



Castlerea Community School Bí Cineálta Policy to Prevent and Address Bullying Behaviour

Castlerea Community School Mission Statement:

Castlerea Community School is dedicated to the pursuit of excellence in education in a caring environment of mutual respect so as to foster the full potential of its students and staff. In partnership with parents, we strive to create a desire for lifelong learning, respect for the individual, an awareness of the needs of the disadvantaged, concern for the environment and an appreciation of our own unique culture.

The Board of Management of Castlerea 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*.

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: Madeline O Connell
(Chairperson of board of management)

Date: 12/01/2025

Signed: Eileen Ryan
(Principal)

Date: 12/06/2025

Bí Cineálta Policy to Prevent and Address Bullying Behaviour

The board of management of Castlerea Community School 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.

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.

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.

Core definition of Bullying Behaviour (as outlined in Chapter 2 of the Bí Cineálta procedures)

Bullying is 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 core definition above sets out clear criteria to help school communities to prevent, correctly identify and address bullying among students. Alleged incidents of bullying are however often complex and must be considered on a case-by-case basis. The core elements of the definition are further described below:

Targeted behaviour

Bullying is deliberate, unwanted behaviour that causes harm to others, and where the student displaying bullying behaviour knows that their behaviour is or will be perceived as harmful by the child or young person experiencing the behaviour. Bullying is not accidental or reckless behaviour. The harm can be physical (for example, personal injury, damage to or loss of property), social (for example, withdrawal, loneliness, exclusion) and/or emotional (for example, low self-esteem, depression, anxiety) and can have a serious and long-term negative impact on the student experiencing the bullying behaviour. If the repeated harm is real for the student experiencing the behaviour but unintended by the other student, this is not bullying but, importantly, must still be addressed under the school's code of behaviour.

Repeated behaviour

Bullying takes the form of a systematic pattern of behaviour which is repeated over time. Single offline incidents of intentional negative behaviour involving an imbalance of power are not considered bullying but must still be addressed under the school's code of behaviour. Posting a single harmful message/image/video online, and which is highly likely to be reposted or shared with others can therefore be seen as bullying behaviour.

Imbalance of power

In incidents of bullying, the student experiencing the bullying behaviour finds it hard to defend themselves because of the abuse of a real or perceived imbalance of power. This imbalance of power may manifest itself through differences in size, strength, age, ability, peer group power, economic status, social status, religion, race, ethnic origin including membership of the Traveller and/or Roma communities, sexual orientation, family circumstances, gender, gender identity, gender expression, experience of the care system, disability or the receipt of special education. In incidents of online (or cyber) bullying, the imbalance of power may relate to online anonymity, technical proficiency and possession of information/images/video, and the inability of the targeted student to remove offensive online material or escape the bullying.

Behaviour that is not bullying behaviour

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 bullying behaviour as it may be visible to a wide audience and has a high likelihood of being shared multiple times and so becomes a repeated behaviour. Disagreement between students, or instances where students don't want to be friends or to remain friends, is not considered bullying behaviour unless it involves deliberate and repeated attempts to cause distress, exclude or create dislike by others including deliberate manipulation of friendship groups. Some students with special educational needs may have social communication difficulties which may make them communicate their needs through behaviours that can hurt themselves or others. It is important to note that these behaviours are not deliberate or planned but, in certain situations, they are an automatic response which they can't control. Bullying is not accidental or reckless behaviour. If the repeated harm is real for the student experiencing the behaviour but unintended by the other student, this is not bullying. These behaviours, while not defined as bullying, can be distressing. Strategies to deal with inappropriate behaviour are provided for within the school's Code of Behaviour.

Criminal Behaviour

Bullying behaviour can be considered criminal behaviour under certain circumstances and legal consequences can apply. The age of criminal responsibility in Ireland is 12 years. Some online behaviour may be illegal, and students need to be aware of the far-reaching consequences of posting inappropriate or harmful content online. In cases of intimate imagery, the Harassment, Harmful Communications and Related Offences Act 2020, also known as Coco's Law, criminalises the non-consensual sharing of intimate images and also criminalises threatening to share these images. If bullying behaviour involves physical violence or threats of violence, it may be considered assault. If bullying behaviour involves discrimination or hate speech targeting a student based on their race, religion, nationality, ethnicity, sexual orientation or membership of the Traveller community, it may be considered a hate crime under the Prohibition of Incitement to Hatred Act 1989¹¹, and those engaging in such behaviour may face criminal charges.

If bullying behaviour involves sexual harassment or sexual assault, this may also be considered criminal behaviour.

An Garda Síochána is the appropriate authority to investigate alleged criminal behaviour.

When bullying behaviour becomes a child protection concern

The Children First Act defines harm as assault, ill-treatment, neglect or sexual abuse and covers single and multiple instances.

The threshold of harm is reached where the mandated person believes that a child's health, development or welfare have been, or are being seriously affected, or are likely to be seriously affected.

In determining when bullying behaviour should be reported to Tusla the following factors should be considered:

- >the impact on the child
- >protective/appropriate action taken by the parents
- >protective/appropriate action taken by the school
- >engagement of child/family with support services such as NEPS

Forms of Bullying behaviour:

- Direct (Physical, verbal, written, extortion)
- Indirect (Exclusion, online)

Types of Bullying behaviour:

- Disablist bullying (because of an actual or perceived disability or additional need)
- Exceptionally able bullying (because of ability or talents)
- Gender identity bullying
- Homophobic / Transphobic (LGBTQ+) bullying
- Physical appearance bullying
- Racist bullying
- Poverty bullying
- Religious identity bullying
- Sexist bullying (inferior because of their sex)
- Sexual harassment (ny form of unwanted verbal, nonverbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature or other conduct based on sex which affects the dignity of the student)

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	9th April 2025	Whole staff information session, small group discussion, Online padlet
Students	19th - 20th May 2025	Survey of 1 st year students, survey and focus group discussion with 5th year students

Parents	13th- 16 th May 2025	Online survey on MSForms platform
Board of Management	5th June 2025	Sharing of draft policy via email for feedback, amendments, additions etc.
Wider school community as appropriate, for example, bus drivers	April 2025	Feedback via questionnaire from all bus drivers
Date policy was approved: 12 th June 2025		
Date policy was last reviewed:		

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 Bf Cineálta procedures):

- Standards and expectations in relation to preventing and addressing bullying behaviour set by school leaders through whole school assemblies, parent and guardian evenings and all interactions with students.
- Consistent approach taken to addressing bullying behaviour across all year groups.
- The creation of a positive and inclusive culture which fosters a positive environment in which students feel comfortable approaching teachers.
- Welcoming of difference and diversity in the school - having the cultural diversity of the school visible and on display, through signage in various languages and the celebration of culture day.
- A welcoming and print rich school environment including positive quotations on acceptance and belonging.
- A school-wide approach to the fostering of respect for all members of the school community.
- Whole staff professional development on bullying to ensure that all staff develops

an awareness of what bullying is, how it impacts on pupils' lives and the need to respond to it-prevention and intervention.

- Regular year group assemblies to highlight the contents and importance of our school's Bí Cineálta policy and ensuring that pupils know who to tell and how to tell.
- An 'opt in' and nominated Student Council which ensures those students who are most interested in developing the student voice in the school feel supported and can connect and engage with our school community.
- Involvement of the student body in contributing to a safe school environment e.g. Prefects, Big Brother – Big Sister buddy system that encourages a culture of peer respect and support.
- School lunchtime clubs to assist in forging friendships.
- Creating a "speaking up" culture through the implementation of a Worry/Telling/Speaking box/Student Voice Post Box - Designated area to report bullying issues- Student Voice Post Box.
- Designated areas for students- Split breaks, separate toilets for each year group.
- A range of extra-curricular activities to reinforce friendships, respectful relationships and resilience. Pupils will be provided with opportunities to develop a positive sense of self-worth through formal and informal interactions.
- As part of our diversity, equity and inclusion strategic pillar, we aim to develop and enhance the number of co-curricular clubs and extra-curricular clubs in the school to ensure that all students can feel and connection and belonging in our school.
- Collaboration with external agencies such as CAMHS, NEPS, Jigsaw, Shona Project etc. as necessary. Promotion of local facilities organizing programmes for students ie. D'gaff and Foroige.
- Collaboration with internal support structures - School completion program, Home School Liaison, Student support teams, Summer Programme, Homework Club etc.
- Code of behaviour signed by both student and parent at the beginning of each academic year.
- The inclusion of the written and student friendly Bí Cineálta policy be included in student journals and displayed publicly in classrooms and in common areas of the school.
- A range of curricular programmes to suit every student's needs and give each student a sense of achievement and belonging: LCA, TY, LCE, L2LP programmes.
- School staff ensures all students have the same opportunities to engage in school activities, programmes and subjects irrespective of their sex.
- Development of a wellbeing programme to include SPHE, CSPE, and RSE which

explicitly addresses topics including diversity, inclusion and racism.

- Variety of programmes are run in SPHE and Wellbeing e.g. The Decider, Lockers, Fuse, .Be, Friends programme, Senior cycle Consent programme etc.
- 1st year transition programme, to include a bonding / team building day.
- Regular group work in all classes - to encourage inclusivity, empathy, cooperation and building relationships.
- A focus on wellbeing and wellbeing indicators in all subject department plans and across all DEIS themes.
- Development of seating plans in all classes and supervision and monitoring of students in recreational areas.
- Restorative practice strategies utilized in the resolution of issues, which focus on the creation of empathy in students.
- The implementation of the school's Acceptable Use Policy to ensure that access to technology within the school is strictly monitored, as is the pupils' use of mobile phones.
- Creating opportunities for students to experience real world challenges through work experience modules, international student exchange and Erasmus+ programmes.
- The implementation of regular whole school awareness measures e.g. a dedicated notice board in the school on the promotion of friendship and bullying prevention; Anti-Bullying awareness and annual or term student surveys.
- Staff aware that they are all mandated persons, child protection procedures handed out each year as reminder and complete Children First E-Learning Programme.
- Principal & Deputy Principal complete DLP/DDLP training and refreshers.

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):

- Supervision and monitoring of classrooms, corridors, school grounds - A weekly schedule of staff supervision on corridors and yard is developed to monitor

student behaviour and wellbeing. Any causes for concern are dealt with and reported to school management.

- All staff are watchful and observe relationships between students in class, note absence patterns and let it be known that high standards of behaviour are always expected.
- Survey of Students - Students are surveyed through an online form regularly throughout the year regarding bullying behaviour as part of the school's mentoring sessions.
- Student Support Teams – Two SST's – Junior and Senior - meet weekly and operate a check and connect system where teachers meet students where concerns may have been brought to their attention.
- Adequate supervision and monitoring of all school tours and extra- curricular activities. Non-teaching and ancillary staff are encouraged to be vigilant and report issues to relevant teachers.
- Supervision will also apply to monitoring student use of communication technology within the school.

Addressing Bullying Behaviour

The teachers with responsibility for addressing bullying behaviour are as follows:

- The Year head for each year group assisted by principal and deputy principal

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):

- Where a member of staff has a concern about a student being bullied, either as a result of a personal observation or as a result of receiving a report from a third party, the staff member should without delay refer the matter to the Year Head, Deputy Principal or Principal.
- In investigating bullying behaviour or addressing bullying behaviour in any way, Year Heads are welcome to seek the assistance and support of the principal, the deputy principal or the student support team at any time.
- The School reserves the right to investigate allegations of bullying (and to take disciplinary action where necessary) where bullying is perpetrated by a member of the school community and it impinges on the work or well-being of a student in the school, even where the bullying acts are committed outside of the school.
- The School reserves the right, in accordance with Section 6 Bí Cineálta Procedures to Prevent and Address Bullying Behaviour for Primary and Post Primary Schools to seek the assistance of agencies such as NEPS, the HSE, and the Gardaí, where it deems such assistance is necessary to dealing effectively with bullying behaviour. In any case, where the School deems bullying behaviour to be potentially abusive (Section 2 Bí Cineálta Procedures to Prevent and Address Bullying Behaviour for Primary and Post Primary Schools) it will consult with the HSE's Children and Family Services to assist it in drawing up an appropriate response or to obtain advice or to make a formal child protection report to the HSE or the Gardaí (as appropriate) in accordance with the DES Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post Primary (revised 2023)
- Concerns about or allegations of bullying will be investigated and addressed in accordance with Section 6 Bí Cineálta Procedures to Prevent and Address Bullying Behaviour for Primary and Post Primary Schools. These are summarised as follows:
 - ensure that the student experiencing bullying behaviour feels listened to 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*

*Parents are an integral part of the school community and play an important role, in partnership with the school, in addressing bullying behaviour. Where bullying behaviour has occurred, the parents of the parties will 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.

When identifying if bullying behaviour has occurred relevant teachers will consider:

what, where, when and why?

- If a group of students is involved, each student will be engaged with individually at first
- Thereafter, all students involved will be met as a group
- At the group meeting, each student will be asked for their account of what happened to ensure that everyone in the group is clear about each other's views.
- Each student will be supported as appropriate, following the group meeting.
- It may be helpful to ask the students involved to write down their account of the incident(s).
- Given the complexity of bullying behaviour it is generally acknowledged that that no one approach works in all situations.
- Approaches such as restorative practice and mediation will be used to address bullying behaviour where the relevant Year Head involved has been trained in how to engage in these methods and the students involved have agreed to their use.
- In circumstances where student expresses concern about their parents being informed, the school will 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 barriers.
- The investigating teacher will engage with the students and parents involved no more than 20 school days after the initial discussion to review progress following the initial intervention.
- If the bullying behaviour has not ceased, the teacher will review the strategies used in consultation with the students and parents and agree to meet again over an agreed timeframe until the bullying behaviour has ceased.
- Where it becomes clear that the student who is displaying the bullying behaviour is continuing to display the behaviour, then the school will consider using the strategies to deal with inappropriate behaviour as provided for within the school's Code of Behaviour and disciplinary sanctions may be considered.

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. Where this occurs, empathy will be shown to the student and the matter will be dealt with sensitively to work out together with the student what steps can be taken to address the matter 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 the school 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 will be facilitated to do so where there are literacy, digital literacy or language barriers.

However, while acknowledging the parent's request, the teacher / management may decide that, based on the circumstances, it is appropriate to address the bullying behaviour.

Supports which may be utilised by the school include, but are not exclusive to, NEPS, Oide, Webwise, National Post Primary Parents Association, TUSLA, DCU Anti-bullying centre

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):

Students who experience Bullying or Witness Bullying:

The school's programme of support for working with pupils affected by bullying is as follows: Students may need counselling and/or opportunities to participate in activities designed to raise their self-esteem, to develop their friendship and social skills and thereby build resilience whenever this is needed.

In this regard the relevant Student Support Team will work closely with the student to ensure they are actively supported in the school and to engage in school based activities they enjoy. They may be placed on our school's Lean in/out support list and/or engage in check and connect.

The schools guidance or chaplaincy departments may also put in place a program of support in conjunction with the Year Head

Students who display bullying Behaviour:

Students who engage in bullying behaviour may need counselling to help them learn other ways of meeting their needs without violating the rights of others. The Year Head in conjunction with the relevant Student Support Team will work closely with the student in this regard.

Recording

All bullying behaviour will be recorded. This will include the type of behaviour, where and when it took place, and the date of the engagement with students and parents. The actions and supports agreed to address bullying behaviour will be documented and retained according to the school's Data Retention Schedule. 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*.

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.

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