



St. Mary's Secondary School

Bí Cineálta Policy to Prevent and Address Bullying Behaviour

St. Mary's Secondary School

Mission Statement

St. Mary's is a Mercy school which is concerned with developing the whole person within a Christian atmosphere. By providing a balance of educational activities, we foster growth in self-esteem and respect for others. We take pride in encouraging high standards of teaching and learning.

Bí Cineálta Policy to Prevent and Address Bullying Behaviour

The Board of Management of St. Mary's Secondary School has adopted the following policy to prevent and address bullying behavior.

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.

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	10/03/2025 31/03/2025 10/04/2025 27/05/2025	Staff Presentation & Discussion Student Support Team Policy Review Draft policy shared Final Consultation
Students	10/03/2025 21/03/2025 10/04/2025 19/05/2025	Whole school Student Survey Student Council Draft policy shared Final Consultation
Parents	30/01/2025 18/03/2025 10/04/2025 13/05/2025	Parental Online Survey Parents Association Meeting Draft policy shared Final Consultation
Board of Management	18/03/2025 13/05/2025 23/06/2025	Presentation of findings of school surveys Presentation of draft Policy Ratification of policy
Date policy was approved: 23 rd June 2025		
Date policy was last reviewed: 23 rd June 2025		

Ratification: This Policy was ratified by the Board of Management on: 23rd June 2025

Signed: Dionglala Ky
Chairperson of BoM

Signed: Donat O'Shelly
Secretary of BoM



Section B: Preventing Bullying Behaviour

The school's prevention strategies align with the four key areas of wellbeing: Culture and Environment, Curriculum (Teaching and Learning), Policy and Planning, and Relationships and Partnerships. These strategies enhance our protective factors, while mitigating our risk factors.

1. General Prevention Strategies

Culture and Environment

- A whole-school approach that fosters a culture of respect, kindness, and inclusion.
- Intercultural Day, Yellow Flag, and diversity celebrations promote inclusivity and cultural appreciation.
- Constant supervision in corridors, break areas, and hidden spaces ensures safety.
- Yondr pouches significantly reduce incidents of cyberbullying by limiting phone use during school hours.
- Lunchtime and breakfast clubs provide safe, structured spaces for students to build positive peer relationships.
- Peer support programs, such as our Leader programme between 5th and 1st year students, foster positive relationships.
- The Positive Behaviour for Learning initiative is an NCSE programme to encourage positive behaviour in our school community.
- Diversity committee to promote & celebrate different communities and create a sense of belonging.
- Student Work Displays celebrate and showcase students' creativity, effort, and learning by displaying their work in classrooms, corridors, and communal areas. These displays promote a sense of pride, belonging, and achievement among students while reinforcing the value placed on learning and participation
- The school has designated social areas for each year group, together with a student Library and Nurture Area.
- Encouraging a culture of telling, where students feel safe to report incidents of bullying without fear of repercussions. This is reinforced by the message that reporting is responsible behaviour, not "telling tales." Providing multiple ways for students to report bullying, such as:
 - Directly speaking to a teacher, Student Leader, or Class Tutor.
 - Submitting concerns via a Pastoral Care Box at the main entrance, through teams message or by emailing pastoralcare@stmarysballina.ie
 - Reporting concerns via the 'Mind Each Other' survey.
 - Texting 089-6174544
 - Encouraging parents or friends to report concerns on behalf of students.
- Regular Mind Each Other year group surveys are carried out throughout the year as a preventative measure. These:
 - Help monitor the class atmosphere.
 - Identify low-level issues early.
 - Reinforce expectations around respectful behaviour.

By involving students in this open and reflective process, the school promotes a shared sense of responsibility in creating a safe learning environment.

- The Helping Hands Wellbeing and Anti-Bullying Programme (WAP) sociometric tool will identify students in Junior years who may be isolated or rejected in the peer group and those who may be marginalised, at risk of being vulnerable or targeted for bullying either online or in person.
- Universal support will be provided to all students by using supportive teams in class to ensure inclusion.



- The Helping Hands Core Team will complete research informed training to:
 - Use the sociogram to diagnose classroom relationship dynamics, identify hidden bullying, understand the relationship dynamics that can lead to hidden bullying and how to intervene to prevent it.
 - Conduct empathic confidential conversations (welfare checks) with identified vulnerable students. Empathic interviewing creates a trusting relationship between pupil and adult.
 - Link with the teaching team, SPHE team, class tutors to create a powerful united approach.
 - The Core Team will regularly meet with the Student Support Team to liaise on the best way to use their knowledge to guide the whole school community on prevention of bullying

Curriculum (Teaching and Learning)

- SPHE, CSPE and Wellbeing explicitly address bullying prevention.
- In Junior Cycle English - a thematic block is taught to align with SPHE using carefully selected texts to reinforce bullying prevention.
- Active teaching & learning strategies in the classroom foster inclusivity and prevent social exclusion by ensuring every student has a role.
- Helping Hands Wellbeing and Anti-Bullying Programme (WAP) sociometric tool will be used in Junior Classes to assign students to psychologically safe teams which will provide students with social and academic peer support.
- Extra-curricular activities such as sports and school trips promote teamwork and friendships.
- Whole-school initiatives such as "Stop Everything and Reflect" moments encourage self-awareness and empathy.
- Student workshops e.g. Shona Project, teach students about respectful relationships.
- Staff CPD on area of anti-bullying.
- The school has an AEN team who meet weekly to plan for students' needs and promote a culture of inclusion. AEN coordinators are responsible for developing student support plans to support students progression and learning.
- AEN student awareness promotion e.g. AsIAm: Understanding Autism and Promoting Inclusion
- Targeted support for EAL students.
- The school participates in Planet Youth which aims to ensure that all young people are active, healthy, and happy, connected to their families and communities, and achieving their full potential.
- Cyber Safety guest speakers and workshops to educate students on digital responsibility.
- Whole-school Anti-Bullying Week to reinforce positive behaviour.
- RSE (Relationships and Sex Education) classes play a significant role in preventing sexual harassment by educating young people about consent, respect, boundaries, and healthy relationships.



Policy and Planning

- A Whole-School Culture promoting Kindness & Respect
- A "Give Respect, Get Respect" strategy reinforces mutual respect among students and staff.
- Students' involvement in promoting wellbeing through Student Council, Student Leaders, Senior Girls and Bí Cineálta committee.
- Use tools like the *Helping Hands* Programme to spot hidden vulnerable and isolated students.
- The school has clear policies, including the Bí Cineálta Policy, Code of Behaviour, Additional Educational Needs and Acceptable Use Policy to guide bullying prevention.
- The school has an Anti-Racism Policy to reinforce inclusivity.
- The Mind Each Other Programme encourages students to support one another.
- Regular school community surveys and feedback mechanisms help monitor the school culture and guide future school initiatives.

Relationships and Partnerships

- The school has a Student Support Team which meets weekly to co-ordinate support for students who may be experiencing academic, social, emotional, or behavioural difficulties, and to promote student well-being and inclusion across the school community.
- As part of the school Code of Behaviour, a Positive Point System is used to promote and reinforce positive student behavior by recognising and rewarding actions that align with the school's values and expectations. It's a practical tool used to encourage a positive school climate, build student motivation, and support well-being.
- The school implements the *Helping Hands* Programme to proactively identify and support vulnerable and isolated students, addressing hidden bullying before it escalates.
- Strong student-teacher relationships are fostered through extracurricular engagement.
- The Student Council and Student Leaders play an active role in promoting a safe school environment, encouraging peer respect, and supporting anti-bullying initiatives.
- Regular school assemblies and school-wide awareness campaigns reinforce anti-bullying messages.
- Peer relationships are strengthened through bonding events, student leadership, and the Student Council.
- Partnerships with external agencies, such as NEPS, CAMHS, and the Gardaí, provide additional support.
- A student suggestion box and wellbeing feedback system ensure that student voices are heard.
- Parental engagement is reinforced through Compass notifications, information sessions, and online safety resources.
- We are committed to fostering a telling environment where students feel safe to report concerns, supported by positive relationships, a dedicated school email, and a confidential text service.



2. Strategies specifically aimed at preventing:

Online (Cyber) Bullying

- Implementation of a school-wide Acceptable Use Policy that regulates online interactions and ensures safe use of technology and we communicate this to our school community through our school website.
- Use of Yondr pouches to limit phone use, preventing misuse of mobile devices during the school day.
- The school carries out random spot-checks of Yondr pouches to monitor compliance.
- A dedicated computer module in Wellbeing classes addresses online safety and digital responsibility.
- WiFi restrictions block access to social media during school hours to reduce cyberbullying risks.
- The Lockers Programme and Garda presentations educate students on responsible online behaviour through our SPHE programme.
- Parental education initiatives include sending resources home instead of relying solely on guest speakers.
- We are committed to fostering a telling environment where students feel safe to report concerns, supported by positive relationships, a dedicated school email, and a confidential text service.

Homophobic and Transphobic Bullying

- Stand Up Week raises awareness and promotes inclusivity.
- SPHE and CSPE curricula integrate discussions on LGBTQ+ issues to foster acceptance.
- Open discussions and guest speakers encourage conversations about LGBTQ+ identity.
- We are committed to fostering a telling environment where students feel safe to report concerns, supported by positive relationships, a dedicated school email, and a confidential text service.

Racist Bullying

- Intercultural Day and Yellow Flag initiatives celebrate cultural diversity.
- Students express cultural identity through art, music, and drama, fostering inclusivity.
- Bystander intervention education helps students respond to bullying situations.
- The school has a formal Anti-Racism Policy which supports inclusivity.
- We provide dedicated supports for our EAL students.
- Our school library has inclusive, diverse literature.
- We are committed to fostering a telling environment where students feel safe to report concerns, supported by positive relationships, a dedicated school email, and a confidential text service.

Sexist Bullying

- SPHE and PE classes emphasise respect for all genders.
- Encouragement for students to pursue non-traditional subjects, such as female students taking Applied Technology and Graphics.
- We are committed to fostering a telling environment where students feel safe to report concerns, supported by positive relationships, a dedicated school email, and a confidential text service.



Sexual Harassment

- Consent workshops run by Foróige educate students about healthy relationships.
- SPHE and Wellbeing classes discuss boundaries and respect in relationships.
- A zero-tolerance policy on sexual harassment ensures all incidents are addressed seriously.
- RSE (Relationships and Sex Education) classes play a significant role in preventing sexual harassment by educating young people about consent, respect, boundaries, and healthy relationships.
- We promote positive role models.
- We are committed to fostering a telling environment where students feel safe to report concerns, supported by positive relationships, a dedicated school email, and a confidential text service.

3. Supervision and monitoring policies in place to prevent and address bullying behaviour

The Board of Management at St. Mary's Secondary School has confirmed that appropriate supervision and monitoring policies and practices are in place to prevent and deal with bullying behaviour while facilitating early intervention when possible.

Supervision and Monitoring Measures

- Supervision of students in classrooms, corridors, school grounds, school tours, and extra-curricular activities to ensure student safety and discourage bullying behaviour.
- Non-teaching and ancillary staff are encouraged to be vigilant and report issues to relevant teachers.
- Increased presence of Student Leaders & Senior Girls in school corridors and communal areas to provide support and deter bullying behaviour.
- Monitoring student use of communication technology within the school, including the enforcement of the Acceptable Use Policy and Mobile Phone & Electronic Device Policy.
- Regular patrols of areas identified as potential bullying hotspots, such as stairwells, corridors, and toilets.
- Encouragement of student voice, including involvement from Student Leaders, Senior Girls, the Student Council and the Bí Cineálta committee in maintaining a safe school environment.
- Frequent student surveys and feedback mechanisms to assess the effectiveness of monitoring strategies and identify new areas of concern.
- Regular sociograms may be completed by Junior classes to monitor any students who are at risk of becoming marginalised.
- Student Support Team – the student support team meet weekly and operate a check and connect system where teachers meet students where concerns may have been brought to their attention.
- Implement flagging systems (e.g. Compass Custom Flags) for staff to easily identify students that are vulnerable as identified by the Student Support Team.



Section C: Addressing Bullying Behaviour

The teacher(s) with responsibility for addressing bullying behaviour include the following:

Bí Cineálta Coordinator and Members of the Student Support Team. This team includes:

- Principal and Deputy Principal
- Year Head
- Wellbeing Coordinator
- AEN Coordinator
- HSCL
- Guidance Counsellor
- School Chaplain

Approach

The primary aim in addressing reports of bullying behaviour should be to stop the bullying behaviour and to restore, as far as practicable, the relationships of the students involved, rather than to apportion blame.

When addressing bullying behaviour teachers should:

- > 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 the students 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 school follows the structured procedures outlined below to determine if bullying behaviour has occurred, address it effectively, and review progress to ensure resolution.

1. Determining if Bullying Behaviour Has Occurred

Bullying is defined in Cineáltas: Action Plan on Bullying and Bí Cineálta Procedures as targeted behaviour, online or offline, that causes harm. The harm can be physical, social, or emotional and involves repeated actions with an imbalance of power.

To determine whether the reported behaviour constitutes bullying, the teacher assigned to investigate the incident will 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 all three questions is yes, the behaviour is classified as bullying and must be



addressed using the Bí Cineálta Procedures.

Additional considerations:

- One-off incidents may be considered bullying if they involve significant harm, such as a single hurtful social media post with a high likelihood of being shared widely.
- If the behaviour does not meet the bullying criteria, the school will address it through the Code of Behaviour.

2. Approaches to Address Bullying Behaviour

The primary aim when addressing reports of bullying behaviour is to stop the behaviour and restore relationships rather than to apportion blame. This strategy supports both the targeted pupil and the perpetrator in moving forward positively and restoring relationships without the use of punishment, unless necessary.

Any staff member, student, or parent may report a suspected bullying incident. Upon receiving a report:

- A *Bí Cineálta Concern Referral Form* is completed by the staff member on the school's Management Information System *Compass* and this is forwarded to the Principal/Deputy Principal, relevant Year Head and Bí Cineálta Coordinator.
- An investigation is immediately initiated.
- If appropriate the incident may be referred to the Student Support Team.
- Engagement with individuals:
 - Each student involved is engaged with individually at first.
 - Students involved may be met as a group to clarify events and perspectives.
 - Each student is supported appropriately following these discussions.
- Parental involvement:
 - If bullying behaviour has been identified, parents of all students involved in the bullying incident are contacted at an early stage.
 - Their views are sought, and they are consulted on actions to be taken.
 - Parents may also make schools aware of bullying behaviour that has occurred.
 - Parents may specifically request that the school take no action in relation to a report of bullying. 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.
- Record keeping:
 - A record of the bullying behaviour is maintained by the investigating staff member on *Compass*. This will include:
 - The form and type of bullying.
 - Location and time of incidents.
 - The date of initial engagement with students and parents.
 - The views of students and parents on proposed actions are documented.
 - The actions and supports agreed to address bullying behaviour will be recorded.
 - 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*.

- A record will be kept of the review with students and their parents to determine if the bullying behaviour has ceased and the views of students and their parents in relation to this.
- Any engagement with external services/supports should also be noted.
- Restorative practices:
 - Restorative interviews and restorative conferencing are used to rebuild relationships.
 - Students are encouraged to write victim-impact statements, where appropriate.
- Investigative Surveys
 - If a specific bullying concern arises, the Bí Cineálta Team may carry out a confidential whole-class survey to gather information while protecting the identity of the original reporter. The survey is not used as direct evidence but helps identify:
 - Pupils who may be involved in or aware of the situation.
 - Who to speak with to determine what actually happened.
 - Pupils are reminded beforehand of the “Reform, Not Blame” ethos and assured that their honest participation is helping to resolve, not punish, any situation. They are asked to sign their responses, but all information is kept strictly confidential.

What Happens with the Surveys

Once surveys are completed:

- They are reviewed confidentially by the Bí Cineálta Coordinator and/or the Student Support Team members.
- Individual pupils may be spoken to discreetly for clarification.
- If bullying is indicated, further steps are taken, including structured conversations with alleged perpetrators.
- If the pupil acknowledges the behaviour and agrees to stop, they are invited to sign a Pupil Behaviour Promise Form. For more serious or repeat cases, a Pupil and Parent Behaviour Promise Form is used and co-signed by a parent/guardian.

If a promise is later found to be broken, stronger sanctions may follow, including parent meetings, suspension, or referral to the Board of Management.

3. Reviewing Progress and Ensuring Resolution

Follow-up within 20 school days:

- The teacher must engage with the students and parents again no more than 20 school days after the initial report.
- The effectiveness of the strategies used and the relationship between students is reviewed.
- The review is documented to determine if the bullying behaviour has stopped.



If bullying persists:

- If bullying continues, strategies are revised in consultation with students and parents.
- A timeline for further engagement is agreed upon.
- If necessary, disciplinary actions outlined in the Code of Behaviour may be implemented.

If Parents Are Unsatisfied:

- If a parent is not satisfied with how the bullying has been addressed, they should refer to the school's complaints procedures, as outlined in the Bí Cineálta Procedures to Prevent and Address Bullying Behaviour for Primary and Post-Primary Schools.
- If a parent remains dissatisfied after the complaint process, they can contact the Ombudsman for Children if they believe the school's actions negatively affected the student.

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.

St. Mary's Secondary School has a structured approach to supporting students who experience bullying, those who witness it, and those who display bullying behaviour. These approaches align with the Bí Cineálta Procedures:

1. Supporting Students Who Experience Bullying

Students who experience bullying may feel stress, anxiety, insecurity, or humiliation. The school provides the following supports to help them recover and rebuild confidence.

- Ensuring immediate reassurance and support for the affected student.
- Encouraging students to express their feelings about their experience in a safe space.
- Providing counselling services and access to pastoral care.
- Engaging with parents to develop a support plan.
- Helping the student rebuild confidence through structured activities.
- Ensuring students understand that bullying is not their fault through awareness campaigns.
- Buddy and peer mentoring programs to help build new friendships.
- Encouraging students to participate in group activities, such as team sports or school clubs, to promote social integration.
- Monitoring the student's wellbeing through follow-up meetings with staff.



2. Supporting Students Who Witness Bullying

Students who witness bullying can also be negatively impacted, experiencing fear, guilt, or anxiety.

- Encouraging students to report bullying by creating a “telling culture” where speaking up is seen as responsible, not “telling tales.”
- Providing education on bystander intervention, including how to safely support a bullied student.
- Reinforcing that witnesses of bullying can help stop it and should report incidents to a trusted adult.
- Teaching students that they have a role in changing school culture by rejecting bullying behaviour.
- Promoting discussions through SPHE and Wellbeing lessons to build empathy and confidence in taking action.
- Providing students with safe ways to report bullying, such as submitting concerns via a Pastoral Care Box at the main entrance, through teams message, text message 089-6174544 or by emailing pastoralcare@stmarysballina.ie

3. Supporting Students Who Display Bullying Behaviour

Students who engage in bullying behaviour may also require support, as they often struggle with social relationships, low self-esteem, or a lack of understanding of their actions.

- Providing one-on-one interventions with teachers or support staff to discuss their behaviour.
- Using restorative interviews and restorative conferencing to help students understand the impact of their actions and rebuild relationships.
- Offering counselling or behavioural support for students who require additional help in managing relationships.
- Encouraging students to engage in structured activities that promote teamwork and social skills, such as group projects or sports.
- Ensuring clear consequences if the behaviour continues, as outlined in the Code of Behaviour.
- Helping students who display bullying behaviour develop positive social skills through targeted interventions.
- Making it clear that students who reform are not blamed or punished but encouraged to continue making positive changes.

4. External Supports and Professional Services

The school collaborates with external agencies to provide additional support when necessary.

The school in certain circumstances may also seek the support and advice of TUSLA, EWO, NEPS, NCSE, second level school support services, HSE and any other agency deemed appropriate to support the school in dealing with incidents of bullying.



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
- 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.

The minutes of the board of management meeting will document the number of new incidents of bullying behaviour; the number currently ongoing and the total number of incidents of bullying behaviour since the beginning of the school year.

The minutes will also note where the board has considered the bullying behaviour verbal update and document when the board has decided that an urgent review of the policy is required.

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.