this regard.

Outside agency support:

- The school in certain circumstances may also seek the support and advice of TUSLA, EWO, NEPS, NCSE, second level school support services, HSE and any other agency deemed appropriate to support the school in dealing with incidents of bullying.

Links with other policies:

- Code of Behaviour
- Internet Acceptable Use Policy
- Child Safeguarding Statement

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 been reported since the last meeting, 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
- any wider strategies to prevent and address bullying behaviour where relevant.
- If any serious incidents of bullying behaviour have occurred which have had a serious adverse impact on a student
- If a parent has informed the school that a student has left the school because of reported bullying behaviour
- If any additional support is needed from the Board of Management
- If the school's Bí Cineálta policy needs urgent review in advance of the annual review.

This update does not contain personal or identifying information. See Chapter 7 of the Bí Cineálta Procedures.

The Minutes of the Board of Management meeting will document the number of new incidents of bullying behaviour; the number currently ongoing and the total number of incidents of bullying behaviour since the beginning of the school year.

The Minutes will also note where the Board has considered the bullying behaviour verbal update and document when the board has decided that an urgent review of the policy is required.

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, 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.

Appendix A

Identifying if bullying behaviour has occurred

To determine whether the behaviour reported is bullying behaviour the Year Head should consider the following questions:

1. Is the behaviour targeted at a specific 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 each of the questions above is **Yes**, then the behaviour is bullying behaviour and the behaviour should be addressed using the Bí Cineálta Procedures.

Note: One-off incidents may be considered bullying in certain circumstances. A single hurtful message posted on social media can be considered bullying behaviour as it has a high likelihood of being shared multiple times and thus becomes a repeated behaviour.

If the answer to any of these questions is **No**, then the behaviour is not bullying behaviour. Strategies to deal with inappropriate behaviour are provided for within the school's Code of Behaviour.

Appendix B

Alleged Bullying Incident Student Statement Form

DATE: _____

STUDENT: _____

DETAILS: Include time, place, names of alleged perpetrators, names of bystanders. Detail here both sides of the event

Appendix C

Student Friendly Bí Cineálta Policy

'Bí Cineálta' means Be Kind

In our school we have a BE KIND POLICY to stop bullying behaviour.

We will ask you each year what you think, what is working well and what we can do better in helping our school to be a kind and safe space to enjoy learning

REMEMBER: Bullying is behaviour when someone keeps being mean or hurtful to others, **ON PURPOSE, OVER and OVER again.**



We want everyone in our school TO FEEL SAFE AND HAPPY.

SO

IF YOU THINK YOU ARE BEING BULLIED TELL A TEACHER OR AN ADULT YOU CAN TRUST

IF YOU THINK SOMEONE ELSE IS BEING BULLIED YOU NEED TO TELL A TEACHER OR ANOTHER ADULT YOU CAN TRUST

When a student tells a staff member that they think they are being bullied **WE, AS A SCHOOL WILL:**

- ✓ Talk with that student
- ✓ Ask that student what they want to happen
- ✓ Make a plan
- ✓ Talk to parents
- ✓ Talk with the other student(s)
- ✓ Talk with the other students' parents



Appendix D

Guide to providing Bullying Behaviour Update for

Board of Management meeting of Mercy College

Having reviewed the details of the incidents of bullying behaviour that have been reported since the previous board of management meeting, the principal must provide the following information at each ordinary meeting of the board of management:

Total number of new incidents of bullying behaviour reported since the last board of management meeting.	
Total number of incidents of bullying behaviour currently ongoing.	
Total number of incidents of bullying behaviour reported since the beginning of this school year	

Where incidents of bullying behaviour have been reported since the last meeting, the update must include a verbal report which should include the following information where relevant:

- the trends and patterns identified such as the form of bullying behaviour, type of bullying behaviour if known, location of bullying behaviour, when it occurred etc
- the strategies used to address the bullying behaviour
- any wider strategies to prevent and address bullying behaviour
- if any serious incidents of bullying behaviour have occurred which have had a serious adverse impact on a student
- if a parent has informed the school that a student has left the school because of reported bullying behaviour
- if any additional support is needed from the board of management
- if the school's Bí Cineálta policy requires urgent review in advance of the annual review

This update should not include any personal information or information that could identify the students involved.

Appendix E

Review of the Bí Cineálta Policy

The Board of Management (the Board) must undertake an annual (calendar) review of the school's Bí Cineálta policy and its implementation in consultation with the school community. As part of the review, this document must be completed.

Bí Cineálta Policy Review

1. When did the Board formally adopt its Bí Cineálta policy to prevent and address bullying behaviour in accordance with the *Bí Cineálta Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools*? *Insert date when the Bí Cineálta policy was last adopted by the school.*
   _____/ _____/20_____

2. Where in the school is the student-friendly Bí Cineálta policy displayed?

3. What date did the Board publish the Bí Cineálta policy and the student-friendly policy on the school website? ___/___/20

4. How has the student-friendly policy been communicated to students?

5. How has the Bí Cineálta policy and student-friendly policy been communicated to parents

6. Have all school staff been made aware of the, school's Bí Cineálta policy and the *Bí Cineálta Procedures to Prevent and Address Bullying Behaviour for Primary and Post- Primary Schools*?

7. Does the Bí Cineálta policy document the strategies that the school uses to prevent bullying behaviour?

8. Has the Board received and minuted the Bullying Behaviour Update presented by the principal at every ordinary board meeting over the last calendar year?

9. Has the Board discussed how the school is addressing all reports of bullying behaviour?

10. Is the Board satisfied that all incidents of bullying behaviour are addressed in accordance with the school's Bí Cineálta Policy?

11. Have the prevention strategies in the Bí Cineálta policy been implemented?

12. Has the Board discussed the effectiveness of the strategies used to prevent bullying behaviour?

13. How have (a) parents, (b) students and (c) school staff been consulted with as part of the review of the Bí Cineálta Policy?

14. Outline any aspects of the school's Bí Cineálta policy and/or its implementation that have been identified as requiring further improvement as part of this review:

15. Where areas for improvement have been identified, outline how these will be addressed and whether an action plan with timeframes has been developed?

16. Does the student-friendly policy need to be updated as a result of this review and if so why?

17. Does the school refer parents to the complaints procedures if they have a complaint about how the school has addressed bullying behaviour?

18. Has a parent informed the school that a student has left the school due to reported bullying behaviour?

19. Has the Office of the Ombudsman for Children initiated or completed an investigation into how the school has addressed an incident of bullying behaviour?

Appendix F

Notification regarding the Board of Management's annual review of the school's Bí Cineálta Policy

The Board of Management of Mercy College confirms that the Board of Management's annual review of the school's Bí Cineálta Policy to Prevent and Address Bullying Behaviour, and its implementation, was completed at the board of management meeting on

11th July 2025

This review was conducted in accordance with the requirements of the Department of Education's *Bí Cineálta Procedures to Prevent and Address Bullying Behaviour for Primary and Post-Primary Schools.*

Signed: _____ Date: 11/7/25

(Chairperson of Board of Management)

Signed: _____ Date: 11/7/25

(Principal)

Date of next review: 11/6/2026

Appendix G

Student Behaviour Promise

Student Name: _____ **Class:** _____

I recognise that my fellow students and I are all unique in many ways - such as our hair colour, skin colour, clothing, height, weight, size, accents, religions, nationalities, sexual orientations, past and current homes, hobbies, personalities, academic abilities, study habits, athletic skills, musical preferences, and much more.

I don't want to be treated unfairly or made to feel bad because of any of these differences, or simply because someone might not like me.

I understand that I have the right to be different, and no one has the right to treat me unfairly or be unkind because of that.

I know I am entitled to fair and respectful treatment both in Mercy College, in line with the school's Bí Cineálta Policy & Code of Behaviour, and outside of school as well.

Likewise, I recognise that all students deserve to be treated with fairness, equality, and respect. It is wrong to treat anyone in any other way. Therefore, I promise to treat all my fellow students with fairness, equality, and respect, regardless of our differences or personal feeling.

In particular: (Handwrite below "I will always treat (Name) equally, fairly and respectfully")

_____

_____

_____

_____

Signed: Student: _____ Date: _____

Teacher: _____

Appendix H

Year Head Record

Date	**Student Name**	**Year Head Name**
What Happened?		**Targeted?** ☐ **Harmful?** ☐ **Repeated?** ☐ **3 ticks=bullying behaviour**
Where?		
When?		
Why?		
Type of Bullying		
THE FOLLOWING HAS BEEN ADDRESSED		**TICK BELOW**
Ensure the student experiencing bullying has been heard & reassured		
Conduct all conversations sensitively, consider age & ability of those involved		
Listen to the views of the student experiencing bullying behaviour Note of student views		
Log of Actions Taken • • •		

• •	
Inform parents of those involved	
If a parent requests ***no action be taken***, ensure this is put in writing & a record placed in the student file	
I have engaged with the students & parents involved no more than 20 school days since the initial information	
Log of dates of engagement • • • • •	
Engagement with external services/supports	
Copy of record placed in student file	