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Anti-Bullying Policy

MISSION STATEMENT

Our mission is to provide an inclusive learning environment which promotes academic excellence, built on the personal, social and spiritual development of all. We endeavour to develop confident, creative life-long learners in an atmosphere of equality, justice and respect.

INTRODUCTION

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 Mount Seskin Community College 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.

KEY PRINCIPLES

2. The Board of Management recognises the very serious nature of bullying and the negative impact that it can have on the lives of students 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 students to disclose and discuss incidents of bullying behaviour in a non-threatening environment;
 - 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 students;
 - explicitly address the issues of cyber-bullying and identity-based bullying including in particular, homophobic and transphobic bullying.
- Effective supervision and monitoring of students;
- Supports for staff;
- Consistent recording, investigation and follow up of bullying behaviour (including use of established intervention strategies);
- On-going evaluation of the effectiveness of the anti-bullying policy.

WHAT BULLYING IS

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
- 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
- Physical Aggression
- Intimidation
- Name-calling
- Damage to Property
- Extortion

Additional information on the different types of bullying is set out in Section 2 of the *Anti-Bullying Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools*.

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 will 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 (including graffiti) where that message, image or statement can be viewed and/or repeated by other people will be regarded as bullying behaviour.

Bullying of staff will be dealt with in the same manner as that of students.

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

This policy applies to all school-related activities, coming to and from school and cyber-bullying.

The Role of the Bystander

Mount Seskin Community College is a Telling School. This means that witnesses of bullying behaviour (including, but not limited to, name calling, physical aggression, deliberate exclusion, graffiti, etc.) have a responsibility to report what they see to school staff.

Everybody in the school community is responsible for reporting bullying behaviour. This includes teachers, special needs assistants, students, care-taking and cleaning staff, administration staff, parents, librarians, cleaners, adult students, visitors.

RESPONSIBILITY FOR INVESTIGATION OF BULLYING

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

A bullying concern may be brought to any member of staff. This concern must be reported to the Year Head of the subject of the bullying behaviour.

The Year Head of the student being bullied is responsible for investigating bullying incidents.

An incident of bullying behaviour may involve students across two or more year groups. In these cases, more than one Year Head may be involved in investigating and dealing with the bullying behaviour.

The Year Head may refer to the Guidance department/Chaplain for support and advice in the investigation of any bullying incidents.

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

EDUCATION AND PREVENTION STRATEGIES

5. The education and prevention strategies (including strategies specifically aimed at cyber-bullying and identity-based bullying including in particular, homophobic and transphobic bullying) that may be used by the school are as follows:
 - Social, Personal & Health Education Programme (SPHE)

- Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE)
- Behaviour for Learning classroom (Skills Room)
- School Completion Programme (SCP)
- Student Council
- Special Educational Needs Department
- Week of Welcome (for 1st Year Students)
- ‘Friendship Week’
- ‘Cairde’
- Guidance Counsellor
- Chaplain
- Year Head & Tutor Pastoral Care
- Cross-Curricular & Extra-curricular activities
- Restorative Practices
- Whole staff training and Continuing Professional Development as needed and/or as opportunity arises.
- Staff modelling of positive behaviour.

INVESTIGATIVE AND FOLLOW-UP PROCEDURES

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:

The primary aim in investigating and dealing with bullying is to resolve any issues and to restore, as far as practicable, the relationships of the parties involved (rather than apportion blame);

Investigation

- i. In investigating bullying behaviour, the Year Head will exercise his/her professional judgement to determine whether bullying has occurred and how best the situation might be resolved.
- ii. Parent(s)/guardian(s) and students 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.
- iii. A calm, unemotional problem-solving approach should be taken.
- iv. Where possible incidents will be investigated outside the classroom situation to ensure the privacy of all involved.
- v. All interviews will be conducted with sensitivity and with due regard to the rights of all students concerned. Students who are not directly involved can also provide very useful information in this way.
- vi. When analysing incidents of bullying behaviour, answers will be sought to questions of what, where, when, who and why. This will be done in a calm manner, setting an example in dealing effectively with a conflict in a non-aggressive manner.

- vii. If a group is involved, each member may be interviewed individually or in a group meeting. At the group meeting, each member will be asked for his/her account of what happened to ensure that everyone in the group is clear about each other's statements.
- viii. Each member of a group will 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).
- ix. In cases where it has been determined by the relevant teacher(s) that bullying behaviour has occurred, the parent(s)/guardian(s) of the parties involved will 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 will 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 students.
- x. Where the relevant teacher has determined that a student has been engaged in bullying behaviour, it will 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 student being bullied.
- xi. It must also be made clear to all involved (each set of students and parent(s)/guardian(s)) that in any situation where disciplinary sanctions are required, this is a private matter between the student being disciplined, his or her parent(s)/guardian(s) and the school.

Follow up

- 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 may be arranged separately with a view to possibly bringing them together at a later date if the student 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) will be advised to bring the matter to the attention of the Principal in the first instance.
- In the event that a parent(s)/guardian(s) has exhausted the school's complaints procedures and is still not satisfied, the Principal will advise the parent(s)/guardian(s) of their right to make a complaint to the Ombudsman for Children.

Recording

All recording of bullying incidents will be done in an objective and factual manner.

Informal

- All staff should keep a written record of any incidents witnessed by them or notified to them.
- All incidents must be reported to relevant Year Head.
- 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.

Determination that bullying has occurred:

- If it is established by the Year Head that bullying has occurred, the Year Head may refer the student to the Guidance Counsellor and/or Chaplain where appropriate measures will be taken to restore the relationships between the parties concerned. The Guidance Counsellor/Chaplain will inform the parents of the student being bullied of the action taken and the need to inform the school should they believe that the bullying has not stopped. Bullying behaviour can be part of a continuum of behaviour rather than a stand-alone issue. In some cases behaviour may escalate beyond that which can be described as bullying to serious physical or sexual assault or harassment. The College's anti-bullying policy should be read in conjunction with the Code of Behaviour in this regard. Referral to outside external agencies and authorities may be appropriate.

Formal

The Year Head of the subject of the bullying behaviour is responsible for completing the Bullying Report sheet.

The Bullying Report sheet must begin to be completed when the relevant teacher has established that bullying has occurred.

Section 9 of the Bullying Report Sheet must be completed 20 days after the bullying concern is reported. In cases where he/she considers that the bullying behaviour has not been adequately and appropriately addressed by this point the relevant teacher will submit the Bullying Report Sheet to the Principal/Deputy Principal for further action.

Record Keeping

All records kept by the Year Head in relation to students involved in bullying instances will be kept in the respective student's file.

The Guidance Counsellor will retain a copy of any bullying record sheet in a designated file in the Guidance office.

The Guidance Counsellor, Year Head, Principal and Deputy Principal will have access to this file.

There will be no time limit set on the length of time that Bullying record sheets will be kept.

SUPPORT PROGRAMMES FOR THOSE AFFECTED BY BULLYING

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

Students can be affected by bullying behaviour in a number of ways and to different extents.

Not all students who are affected by bullying behaviour may come to the attention of their Year Head in this regard, e.g. witnesses to bullying behaviour.

The supports that are offered to a wide range of students who may be affected by bullying behaviour are:

- Tutor & Year Head
- Guidance Counsellor
- Chaplain
- Behaviour for Learning Classroom (Skills Room)
- School Completion Programme supports
- SPHE Programme
- CSPE Clubs and extra-curricular activities
- Home School Community Liaison Teacher

Subjects and Perpetrators of Bullying Behaviour

In cases where bullying behaviour has been identified, the Year Head(s) of the students involved (both subject and perpetrator) will determine, through discussion with the student involved what supports may best meet their needs. These supports may include:

- Services of Guidance Counsellor or Chaplain.
- Referral to the Behaviour for Learning classroom in order to participate in programmes designed to build self-esteem and develop skills in dealing with their situation.
- Restorative Practice meeting(s) with the subject and perpetrator in order to rebuild relationships.

Parents

The parent of the subject or perpetrator of bullying behaviour has a role to play in the support of a student. They may be invited to attend any of the above supports in order to help them to understand the behaviour of their child and how they can best support the student and improve outcomes for all involved.

SUPERVISION AND MONITORING OF STUDENTS

8. 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.

PREVENTION OF HARASSMENT

9. 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 students or staff or the harassment of students 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 _____ [date].
11. 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 students 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.
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 (or where none exists, be otherwise readily accessible to parents and students 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.

Approved by the Board of Management: May 2014

Date of Review: May 2015