



VIRGIN MARY GIRLS' NATIONAL SCHOOL

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Anti-Bullying Policy

Bullying is unwanted, aggressive behaviour among school-aged children that involves a real or perceived power imbalance. The behaviour is repeated, or has the potential to be repeated, over time. Bullying includes actions such as making threats, spreading rumours, attacking someone physically or verbally, and excluding someone from a group on purpose.

The Virgin Mary Girls' School community believes that each pupil has a right to an education free from fear and intimidation. Our ethos is to foster self-esteem in an all-inclusive harmonious environment. Every member of the school community has a part to play in prevention of bullying i.e. staff, parents, pupils, ancillary staff and the Board of Management.

The school regards bullying as a serious infringement of individual rights and a serious threat to the self-esteem and self-confidence of targeted pupil(s). Therefore, it does not tolerate bullying of any kind.

Every report of bullying is treated seriously and dealt with, having due regard for the well-being of the targeted pupil(s) and the perpetrator(s).

An 'Anti-Bullying Team,' made up of staff members, exists to cultivate an environment free from bullying.

The immediate priority, should a bullying incident occur, is ending the bullying, (*thereby protecting the person(s) being targeted*) and resolving the issues and restoring the relationships involved insofar as is practicable using a "Reform, not Blame" approach.

All pupils are expected to contribute to the creation and maintenance a safe environment in the school. On becoming aware of any bullying situation, in or outside the school, involving members of the school community they should notify a trusted responsible adult. Bullying behaviour is too serious not to report.

Pupils' participation in school life in general is encouraged through existing school structures. Awareness of bullying, and willingness to take action to prevent or stop it, is part of this participation.

Anti-Bullying Policy

1. In accordance with the requirements of the *Education (Welfare) Act 2000* and the code of behaviour guidelines issued by the NEWB, the Board of Management of the Virgin Mary Girls' School has adopted the following anti-bullying policy within the framework of the school's overall code of behaviour. This policy fully complies with the requirements of the *Anti-Bullying Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools*, which were published in September 2013.
2. The Board of Management recognizes 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;
 - Effective leadership;
 - A school-wide approach;
 - A shared understanding of what bullying is and its impact;
 - Implementation of education and prevention strategies (including awareness raising measures) that –
 - Build empathy, respect and resilience in pupils; and
 - Explicitly address the issues of cyber-bullying and identity-based bullying including in particular, homophobic and transphobic bullying;
 - Effective supervision and monitoring of pupils;
 - Supports for staff;
 - Consistent recording, investigation and follow up of bullying behaviour (including use of established intervention strategies); and
 - On-going yearly evaluation of the effectiveness of the anti-bullying policy
3. 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, it is deliberate, hurtful and repeated.

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

- deliberate exclusion, malicious gossip and other forms of relational bullying,
- cyber-bullying and
- identity-based bullying such as homophobic bullying, racist bullying, religious beliefs, bullying based on a person's membership of the Traveller community and bullying of those with disabilities or special educational needs.

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 behaviour.

However, in the context of this policy, placing a once-off offensive or hurtful public message, image or statement on a social network site/app 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 behaviour.

This definition includes a wide range of behaviour, whether verbal or written, whether physical or social, whether targeting person or property, whether carried out directly or indirectly or through any electronic or other medium, which could harm a pupil or undermine her/his self-esteem or self-confidence.

Appendix 1 gives a list of specific examples of bullying behaviour. This list is not exhaustive. Additional information on different types of bullying is set out in Section 2 of the *Anti-Bullying Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools*.

4. The "Relevant Teacher(s)" for investigating and dealing with bullying in this school is: the class teacher.
5. The education and prevention strategies (including strategies specifically aimed at cyber-bullying and identity based bullying) used by the school are as follows:
 - The anti-bullying module of the SPHE programme as it applies during each school year (Stay Safe Programme)
 - At least five awareness-raising exercises per school year for each class group (e.g. *National anti-bullying campaign and use of website resources*), pro-actively explaining the nature and variety, causes, consequences and unacceptability of bullying.

Pupils are helped to examine the issue of bullying in a calm rational way, outside of the tense context of particular bullying incidents. In the process they are made more aware of the nature of bullying and the various forms that it can take.

Pupils are made aware that the consequences of bullying behaviour are always bad for those who are targeted, even if this is not always obvious at the time.

Pupils are encouraged to recognise, reject and report bullying behaviour.

Through presentations or other exercises, the school staff and parents/guardians are made aware of the nature of bullying and the signs that might indicate that a pupil is being bullied. They are encouraged to be vigilant in watching out for signs of bullying and to report any suspicion of bullying they may have to the "Relevant Teachers.

Through regular reports in school newsletters and school website as well as at meetings with parent/guardian groups parents/guardians are regularly informed of the activities of the school 'Anti-Bullying Team' and encouraged to support its work.

- An annual anti-bullying/friendship day/Cyber Safety Week.
- Proactive Strategies.
 - Teachers are constantly on the lookout for behaviour that might give rise to bullying.
 - Anxious and vulnerable pupils are kept under close observation by yard supervisors.
 - Ensuring children line up in a disciplined manner, can avoid harassment for some pupils.
 - Teacher on the yard is responsible for recording & informing the class teacher.

6. 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, (e.g. the six step approach available from the "Dealing with Incidents" section of the Anti-Bullying Campaign website) are as follows:
- The 'Relevant Teacher(s)' investigates all instances of reported or suspected bullying behaviour with a view to establishing the facts and bringing any such behaviour to an end.
 - The School, through the 'Relevant Teacher(s)' reserves the right to ask any pupil to write an account of what happened, as part of an investigation. This will be a standard procedure and does not necessarily imply that a pupil is guilty of misbehaviour.
 - Pupils who are alleged to have been involved in bullying behaviour are interviewed by the 'Relevant Teacher(s)' to establish the nature and extent of the behaviour and any reasons for it. In the event that they have been involved in bullying behaviour they are asked to sign a binding promise that they will treat all pupils fairly, equally and respectfully including the targeted pupil(s).
 - The 'Relevant Teacher' does not apportion blame but rather treats bullying behaviour as a "mistake" that can and must be remedied. She emphasises that the intention is not to punish perpetrators but to talk to them, to explain how harmful and hurtful bullying is and to seek a promise that it will stop. If that promise is forthcoming and is honoured there will be no penalty and that will be the end of the matter. Pupils who report bullying therefore are not getting others "in trouble" so much as enabling them to get out of trouble into which they may ultimately get if the bullying continued.
 - When an investigation is completed and/or a bullying situation is resolved the 'Relevant Teacher's' will complete a report, to include the findings of the investigation, the strategy adopted and the outcome of the intervention, as well as any other relevant information.
 - If a pupil has signed such a promise but then chooses to break that promise and continue the bullying behaviour, this can then no longer be considered a "mistake." In this event, parent(s)/guardian(s) will be informed and requested to countersign their daughter's promise. Breach of this additional promise by further bullying behaviour is regarded as a very grave matter and a serious sanction may be imposed by the school authorities (See sanctions below).
 - All documentation regarding bullying incidents and their resolution is retained securely in the school.
 - Sanctions:
- Where a pupil has been found to be engaged in bullying behaviour, has formally promised to stop and has broken that promise, any sanction may be imposed in accordance with the school code of behaviour, please see the schools Code of Behaviour Policy.
7. The school's programme of support for working with pupils affected by bullying is as follows:
- Bullied pupils:
 - Ending the bullying behaviour,
 - Reemphasizing the school culture to foster more respect for bullied pupils and all pupils,
 - Reemphasizing the school culture to foster greater empathy towards and support for bullied pupils,
 - Indicating clearly that the bullying is not the fault of the targeted pupil through the awareness-raising programme,
 - Indicating clearly that the bullying is not the fault of the targeted pupil through the speedy identification of those responsible and speedy resolution of bullying situations,

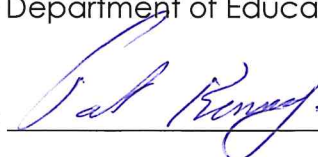
- Making adequate counselling facilities available to pupils who need it in a timely manner,
 - Helping bullied pupils raise their self-esteem by encouraging them to become involved in activities that help develop friendships and social skills (e.g. participation in group work in class and in extra-curricular group or team activities during or after school).
- Bullying pupils:
 - Making it clear that bullying pupils who reform are not blamed or punished and get a "clean sheet,"
 - Making it clear that bullying pupils who reform are doing the right and honorable thing and giving them praise for this,
 - Making adequate counseling facilities available to help those who need it learn other ways of meeting their needs besides violating the rights of others,
 - Helping those who need to raise their self-esteem by encouraging them to become involved in activities that develop friendships and social skills (e.g. participation in group work in class and in extra-curricular group or team activities during or after school),
 - Using learning strategies throughout the school and the curriculum to help enhance pupils' feelings of self-worth,
 - In dealing with negative behaviour in general, encouraging teachers and parents to focus on, challenge and correct the behaviour while supporting the child,
 - In dealing with bullying behaviour seeking resolution and offering a fresh start with a "clean sheet" and no blame in return for keeping a promise to reform.

8. Supervision and Monitoring of Pupils:

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.

9. The Board of Management confirms that the school will, in accordance with its obligations under equality legislation, take all such steps as are reasonably practicable to prevent the sexual harassment of pupils or staff or the harassment of pupils 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.
10. This policy was adopted by the Board of Management on October 20th 2020 and will be updated annually.
11. This policy has been made available to school personnel, published on the school website, is readily accessible to parents and pupils on request. A copy of this policy will be made available to the Department of Education and Skills and to the patron if requested.
12. 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 is *readily accessible to parents and pupils on request*) and provided to the Parents' Association (where one exists). A record of the review and its outcome will be made available to the Department of Education and Skills and to the patron if requested.

Signed: _____



Signed: _____



5/10/2023

(Chairperson of Board of Management)

(Principal)

Date: 5/10/2023

Date: 5/10/2023

Appendix 1

Bullying can take a number of forms. These may include any of the following (this list is not exhaustive):

- **Repeated aggressive behaviour/attitude/body language, for example:**

Shouting and uncontrolled anger,
Personal insults,
Verbal abuse,
Offensive language directed at an individual,
Continually shouting or dismissing others,
Public verbal attacks/criticism,
Domineering behaviour,
Open aggression,
Offensive gestures and unwanted physical contact.

- **Intimidation, either physical, psychological or emotional, for example:**

Treating in a dictatorial manner,
Ridicule,
Persistent slagging,
Deliberate staring with the intent to discomfort.
Persistent rudeness in behaviour and attitude toward a particular individual.
Asking inappropriate questions/making inappropriate comments re. personal life/family
Asking inappropriate questions/making inappropriate comments re. social life or schoolwork.

- **Interference with property, for example:**

Stealing/damaging books or equipment
Stealing/damaging clothing or other property
Demanding money with menaces
Persistently moving, hiding or interfering with property
Marking/defacing property

- **Undermining/Public or Private Humiliation, for example:**

Condescending tone,
Deliberately withholding significant information and resources,
Writing of anonymous notes,
Malicious, disparaging or demeaning comments,
Malicious tricks/derogatory jokes,
Knowingly spreading rumours,
Belittling others' efforts, their enthusiasm or their new ideas,
Derogatory or offensive nicknames (name-calling),
Using electronic or other media for any of the above (cyber bullying),
Disrespectfully mimicking a particular individual in his/her absence,
Deliberately refusing to address issues focusing instead on the person.

- **Ostracising or isolating, for example:**

Deliberately marginalising an individual
Deliberately preventing a person from joining a group,
Deliberately preventing from joining in an activity, schoolwork-related or recreational
Blaming a pupil for things she/he did not do.

Appendix 2

Practical tips for building a positive school culture and climate

- Model respectful behaviour to all members of the school community at all times.
- Explicitly teach pupils what respectful language and respectful behaviour looks like, acts like, sounds like and feels like in class and around the school.
- Display key respect messages in classrooms, in assembly areas and around the school. Involve pupils in the development of these messages.
- Catch them being good - notice and acknowledge desired respectful behaviour by providing positive attention.
- Consistently tackle the use of discriminatory and derogatory language in the school – this includes homophobic and racist language and language that is belittling of pupils with a disability or SEN.
- Give constructive feedback to pupils when respectful behaviour and respectful language are absent.
- Have a system of encouragement and rewards to promote desired behaviour and compliance with the school rules and routines.
- Explicitly teach pupils about the appropriate use of social media.
- Positively encourage pupils to comply with the school rules on mobile phone and internet use.
- Follow up and follow through with pupils who ignore the rules.
- Actively involve parents in awareness raising campaigns around social media.
- Actively promote the right of every member of the school community to be safe and secure in school.
- Highlight and explicitly teach school rules in pupil friendly language in the classroom and in common areas.
- All staff can actively watch out for signs of bullying behaviour.
- Ensure there is adequate playground/school yard/outdoor supervision.
- School staff can get pupils to help them to identify bullying “hot spots” and “hot times” for bullying in the school.
- Hot spots tend to be in the playground/school yard/outdoor areas, changing rooms, corridors and other areas of unstructured supervision.
- Hot times again tend to be times where there is less structured supervision such as when pupils are in the playground/school yard or moving classrooms.
- Support the establishment and work of student councils.
- Special attention should be med to potential hot spots when on school outings.

Appendix 3

Template for recording bullying behaviour

1. Name of pupil being bullied and class group

Name _____ Class _____

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

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|--|
| |
| |
| |

3. Source of bullying concern/report (tick relevant box(es))*

| | |
|------------------|--|
| Pupil concerned | |
| Other Pupil | |
| Parent | |
| Teacher | |
| Anonymous Online | |
| Other | |

4. Location of incidents (tick relevant box(es))*

| | |
|------------|--|
| Playground | |
| Classroom | |
| Corridor | |
| Toilets | |
| School Bus | |
| Online | |
| Other | |

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

| |
|--|
| |
|--|

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

| | | | |
|---------------------|--|------------------|--|
| Physical Aggression | | Cyber-bullying | |
| Damage to Property | | Intimidation | |
| Isolation/Exclusion | | Malicious Gossip | |
| Name Calling | | Other (specify) | |

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

| Homophobic | Disability/SEN related | Racist | Membership of Traveller community | Other (specify) |
|------------|------------------------|--------|-----------------------------------|-----------------|
| | | | | |

8. Brief Description of bullying behaviour and its impact

| |
|--|
| |
|--|

9. Details of actions taken

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|--|
| |
|--|

Signed _____ (Relevant Teacher) Date _____

Date submitted to Principal/Deputy Principal _____

Appendix 4

Checklist for annual review of the anti-bullying policy and its implementation

The Board of Management must undertake an annual review of the school's anti-bullying policy and its implementation. The following checklist must be used for this purpose. The checklist is an aid to conducting this review and is not intended as an exhaustive list. In order to complete the checklist, an examination and review involving both quantitative and qualitative analysis, as appropriate across the various elements of the implementation of the school's anti-bullying policy will be required.

Yes /No

| | |
|--|-----|
| Has the Board formally adopted an anti-bullying policy that fully complies with the requirements of the <i>Anti-Bullying Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools</i> ? | ✓ |
| Has the Board published the policy on the school website | ✓ |
| Has the Board ensured that the policy has been made available to school staff (including new staff)? | ✓ |
| Is the Board satisfied that school staff are sufficiently familiar with the policy and procedures to enable them to effectively and consistently apply the policy and procedures in their day-to-day work? | ✓ |
| Has the Board ensured that the policy has been adequately communicated to all pupils? | ✓ |
| Has the policy documented the prevention and education strategies that the school applies? | ✓ |
| Have all of the prevention and education strategies been implemented? | ✓ |
| Has the effectiveness of the prevention and education strategies that have been implemented been examined? | ✓ |
| Is the Board satisfied that all teachers are recording and dealing with incidents in accordance with the policy? | ✓ |
| Has the Board received and minuted the periodic summary reports of the Principal? | ✓ |
| Has the Board discussed how well the school is handling all reports of bullying including those addressed at an early stage and not therefore included in the Principal's periodic report to the Board? | ✓ |
| Has the Board received any complaints from parents regarding the school's handling of bullying incidents? | ✗ |
| Have any parents withdrawn their child from the school citing dissatisfaction with the school's handling of a bullying situation? | ✗ |
| Have any Ombudsman for Children investigations into the school's handling of a bullying case been initiated or completed? | ✗ |
| Has the data available from cases reported to the Principal (by the bullying recording template) been analysed to identify any issues, trends or patterns in bullying behaviour? | N/A |
| Has the Board identified any aspects of the school's policy and/or its implementation that require further improvement? | ✗ |
| Has the Board put in place an action plan to address any areas for improvement? | N/A |

Appendix 5

Information and Tips for Pupils

Remember:

- Keep unhelpful hands, feet, objects and comments to yourself.
- Know the difference between TELLING and TELLING ON.
- Play preferred games.
- Be in the right place at the right time
- Say no to bullies

| | |
|---|--|
| <p>When you are being bullied:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Tell yourself that bullying is wrong. You do not deserve to be bullied.• If you can, be firm and clear - look them in the eye and tell them to stop• Try not to fight back• Get away from the situation and tell an adult as quickly as possible• If you can, try not to be on your own in places where bullying happens | <p>After you have been bullied:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Don't blame yourself for what has happened• Tell a teacher or another adult in your school• Tell your family• If you are scared to tell a teacher or an adult on your own, ask a friend to go with you• Keep on speaking up until someone listens• If the bullying has happened by text message or on the Internet do not delete the message without copying it or taking a screenshot/photo of it. |
| <p>When you are telling an adult about being bullied be clear about:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• What has happened to you• How often it has happened• Who was involved• Who saw what was happening• Where it happened• What you have done about it already• How it started in the first place | <p>What pupils who witness bullying can do:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Tell a teacher or staff member what is happening• Do not allow someone to be deliberately left out of a group• Do not smile or laugh in a mean way when someone is being bullied• Encourage people who are bullied to join in with group games etc.• If you can, tell the bully to stop what they are doing |

Information and Tips for Parents

General things to remember

- Be aware of the school's policy on bullying. Remember we are a telling school.
- The staff are always willing to speak with parents but remember to organise a good time to talk.
- Get more information on bullying and be comfortable with your understanding of it.
- Maintain good communication with your child, provide opportunities for one-to-one chats.
- Support any bullying awareness campaigns in the school and wider community.
- Remember, there will always be conflicts between children. However, bullying is different to the normal conflicts that children have.
- Respect your child and teach them to respect others.
- Do not let your children come to school too early or hang around after school – there is only supervision during school hours.
- If you witness what appears to be a bullying incident in the school, make your concerns known to a member of staff.

What if your child is involved in bullying?

- If your child tells you they have witnessed a bullying incident, find out what happened and let the school know.
- If your child is upset over something that happened to them, try to determine whether there was genuine bullying involved. Again, you can approach the teacher and get their perspective.
- Be aware of the signs and symptoms of bullying and watch for signs your child may be being bullied.
- If you are worried that your child is being bullied, ask him/her directly. Give your child a chance to vent his/her feelings about being bullied. But remember to stay calm and listen to your child.
- Take bullying seriously and find out the facts when told about an incident of bullying. Keep a written diary of all incidents. Don't agree to keep the bullying a secret
- Empower your child with the skills to deal with bullies. Help children practice strategies such as shouting no, walking with confidence and keeping away from bullies.
- If the bullying is happening on the way to or from school arrange to meet your child and walk with them.
- If your child has been identified as displaying bullying behaviour, stay calm and do not panic. Try to find out the reasons why.

Information and Tips for Staff

General things to remember

- Promote a culture of respect in the school – children respecting children, children respecting staff, staff respecting children, staff respecting staff. Praise respectful behaviour.
 - Tell the pupils from Day One that bullying is not tolerated in the school.
 - Make sure children know the difference between bullying and normal conflict.
 - Ensure that children, parents and teachers take responsibility for any bullying that goes on in the school. Everyone is expected to ensure that it does not happen.
 - Promote the idea of the school as being a telling school. Explain the difference between telling about and telling on. Tell children to tell and back them up.
 - Raise awareness of the school policy on bullying. Keep parents informed and involved.
 - Use circle time or class based discussion to discuss bullying behaviour with the class. Role-play situations and discuss possible solutions or strategies. Be open to involving pupils in developing ideas. If they are part of the problem, they can be part of the solution.
 - Discuss the general discipline policy and anti-bullying policy with the class.
-
- Teach children to be confident. Differences should be acceptable and never a cause for bullying.

Dealing with incidents of bullying

- Be guided by the steps outlined in the Anti-Bullying Policy.
- Support and encourage pupils to report bullying. Provide a discrete way for pupils to report bullying and encourage pupils who witness it to report.
- Take bullying seriously and find out the facts when told about a possible incident of bullying. Gather information, talk to the pupils involved individually. Keep a written record of dates, incidents and steps taken.
- If an incident of bullying occurs, challenge it directly and follow the steps in the bullying policy.
- Support children who are being bullied and help the bullies to change their behaviour.
- Inform parents (informally at first), ask for their suggestions and seek their support.
- If the bullying is about a particular issue (e.g. differences among pupils), you could initiate a discussion on the issue in class, but not focused on any particular child.
- Watch out for signs which may point to a child being bullied, be aware of suspicious you may have based on children's behaviour.
- If necessary break up the group dynamics by assigning places. Most bullying groups have a leader with other children being frightened of not bullying. Turn peer pressure against bullying.

From Department of Education and Skills Anti-Bullying Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools (September, 2013).