Portmarnock Community School

Bí Cineálta Policy to Prevent and Address Bullying Behaviour

The Board of Management of Portmarnock Community School 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.

OBJECTIVES OF THIS POLICY

The aims of this Anti-Bullying Policy are to set out a framework within which the whole community of Portmarnock Community School manages issues relating to bullying and to define the school's strategy in relation to the prevention and resolving of bullying behaviour.

The Board of Management, staff, students and parents/guardians have a responsibility to understand what bullying is. As a school we take bullying seriously. All staff, students and parents/guardians should know what the school policy on bullying is and what they should do if bullying arises. Bullying in Portmarnock Community School will not be tolerated.

Purpose and Scope:

The purpose of this Policy is to prevent and respond to incidents of bullying in a clear, consistent, and effective manner. It applies to all members of the school community—students, staff,

parents/guardians, and visitors—and is enforceable during school hours, on school property, at all school-related activities, and in any context (including digital environments) where bullying affects the school climate. The school reserves the right to intervene in incidents of digital or cyber bullying that occur outside school hours and off school premises where such behaviour impacts on the wellbeing of students or the good order of the school.

STATEMENT OF RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Harassment and bullying are behaviour that is destructive to a positive working atmosphere and will not be endured. It is the right of every member of Portmarnock Community School to work in an environment free from any form of fear and intimidation. It is the responsibility of each and every member of Portmarnock Community School to ensure that bullying of any form is not tolerated and when observed or experienced, that it is reported to the appropriate person (see agreed procedures for telling, investigating, recording and responding to bullying below).

RATIONALE

This Anti-Bullying Policy was developed as a priority for the Portmarnock Community School community. We endeavour to provide a safe environment in the school for all students and staff. The Board of Management of Portmarnock Community School has adopted this Anti-Bullying Policy in accordance with the requirements of:

● Education (Welfare) Act 2000

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:

Definition of Bullying

Bullying is defined in *Cineáltas: Action Plan on Bullying* and *Bí Cineálta: Procedures to Prevent and Address Bullying Behaviour for Primary and Post-Primary Schools* as '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'. The detailed definition is provided in Chapter 2 of the Bí Cineálta procedures.

Each school is required to develop and implement a Bí Cineálta Policy that sets out how the school community prevents and addresses bullying behaviour.

Strategies to deal with inappropriate behaviour that is not bullying behaviour are provided for within the school's Code of Behaviour.

Section A: Development/review 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.

	Date consulted	Method of Consultation
School Staff	January 2025 – Whole staff policy review workshop during Croke Park hours March- April Feb- March	● In person meeting ● Group workshop ● Focus group- in person ● Online surveys ● Feedback on wellbeing & preventative strategies ● Consultation with stakeholder focus group ● Year Head focus group
Students	January – April 2025 – Consultation with Student Council and Year Group feedback sessions	● Student Council meeting ● Google classroom discussion ● Student survey (Google Form) ● Stakeholder focus group
Parents	January 2025 – Survey and feedback through Parents' Association meeting	● Parent surveys ● Stakeholder focus group
Board of Management	Spring 2025 – BOM discussion June 10 2025, adoption of reviewed policy	● In person meeting and policy review
Wider school community as appropriate, for example, bus drivers	School Code of Behaviour reviewed with wider community representatives during 2024/25 cycle	● Survey conducted via Google Form/ Email

Date policy was approved: 10th June 2025

Date policy will be reviewed: May 2026

Section B: Preventing Bullying Behaviour

This section sets out the prevention strategies that will be used by the school. These include strategies specifically aimed at preventing online bullying behaviour, homophobic and transphobic bullying behaviour, racist bullying behaviour, sexist bullying behaviour and sexual harassment as appropriate (see Chapter 5 of the Bí Cineálta procedures):

The Board of Management of Portmarnock Community School 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:

- Positive School Culture & Climate
- Teamwork, Respect & Kindness will be encouraged and praised to foster an environment and culture of mutual respect
- The education about bullying and prevention of bullying is the responsibility of all staff

Portmarnock Community School takes a whole school approach involving staff, students and parents/guardians. The staff work to raise the awareness of bullying so that all members of the school community understand what bullying is and how it is dealt with. A high degree of vigilance is used throughout the school to ensure that bullying behaviour is identified and tackled. Through curricular and extra-curricular programmes, Portmarnock Community School provides students with opportunities to develop a positive sense of self-worth.

Types of Bullying Behaviour include:

- Verbal: name-calling, teasing, threats, or spreading rumours
- Physical: pushing, hitting, damaging or stealing property
- Social: exclusion, humiliation, or manipulation of relationships
- Cyberbullying: sending abusive messages, impersonation, sharing harmful or false content
- Identity-based: targeting individuals based on race, gender identity, religion, disability, or sexual orientation
- Sexual harassment: unwelcome comments or behaviour of a sexual nature

Technology and AI-Related Harm:

Bullying via technology now includes the misuse of artificial intelligence. Examples of AI-related bullying include:

- Creation and dissemination of deep fake images or videos to intimidate or ridicule
- Impersonation using AI-generated content
- Use of AI to generate threatening or misleading text, audio, or visual content
- Sharing AI-altered images to cause distress or humiliation

Such behaviours will be treated as serious disciplinary matters and may be referred to external agencies depending on severity. The school integrates digital literacy education, including the ethical use of AI, into its curriculum.

Online Bullying and Digital Conduct:

Portmarnock Community School recognises the specific risks associated with online conduct. The following behaviours are some examples of behaviours that are considered forms of cyberbullying and are strictly prohibited:

- Harassment, flaming, denigration, impersonation, outing, tricking, exclusion, and cyberstalking
- Use of email, messaging, or online platforms to scare, harm, or intimidate others
- Engaging in online activity intended to cause physical or emotional harm

Disciplinary consequences will apply to any such behaviour, including the potential loss of digital privileges. In some instances, cyberbullying may constitute a criminal offence. All online activity on school systems is monitored and logged. The school will act in line with national safeguarding policy and under the direction of:

- *The Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools (2023)*
- *Children First (2017)*
- *Cineáltas Anti-Bullying Guidelines (2025)*
- *Relevant statutory agencies, including the Department of Education, the Department of Justice, and the HSE*

Prevention of Harassment

The school upholds its obligations under the Equal Status Acts 2000–2018. Harassment based on any of the nine protected characteristics is strictly prohibited and will be addressed under this policy.

The Education and Prevention Strategies used by the school are as follows:

SPHE

The SPHE Short Course of 100 hours is timetabled for each of the three years of Junior Cycle in Portmarnock Community School. The spiral approach of revisiting key ideas and topics throughout the three years of Junior Cycle is an important part of SPHE. This means that anti-bullying lessons will feature in each of the years of Junior Cycle SPHE in Portmarnock Community School

CSPE

CSPE is an important part of wellbeing provision in Portmarnock Community School. Throughout their studies, students will learn about social responsibilities, human rights and human dignity.

RSE

Relationships & Sexuality Education is delivered in each of the six year groups in Portmarnock Community School

Themed Weeks

A number of themed weeks take place in P.C.S to promote a positive school culture and raise awareness about bullying; Friendship Week, Random Act of Kindness Week.

Student Voice and Leadership

Student Council and Student Leadership groups (incl 5th Year Ambassadors).
Fifth year students establish links with incoming first years to support them in the transition from primary school.
The school also has a Senior Prefect system, TY Leadership Group, Student Council (Whole School) and various leadership committees in Junior and Senior Cycles.

Ladder of Referral

All students and staff are informed about referral procedures in the school
- Class Teacher
- Tutor
- Year Head / Guidance Counsellor/ Chaplain
- Deputy Principals
- Principal

Tyro Positive Behaviour Reward System

Portmarnock Community School seeks to promote a positive school culture and environment by recognising and rewarding students for effort, achievement and for living by our school ethos and values.

Guest Speakers/ Workshops

Guest speakers are invited in, for both students, staff and parents to give talks in wellbeing related topics including anti-bullying and cyber-safety. The Gardai are invited yearly to speak to our students.

School Anti Bullying Policy

The Policy is published on the school website and is available to all staff in the staff handbook. The Policy is in the student journal and is signed by students and their parents/guardians at the beginning of the school year.

Children First 2017

Child Protection and Anti-Bullying training is included in the agenda for staff development throughout the year.

Year Group Assemblies

Year Heads, Deputy Principals and the Principal emphasise and reinforce the importance of mutual respect during assemblies. Assemblies are used to draw attention to examples of students demonstrating our school values and to reinforce key messages in line with our school ethos in their school life.

Agreed Class Rules

At the beginning of the school year there is discussion and agreement between teachers and students about rules and expectations in subject classes. This reinforces the importance of respect between each member of the school community.

Links to Other Policies

This Anti-Bullying Policy is linked to the following school policies:
- Code of Behaviour
- School Regulations
- Suspension & Permanent Exclusion
- Child Safeguarding
- ICT Acceptable Use Policy
- SPHE
- RSE

The school has the following supervision and monitoring policies in place to prevent and address bullying behaviour (see Chapter 5 of the Bí Cineálta procedures):

- Vigilant supervision during unstructured times
- Online activity reviewed where relevant
- Regular review of records and intervention outcomes

Supervision takes place before school, during morning break and in the student canteen at lunchtime. All teaching and nonteaching staff are aware of the importance of noting any unacceptable behaviour. Classroom doors should remain locked at break and lunchtimes. On occasion throughout the year, SPHE teachers and student surveys will ask students to identify potential "hotspots" for bullying to occur on a map of the school. This information is shared with school management.

Section C: Addressing Bullying Behaviour

The teacher(s) with responsibility for addressing bullying behaviour is (are) as follows:
Year Heads, Deputy Principals, and Principal, supported by the Guidance and Pastoral Care Team.

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

The steps that will be taken by the school to determine if bullying behaviour has occurred, the approaches taken to address the bullying behaviour and to review progress are as follows (see Chapter 6 of the Bí Cineálta procedures):

Procedures for Reporting and Investigating
- All reports, including anonymous ones, are taken seriously
- Investigations are handled confidentially and sensitively by relevant staff (e.g., Year Head, SMT)
- Interventions may include restorative practices, mediation, or formal disciplinary actions
- Documentation is maintained in line with national guidelines

To determine whether the behaviour reported is bullying behaviour the Year Head should consider the following questions:
- Is the behaviour targeted at a specific student or group of students?
- Is the behaviour intended to cause physical, social or emotional harm?
- Is the behaviour repeated?

If the answer to each 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 questions is *No*, then the behaviour is not bullying behaviour. Strategies for dealing with inappropriate behaviour are provided within the school's Code of Behaviour.

Note: A one-off instance of negative behaviour towards another student is not bullying behaviour. However, a single hurtful message posted on social media can be considered as bullying behaviour as it may be visible to a wider audience and has a high likelihood of being shared multiple times, so it becomes a repeated behaviour.

When identifying if bullying behaviour has occurred the year head should consider the following:
- What?
- Where?
- When?
- Why?

The following steps will be taken by the year head to determine if bullying behaviour has occurred

- The Year Head will meet with the student who claims they are being bullied to take account of the actions they have experienced. It can be helpful to have the student write down their account of the incident(s).
- The Year Head will meet the student who has been identified as engaging in bullying behavior to take their account of the incident. It can be helpful to have the student write down their account of the incident(s).
- If a group of students is involved, each student will be engaged individually first. It may also be helpful to ask the students involved to write down their account of the incident.
- 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.

Please note: 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. Where the bullying behaviour continues in school, schools should deal with it in accordance with their Bí Cineálta policy.

Where Bullying Behaviour has occurred

- Parents are an integral part of the school community and play an important role, in partnership with schools, in addressing bullying behaviour.
- Where bullying behaviour has occurred, the parents of the parties 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 as outlined in the school's Bí Cineálta policy.
- In circumstances where students express concern about their parents being informed, the school should develop an appropriate plan to support the student and for how their parents will be informed.
- The school will consider communication barriers that may exist when communicating with parents, for example, literacy, digital literacy or language barrier
- It is important that the school listens to the views of the student who is experiencing bullying behaviour as to how best to address the situation.

Record Keeping

A record shall be kept of the engagement with all involved.

This record should document the form and type of bullying behaviour, if known, where it took place and the date of the initial engagement with students involved and their parents.

This record shall also include the views of the students and 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.
- Important factors to consider as part of this engagement are the nature of bullying behaviour, the effectiveness of the strategies used to address bullying behaviour and the relationship between the students involved.
- The teacher should document this review with students and their parents to determine if the bullying behaviour has ceased, and the views of students & parents in relation to this.

- The date that it has been determined that 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 continues 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, in accordance with the Bí Cineálta Procedures to Prevent and Address Bullying Behaviour for Primary and Post-Primary Schools, 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.

A note on Restorative Practice

Approaches such as Restorative Practice and Mediation should only be used to address bullying behaviour when the teachers involved have been trained in how to engage in these methods and the students involved have agreed to their use.

To ensure clarity among the school community about how instances of bullying behaviour will be dealt with, the approaches that will be used by the school must be specified in the school's Bí Cineálta policy.

Requests to take No Action

A student reporting bullying behaviour may ask that a member of staff does nothing about the behaviour other than "look out" for them. The student may not want to be identified as having told someone about the bullying behaviour. They may feel that telling someone might make things more difficult for them. Where this occurs, it is important that the member of staff shows empathy to the student, deals with the matter sensitively and speaks with the student to work out together what steps can be taken to address the matter and how their parents will be informed of the situation. It is important that the student who has experienced bullying behaviour feels safe.

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 or be facilitated to do so where there are literacy, digital literacy or language barriers**. However, while acknowledging the parent's request, schools may decide that, based on the circumstances, it is appropriate to address the bullying behaviour.

Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post Primary Schools

If bullying behaviour is a child protection concern the matter will be addressed without delay by the Designated Liaison Person in accordance with *Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools*.

The school will use the following approaches to support those who experience, witness and display bullying behaviour (see Chapter 6 of the Bí Cineálta procedures):

It is important for school staff to be fair and consistent in their approach to address bullying behaviour.

Both the student who is experiencing bullying behaviour and the student who is displaying bullying behaviour need support.

It is important that the student who is experiencing bullying behaviour is engaged without delay so that they feel listened to, supported and reassured.

School staff should identify the support needed for the student who is displaying bullying behaviour to better manage relational difficulties and ensure that their needs are met.

The following approaches may be used by school staff to support students
- Listen to the student with care and empathy.
- Remain nonjudgmental.
- Contact the parents.
- Referral to school guidance counsellor.
- Referral to school student support team.
- Class teachers may adjust class seating plans and class activity arrangements.
- Encourage students to speak to their parents and guardians.
- Refer students to Childline if they need support whilst at home.
- Bí Cineálta

Procedures to Prevent and Address Bullying Behaviour for Primary and Post Primary Schools

- All bullying behaviour will be recorded. This will include:
  - The type of behaviour
  - Where it took place
  - When it took place
  - The date of the engagement with students and parents
- The actions and supports agreed to address bullying behaviour will be documented.
- If the bullying behaviour is a child protection concern the matter will be addressed without delay in accordance with *Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools*.

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. See Chapter 7 of the Bí Cineálta procedures.

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.

Signed: _____

Date: _____

(Chairperson of Board of Management)

Signed: _____

Date: _____

(Principal)