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**Merlin Woods Primary School**

**Anti-Bullying Policy 2023**

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 Merlin Woods Primary 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 recognises 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 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.**

The following types of bullying 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, 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 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.** (cyber-bullying)

Negative behaviour that does not meet this definition of bullying will be dealt with in accordance with the school’s code of behaviour. Additional information on different types of bullying is set out in Section 2 of the Anti-Bullying Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools.

**Indications of Bullying:**

The onus is on all members of the school community, teachers, parents, children, ancillary staff, Board of Management to ensure vigilance against bullying.

The following signs/symptoms may suggest that a pupil is being bullied:

* anxiety about travelling to and from school
* unwillingness to go to school
* deterioration in educational performance, loss of concentration and loss of enthusiasm and interest in school
* pattern of physical illnesses (e.g. headaches, stomach aches)
* unexplained changes either in mood or behaviour
* visible signs of anxiety or distress – stammering, withdrawing, nightmares, difficulty in sleeping, crying, not eating, vomiting, bedwetting
* spontaneous out-of-character comments about either pupils or teachers
* possessions missing or damaged
* increased requests for money or stealing money
* unexplained bruising or cuts or damaged clothing
* reluctance and/or refusal to say what is troubling him/her

The above signs do not necessarily mean that a pupil is being bullied. If repeated or occurring in combination those signs do warrant investigation in order to establish what is affecting the pupil. There may be other signs depending on the individual and his/her circumstances.

**Examples of bullying behaviours**

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| **General behaviours which apply to all types of bullying** | * Harassment based on any of the nine grounds in the equality legislation e.g. sexual harassment, homophobic bullying, racist bullying etc. * Physical aggression * Damage to property * Name calling * Slagging * The production, display or circulation of written words, pictures or other materials aimed at intimidating another person * Offensive graffiti * Extortion * Intimidation * Insulting or offensive gestures * The “look” * Invasion of personal space * A combination of any of the types listed |
| **Cyber** | * **Denigration**: Spreading rumours, lies or gossip to hurt a person’s reputation * **Harassment**: Continually sending vicious, mean or disturbing messages to an individual * **Impersonation**: Posting offensive or aggressive messages under another person’s name * **Flaming**: Using inflammatory or vulgar words to provoke an online fight * **Trickery**: Fooling someone into sharing personal information which you then post online * **Outing**: Posting or sharing confidential or compromising information or images * **Exclusion**: Purposefully excluding someone from an online group * **Cyber stalking**: Ongoing harassment and denigration that causes a person considerable fear for his/her safety * Silent telephone/mobile phone call * Abusive telephone/mobile phone calls * Abusive text messages * Abusive email * Abusive communication on social networks e.g. Snapchat/Facebook/Ask.fm/ Twitter/ You Tube or on games consoles Abusive website comments/Blogs/Pictures * Abusive posts on any form of communication technology   Note: Pupils and parents should be aware that is it an illegal offence to send or receive naked photos, videos, selfies etc, even of themselves, under the Child Pornography Act 1998. Phones, laptops etc can be seized and searched. |
| **Identity Based Behaviours Including any of the nine discriminatory grounds mentioned in Equality Legislation (gender including transgender, civil status, family status, sexual orientation, religion, age, disability, race and membership of the Traveller community):** | |
| **Homophobic and Transgender** | Spreading rumours about a person’s sexual orientation Taunting a person of a different sexual orientation  Name calling e.g. Gay, queer, lesbian...used in a derogatory manner • Physical intimidation or attacks • Threats |
| **Race, nationality, ethnic background and membership of the Traveller community** | • Discrimination, prejudice, comments or insults about colour, nationality, culture, social class, • religious beliefs, ethnic or traveller background • Exclusion on the basis of any of the above |
| **Relational** | This involves manipulating relationships as a means of bullying. Behaviours include: • Malicious gossip • Isolation & exclusion • Ignoring • Excluding from the group • Taking someone’s friends away • “Bitching” • Spreading rumours • Breaking confidence • Talking loud enough so that the victim can hear • The “look” • Use of terminology such as ‘nerd’ in a derogatory way |
| **Special Educational Needs, Disability** | • Name calling • Taunting others because of their disability or learning needs • Taking advantage of some pupils’ vulnerabilities and limited capacity to recognise and defend themselves against bullying • Taking advantage of some pupils’ vulnerabilities and limited capacity to understand social situations and social cues • Mimicking a person’s disability • Setting others up for ridicule |

**4. The relevant teacher(s) for investigating and dealing with bullying is (are):**

The Class Teacher, the Principal/ Deputy Principal. Any teacher may act as a relevant teacher if circumstances warrant it.

**5. The education and prevention strategies (including strategies specifically aimed at cyberbullying and identity-based bullying including in particular, homophobic and transphobic bullying) that will be used by the school are as follows:**

***In Merlin Woods Primary School we foster a positive school ethos among pupils, staff and parents:***

There is a strong sense of community and cooperation between the Board of Management, staff, pupils and parents, and each has a clear role in the prevention of bullying.

* Through a programme of positive action, the school promotes an atmosphere of happiness, friendship, openness, mutual respect and tolerance. This will be evident throughout the school.
* Restorative Practice methods are used in our school to promote and restore relationships. Through R.P. children discuss incidents and feelings, the impact on themselves and others, and how to restore the relationship and move forward.
* Positive self-esteem is fostered among the pupils by celebrating individual differences/achievement and by providing opportunities for success.
* Through continuous positive reinforcement through proactive teaching methodologies and classroom management. Eg Kindness Awards are given out in class/assemblies.
* Pupils are helped to develop empathy by discussing feelings and emotions and by being given a forum for expression in an open and democratic environment. e.g. circle time, drama, structured and free play, Golden Time, MindUp etc.
* The SPHE curriculum, including the Walk Tall, Stay Safe and RSE programmes, is used throughout the school to support the anti bullying policy.
* Specific programmes such as The Incredible Years, Friends for Life, Merlin Woods Anti-Bullying Week are used at appropriate class levels throughout the school. Through these specific lessons, children learn skills such as developing friendships, expressing their feelings, dealing with bullying behaviours, how to ask for help, etc.
* The school's anti-bullying approach is discussed regularly with the pupils. Positive behaviours are recognised and rewarded.
* The members of staff are particularly vigilant in monitoring pupils who are considered at risk of bullying/being bullied. Teachers will respond sensitively to pupils who disclose incidents of bullying. All disclosed incidents of bullying will be investigated. In all cases of bullying there is an emphasis on the behaviour, **not** the child.
* Each staff member is responsible for the implementation of the Anti –bullying policy. Within the class, teachers monitor pupils and actively reduce inactive time.
* There is a whole school awareness and adherence to class rules, through strong establishment, explanation, reinforcement and reiteration.
* There are clear yard strategies in place, such as monitoring and supervision, playground pals/buddy system and the teaching of co-operative games.
* Pupils participate in Active School Committee and help promote kindness and friendship amongst all pupils, particularly those with additional needs.
* The school celebrates our multicultural aspect through various school events, eg Yellow Flag, parents visiting school to share their culture, traditions, customs, dress, language, food, literature, artwork etc. We also use traditional events such as Christmas to celebrate diversity, individual difference, and traditions, whereby parents share food and traditions from various cultures.

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 are as follows:

1. The primary aim for the relevant teacher in investigating and dealing with bullying is to resolve any issues and to restore, as far as is practicable, the relationships of the parties involved (rather than to apportion blame);
2. In investigating and dealing with bullying, the teacher will exercise his/her professional judgement to determine whether bullying has occurred and how best the situation might be resolved;
3. All reports, including anonymous reports of bullying must be investigated and dealt with by the relevant teacher. 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;
4. Non-teaching staff such as secretaries, special needs assistants (SNAs), bus escorts, caretakers, cleaners must be encouraged to report any incidents of bullying behaviour witnessed by them, or mentioned to them, to the relevant teacher;
5. Parents and pupils 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;
6. It is very important that all involved (including each set of pupils and parents) understand the above approach from the outset;
7. Teachers should take a calm, unemotional problem-solving approach when dealing with incidents of alleged bullying behaviour reported by pupils, staff or parents;
8. Incidents are generally best investigated outside the classroom situation to ensure the privacy of all involved;
9. All interviews should be conducted with sensitivity and with due regard to the rights of all pupils concerned. Pupils who are not directly involved can also provide very useful information in this way;
10. When analysing incidents of bullying behaviour, the relevant teacher should seek answers to questions of what, where, when, who and why. This should be done in a calm manner, setting an example in dealing effectively with a conflict in a non-aggressive manner. In our school we use a Restorative Practice approach using **Restorative Practice Questions:** What happened? What were you thinking at the time? What have your thoughts been since? How have you been affected by what happened? or Who has been affected by what you did? What has been the hardest thing for you? or How have they been affected by what you did? What do you think needs to happen next? This should be done in a calm manner, setting an example in dealing effectively with a conflict in a non-aggressive way.
11. If a group is involved, each member should be interviewed individually at first. Thereafter, all those involved should be met as a group, if deemed appropriate. At the group meeting, each member should be asked for his/her account of what happened to ensure that everyone in the group is clear about each other’s statements;
12. Each member of a group should be supported through the possible pressures that they may face them from the other members of the group after interview by the teacher;
13. It may also be appropriate or helpful to ask those involved to write down their account of the incident(s);
14. In cases where it has been determined by the relevant teacher that bullying behaviour has occurred, the parents of the parties involved should be contacted at an early stage to inform them of the matter and explain the actions being taken (by reference to the school policy). The school should give parents an opportunity of discussing ways in which they can reinforce or support the actions being taken by the school and the supports for their pupils;
15. Where the relevant teacher has determined that a pupil has been engaged in bullying behaviour, it should be made clear to him/her how he/she is in breach of the school’s anti-bullying policy and efforts should be made to try to get him/her to see the situation from the perspective of the pupil being bullied;
16. It must also be made clear to all involved (each set of pupils and parents) that in any situation where disciplinary sanctions are required, this is a private matter between the pupil being disciplined, his or her parents and the school;
17. Follow-up meetings with the relevant parties involved should be arranged separately with a view to possibly bringing them together at a later date if the pupil who has been bullied is ready and agreeable. This can have a therapeutic effect; Parents must be kept informed of follow up.
18. In cases where the relevant teacher considers that the bullying behaviour has not been adequately and appropriately addressed within 20 school days after he/she has determined that bullying behaviour has occurred, it must be recorded by the relevant teacher in the recording template at Appendix 3 of the DES Anti-Bullying Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools;
19. In determining whether a bullying case has been adequately and appropriately addressed the relevant teacher must, as part of his/her professional judgement, take the following factors into account:

* Whether the bullying behaviour has ceased;
* Whether any issues between the parties have been resolved as far as is practicable;
* Whether the relationships between the parties have been restored as far as is practicable; and
* Any feedback received from the parties involved, their parents or the school Principal or Deputy Principal;

1. Where a parent is not satisfied that the school has dealt with a bullying case in accordance with these procedures, the parents must be referred, as appropriate, to the school’s complaints procedures;
2. In the event that a parent has exhausted the school's complaints procedures and is still not satisfied, the school must advise the parents of their right to make a complaint to the Ombudsman for Children.
3. In the case of a complaint against a staff member or parent, the incident will be raised first with the people in question and if unresolved will be mediated by the Principal or Deputy Principal with the people in question. Conflict resolutions strategies will be used to deal with the conflict in a non- aggressive manner.
4. For cases of adult bullying, the procedures as outlined in the INTO Management Body’s Publication’ Working Together Procedures and Policies For Positive Staff Relations’, should be followed.

**Recording of bullying behaviour**

It is imperative that all recording of bullying incidents must be done in an objective and factual manner. The school’s procedures for noting and reporting bullying behaviour are as follows:

***Informal- pre-determination that bullying has occurred***

* All staff must keep a written record of any incidents witnessed by them or notified to them. All incidents must be reported to the relevant teacher
* While all reports, including anonymous reports of bullying must be investigated and dealt with by the relevant teacher, the relevant teacher must keep a written record of the reports, the actions taken and any discussions with those involved regarding same.
* The relevant teacher must inform the principal of all incidents being investigated.
* Teacher will use school template and record will be kept on child’s file.

***Formal Stage 1 - determination that bullying has occurred:***

If it is established by the relevant teacher that bullying has occurred, the relevant teacher must keep appropriate written records which will assist his/her efforts to resolve the issues and restore, as far as is practicable, the relationships of the parties involved.

***Formal Stage 2 – Recording (use bullying report form)***

The relevant teacher must use the recording template to record the bullying behaviour in the following circumstances:

a) in cases where he/she considers that the bullying behaviour has not been adequately and appropriately addressed within 20 school days after he/she has determined that bullying behaviour occurred; and

b) Where the school has decided as part of its anti-bullying policy that in certain circumstances bullying behaviour must be recorded and reported immediately to the Principal or Deputy Principal as applicable. When the recording template is used, it must be retained by the relevant teacher in question and a copy maintained in the student file in the office.

**Intervention Strategies:**

The nature of the bullying and the age of the child will determine the strategy to be employed.

***Established intervention strategies:***

• Teacher interviews with all pupils

• Negotiating agreements between pupils and following these up by monitoring progress. This can be on an informal basis or implemented through a more structured mediation process

• Working with parent(s)/guardian(s) to support school interventions

• No Blame Approach

• Circle Time

• Restorative interviews

• Restorative conferencing

• Implementing Friends for Life Programme, Mind Up programme

• Peer mediation where suitable training has been given

**7. The school’s programme of support for working with pupils affected by bullying is as follows (see Section 6.8 of the Anti-Bullying Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools):**

* All in-school supports and opportunities will be provided for the pupils affected by bullying to participate in activities designed to raise their self-esteem, to develop friendships and social skills and build resilience

*e.g. - Pastoral care system - Buddy mentoring system - Group work such as circle time*

* If pupils require counselling of further supports the school will endeavour to liaise with the appropriate agencies to organise same. This may be for the pupil affected by bullying or involved in the bullying behaviour.
* Pupils should understand that there are no innocent bystanders and that all incidents of bullying behaviour must be reported to a teacher.

It is also important to note that bullying behaviour can be part of a continuum of behaviour rather than a stand-alone issue and in some cases behaviour may escalate beyond that which can be described as bullying to serious physical or sexual assault or harassment. The school may refer to outside agencies where appropriate:

In cases where a school has serious concerns in relation to managing the behaviour of a pupil, the advice of the National Education Psychological Service (NEPS) should be sought.

In relation to bullying in schools, “Children First National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children 2011 (Children First)” and “the Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools” provide that in situations where “*the incident is serious and where the behaviour is regarded as potentially abusive, the school must consult the HSE Children and Family Social Services with a view to drawing up an appropriate response, such as a management plan”*.

Serious instances of bullying behaviour should, in accordance with the “Children First” and “the Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools”, be referred to the HSE Children and Family Services and/or Gardaí as appropriate.

“The Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools” also provide that where school personnel have concerns about a child but are not sure whether to report the matter to the HSE, the Designated Liaison Person must seek advice from the HSE Children and Family Social Services.

In the event that the school and/or parents deem the incident(s) to potentially be a criminal offence, An Garda Síochána /Community Garda may be contacted.

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. 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.

10. This policy has been made available to school personnel, published on the school website (or where none exists, is otherwise readily accessible to parents and pupils on request) and provided to the Parents’ Association (where one exists). A copy of this policy will be made available to the Department and the patron if requested.

11. 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 (or where none exists, be otherwise 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, if requested, to the patron and the Department.

This policy was adopted by the Board of Management in October 2019, reviewed most recently in October 2023.

Signed: ***Fr Martin Glynn*** Signed: ***Paula O’Connor***

(Chairperson of Board of Management) (Principal)

Reviewed and ratified by the B.O.M on: **23rd October 2023**

***Please Note: Isolated incidences of misbehaviour are dealt with under the Code of Behaviour.***

**Examples of Restorative Practice Questions:**

**To ask the person who conducted the negative action:**

What happened?

What were you thinking then/since?

Who could have been affected by what you did, and how?

What could you have done differently?

What needs to happen now to make things right?

**To ask the person who was at the receiving end of the negative action:**

What happened?

What did you think when you realised what was happening?

How did this impact on you?

How did this impact on others?

What was the hardest thing?

What needs to happen to make things right?

**NOTE: Questions must be simplified according to the level of children involved.**