



# St. Mary's Diocesan School

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## Bí Cineálta Policy to Prevent and Address Bullying Behaviour

The Board of Management of St. Mary's Diocesan School 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 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.

The Board of Management recognises the very serious nature of bullying and the negative impact that it can have on the lives of pupils and is therefore fully committed to the following key principles of best practice in preventing and tackling bullying behaviour:

### 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

## 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.

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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.

### 1. Targeted Behaviour

Bullying involves intentional and harmful actions directed at others. It occurs when a student knowingly engages in unwanted behaviour that causes harm and is aware that their actions are perceived as harmful by the affected individual. This behaviour is neither accidental nor reckless. The harm caused can take various forms:

- Physical (e.g., injury, damage to property)
- Social (e.g., isolation, exclusion)
- Emotional (e.g., low self-esteem, anxiety, depression)

Such harm can have severe and long-lasting effects on the targeted student. However, if the harmful impact is unintentional, it is not classified as bullying. Nonetheless, these situations still require intervention under the school's code of behaviour.

### 2. Repeated Behaviour

Bullying is characterised by a repeated pattern of harmful behaviour over time. A single, intentional negative act offline, even if involving a power imbalance, is not considered bullying but should still be addressed under the school's behaviour policy. In contrast, a single harmful message, image, or video posted online can qualify as bullying if it is likely to be reshared or widely circulated.

### 3. Imbalance of Power

In bullying incidents, the targeted student often struggles to defend themselves due to a real or perceived imbalance of power. This power imbalance can manifest in various ways, including:

- Differences in physical factors such as size, strength, or age
- Social or economic factors like peer influence, status, or financial situation
- Personal attributes such as race, ethnic origin, religion, sexual orientation, gender identity, or disability
- Experience in care systems or receipt of special education

In cases of online (cyber) bullying, power imbalances may arise from factors like online anonymity, technological expertise, or control over harmful content. The targeted student may feel powerless to remove offensive material or escape the harassment.

#### **Behaviour That Is Not Bullying**

A single instance of negative behaviour, while harmful, does not constitute bullying. However, a hurtful message posted on social media may still be considered bullying if it is likely to be shared and cause ongoing harm. Bullying behaviour may be visible to a wide audience and is likely to be shared multiple times, thereby becoming repeated behaviour.

Disagreements between students, or situations where students do not want to be or remain friends, are not considered bullying unless they involve deliberate and repeated attempts to cause distress, exclude, or

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manipulate others, including efforts to influence friendship groups negatively.

Some students with special educational needs may have social communication difficulties, which can lead to behaviours that inadvertently cause harm to themselves or others. It is important to recognise that these behaviours are not deliberate or planned; in some situations, they are automatic responses beyond the student's control. Bullying is not characterised by accidental or reckless behaviour.

If a student experiences repeated harm but the behaviour causing it is unintentional, this does not qualify as bullying. Nevertheless, such behaviours, while not defined as bullying, can still be distressing. Schools should address these situations through strategies outlined in their Code of Behaviour.

### **Culture and Environment**

A positive and inclusive school culture and environment 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. Relationships between all members of the school community should be based on respect, care, integrity and trust. Open communication between the patron, boards of management, school staff, students and their parents help to foster a collaborative approach and shared responsibilities in relation to preventing and addressing bullying behaviour. The school leadership team influences the school culture and set the standards and expectations for the school community when preventing and addressing bullying behaviour. Each member of school staff has a responsibility to develop and maintain a school culture where bullying behaviour is unacceptable and to take a consistent approach to addressing bullying behaviour. Students can shape the school culture by promoting kindness and inclusion within their peer group and maintain a positive and supportive school environment for all. Parents, as active partners in their child's education, can help foster an environment where bullying behaviour is not tolerated through promoting empathy and respect.

## **Section A: 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 | 9 <sup>th</sup> May 2025    | Discussion and questionnaire                                        |
| Students     | 22 <sup>nd</sup> April 2025 | Questionnaire (whole student body)                                  |
|              | 13 <sup>th</sup> May 2025   | Discussion and review of student friendly version (Student Council) |

|                                                      |                             |               |
|------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------|---------------|
| Parents                                              | 19 <sup>th</sup> March 2025 | Questionnaire |
| Board of Management                                  | 10 <sup>th</sup> June 2025  | Discussion    |
| Date policy was approved: 10 <sup>th</sup> June 2025 |                             |               |
| Date policy was last reviewed: N/A (New policy)      |                             |               |

## Section B: Preventing Bullying Behaviour

This section sets out the prevention strategies that will be used by the school. These include strategies specifically aimed at preventing online bullying behaviour, homophobic and transphobic bullying behaviour, racist bullying behaviour, sexist bullying behaviour and sexual harassment as appropriate (see Chapter 5 of the Bí Cineálta procedures):

The Board of Management confirms that appropriate supervision and monitoring policies are in place to both prevent and address bullying behaviour and facilitate early intervention where possible. A proactive approach is encouraged during periods of supervision, which occurs before school and during morning and lunch breaks. Designated areas for socialising and eating are assigned to students.

We provide facilities such as a games rooms (board games, chess and lego clubs) and lunchtime sports along with a quiet space during designated lunchtimes. Each base class has a Tutor who meets with students for check-ins. A Student Support Team is in place, comprising the Principal, Deputy Principal, Guidance Counsellor and AEN Coordinator.

Our school community aims to prevent various forms of bullying, including cyberbullying, homophobic and transphobic bullying, racist bullying, sexist bullying, and sexual harassment, as outlined in the Bí Cineálta procedures. Our strategies include:

### Preventing Cyberbullying Behaviour

Technology and social media offer many positive opportunities for entertainment, social engagement, and education. However, increased use of technology has made students more vulnerable to cyberbullying and unacceptable online behaviour. At St. Mary's DS strategies to prevent cyberbullying include the following, which is not an exhaustive list:

- We promote digital literacy, digital citizenship, and safe online environments through initiatives such as a digital literacy plan, assemblies, SPHE classes, and visiting speakers.
- Assembly topics and guest speakers cover themes such as respectful and kind online relationships.
- We have developed and communicated an Acceptable Use Policy (AUP) for technology to students and parents.
- Appropriate online behaviour is outlined in the school's Code of Behaviour.

- We organise online safety events for parents, who play a key role in overseeing their children's online activities.
- Mobile phones are not allowed to be used during class time unless permitted by a teacher in the classroom for educational purposes.

### **Preventing Homophobic/Transphobic Bullying Behaviour**

All students, including gay, bisexual, and transgender students, have the right to feel safe and supported at school. At St. Mary's DS our strategies to prevent homophobic and transphobic bullying include the following, which is not an exhaustive list:

- We maintain an inclusive physical environment by displaying relevant posters and flags throughout the school.
- We hold workshops and seminars for students, staff, and parents to raise awareness of the impact of bullying, including homophobic behaviour.
- We encourage students to speak up when they witness homophobic behaviour.

### **Preventing Racist Bullying Behaviour**

Schools today are much more culturally diverse, with students from many different backgrounds. At St. Mary's DS we strive to prevent racist bullying by implementing the following strategies, which is not an exhaustive list:

- We foster a school culture that celebrates diversity, where students see their own identities reflected in the environment.
- We strive to showcase the school's cultural diversity through photos and social media content.
- We empower bystanders to report incidents of racist behaviour.
- We provide staff with resources to support students learning English as an additional language and to communicate effectively with parents from diverse backgrounds.
- We offer support for students from ethnic minority communities, including Traveller and Roma students, and maintain regular communication with their parents.
- We ensure that library resources and textbooks reflect the lived experiences of individuals from different national, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds.

### **Preventing Sexist Bullying Behaviour**

As a single sex school with a mixed staff, we place a strong focus on gender equality as part of our measures to create a supportive and respectful environment. At St. Mary's DS, our strategies to prevent sexist bullying include the following, which is not an exhaustive list:

- We ensure that staff model respectful behaviour and treat all students equally.
- We provide equal opportunities for all students to participate in school activities.
- We celebrate diversity by acknowledging and valuing the contributions of all students.
- We organise awareness campaigns, workshops, and presentations on gender equality and respect during Friendship/Anti-Bullying Week and at other times throughout the year.

### **Preventing Sexual Harassment**

Preventing sexual harassment requires a comprehensive approach focused on education, awareness, and clear policies. At St. Mary's DS, we have a zero-tolerance policy for sexual harassment, which is never dismissed as teasing or banter. Strategies include the following, which is not an exhaustive list:

- We use the updated SPHE curriculum to educate students about healthy relationships and respectful behaviour.
- We promote positive role models within the school community.
- We actively challenge harmful gender stereotypes that contribute to sexual harassment.

The school has the following supervision and monitoring strategies in place to prevent and address bullying behaviour (see Chapter 5 of the Bí Cineálta procedures):

- Promotion of a positive school climate where RESPECT is key
- Effective Leadership
- A Whole-School Approach
- A Fair and Transparent Code of Positive Behaviour
- Acceptable Use Policy
- Digital Awareness
- Encouragement of Peer Support
- Support for EAL (English as an Additional Language) students
- Awareness Programs in CSPE, SPHE, and RSE
- Anti-Bullying Workshops and Guest Speakers
- Effective supervision and monitoring of students
- Consistent Recording, Investigation, and Follow-Up of Bullying Behaviour
- Ongoing Evaluation of the Effectiveness of the Bí Cineálta Procedures

## Section C: Addressing Bullying Behaviour

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

Classroom teachers can refer any issues to Year Heads who will liaise with Deputy Principals/Principal.

The primary aim in addressing reports of bullying behaviour should be to stop the bullying behaviour and to restore, as far as practicable, the relationships of the students involved, rather than to apportion blame. All staff (class teachers, year heads, guidance counsellor, deputy principals, principal) have a responsibility to report suspected incidences of bullying. These should be brought to the attention of the Year Head who will complete a Bullying Incident Report Form (Appendix 1).

Students and or/parents should report bullying behaviour to any member of staff with whom they feel comfortable, but their main point of contact will be the Year Head of that student(s) and they should be contacted first.

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):

***To determine whether reported behaviour is bullying, consider the following questions:***

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

If the answer to all these questions is "Yes," then the behaviour is considered bullying and should be addressed according to the Bí Cineálta Procedures.

Where an incident of cyber bullying has occurred the behaviour does not have to be repeated, as in its nature it will be repeated, whether that was intended or not.

### ***Strategies for Addressing Bullying Behaviour***

- Engage with each student individually.
- Document the incident and actions taken.
- Review the situation with students and their parents no later than 20 school days after initial engagement.
- If bullying persists, re-evaluate strategies in consultation with students and their parents and set a new timeframe where needed.

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):

### ***Supports***

The school may seek support from various resources when working with students affected by bullying, including:

- Counselling services (through guidance or other services)
- Building self-esteem and developing social skills
- Restorative practices to rebuild and maintain relationships
- Cooperation with parents
- Referral to outside agencies if necessary
- National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS)
- Oide
- Webwise
- National Parents Council
- Dublin City University (DCU) Anti-Bullying Centre
- Tusla

### **Requests to Take No Action**

A student reporting bullying behaviour may ask a member of staff not to take any action other than to "look out" for them. The student may not want to be identified as the person who reported the bullying behaviour. They might worry that telling someone could make their situation worse. In such cases, it is crucial for the staff

member to show empathy, handle the situation sensitively, and collaborate with the student to determine what steps can be taken to address the issue. Together, they should agree on how the student's parents will be informed. It is essential that the student who has experienced bullying feels safe and supported.

Parents may also notify the school of bullying behaviour and request that no action be taken. In such instances, parents should put their request in writing or be facilitated to do so if there are literacy, digital literacy, or language barriers. While the school should acknowledge the parent's request, it may still decide, based on the circumstances, that addressing the bullying behaviour is appropriate.

## Procedures to Prevent and Address Bullying Behaviour for Primary and Post Primary Schools

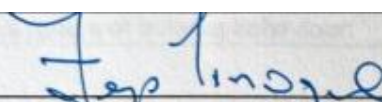
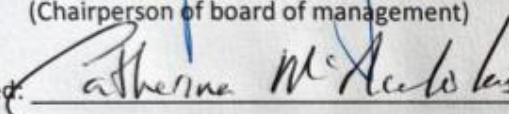
All bullying behaviour will be recorded on Appendix 1. This will include the type of behaviour, where and when it took place, and the date of the engagement with students and parents. The actions and support agreed to address bullying behaviour will be documented. If the bullying behaviour is a child protection concern the matter will be addressed without delay in accordance with *Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools*.

## Section D: Oversight

The principal will present an update on bullying behaviour at each board of management meeting (Appendix 2). 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 occurred, 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 and any wider strategies to prevent and address bullying behaviour where relevant. This update does not contain personal or identifying information. See Chapter 7 of the Bí Cineálta procedures.

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 and is also available on our website and in hard copy on request.

This policy and its implementation will be reviewed (Appendix 3), 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: <u></u> | Date: <u>10/6/25</u> |
| (Chairperson of board of management)                                                               |                      |
| Signed: <u></u> | Date: <u>10/6/25</u> |
| (Principal)                                                                                        |                      |

## Appendix 1

## Bullying Incident Report Form

1. Name of student being bullied: \_\_\_\_\_

2. Base class: \_\_\_\_\_

3. Name(s) and class(es) of students allegedly engaged in bullying behaviour:

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4. Source of bullying concern/report (tick as relevant):

|                   |  |
|-------------------|--|
| Student concerned |  |
| Other Student(s)  |  |
| Teacher           |  |
| Parent            |  |
| Other:            |  |

5. Location of incident(s) (tick as relevant)

|               |  |               |  |
|---------------|--|---------------|--|
| School Yard   |  | Classroom     |  |
| Bus           |  | Toilets       |  |
| Out of School |  | Changing Room |  |
| Corridor      |  | Other         |  |

6. Name of person(s) who reported the alleged bullying concern: \_\_\_\_\_

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7. Type of bullying behaviour (tick as relevant):

|                             |  |                          |  |
|-----------------------------|--|--------------------------|--|
| Physical                    |  | Gender Identity Bullying |  |
| Verbal                      |  | Extortion                |  |
| Damage to Personal Property |  | Written Bullying         |  |
| Exclusion/Isolation         |  | Relational Bullying      |  |
| Cyber Bullying              |  | Other                    |  |
| Intimidation                |  |                          |  |

8. Brief description of bullying behaviour:

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### 9. Impact of bullying behaviour:

10. Details of action taken:

Date submitted to Principal/Deputy Principal: \_\_\_\_\_

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_ (Year Head)

## Appendix 2

### Providing Bullying Behaviour Update - Board of Management Oversight Report

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

Date of last meeting: \_\_\_\_\_

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.

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### Appendix 3

## 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*?

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*?

Yes \_\_\_\_ / No \_\_\_\_

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

Yes \_\_\_\_ / No \_\_\_\_

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

Yes \_\_\_\_ / No \_\_\_\_

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

Yes \_\_\_\_ / No \_\_\_\_

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

Yes \_\_\_\_ / No \_\_\_\_

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

Yes \_\_\_\_ / No \_\_\_\_

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

Yes \_\_\_\_ / No \_\_\_\_

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

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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:

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

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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?

Yes \_\_\_\_ / No \_\_\_\_

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

Yes \_\_\_\_ / No \_\_\_\_

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?

Yes \_\_\_\_ / No \_\_\_\_

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