

School Bí Cineálta Policy to Prevent and Address Bullying Behaviour

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The Board of Management of Mercy College Woodford 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.

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.

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	31/2/25 6/5/25 12/5/25	Half school day closure. Staff worked in groups and feedback to plenary session where views could be discussed. Staff Survey. Draft policy shared with staff for consultation.
Students	27/2/25 March/April 2025 April 30 th - May 3 rd 2025	The Student Council consulted and drafted questions for the student survey. All students were consulted to provide suggestions for Bí Cineálta Student Friendly Policy in SPHE classes Student Survey.
Parents	May 2025 9/5/25	Parent Survey. Draft policy shared with Parents Association for consultation.
Board of Management	7/5/25	Draft policy shared with BOM for consultation.
Wider school community as appropriate, for example, bus drivers	31/1/25	School ancillary staff participated in staff consultation day.
Date policy was approved: 27/05/2025		
Date policy was last reviewed:		

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 Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework for Practice provides four key areas for a holistic, whole school approach to wellbeing promotion.

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 sets 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

Mercy College Woodford is fully committed to these principles and will seek to prevent bullying behaviour through the following strategies:

- Create a school culture where bullying behaviour is unacceptable and a consistent approach to addressing bullying behaviour is followed
- Create a positive school culture and climate which is welcoming of difference and diversity and is based on inclusivity
- Promote respectful relationships across the school community
- Involve parents as active partners in fostering an environment where bullying behaviour is not tolerated
- As a school community we develop our school as a telling environment by encouraging pupils to disclose and discuss incidents of bullying behaviour they witness or experience. We aim to create a safe and supportive space where students feel empowered to report bullying incidents.
- Promote the concept of a trusted adult by encouraging students to report if they or another student is experiencing bullying behaviour. Staff support this strategy by reassuring the student they have done the right thing by reporting the behaviour and the staff member should, without delay, inform the member of staff who has responsibility for addressing bullying behaviour
- Create safe spaces in our school buildings and outdoor spaces with adequate and vigilant supervision. All reasonable measures are put in place to ensure the safety of students and to supervise students when attending school or school activities.
- Incorporate artwork and signs, including students own artwork, to promote our school values such as equality, inclusion and respect

Curriculum (Teaching and Learning)

In Mercy College Woodford we strive to:

- Promote an approach to teaching and learning that is both collaborative and respectful.
- Provide students with regular opportunities to work in small groups with their peers, which help build a sense of connection, belonging and empathy among students.
- Encourage students to work with as many different peers, in as many different contexts as possible, fostering inclusion and respect for diversity.
- Provide students with opportunities to understand causes and effects of bullying, cyber-bullying, the issue of identity-based bullying including homophobic and transphobic bullying.

Ways in which we work to achieve this:

- Teach SPHE and RSE content which fosters students' well-being and self confidence as well as promoting personal responsibility for their own behaviours and actions.
- Wellbeing classes on digital literacy including digital citizenship education and responsibility online.
- Staff model respectful behaviour towards colleagues, students and visitors in our school environment.
- Opportunities are provided for curricular activities where topics on behaviour can be linked to students own context.
- Students are encouraged to take part in extra-curricular activities to develop a sense of self-worth, inclusion and respect for each other.
- Students are given regular opportunities to work in small groups with peers, which can help build a sense of connection, belonging and empathy.
- The school will publish the school's anti-bullying policy on the school website.
- Staff will be involved in the review of the policy at agreed intervals.

Policy and Planning

The wellbeing of the school community underlies all school policies and plans. In Mercy College Woodford we strive to:

- Raise awareness of bullying as a form of unacceptable behaviour with school management, teachers, students, parents/guardians.
- Promote a school ethos which encourages students to disclose and discuss incidents of bullying behaviour.
- Ensure appropriate supervision and monitoring measures through which all areas of school activity are kept under observation.
- Develop procedures for noting, investigating and dealing with incidents of bullying behaviour.
- Implement a programme of support for those affected by bullying behaviour and for those involved in bullying behaviour.
- Work with appropriate agencies in countering all forms of bullying and promoting anti bullying behaviour.
- Effective leadership is a key component with Principal, Deputy Principal, DLP, DDLP, and School Leadership Team focused on supporting the implementation of this policy.
- Engage in appropriate teacher professional development courses to prevent and address bullying behaviour and sharing this knowledge and experience.
- Support the participation of students in the development of school policies to increase awareness, incorporate student voice and ensure effective implementation.

Relationships and Partnerships

At Mercy College we recognise that strong interpersonal connections are a vital part of effectively preventing and addressing bullying behaviour. Strategies to strengthen relationships and partnerships between members of our school community include the following, which is not an exhaustive list:

- Age and stage appropriate awareness initiatives that engage the student body in looking at their own behaviour including dealing with navigating friendships.
- Supporting the active participation of students in school life such as involvement with the student council or other student committees.
- Supporting the active participation of parents in school life, such as involvement in the parents association, including those who may find it difficult or daunting to engage due to language or cultural barriers.

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. 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 digital literacy classes, SPHE classes, and Webwise Student Ambassadors.
- Assembly topics and guest speakers cover themes such as respectful and kind online relationships.
- We have developed and communicated an Internet Acceptable Use Policy for technology to students and parents.

Preventing Homophobic/Transphobic Bullying Behaviour

All students, including gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender students, have the right to feel safe and supported at school. At Mercy College Woodford, our strategies to prevent homophobic and transphobic bullying include the following, which is not an exhaustive list:

- We empower bystanders to report incidents of homophobic or transgender bullying 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 Mercy College Woodford, 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 resources and textbooks reflect the lived experiences of individuals from different national, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds.

Preventing Sexist Bullying Behaviour

At Mercy College Woodford, we place a strong focus on gender equality as part of our measures to create a supportive and respectful environment. 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, regardless of their sex.
- We provide equal opportunities for all students to participate in school activities, regardless of gender.
- We celebrate diversity by acknowledging and valuing the contributions of all students.
- Encourage parents to reinforce these values of respect at home.

Preventing Sexual Harassment

Preventing sexual harassment requires a comprehensive approach focused on education, awareness, and clear policies. At Mercy College Woodford, 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 policies in place to prevent and address bullying behaviour (see Chapter 5 of the Bí Cineálta procedures):

At Mercy College Woodford there are a range of policies in place to support the implementation of the Bí Cineálta policy to prevent and address bullying behaviour including:

- Student Friendly Bí Cineálta Policy
- Student Code of Behaviour Policy
- Child Protection Policy
- Internet Acceptable Use Policy
- Pastoral Care Policy
- Attendance Policy
- Ensuring school rules and policies apply on trips and providing adequate supervision on trips or activities
- Teachers on supervision duty must be vigilant, encouraging students to participate in extra-curricular activities
- Staff model positive and respectful behaviour

Section C: Addressing Bullying Behaviour

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

The relevant Year Head

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):

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. All staff (class teachers, year heads, guidance counsellor, deputy principal, principal) have a responsibility to report suspected incidences of bullying. These should be brought to the attention of the relevant Year Head. Students and or/parents can 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).

Identifying if bullying behaviour has occurred

- Parents/guardians and students are required to co-operate with any investigation and assist the school in resolving any issues and restoring, as far as is practicable, the relationships of the parties involved as quickly as possible.
- Staff members should take a calm, unemotional problem-solving approach.
- Where possible incidents should be investigated outside the classroom situation to ensure the privacy of all involved. It may be helpful to ask the students involved to write down their account of the incident
- All conversations should be conducted with sensitivity and with due regard to the rights of all students concerned
- If a group is involved, each member should be interviewed individually first. Thereafter, all those involved should be met as a group, if appropriate
- Each member of a group should be supported through the possible pressures that they may face from other members of the group after the interview by the Year Head

• When analysing incidents of bullying behavior, the relevant Year Head should consider the following: what, where, when and why?

The definition of bullying provided in Chapter 2 of the Bí Cineálta Procedures sets out clear criteria to help in identifying if bullying behaviour has occurred.

Consider the following questions:

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

If the answer to each of the questions above is **Yes**, then the behaviour is bullying behaviour and should be addressed using the Bí Cineálta Policy

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

Where bullying behaviour has occurred

- In cases where it has been determined by the relevant Year Head, in consultation with senior management, that bullying behaviour has occurred, the parent/guardian of the parties involved should be contacted at an early stage to inform them of the matter and consult with them on the actions to be taken (by reference to the school policy). The school should give parents/guardians an opportunity of discussing ways in which they can reinforce or support the actions being taken by the school and the supports provided to the students.
- It is important to listen to the views of the student who is experiencing the bullying behaviour as to how best to address the situation.
- Where the relevant Year Head has determined, in consultation with senior management, that a student has been engaged in bullying behaviour, it should be made clear to the student that they are in breach of the school's Bí Cineálta Anti-Bullying policy. Efforts should be made to help the student to see the situation from the perspective of the student experiencing the bullying behaviour.
- Staff should be fair and consistent in their approach to address bullying behaviour. Both the student who is experiencing bullying behaviour and the student who is displaying bullying behaviour need support.
- It must be made clear to all involved (each set of students and parents/guardians) that in any situation where disciplinary sanctions under the Code of Behavior are required, this is a private matter between the students being disciplined, his or her parents/guardians and the school.
- A record should be kept of the engagement with all involved.

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 report the issue to the relevant Year Head. Together, the Year Head and student discuss 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.

Determining if bullying behaviour has ceased

- The relevant Year Head must engage with the students and parents involved no more

than 20 days after the initial discussion to review progress.

- Important factors to consider as part of this engagement are the nature of the bullying behaviour, the effectiveness of the strategies used to address the bullying behaviour and the relationship between the students involved.
- The relevant teacher should document the review with students and their parents to determine if the bullying behaviour has ceased and the views of students and their parents in relation to this.
- The date that it has been determined that the bullying behaviour has ceased should also be recorded.
- Any engagement with external services/supports should also be noted.
- Ongoing supervision and support may be needed for the students involved even where bullying behaviour has ceased.
- If the bullying behaviour has not ceased the relevant teacher should review the strategies used in consultation with the students involved and their parents. A timeframe should be agreed for further engagement until the bullying behaviour has ceased.
- If it becomes clear that the student who is displaying the bullying behaviour is continuing to display the behaviour, then consideration should be given to using the strategies to deal with inappropriate behaviour as provided for within the school's Code of Behaviour. If disciplinary sanctions are considered, this is a matter between the relevant student, their parents and the school.
- If a parent(s) is not satisfied with how the bullying behaviour has been addressed by the school, in accordance with the Bí Cineálta Procedures to Prevent and Address Bullying Behaviour for Primary and Post-Primary Schools, they should be referred to the school's complaints procedures.
- If a parent is dissatisfied with how a complaint has been handled, they may make a complaint to the Ombudsman for Children if they believe that the school's actions have had a negative effect on the student.

Recording Bullying Behaviour

- All incidents of bullying behaviour should be recorded. This record should document the form and type of bullying behaviour, if known (see Section 2.5 and 2.7 of the Bí Cineálta procedures), where and when it took place and the date of the initial engagement with the students involved and their parents.
- The record should include the views of the students and their parents regarding the actions to be taken to address the bullying behaviour.
- It should document the review with students and their parents to determine if the bullying behaviour has ceased and the views of students and their parents in relation to this.
- It is important to document the date of each of these engagements and the date that it has been determined that the bullying behaviour has ceased.
- Any engagement with external services/supports should also be noted.
- These records should be retained in accordance with the school's record keeping policy and in line with data protection regulations.
- A copy of this record should be noted on a Student Support File if one exists for the student. This will assist the school's student support team in providing a consistent and holistic response to support the wellbeing of the students involved. Where a Student Support Plan exists, the plan should be updated to incorporate response strategies and associated supports.

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 will be listened to at all times
- Opportunities will be provided for the students who experience, witness or display bullying behaviour to participate in activities designed to raise their self-esteem, to develop friendships and social skills and build resilience as needed
- Students will be given the opportunity to meet with the school Counsellor and Year Head on a regular basis or as deemed necessary
- If a student wishes to meet with Year Head/School Counsellor, ensure that adequate time is allowed for the same, adhering to privacy and confidentiality and a safe place for these meetings to take place
- Year Head/Deputy Principal/Principal liaise regularly with parents
- Make relevant staff aware (on the grounds of permission from parents/students to do so) of the situation if deemed that it would benefit the process.
- Link in with outside agencies as needed such as NEPS, Oide, Webwise, National Parents Council, Dublin City University (DCU) Anti-Bullying Centre
- Contact Tusla for advice in cases where it is considered that bullying behaviour is a child protection concern
- Monitor supports regularly, review and adapt as necessary
- If students require further counselling or supports the school will endeavour to liaise with the appropriate agencies to organise same - This may be for students who experience, witness or display bullying behaviour

All bullying behaviour will be recorded. 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 supports 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. 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, 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: Mattie Quinn
(Chairperson of board of management)

Date: 27/5/25

Signed: Angela Ryan
(Acting Principal)

Date: 27/5/25