



St. Patrick's NS Strangsmills

Bí Cineálta policy

Revised: 2026

Bí Cineálta Policy to Prevent and Address Bullying Behaviour

The Board of Management of St. Patrick's NS Strangsmills 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 is defined in Cineáltas as:

Bullying is 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.

There are many different types of bullying behaviour. These can include the following which is not an exhaustive list:

disablist bullying behaviour, exceptionally able bullying, gender identity bullying, homophobic/transphobic (LGBTQ+) bullying, physical appearance bullying, racist bullying, poverty bullying, religious identity bullying, sexist bullying, sexual harassment.

Direct bullying behaviour:

Physical bullying behaviour: includes pushing, shoving, punching, kicking, poking, "mess fights", tripping students and the destruction of personal property. It may also take the form of severe physical assault.

Verbal bullying behaviour: Continual name-calling directed at a student which hurts, insults or humiliates the student. This may refer to physical appearance; for example, size or clothes worn or gender identity. It can also refer to a student's accent, distinctive voice characteristics, academic ability, race or ethnic origin.

Written bullying behaviour: includes writing insulting remarks about a student in public places, passing around notes about or drawings of a student.

Extortion: where something is obtained through force or threats.

Indirect bullying behaviour:

Exclusion: occurs where a student is deliberately and repeatedly isolated, excluded or ignored by a student or group of students.

Relational: occurs when a student's attempts to socialise and form relationships with peers are repeatedly rejected or undermined. Common forms include control: "Do this or I won't be your friend anymore"; a group of students ganging up against one student; nonverbal gesturing; malicious gossip; spreading rumours about a student; giving a student the "silent treatment"; and the deliberate manipulation of friendship groups to make someone unpopular.

Online bullying behaviour: Online bullying behaviour (cyberbullying) is carried out through the use of technologies such as text or direct messaging/instant messaging, social media platforms, email, apps, digital gaming sites, gaming consoles, chatrooms and other online technologies.

Criminal Behaviour

Bullying behaviour can be considered criminal behaviour under certain circumstances and legal consequences can apply. The age of criminal responsibility in Ireland is 12 years.

Some online behaviour may be illegal, and students need to be aware of the far-reaching consequences of posting inappropriate or harmful content online. In cases of intimate imagery, the Harassment, Harmful Communications and Related Offences Act 2020, also known as Coco's Law, criminalises the non-consensual sharing of intimate images and also criminalises threatening to share these images.

If bullying behaviour involves discrimination or hate speech targeting a student based on their race, religion, nationality, ethnicity, sexual orientation or membership of the Traveller community, it may be considered a hate crime under the Prohibition of Incitement to Hatred Act 1989¹¹, and those engaging in such behaviour may face criminal charges.

If bullying behaviour involves sexual harassment or sexual assault, this may also be considered criminal behaviour.

An Garda Síochána is the appropriate authority to investigate alleged criminal behaviour.

Section A: Development 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. Senior pupils and Parents were consulted via an online survey using the questions as suggested by the Department of Education in January and February. Staff were consulted through whole staff discussion at staff meetings as well as during the closure time to devise the whole school policy in February 2025. The Parents Association and entire parent body were invited to attend a meeting to discuss the draft policy in March. The draft policy was shared with the school secretary and kitchen operative for feedback.

Section B: Preventing Bullying Behaviour

School-wide approach

- We foster a respect for all members of the school community. The code of behaviour and anti-bullying policy are discussed in each classroom at the beginning of each school term. A playground motto was introduced 'kind hands, kind feet, kind words' to reinforce our positive approach.
- We promote the value of diversity to address issues of prejudice and stereotyping, and highlight the unacceptability of bullying behaviour.
- Positive behaviour/Bí Cineálta week is implemented in September of each school year and programmes such as Fuse and the SPHE programmes are used across the school.
- Friendship week is implemented in February of each school year with a focus on wellbeing and positive social interactions. Neurodiversity week also takes place in April or May to focus on inclusion and respect for difference.
- Enhancing of the self-esteem of all our pupils through both curricular and extracurricular activities. Pupils will be provided with opportunities to develop a positive sense of self-worth through formal and informal interactions.
- Whole staff professional development on bullying to ensure that all staff develops an awareness of what bullying is, how it impacts on pupils' lives and the need to respond to it-a prevention and intervention approach.
- An annual audit of professional development needs with a view to assessing staff requirements through internal staff knowledge/expertise and external sources as deemed necessary.
- Professional development with specific focus on the training of the relevant teacher(s) as deemed necessary including for e.g. Lust for Life programme

- School wide awareness raising and training on all aspects of bullying, to include pupils, parent(s)/guardian(s) and the wider school community as deemed necessary
- Supervision and monitoring of classrooms, corridors, school grounds, school tours and extra-curricular activities. Non-teaching staff are asked to be vigilant and report issues to relevant teachers. Supervision will also apply to monitoring student use of communication technology within the school.
- Involvement of the pupils in contributing to a safe school environment e.g. buddy system, playground leaders, class and school student council and other student support activities that can help to support pupils and encourage a culture of peer respect and support.
- Development and promotion of an Anti-Bullying code for the school-to be displayed publicly in classrooms and in common areas of the school
- The school's Bí Cinealta policy is discussed with pupils and all parent(s)/guardian(s) are directed to the website to access the policy.
- The implementation of regular whole school awareness measures e.g. the promotion of friendship, bullying prevention events, school assemblies.
- Encourage a culture of telling whereby class teachers discuss the concept of 'a trusted adult' in the school, with particular emphasis on the importance of bystanders. In that way pupils will gain confidence in 'telling'. This confidence factor is of vital importance. It should be made clear to all pupils that when they report incidents of bullying they are not considered to be telling tales but are behaving responsibly
- The 'Restorative Practice' approach is now in use in the school – it is an approach to conflict resolution that puts the focus on repairing the harm that has been done.
- Ensuring that pupils know who to tell and how to tell, e.g.:
 - Direct approach to teacher at an appropriate time, for example after class.
 - Message/worry box
 - Get a parent(s)/guardian(s) or friend to tell on your behalf.
 - Administer a questionnaire once a year to all pupils where appropriate from second class upwards
 - Ensure bystanders understand the importance of telling if they witness or know that bullying is taking place.
- We have identified clear protocols to encourage parent(s)/guardian(s) to approach St Patrick's NS if they suspect that their child is being bullied.
- An Acceptable Use Policy has been developed in the school to include the necessary steps to ensure that the access to technology within the school is strictly monitored.

Implementation of curriculum

- The full implementation of the SPHE curricula and the RSE and Stay Safe Programmes.
- Continuous Professional Development for staff in delivering these programmes.
- School wide delivery of lessons on bullying from evidence based programmes, e.g. Stay Safe Programme, The Walk Tall Programme, Zippy's friends, Friends, Lust for life
- School wide delivery of age appropriate cyber-bullying programmes
- Delivery of the Garda SPHE Programmes at primary level. These lessons, delivered by Community Gardai, cover issues around personal safety and cyber-bullying
- The school will specifically consider the individual needs of SEN pupils with regard to programme implementation and the development of skills and strategies to enable all pupils to respond appropriately.

Links to other policies

- Links to school policies, practices and activities that are particularly relevant to bullying, e.g. Code of Behaviour, Child Protection policy, Supervision of pupils, Acceptable Use policies etc. are made available through the school website. www.strangsmillsns.ie

Section C: Addressing Bullying Behaviour

The teacher with responsibility for addressing bullying behaviour is **the class teacher**. The class teacher is the first point of contact. If a parent or child approaches a teacher other than the class teacher they will be directed to the class teacher in the first instance.

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

Identifying if bullying behaviour has occurred

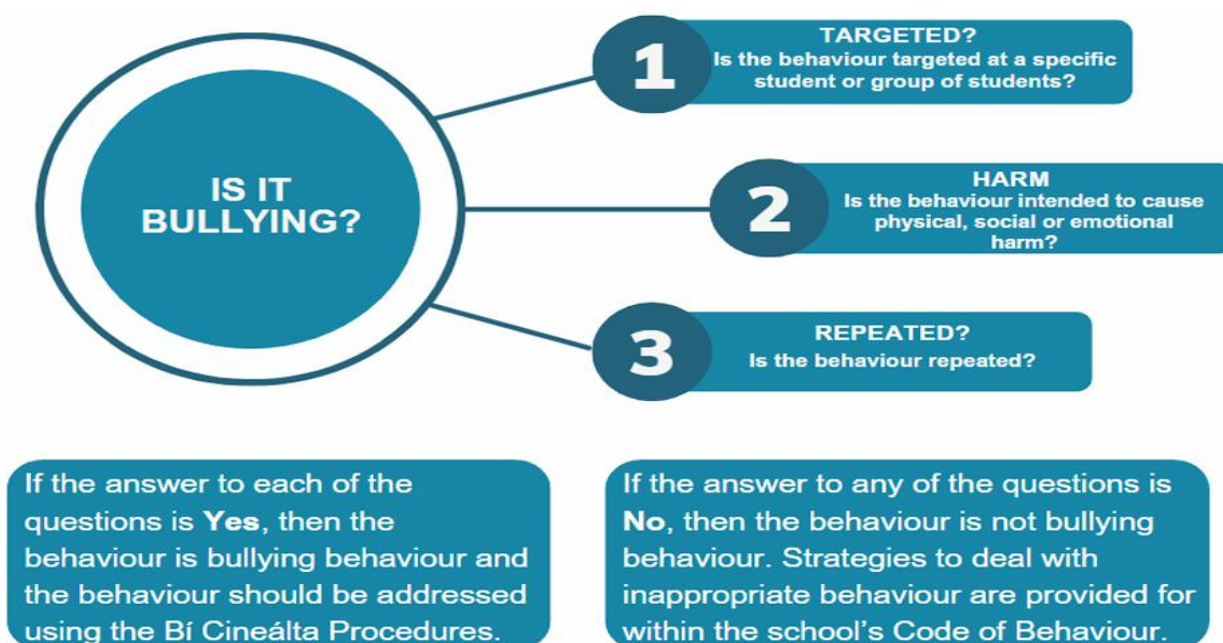
When identifying if bullying behaviour has occurred the teacher should consider the following:
what, where, when and why?

To determine whether the behaviour reported is bullying behaviour you should consider the following questions:

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

If the answer to **all three** of the questions above is **Yes**, then the behaviour is bullying behaviour and the behaviour should be addressed using the Bí Cineálta Procedures.

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



Note: One-off incidents may be considered bullying in certain circumstances. A single hurtful message posted on social media can be considered bullying behaviour as it has a high likelihood of being shared multiple times and thus becomes a repeated behaviour.

Procedures for investigation, following up and recording bullying behaviour

If it is determined that bullying has occurred:

- The Relevant Teacher(s) must keep written records to support efforts to resolve the issue and restore relationships as far as practicable.
- The bullying incident must be recorded on the *Bullying Behaviour Report template*
- The Relevant Teacher must inform the Principal.

The primary aim of investigating and addressing bullying is to resolve the issue and restore relationships (in so far as in practicable) rather than to apportion blame. The school follows these procedures:

- The Relevant Teacher(s) will use professional judgment to determine:
 - Whether bullying has occurred.
 - The type of bullying involved.
 - The most appropriate course of action.
- All reports must be investigated so that pupils feel confident in reporting incidents. Pupils should understand that reporting bullying is a responsible action, not "telling tales."
- Teachers will approach reports of bullying in a calm, unemotional, and problem-solving manner.
- Upon receiving an alleged bullying report, the Relevant Teacher will:
 - Interview the victim(s) to understand their experience and feelings.
 - Conduct initial investigations in class where appropriate, but some incidents may be investigated outside the classroom for privacy.
 - Use a calm approach to gather details (who, what, where, when, why) and ensure that all involved understand the situation.

If a group of students is involved, each student should be engaged with individually at first.

Thereafter, all students involved should be met as a group.

- At the group meeting, each student should be asked for their account of what happened to ensure that everyone in the group is clear about each other's views.
- Each student should be supported, as appropriate, following the group meeting.
- It may also be helpful to ask the students involved to write down their account of the incident.
- The definition of bullying sets out clear criteria to help to identify bullying behaviour.

Note: Parents may also make schools aware of bullying behaviour that has occurred and specifically request that the school take no action. Parents should put this request in writing to the school. However, while acknowledging the parent's request, schools may decide that, based on the circumstances, it is appropriate to address the bullying behaviour.

Where bullying behaviour has occurred

Where bullying behaviour has occurred, the parents of the students involved must be contacted at an early stage to inform them of the matter and to consult with them on the actions to be taken to address the behaviour.

- 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
- A record should be kept of the engagement with all involved
- This record should document the form and type of bullying behaviour, if known, 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

Follow up where bullying behaviour has occurred

- The teacher must engage with the students involved and their parents again, no more than 20 school days after the initial engagement.
- The 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 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 the school 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 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

Behaviour that is not bullying behaviour

- Disagreement between students, or instances where students don't want to be friends or to remain friends, is not considered bullying behaviour unless it involves deliberate and repeated attempts to cause distress, exclude or create dislike by others including deliberate manipulation of friendship groups.
- If the repeated harm is real for the student experiencing the behaviour, but **unintended** by the other student, this is not bullying, but, importantly, must be addressed under the school's Code of Behaviour.
- Some students with special educational needs may have social communication difficulties which may make them communicate their needs through behaviours that can hurt themselves or others. It is important to note that these behaviours are not deliberate or planned, but in certain situations, they are an automatic response which they cannot control.

Where bullying occurs outside of school

A school is not expected to deal with bullying behaviour that occurs when students are not under the care or responsibility of the school. However, where this bullying behaviour has an impact in school, schools are required to support the students involved. Support in this situation may take the form of the follow methods:

- Re-teach related SPHE lessons e.g. Fuse programme
- Separate children involved in the classroom
- Make staff aware so that the students can be monitored
- Inform parents and suggest support that could be provided at home
- Regular check-in's with the student
- Include them in social skills/self-esteem/resilience groups working with the SET

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.

Communication and implementation

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.

Review and Ratification

This policy was ratified by the Board of Management of St. Patrick's NS on April 1st 2025 and was again reviewed on September 29th 2026 with input sought from parents, staff and pupils. The Policy will be reviewed in 2028/2029 or earlier if necessary.

Signed: _____ **Date:** _____

Kieran Leahy
Chairperson, Board of Management

Signed: _____ **Date:** _____

Elaine O'Connor
Principal