



**Portlaoise College**

**Anti-Bullying Policy**

**May 2018**

## **Introduction**

A Code of Behaviour Guidelines issued by the NEWB, the Board of Management of Portlaoise College has adopted the following anti-bullying policy within the framework of the school's overall Code of Conduct. This policy fully complies with the requirements of the Anti-Bullying Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools which were published in September 2013.

## **School Philosophy**

Students who attend Portlaoise College will be encouraged to reach their full potential mentally, physically, spiritually, emotionally and socially, in an atmosphere and environment in which they feel safe, valued and secure and in which respect for self and others is the norm. The Staff of our school, conscious of the need for a positive working environment, will encourage the involvement of the wider school community in the achievement of these aims through a 'whole school' approach in consultation with staff, students, parents, the Board of Management and other relevant agencies as appropriate.

## **Ethos**

Our school operates under the direct patronage of Laois & Offaly E.T.B. This policy has been developed in line with our mission statement which has, at its core, care of the student. The school believes that respect for the individual is essential for the smooth running of the school, where effective teaching and learning can take place.

## **Statement of Commitment**

The Board of Management of Portlaoise College regards any form of harassment or bullying of staff, students or parents as totally unacceptable and will respond seriously to any complaint by investigating thoroughly and taking appropriate action as outlined in this policy. This school acknowledges the right of each member of the school community to enjoy school in a secure environment. To achieve this, the school will endeavour to promote qualities of social responsibility, tolerance and understanding and habits of mutual respect, courtesy and an awareness of the interdependence of people in groups and community.

## **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 students and is therefore fully committed to the following key principles of best practice in preventing and tackling bullying behaviour:

- a. A positive school culture and climate which-
  - i. is welcoming of difference and diversity and is based on inclusivity;
  - ii. encourages students to disclose and discuss incidents of bullying behaviour in a non-threatening environment
  - iii. 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-
  - i. build empathy, respect and resilience in students;
  - ii. explicitly address the issues of cyber-bullying and identity-based bullying including in particular, homophobic and transphobic bullying.
- f. Effective supervision and monitoring of students
- g. Supports for staff
- h. Consistent recording, investigation and follow-up of bullying behaviour (including use of established intervention strategies)
- i. On-going evaluation of the effectiveness of the anti-bullying policy.

### **Definition of Bullying**

In accordance with the Anti-Bullying Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools bullying is defined as follows:

*“Bullying is unwanted negative behaviour, verbal, psychological or physical, conducted by an individual or group against another person (or persons) and which is repeated over time.”*

The following types of bullying behaviour are included in the definition of bullying

- **Deliberate Exclusion:** This includes malicious gossip and other forms of relational bullying.
- **Cyber-Bullying and Identity-Based Bullying:** This includes 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.
- **Physical Aggression:** This includes pushing, shoving, punching, kicking, poking or tripping people up and is more common among boys than girls.
- **Damage to Property:** This may result in damage to clothing, schoolbooks and other learning material or interference with a student’s locker or bicycle etc. Items of personal property may be effaced, broken, stolen or hidden.
- **Extortion:** Demands for money may be made, victims’ lunches or lunch money taken, victims may also be forced into theft of property for delivery to the bully. Sometimes, this tactic is used with the sole purpose of incriminating the victim.
- **Intimidation:** This is based on the use of very aggressive body language with the voice being used as a weapon.
- **Cyber Bullying:** Using mobile phones (text messages; Whatsapp groups etc.), e-mail or picture messages, social networking sites e.g. (Twitter, Snapchat, Instagram Facebook etc.) to abuse, frighten or spread rumours about others.
- **Abusive Phone Calls and Text Messages:** These are a form of verbal intimidation and the anonymous phone call is often used where teachers are the victims of bullying
- **Isolation:** A certain person is deliberately isolated, excluded or ignored by some or the entire class group. This practice is usually started by the person engaged in bullying behaviour and is more common among girls than boys. Passing notes,

whispering insults, drawing on blackboards etc. may also form part of this bullying behaviour.

- **Name Calling:** Persistent name calling directed at the same individual (s), which hurts insults, or humiliates should be regarded as a form of bullying behaviour, e.g. 'Dummy', 'dope', 'retard', 'swot', 'lick', 'teacher's pet', etc.
- **Slagging:** This behaviour usually refers to the good-natured banter which goes on as part of the normal social interchange between people. However, when it extends to very personal remarks aimed again and again at one individual about appearance, clothing, personal hygiene etc., then it assumes the form of bullying. It may take the form of suggestive remarks about a pupil's sexual orientation.
- **Bullying of School Personnel:** by means of physical assault, damage to property, verbal abuse, threats to people's families etc.

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 Conduct.

However, in the context of this policy, 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 Conduct. Where it is felt that bullying may amount to a criminal act, the Portlaoise College will seek legal advice and the matter will be reported to the Gardaí.

### **The Role of Staff**

Portlaoise College adopts a whole school approach to prevent bullying. All teachers have a responsibility to report any concerns in relation to bullying. Incidents of bullying will be communicated through the ladder of referral.



All communication will be recorded in line with the school procedures and records of communications will be documented.

## **Education and Prevention Strategies**

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

### ***Students***

- Students are the key to creating a climate in which bullying is not tolerated. Education about bullying is best carried out within the overall context of a healthy living programme and so will be integrated with units on self-esteem, assertiveness and relationships. A cross-curricular approach together with the S.P.H.E. programme can strongly reinforce the anti-bullying policy.
- Techniques to promote desired behaviour will be based on encouragement, praise and good actions.
- Students will be given clear information on a) the meaning of bullying b) the importance of telling and c) the help, which is available for the bully/victim.
- Annual Anti-Bullying Week, including L.G.B.T. Stand Up Week.
- The school policy on bullying will be explained to all students at the start of each academic year.

### ***Parents***

- Information and guidelines on bullying for parents will be made available to all parents.
- Bullying workshops will be given to raise awareness and to prevent bullying.

### ***Teachers***

- Every effort will be made to raise teachers' awareness of bullying and of the available techniques available to deal with such behaviour.
- Information and guidelines on bullying for teachers will be made available to all teachers.

### ***Cyber Bullying***

- If an incident of cyber bullying is being investigated, Portlaoise College reserves the right to ask a student to show their phone/electronic devices to the Year Head/Deputy Principal/Principal. If the student refuses to co-operate with this request, sanctions as per the Code of Conduct will be imposed.
- Cyber bullying will be treated in the same respect as any other form of bullying, as outlined above.

### ***Incidents outside of school***

Portlaoise College reserves the right to apply its Anti-Bullying Policy in respect of bullying that occurs at a location, activity, function or programme that is not school related if, in the opinion of the Principal/Deputy Principal and/or Board of Management, the alleged bully has

created a hostile environment at school for the victim, has infringed on the rights of the victim and/or has materially or substantially disrupted the education process or the order/operation of the school.

## **School Initiatives**

### ***Bullying Education Programmes***

**Anti-Bullying Week;** the school holds an annual Anti-Bullying Week which includes anti-bullying workshops and strategies aimed at raising awareness.

Following incidents of bullying, issues relating to the prevention of bullying need to be examined. Aspects may need to be altered which may make bullying less likely in the future. Students and teachers of S.P.H.E. will evaluate the programmes annually.

**School Journal;** the school Anti-Bullying Policy and rules related to bullying are clearly outlined in the school journal.

**Investigation Procedures;** Principal/assigned teacher, S.P.H.E Coordinator, will evaluate these annually.

**Policy;** The anti-bullying working group will review the policy annually in consultation with the wider school community.

**Evaluation;** *Students will conduct two surveys per year focusing on their attitudes towards bullying. The Anti-Bullying Team will evaluate the Anti-Bullying Policy annually.*

## **School Procedures**

It is vital that all incidents of bullying are taken seriously. Incidents are best investigated outside the classroom situation to avoid embarrassment to either victim or bully. All interviews should be conducted with sensitivity and with due regard to the rights of all students concerned. A low-key approach is recommended.

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:

- Bullying incident forms (See appendix 1) should be used in all cases by the staff member reporting the bullying. Staff will follow the ladder of referral, Anti-Bullying forms will be given to the tutor who will pass them on to the Year Head. The Year Head, in turn will give the forms to the Pastoral Care team and to the Principal/Deputy Principal.
- On receiving a report, the Year Head/Principal/Deputy Principal will speak to both the alleged bully and the alleged victim separately. Both bully and victim should give a written account of the incident(s). The investigating teacher should keep a written record of their discussions with those involved and these retained in the students' files. If it is established that bullying has taken place, the Year Head/Principal/Deputy Principal will decide (in consultation with management) on what sanctions are appropriate.

- At this stage, it is established whether parents/guardians should be contacted.
- In the event of an incident, a verbal warning will be issued to the students.
- A decision will be taken on the support strategy to be implemented for the victim and the bully. This may include:
  - Referral to school Pastoral Care Team
  - Reconciliation and Mediation
- Sanctions may be imposed on the bully in line with the school Code of Conduct.
- Gardaí may be contacted if appropriate.

### **Student Support**

A programme of support for those students involved in bullying behaviour and for the victim is an integral part of our intervention process. The schools support programme includes:

#### **Pastoral care and school counselling:**

- Victims may be referred on to the pastoral care team in the school for individual or group support.
- The bully may be referred to the Guidance and Counselling Team for support in addressing their behaviour patterns.

### **Reconciliation and Mediation**

There are circumstances where reconciliation between the parties is possible. However, in practice it may be more effective to tell the young people involved to leave each other alone. The same instruction should apply to friends on both sides.

Mediation through, the skilled facilitation of a teacher, may be sufficient to resolve the problem. The advantage of arranging and facilitating mediation for young people is that it involves them in problem solving at their own level.

It gives them a sense of ownership of the solution, rather than imposing it from outside. The process itself can be as valuable as the end result, because it allows divergent points of view and attitudes to emerge and be solved in a structured and safe way. The presence of an adult helps provide focus, fairness and safety to the interaction.

A crucial consideration in mediation is that a young person who has been victimised will need to feel confident enough to face a direct meeting with someone who has caused them suffering. The teacher should be aware that this may take time and that some young people may never feel confident enough to engage in the mediation process.

Mediation is not always an appropriate option e.g. if the young person insists on minimising the effects of their bullying behaviour, or has poor conscience development. In assessing the situation, the guiding principle should be that mediation should not make matters worse and that the bullying should stop.

### **Monitoring Progress**

After mediation, the Assigned Teacher should regularly monitor the relationship between bully and victim until such time as he/she is confident that the situation is resolved.

### **Further Action**

If the problem remains unresolved, the parents/guardians will be informed and a written record kept of all subsequent discussions. Such reports should be placed in the respective students' files. Parents will be informed of the problem and of the action being taken, with reference to the school policy. Parents will be encouraged to try to find out why their child has been bullying and to give practical support in coping with the problem.

In serious cases of bullying suspension, may be justified.

### **Supervision and Monitoring of Students**

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 students or staff or the harassment of students 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.

### **Policy Availability**

This policy has been made available to school personnel, published on the school website (or where none exists, is otherwise readily accessible to parents and students on request) and provided to the Parents' Association (where one exists). A copy of this policy will be made available to the Department and the patron if requested.

### **Review of Policy**

This policy and its implementation will be reviewed by the Board of Management once in every school year.

Written notification that the review has been completed will be made available to school personnel, published on the school website (or where none exists, be otherwise readily accessible to parents and students on request) and provided to the Parents' Association (where one exists).

A record of the review and its outcome will be made available, if requested, to the patron and the Department.

**This policy was adopted by the Board of Management of Portlaoise College on Thursday 3rd May 2018.**

**Date of next review: May 2019**

**Signed:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Chairperson  
Board of Management**



# Template for recording Bullying Behaviour

**1. Name of student being bullied and class group.**

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

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

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<b>3. Source</b> of bullying concern/report (tick relevant box(es))	<b>4. Location</b> of incidents (tick relevant box(es))
Student concerned <input type="checkbox"/>	Playground <input type="checkbox"/>
Other student <input type="checkbox"/>	Classroom <input type="checkbox"/>
Parent <input type="checkbox"/>	Toilets <input type="checkbox"/>
Teacher <input type="checkbox"/>	Corridor <input type="checkbox"/>
Other <input type="checkbox"/>	Other <input type="checkbox"/>

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

\_\_\_\_\_

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

Physical Aggression <input type="checkbox"/>	Cyber-bullying <input type="checkbox"/>
Damage to Property <input type="checkbox"/>	Intimidation <input type="checkbox"/>
Isolation/Exclusion <input type="checkbox"/>	Malicious Gossip <input type="checkbox"/>
Name Calling <input type="checkbox"/>	Other (specify) <input type="checkbox"/>

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

Homophobic	Disability/SEN related	Racist	Membership of Traveller community	Other (specify)
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

**8. Brief description of bullying behaviour and its impact.**

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**9. Details of actions taken.**

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Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

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