

## Anti-Bullying Policy

### Introduction

The Board of Management of Saplings Special School for children A.S.D and Complex Needs, Goresbridge, Co. Kilkenny has developed this policy in accordance with the requirements of the Education (Welfare) Act 2000 and the code of behaviour guidelines issued by the NEWB.

### Rationale

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 Saplings Special School, Goresbridge has adopted the following anti-bullying policy within the framework of the school's overall code of behaviour. Together these policies recognise the individuality of each child's needs which have to be accommodated, while at the same time acknowledging the right of every child to an education in a disruption-free environment. This policy fully complies with the requirements of the Anti-Bullying Procedures for Primary and Post –Primary Schools which were published in September 2013.

### Aims

- To raise awareness of bullying as a form of unacceptable behaviour with school management, teaching and non-teaching staff, pupils and parents/guardians.
- To provide a definition of bullying for the whole school community
- To create a school ethos which encourages children to disclose and discuss incidents of bullying behaviour.
- To explain the relationship of autistic spectrum disorder and bullying
- To develop procedures for investigating and dealing with incidents of bullying behaviour.
- To raise awareness of bullying and to encourage vigilance in all stakeholders in recognising the signs and symptoms of bullying.
- To ensure that all members of the school community are enabled to act effectively to deal with bullying.
- To provide an environment where the health and safety of all school members is not endangered to the best of our ability.

### School Ethos

Saplings ethos supports individuals with a diagnosis of autism and their families, assisting them to achieve their full potential, celebrating each individual's dignity, uniqueness and right to an optimal education. It is within this school climate and atmosphere that our Anti-Bullying Policy is operated.

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:

### Positive school culture and climate

A positive school climate is one which the school:

- Is welcoming of difference and diversity and is based on inclusivity;
- Promotes respectful relationships across the school community
- Acknowledges the right of each member of the school community to enjoy school in a secure environment.
- Acknowledges the uniqueness of each individual and his/her worth as a human being.
- Promotes positive habits of self-respect, self-discipline and responsibility among all its members.

- Encourages pupils to disclose and discuss incidents of bullying behaviour in a non-threatening environment
- Prohibits vulgar, offensive, sectarian or other aggressive behaviour or language by any of its members.
- Has a clear commitment to promoting equity in general and gender equity in particular in all aspects of its functioning.
- Has the capacity to change in response to pupils' needs.
- Identifies aspects of curriculum through which positive and lasting influences can be exerted towards forming pupils' attitude and values.
- Takes particular care of "at risk" pupils and uses its monitoring systems to facilitate early intervention where necessary and it responds to the needs, fears or anxieties of individual members in a sensitive manner.
- Recognises the need to work in partnership with and keep parents informed on procedures to improve relationships on a school-wide basis.
- Recognises the role of parents in equipping the pupil with a range of life-skills.
- Recognises the role of other community agencies in preventing and dealing with bullying.
- Promotes habits of mutual respect, courtesy and an awareness of the interdependence of people in groups and communities.
- Promotes qualities of social responsibility, tolerance and understanding among all its members both in school and out of school.
- Staff members share a collegiate responsibility, under the direction of the Principal, to act in preventing bullying/aggressive behaviour by any member of the school community.

#### Definition of Bullying

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
- 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.

*Negative behaviour that does not meet this definition of bullying will be dealt with in accordance with the school's code of behaviour.*

**Examples of Bullying Behaviour**

<p><b>General behaviours which apply to all types of bullying</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Harassment based on any of the nine grounds in the equality legislation e.g. sexual harassment, homophobic bullying, racist bullying etc.</li> <li>▪ Physical aggression</li> <li>▪ Damage to property</li> <li>▪ Name calling</li> <li>▪ Slagging</li> <li>▪ The production, display or circulation of written words, pictures or other materials aimed at intimidating another person</li> <li>▪ Offensive graffiti</li> <li>▪ Extortion</li> <li>▪ Intimidation</li> <li>▪ Insulting or offensive gestures</li> <li>▪ The “look”</li> <li>▪ Invasion of personal space</li> <li>▪ A combination of any of the types listed.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Cyber</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Denigration: Spreading rumors, lies or gossip to hurt a person’s reputation</li> <li>▪ Harassment: Continually sending vicious, mean or disturbing messages to an individual</li> <li>▪ Impersonation: Posting offensive or aggressive messages under another person’s name</li> <li>▪ Flaming: Using inflammatory or vulgar words to provoke an online fight</li> <li>▪ Trickery: Fooling someone into sharing personal information which you then post online</li> <li>▪ Outing: Posting or sharing confidential or compromising information or images</li> <li>▪ Exclusion: Purposefully excluding someone from an online group</li> <li>▪ Cyber stalking: Ongoing harassment and denigration that causes a person considerable fear for his/her safety</li> <li>▪ Silent telephone/mobile phone call</li> <li>▪ Abusive telephone/mobile phone calls</li> <li>▪ Abusive text messages</li> <li>▪ Abusive email</li> <li>▪ Abusive communication on social networks e.g. Facebook/Ask.fm/ Twitter/You Tube or on games consoles</li> <li>▪ Abusive website comments/Blogs/Pictures</li> <li>▪ Abusive posts on any form of communication technology</li> </ul>
<p><b>Identity Based Behaviours</b> 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)</p>	
<p><b>Homophobic and Transgender</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Spreading rumours about a person’s sexual orientation</li> <li>▪ Taunting a person of a different sexual orientation</li> <li>▪ Name calling e.g. Gay, queer, lesbian...used in a derogatory manner</li> <li>▪ Physical intimidation or attacks</li> <li>▪ Threats</li> </ul>
<p><b>Race, nationality, ethnic background membership of</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Discrimination, prejudice, comments or insults about colour, nationality, culture, social class, religious beliefs, ethnic or traveller background</li> </ul>

<b>the Traveller community</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Exclusion on the basis of any of the above</li> </ul>
<b>Relational</b>	<p>This involves manipulating relationships as a means of bullying. Behaviours include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Malicious gossip</li> <li>▪ Isolation &amp; exclusion</li> <li>▪ Ignoring</li> <li>▪ Excluding from the group</li> <li>▪ Taking someone's friends away</li> <li>▪ "Bitching"</li> <li>▪ Spreading rumours</li> <li>▪ Breaking confidence</li> <li>▪ Talking loud enough so that the victim can hear</li> <li>▪ The "look"</li> <li>▪ Use of terminology such as 'nerd' in a derogatory way</li> </ul>
<b>Sexual</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Unwelcome or inappropriate sexual comments or touching</li> <li>▪ Harassment</li> </ul>
<b>Special Educational Needs, Disability</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Name calling</li> <li>▪ Taunting others because of their disability or learning needs</li> <li>▪ Taking advantage of some pupils' vulnerabilities and limited capacity to recognise and defend themselves against bullying</li> <li>▪ Taking advantage of some pupils' vulnerabilities and limited capacity to understand social situations and social cues.</li> <li>▪ Mimicking a person's disability</li> <li>▪ Setting others up for ridicule</li> </ul>

Bullying is usually distinguishable from banter or conflict, Saplings Goresbridge differentiates between these as follows:

<b>Typical peer conflict</b>	<b>Bullying</b>
Equal power between students, both students play an active role	Imbalance of power, conflict may be one-sided
Students may be friends and show interest in repairing a relationship	No real friendship known and no interest in repair
Conflict not pre-meditated and remorse shown	Actions are planned and purposeful, no sincere remorse
Students are supported by other peers	Target has no peer support
Intention to resolve a situation	Intention to gain power or control.

The relevant teacher(s) for investigating and dealing with bullying is (are) as follows:

- The Class teacher
- Deputy Principal and Principal where the matter is considered more serious.

*Any teacher may act as a relevant teacher if circumstances warrant it.*



#### **Relationship to the characteristic spirit of the school**

The nature of autistic spectrum disorder means that children on the spectrum may not have sufficient understanding or awareness that behaviours directed towards others may be undesirable or defined as bullying. Children who are recipients of such behaviours may be unable to express their aversion to these behaviours, and often difficulties with communication mean they are unable to

inform adults. This means that all staff at Saplings Goresbridge have a duty not only to be aware of such behaviours but also to respond appropriately to these instances.

### **The behaviours of children with ASD and the characteristics of bullying behaviour**

The pupils attending Saplings Goresbridge have a diagnosis of an autistic spectrum disorder. This means that they are likely to have a limited ability to comprehend that they may be engaging in activities which have the characteristics of bullying behaviour. Children with ASD are likely to be unaware that certain behaviours are socially unacceptable.

It is possible that one child may develop an obsession with another child which may cause distress or anxiety to the recipient. Such behaviour might include wanting to be near the 'target' child or having an interest in making physical contact with that child, such as touching a particular part of his or her body, for example, by demonstrating potentially physically harmful behaviours such as kicking, pinching or throwing objects.

Staff have a duty of care to be vigilant and alert to these behaviours. For example, the child who is the target may show fear or anxiety when he/she sees the child who targets him/her. This information must be shared amongst all members of the staff team, and also shared with other members of staff as soon as possible, particularly with those on duty during playtimes and lunchtime. Incidents of bullying with or without intent are recorded by using the Saplings, Goresbridge Bullying Report Form, and reported to the School Principal. It should be recorded on these forms if the child who was the target was or was not able to articulate their experiences.

The school acknowledges that there are three parties involved in bullying – those who bully, those who are bullied and those who witness the bullying. Staff and teachers bear this in mind when dealing with bullying incidences and try to support and work with all parties involved.

### **Possible Signs and Symptoms of Bullying in a child with ASD**

A child may indicate by signs or behaviour that he or she is being bullied. Adults should be aware of these possible signs and that they should investigate if a child displays:

- Increased anxiety (displayed through increasingly obsessive behaviours, hand movements, repetitive questioning and statements, or short temper)
- Reluctance or unwillingness to go to school
- Other unexplained increase in difficult behaviours
- Deterioration in school performance or loss of interest in school
- Property or possessions missing or damaged
- Unexplained bruising or injuries
- Withdrawal
- Aggression
- Seeming over-sensitive or over-reacting to minor occurrences (being 'on edge')
- Seeking revenge
- Repeatedly exposing him- or herself to the same kind of bullying situation. Although the pupil may know it is a negative interaction, they may still consider this better than no interaction at all. It becomes a scenario they are familiar with and which follows a predictable sequence.

### **Misunderstanding**

There are many reasons why students with ASD may display behaviour that appears similar to bullying, such as poor understanding of interactions and a reaction to previous social experiences.

- It might be learned behaviour that they have witnessed or used previously to gain a desired response.
- 'Cause and effect' may be the only kind of interactions they know how to initiate – the motivation behind the behaviour is unlikely to cause intentional harm.

- They may lack the skills to maintain an interaction appropriately, and have difficulty ‘reading’ another person’s responses, so they don’t realise when the other pupil is no longer enjoying the interaction.
- They may seek out interactions in a way which lacks boundaries.
- They may be following the instructions of another or be seeking approval or acceptance into a gang by joining in with someone else’s bullying.
- They may be mimicking incidents or behaviour that they have witnessed or, of which they have been a part.
- Their behaviour might be an attempt to retaliate, without any understanding of the consequences of their own behaviour.
- Displaying aggressive behaviour might be a strategy to avoid being bullied themselves.
- They might be feeling frustrated at being left out and want to force other students to be their friends.
- Difficulties with winning and losing.

### Misunderstandings Verses Bullying

It is important to remember that not all cases that look like bullying in fact involve bullying. In some cases, particularly with pupils with ASD, the situation may involve a lack of empathy or a lack of understanding rather than an intent to hurt or marginalise. Here are some of the examples of the misconceptions that we encourage teachers to explore when explaining bullying:

<b>Bullying</b>	<b>Accident or misunderstanding</b>
Someone thinks it’s fun to upset you. They say things again and again and laugh when you get cross or sad.	Someone says something that they didn’t know would upset you and they say sorry. They are sad you are upset.
They carry on when you ask them to stop.	They stop if you ask them to.
They take your things in order to see you get upset.	They borrow something without asking but give it back when you ask.
They kick, push, punch, or hurt you on purpose	They accidentally bump into you or push past and then say sorry.
They mock things you say or call you names if you make a mistake.	They don’t agree with everything you say but respect your opinion.

### Education and Prevention Strategies

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

- A school-wide approach to the fostering of respect for all members of the school community.
- The promotion of the value of diversity to address issues of prejudice and stereotyping, and highlight the unacceptability of bullying behaviour.
- Supervision and monitoring of classroom, corridors, school grounds, school tours and extra-curricular activities.
- Non-teaching and ancillary staff will be encouraged to be vigilant and report issues to relevant teachers.
- Supervision will also apply to monitoring student use of communication technology within the school.
- The school’s anti-bullying policy is discussed with pupils and all parent(s)/guardian(s) are given a copy as part of the Code of Behaviour of the school.
- Encourage a culture of telling, 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 are behaving responsibly.

- The development of an Acceptable Use Policy in the school to include the necessary steps to ensure that the access to technology within the school is strictly monitored, as it is the pupils' use of mobile phones.
- Development of school policies and practices that are relevant to bullying, including Code of Behaviour, Child Protection Policy, Supervision Policy, ICT Acceptable Use policy, Attendance policy etc
- Through everyday classes – Language, SPHE, Religion, History, Geography & P.E. etc.
- Co-operation and group work.
- Direct teaching of self-regulation skills
- Stay safe/So SAFE programmes
- Social/Life skills programmes.
- Social Stories

#### **Procedures for investigating and dealing with bullying**

The primary aim 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). The school's procedures must be consistent with the following approach. Every effort will be made to ensure that all involved (including pupils, parent(s)/guardian(s)) understand this approach from the outset.

#### **Reporting bullying behaviour**

- Any pupil or parent(s)/guardian(s) may bring a bullying incident to any teacher in the school.
- All reports, including anonymous reports of bullying, will be investigated and dealt with by the relevant teacher.
- Teaching and non-teaching staff such as secretaries, special needs assistants (SNAs), bus escorts, caretakers, cleaners must report any incidents of bullying behaviour witnessed by them, or mentioned to them, to the relevant teacher

#### **Investigating and dealing with incidents: Style of approach**

- In investigating and dealing with bullying, the (relevant) teacher will exercise his/her professional judgement to determine whether bullying has occurred and how best the situation might be resolved;
- Parent(s)/guardian(s) 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;
- Teachers should take a calm, unemotional problem-solving approach.
- Where possible incidents should be investigated outside the classroom situation to ensure the privacy of all involved;
- 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;
- 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;
- If a group is involved, each member should be interviewed individually at first. Thereafter, all those involved should be met as a group. 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;

- Each member of a group should be supported through the possible pressures that may face them from the other members of the group after the interview by the teacher;
- It may also be appropriate or helpful to ask those involved to write down their account of the incident(s)
- In cases where it has been determined by the relevant teacher that bullying behaviour has occurred, the parent(s)/guardian(s) 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 parent(s)/guardian(s) an opportunity of discussing ways in which they can reinforce or support the actions being taken by the school and the supports provided to the pupils;
- 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;
- It must also be made clear to all involved (each set of pupils and parent(s)/guardian(s)) that in any situation where disciplinary sanctions are required, this is a private matter between the pupil being disciplined, his or her parent(s)/guardian(s) and the school;
- Follow up and recording
- 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;
- Any feedback received from the parties involved, their parent(s)/guardian(s) or the school Principal or Deputy Principal
- 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.
- Where a parent(s)/guardian(s) is not satisfied that the school has dealt with a bullying case in accordance with these procedures, the parent(s)/guardian(s) must be referred, as appropriate, to the school's complaints procedures.
- In the event that a parent(s)/guardian(s) has exhausted the school's complaints procedures and is still not satisfied, the school must advise the parent(s)/guardian(s) of their right to make a complaint to the Ombudsman for Children.

#### **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. Consideration needs to be given to where the records will be made e.g. incident book. 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.

##### **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.



- The school in consultation with the relevant teacher/s should develop a protocol for the storage of all records retained by the relevant teacher.

#### **Formal Stage 2-Appendix B (From DES Procedures)**

- The relevant teacher must use the recording template at Appendix 3 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.
- The school should list behaviours that must be recorded and reported immediately to the principal. These should be in line with the school's code of behaviour. When the recording template is used, the original must be maintained by the principal. This will be kept in a pupil file in a locked cabinet in the principal's office. They may be accessed only by Principal or Deputy Principal, and by the class teacher on request, and will be retained together with all other records until such time as they can be legally destroyed.

#### **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
- Strengthening the victim
- Restorative Practice

#### **Programme of Support**

The school's programme of support for working with pupils affected by bullying is as follows:

- 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.
- Programmes with those affected by and those involved in bullying and their peers – whole class where appropriate
- Programmes with whole class lessons dealing with respect, self-esteem and the issue of bullying. & SPHE.
- If pupils further supports the school will endeavour to liaise with the appropriate agencies to organise same, FDYS, Psychology etc. 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.

#### **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. There will be comprehensive supervision and monitoring measures in all areas of school activity, by teaching staff, SNA as well as Ancillary Staff as far as possible. Please refer to Schools Supervision Policy

- ✓ Supervision each morning from 9.10 a.m.
- ✓ Supervised play at breaks and lunch times.

- ✓ Supervised meals at break and lunch.
- ✓ Supervision during school time outside school premises e.g. swimming, tours etc.
- ✓ Adherence to ICT Acceptable Use Policy.

#### **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.

*NB: This policy is intended to be consulted in conjunction with the school's child protection policy.*

#### **Ratification and Communication**

This **Anti-Bullying Policy** was ratified by the Board of Management, Saplings, Goresbridge on **12<sup>th</sup> February 2024** . It is due for review annually or as changes in DES Policy dictate and has been communicated to all stakeholders via agreed minutes. It will form part of the school plan which is located in reception and will be published on the school website.

Signed by Principal.....

Signed by Chairperson of the Board.....

Date.....