

Shimna Integrated College

Anti-Bullying Policy

1. Introduction

Bullying in any form and by anyone, student or member of staff, is totally unacceptable within, or on the way to and from, the college. With regard to bullying, the college is clear that:

- students have a right to learn free from fear;
- bullying behaviour will not be tolerated;
- the needs of the bullied students are paramount;
- bullied students will be listened to and supported;
- bullies will be supported in modifying their behaviour;
- reported incidents will be taken seriously and thoroughly investigated;
- and the parent(s)/guardian(s) of both the bullied and bullying students will be involved at the appropriate stage.

The governors and college staff are well aware that bullying is an issue that needs to be dealt with promptly and effectively when it takes place. Consequently, the college invests in a culture and ethos in which students are encouraged to, and become increasingly confident in, expressing their views, know that they will be listened to and that their views are respected and acted upon.

2. Definition

The following is the college's definition of bullying:

“Bullying is deliberately hurtful behaviour, repeated over a period of time, where it is difficult for the victim to defend her/himself.” [Department of Education, 1999.]

At the individual level, bullying is an attack on a student's right to be safe at college; at college level, it is an attack on our ethos.

3. Forms of Bullying

a. Bullying may take a variety of forms, including the following:

- physical eg hitting, kicking, pinching and other forms of physical violence; spitting; theft; damage to belongings; or using implements to cause deliberate injury to another student;
- verbal eg demanding money; threats, offensive name-calling; taunting or disparaging comments; spreading malicious rumours or gossip; or making fun of peers;
- non-verbal eg menacing looks, stealing property;
- exclusion eg not being talked to by peers; being left out of activities; or not invited to social events;
- extortion eg taking money or property.

It should be recognised at all levels in the college that bullying may arise in the context of disability, sectarianism, homophobia, class prejudice or racism.

b. Cyber-Bullying and Harassment

Cyber-bullying (on-line aggression) is the use of electronic information and communication devices such as e-mail, instant messaging, text messaging, mobile phone pagers and defamatory web sites to bully or otherwise harass an individual or group through personal attacks or other means. To protect students from this form of bullying, the college will ensure that students are aware of:

- how to protect themselves from mobile phone theft;
- how to disable the phone if it is lost or stolen;
- rules concerning the possession and use of mobile phones within the college; and
- how to react when threatened whether through a mobile phone e-mail, chat room or instant messenger services;
- how to react to photographs taken without permission.

Our deputy designated staff member Aine Harrison is a trained CEOP Ambassador and trains all our year 8 students and provides refresher sessions for all KS3 students.

Cyber-bullying has become a serious and distressing form of bullying for those involved. The college needs and expects parents to cooperate fully with the decisions taken to reduce the possibility of such bullying. As such bullying often takes place out of college, parents are requested to inform the college at the earliest opportunity, if their child is being bullied or harassed in this way.

4. Signs and Symptoms of Bullying

Signs and symptoms of bullying include:

- behavioural eg continually losing money; deterioration in school performance; increased absenteeism; truancy; refusal to go outside at break or lunch times; request for a class move;
- emotional eg loss of confidence and bursts of tears in class and withdrawal; afraid to travel home on school transport; insisting on being collected by parent/guardian;
- physical eg development of mystery cuts and bruises; damaged clothes and belongings;

5. Preventative Measures

Preventative measures with regard to bullying used by the college include:

- creating a bully-free ethos;
- a structured pastoral provision;
- a taught pastoral curriculum that includes the issue of bullying and provides the students with opportunities to discuss related matters;
- college assemblies which are a regular forum for making explicit the significance of shared responsibility for the anti-bullying ethos of the college;
- the provision of a college-based counselling service implemented by external staff;
- the implementation of a detailed discipline policy that stresses positive approaches to discipline and student behaviour;

- periodic college-based staff focus and/or development for all members of the college staff;
- specific in-service training provided for staff,
- encouraging students to report incidents of bullying that may not be apparent to college staff;
- the involvement of the parent(s)/guardian(s) of the students concerned; and
- the use of the sanctions of suspension and expulsion for students who persist in bullying.

6. What Students Need to Know About Bullying

It is important that students learn via the above measures that:

- they have a right not to be bullied in college;
- they can talk about it no matter who in the college, adult or student, is bullying them;
- it is the bully, not the student being bullied, who has the problem; the student being bullied is not to blame if s/he is bullied;
- they are not alone, despite what the bully may have done or said to make them feel so;
- they cannot – and are not expected to – deal with a bullying situation by themselves, and they are entitled to help;
- they need to speak out and can trust staff to take their concerns seriously and to support them;
- they have responsibilities in supporting in whatever way possible, their peers who are being bullied;
- they have personal responsibilities – to tell, if they become the bully’s target, and to help protect any student who they know is being bullied.

Students being bullied should be encouraged to keep a diary of incidents so that, when they feel strong enough to talk about it, they have a record of what has happened to them.

7. Responsibilities

The responsibility for ensuring a safe learning environment rests with the whole college community. More specific responsibilities include the following:

a. Staff Responsibilities

Our staff will:

- be aware of what may be going on in their classrooms in the form of, for example, sectarian, racist, class prejudiced and homophobic comments, name calling and a student being isolated, and deal with it there and then;
- deal urgently with all reported incidents of bullying;
- be effective role models in all their dealings with their students;
- ensure that their dealings with students cannot be misinterpreted as a form of bullying;
- seek to reduce the fear that some students have of the possible negative repercussions of reporting bullying incidents;
- deal with bullying incidents confidentially and where possible, provide anonymity for the student being bullied;
- foster in student’s self-esteem, self-respect and respect for others;

- demonstrate by example the high standards of personal and social behaviour expected of students;
- discuss bullying with all classes so that every student learns about the damage it causes both to the student who is bullied and to the bully, and the importance of telling a teacher when it happens;
- be alert to signs of distress and other possible indications of bullying;
- listen **attentively** to students who have been bullied, take seriously what they say and act to support and protect them;
- be aware of particular places in the college buildings and grounds where bullying is more likely to take place, and be willing to be actively on the lookout for such behaviour when passing by them.
- report suspected cases as required by the college;
- follow up any complaint about bullying by a parent and report back promptly and fully on the action taken; deal with observed incidents of bullying promptly and effectively, in accordance with agreed procedures;
- cooperate fully in any investigation into bullying incidents in the college or beyond;

b. Students' Responsibilities

We expect our students to:

- behave in a caring manner towards other members of the college community, and to help create a climate where bullying is not accepted;
- refrain from making sectarian, racist, homophobic, class prejudiced or other hurtful and distressing comments about their peers;
- include their peers in activities rather than exclude and isolate them;
- refrain from becoming involved in any kind of bullying, even at the risk of incurring temporary unpopularity;
- intervene to protect the student who is being bullied, unless it is unsafe to do so;
- report to any member of staff, any witnessed or suspected instances of bullying, to dispel any climate of secrecy and help to prevent further instances;
- ensure that they do not become involved in bullying activities when travelling to and from the college by bus or on foot;
- cooperate in any investigation into bullying incidents in the college.

Anyone who becomes the target of a bully / bullies need not suffer in silence, but have the courage to speak out, to put an end to their own suffering and that of other potential targets.

c. Parents' Responsibilities

We ask parents/guardians to support their children and the college by:

- watching for signs of distress or unusual behaviour in their child, which might be evidence of bullying;
- advising their child to report any bullying to a member of staff;
- advising their child not to retaliate violently to any form of bullying;
- being sympathetic towards their child and reassuring them that the appropriate action will be taken;
- keeping a written record of any instances of bullying reported by their child;

- informing the college of any suspected or actual bullying, even if their child is not involved;
- co-operating with the college, if their child is accused of bullying, trying to ascertain the truth and point out the implications of bullying for the bullied and the bully.

d. Responsibilities of All

All members of the college community will work together to combat bullying.

8. Procedures for Dealing With Bullying

a. Supporting Students who are Bullied

When members of staff are alerted to the possibility of bullying, they will deal with it firmly, sensitively and with the necessary degree of priority. They will take all necessary steps to identify those responsible and apply appropriate preventative measures. They will also:

- listen sympathetically and take seriously what they are told;
- encourage the bullied student to be open and honest about what happened and who was involved;
- assure the bullied student that s/he is not to blame;
- ask the student what s/he would like to see happening to resolve the problem;
- ask the student what s/he thinks would make the matter worse;
- assure the student that s/he will be supported and protected;
- agree on an appropriate form of action.

In serious cases where a student is upset, s/he will be offered the continuing support of a sympathetic member of staff or appropriate counselling.

b. Dealing with Bullies

The college recognises its responsibility to work with students who are bullies so as to change their unacceptable behaviour. Bullying behaviour will be treated the same as other forms of unacceptable behaviour. In dealing with bullies, members of staff will:

- talk calmly and dispassionately with them;
- ask them to think and talk about the implications of their behaviour for the student they bullied and for themselves;
- seek to discover any underlying reasons for the behaviour;
- assure the student that such behaviour is unacceptable and will not be tolerated;
- seek assurances that it will not be repeated; and
- make an objective and factual report that is signed and dated.

In order to reduce the possibility of the bully continuing with her/his behaviour, it may be necessary to take measures such as:

- separating the bully/bullied from being in the same class;
- making sure their paths do not cross at break or lunch time; and
- reorganising their travel arrangements.

The future behaviour of those who bully will be carefully monitored. ***Persistent bullying by a student will result in her/his suspension, and possibly expulsion, from the college.***

In more serious instances, the form tutor and/or the principal will become involved. As and when they think it appropriate, they will involve the parent(s)/guardian(s) and, if they think it necessary, external support personnel. In cases where adults are found to be bullying students, the principal will be involved.

c. Record Keeping

The college will keep detailed objective and factual records, signed and dated by the staff members involved, of bullying incidents, safely and confidentially.

9. Staff Development

The college will provide staff opportunities to explore the issue of bullying and to keep them informed about advice and guidelines from the Department of Education and/or the Education and Library Board. Identified members of staff will attend in-service courses focusing on dealing with bullying provided by the Education and Library Board and voluntary support agencies such as the NSPCC and Save the Children.

10. External Support Agencies

Initially, the college staff will attempt to deal with bullying incidents. They will, however, not hesitate to seek the advice, skills and expertise available to them from external statutory and voluntary support agencies.

11. Monitoring and Evaluation

The college will monitor the implementation of this anti-bullying policy to ensure that it is effective and takes account of guidelines produced by the Department of Education and the Education Authority and to ensure that the students learn in an environment free from fear.

12. Complaints Procedure

Parents/guardians who have any concerns about bullying matters may, by prior arrangement, discuss these concerns with their child's teacher/s. Those who wish to make a complaint in relation to bullying, should contact the principal. If they are not satisfied with the outcome, they may refer the matter to the chairperson of the Board of Governors who will deal with the matter as promptly as possible and, in due course, will respond in writing to them. A copy of the college's Complaints Policy is available from the college web site or, on request, from the college office.

13. Conclusion

The college recognises that bullying is a serious and unacceptable form of behaviour and will seek to implement this policy, along with those in relation to discipline and pastoral care, so as to minimise its incidence and the consequent negative effects for individuals.

The Board of Governors agrees with, and fully supports the contents and implementation of this policy.