

How We Handle Bullying in Our School: A Parent's Guide

(Based on Bí Cineálta Procedures)

Our school is committed to ensuring a safe and happy environment for all students. The Department of Education has published new procedures called "Bí Cineálta" (which means "Be Kind") to guide all primary and post-primary schools in preventing and addressing bullying behaviour. These procedures take a whole-school approach, meaning everyone in the school community – school staff, students, parents, and the Board of Management – works together.

What is Bullying Behaviour?

Bullying is defined as targeted behaviour, online or offline, that causes harm. This harm can be physical, social, and/or emotional. Bullying behaviour is repeated over time and involves an imbalance of power between the individuals or groups involved.

It's important to understand that bullying is deliberate, unwanted behaviour. It is not accidental or reckless. If harm is caused repeatedly but was unintended, it is not bullying but must still be addressed by the school, typically through the school's Code of Behaviour.

A single hurtful message or image posted online can be considered bullying because it can be easily shared multiple times, effectively becoming repeated behaviour.

Behaviour that is not bullying includes:

- One-off instances of negative behaviour.
- Disagreements between students.
- Students not wanting to be friends (unless it involves deliberate, repeated attempts to cause distress or exclude).
- Some behaviours from students with special educational needs that might cause hurt but are not deliberate or planned.

Why is Preventing and Addressing Bullying Important?

Bullying can have a significant and lasting negative impact on students. It can lead to feelings of stress, insecurity, anxiety, and lower self-esteem. It can affect a student's engagement with school and their overall wellbeing. Students who witness bullying can also be affected, feeling fear, guilt, or anxiety. Even students who engage in bullying behaviour can experience negative consequences, such as difficulty forming relationships later in life.

Bullying is also considered a children's rights issue, as it can interfere with a child's rights, such as the right to be protected from abuse and neglect, the right to education, and the right to enjoy the highest standard of health.

Our School's Approach (Our Bí Cineálta Policy)

Our school has developed a Bí Cineálta policy to prevent and address bullying behaviour. This policy was developed with input from the school community, including staff, students, and parents. You can find our policy on the school website, and we also have a student-friendly version displayed in the school.

Our policy outlines how we:

- Prevent bullying behaviour through measures promoting a positive and inclusive school culture, creating safe physical spaces, providing appropriate supervision, using curriculum opportunities to build empathy and respect, and fostering strong relationships and partnerships within the school community.
- Support students who experience, witness, or display bullying behaviour.
- Address incidents when they are reported.

Your Role as a Parent

Parents play a crucial role in partnership with the school to prevent and address bullying. Collaboration between parents and school staff is essential. We encourage active partnership to reinforce values that discourage bullying behaviour at home and in school.

Identifying and Reporting Bullying

Sometimes it can be difficult to tell if a student is experiencing bullying. Some signs that might indicate a student is being bullied include:

- Anxiety about coming to school.

- Reluctance or refusal to attend school.
- Changes in school performance, concentration, or enthusiasm.
- Physical illnesses like headaches or stomach aches, particularly before school.
- Changes in mood or behaviour.
- Missing or damaged possessions.
- Unexplained bruising, cuts, or damaged clothing.

These signs don't always mean a student is being bullied, but if they persist, it's important to investigate.

We encourage a 'telling environment' in our school, where students feel safe and comfortable reporting concerns about bullying. Students are encouraged to talk to a 'trusted adult' – any member of staff they feel comfortable with.

If you, as a parent, become aware of potential bullying behaviour involving your child, please report it to the school. This allows us to address the situation appropriately.

How We Address Bullying Behaviour

When bullying behaviour is reported or witnessed, our primary aim is to stop the behaviour and, as far as practicable, restore the relationships of those involved.

We do this by:

- Ensuring the student experiencing bullying feels listened to, safe, and reassured. Their views on how best to address the situation are important.
- Meeting with students involved individually first, then potentially as a group, to understand what happened.
- Conducting all conversations with sensitivity, considering the age and ability of the students.
- Taking action in a timely manner.
- Informing the parents of the students involved at an early stage to discuss the matter and consult on the actions to be taken. We will work with you to address any concerns you may have about being informed.

- Identifying and providing appropriate support for both the student who experienced the bullying and the student who displayed the bullying behaviour.

Even if a student or parent requests that no action is taken by the school, we may still decide that it is appropriate to address the behaviour based on the circumstances.

We record all incidents of bullying behaviour, including the type of behaviour, where and when it took place, and the steps taken.

Following Up and Review

No more than 20 school days after the initial discussion, the teacher addressing the behaviour will engage with the students and parents involved again to review progress and determine if the bullying behaviour has stopped. Ongoing supervision and support may still be needed after the behaviour has ceased. If the behaviour has not stopped, we will review the strategies and agree on further steps, which may include using the school's Code of Behaviour.

Complaint Process

If you are not satisfied with how bullying behaviour has been addressed by the school, you can follow the school's complaints procedure.

Support Services

Our school can access support from various services such as the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS). Parents can also access support and information on preventing and addressing bullying behaviour through organisations like the National Parents Council.

Policy Review and Oversight

Our school's Bí Cineálta policy is reviewed each calendar year, with input from the school community. The principal provides an update on bullying behaviour to the Board of Management at each of its meetings, including the number of incidents

and strategies used. This helps the Board oversee the effectiveness of our school's measures.

By working together, we can help ensure our school is a safe and supportive place for all students, where kindness prevails.