

Our Lady's College.

Anti-Bullying Policy

Definition:

Bullying is deliberate, repeated, inappropriate behaviour, which could be reasonably regarded as undermining a student's right to personal dignity. 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 student or undermine her self-esteem or self-confidence.

According to DES circular 045/2013

"...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 or other public forum where the message, image or statement can be viewed and/or repeated by other people will be regarded as bullying behaviour."

Appendix 1 gives a list of specific examples of such behaviour. This list is not exhaustive.

School Position on Bullying:

- The School Community of Our Lady's College believes that each student has a right to an education free from fear and intimidation.
- The School regards bullying as a serious infringement of individual rights and a serious threat to the self-esteem and self-confidence of targeted student(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 student(s) and the perpetrator(s).
- There is a whole school approach to bullying at Our Lady's College. It is led by the Pastoral Care Team in each year group who cultivate an environment free from bullying and deal with bullying incidents, should they occur.
- The immediate priority, should a bullying incident occur, is ending the bullying and protecting the person(s) being targeted while avoiding any consequent negative repercussions.
- All students are expected to contribute to the creation and maintenance of a safe environment in the school. On becoming aware of any instance of bullying involving members of the school community they should notify a responsible adult. Bullying 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.

The 1993 D.E.S. Guidelines on Countering Bullying Behaviour aim to:

- (a) *“increase the awareness of bullying behaviour in the school community as a whole”*
- (b) *“assist schools in devising school-based measures to prevent and deal with bullying behaviour”*

In fulfillment of these guidelines Our Lady’s College operates a two-strand approach to bullying:

Strand 1 is a programme of awareness raising about the nature and unacceptability of bullying.

Strand 2 is the school's system of investigation of, and response to bullying incidents as and when they arise.

Strand 1:

Raising Awareness - pro-actively explaining the nature and variety, causes, consequences and unacceptability of bullying

Students 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.

Students 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.

Students are encouraged to recognise, reject and report bullying behaviour, either spontaneously or through questionnaires that are regularly used in the school.

Through presentations and other exercises, the school staff and parents are made aware of the nature of bullying and the signs that might indicate that a student 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 a teacher.

Through regular reports in school newsletters and other communications as well as at meetings with parent groups, parents are regularly informed of the ‘anti-bullying activities’ and encouraged to support this work.

Strand 2

Investigating bullying - initially a no-blame approach but the behaviour is taken very seriously

The School 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 reserves the right to ask any student 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 student is guilty of misbehaviour.

Students who are alleged to have been involved in bullying behaviour are interviewed 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 students fairly, equally and respectfully including the targeted student.

When an investigation is completed and/or a bullying situation is resolved the staff members involved will prepare a report, to include the findings of its investigation, strategy adopted and the outcome of the intervention, as well as any other relevant information.

They do not apportion blame but rather treat bullying behaviour as a "mistake" that can and must be remedied. It emphasises that its 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.** Students 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.

If a student 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 parents will be informed and requested to countersign their daughter's promise. Breach of this additional promise is regarded as a very grave matter and serious sanction may be imposed by the school authorities (See sanctions below).

All documentation regarding bullying incidents is retained securely in the school.

Sanctions:

Where a student has been found to be engaged in bullying behaviour, has formally promised to stop and has broken that promise, any of the following sanctions may be imposed:

1. She will be required to sign another promise, this time countersigned by a parent/guardian;
2. Parent(s)/guardian(s) will be contacted and informed of the nature and extent of the bullying behaviour with a view to agreeing a strategy whereby a promise to end the bullying behaviour would be honoured;
3. Parent(s)/guardian(s) may be invited to a meeting with a member of staff and the Principal. The student may be suspended from school.
4. The case may be referred to the Board of Management and the student may be expelled from Our Lady's College.

Prevention of Harassment:

The Board of Management confirms that the school will, in accordance with its obligations under equality legislation, take all such steps that 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.

Reporting and recording of bullying incidents.

All reports of bullying will be investigated using the process outlined above. A record will be kept of all investigations and the outcomes of those investigations. At least once per term the Principal will inform the Board of Management of the number of bullying cases reported since the previous meeting and provide confirmation that all these cases have or are being dealt with in accordance with the school's anti-bullying policy.

Approval: This Policy was approved by the Board of Management

On (date):..... Signed:.....

This policy will be reviewed annually.

(Chairperson)

This Policy was approved by the Trustees:

On:..... Signed:.....
(Trustee Representative)

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 or making inappropriate comments regarding one's personal life/family
 - Asking inappropriate questions or making inappropriate comments regarding one's social life or schoolwork.

- **Interference with property, for example:**
 - Stealing/damaging books or equipment
 - Stealing/damaging clothing or other property
 - Demanding money with menaces
 - 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 presence/absence,

Deliberately refusing to address issues focusing instead on the person,

Homophobic remarks or actions

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

Deliberately marginalising an individual

Deliberately preventing a person from joining a group,

Deliberately preventing a person from joining in an activity, whether schoolwork-related or recreational

Blaming a student for things she did not do.