

## School Bí Cineálta Policy to Prevent and Address Bullying Behaviour

The Board of Management of St. Michael's House Special National School, Skerries 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
- Membership of the Traveller community

### DEFINITION OF BULLYING

- Bullying is targeted behaviour, online or offline, that causes harm.
- The harm caused can be physical, social and/or emotional in nature and can have lasting effects on the child experiencing the behaviour.
- Bullying behaviour is repeated over time and involves an imbalance of power in relationships between two people or groups of people in society.
- It is behaviour which is deliberate in nature and is unwanted. It is not accidental or reckless behaviour.

➤ **Targeted Behaviour:**

Bullying is deliberate, unwanted behaviour that causes harm to others, and where the student displaying bullying knows that their behaviour is or will be perceived as harmful by the child or young person experiencing the behaviour.

The harm can be:

- Physical (e.g. personal injury, damage to or loss of property)
- Social: (e.g. withdrawal, loneliness, exclusion)
- Emotional: (e.g. low self-esteem, depression, anxiety)

➤ **Repeated Behaviour:**

Bullying takes the form of a systemic pattern of behaviour which is repeated over time

➤ **Imbalance of Power:**

In incidents of bullying, the student experiencing the bullying behaviour finds it hard to defend themselves as a result of the abuse of a real or perceived imbalance of power. Some students with special educational needs may have difficulties recognising bullying behaviour has occurred. Some students with complex needs may lack awareness of social dynamics leading them to trust others implicitly. Consequently, our students may be more at risk of experiencing bullying behaviour.

## TYPES OF BULLYING:

There are many different types of bullying behaviour. These can include directing bullying at someone focused on the following: *disability, exceptional ability, gender identity, LGBTQ+, physical appearance, racism, poverty status, religious identity, sexism and sexual harassment*. Staff in our school identified the following *student-to-student* behaviours which could fall within the definition of perceived bullying within the context of our school. This is not an exhaustive list.

Bullying can be: **Direct:**

- Physical: pushing, shoving, punching, kicking, poking, spitting, biting and tripping students. Physical assault. Inappropriate touching. Destruction of personal property
- Verbal: continual name calling/teasing which insults, humiliates the student – this may refer to physical appearance, size, clothes, gender, accent, academic ability, race or ethnic origin.

- Cyberbullying:
  - Inappropriate texts/messages/photos via students' phones
  - Inappropriate pictures/websites on iPads, laptops, etc.
  - Inappropriate comments/photos, etc. on social media

We do recognise in our school setting that our students have particular limited interests with online platforms – mostly cartoons, music videos, football games, etc. - and only at the most senior end of the school would some of our students possibly have more of an interest in social media. Parental monitoring and positive, proactive, and continuous communication between home and school helps to monitor this concern.

Bullying can be: **Indirect:**

- Exclusion: where a student is deliberately and repeatedly isolated, excluded or ignored by a student or group of students.
- Relational: Where a student's attempts to form friendships with peers are repeatedly rejected or undermined, threats, non-verbal gesturing, silent treatment and manipulation of friend groups, etc. can all form relational bullying for a student.

#### **BEHAVIOUR THAT IS NOT BULLYING BEHAVIOUR:**

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 for the student on the receiving end. Strategies to deal with inappropriate behaviour should be provided for within the school's Code of Behaviour.

Disagreements between students is not considered bullying **unless** it involves deliberate and repeated attempts to cause distress, exclude or create dislike by others. Our students are unlikely to plan to deliberately harm another with targeted behaviour of bullying. Bullying is an abstract concept that is difficult to understand as it involves both flexibility of thought, imagination and an understanding of the Theory of Mind. (Theory of Mind is the ability to understand that other people may have different thoughts, feelings, ideas, attitudes or knowledge to one's own) These areas pose significant difficulty for children with special educational needs.

The students in St. Michael's House Special National School, Skerries have a diagnosis of a Moderate Intellectual Disability and/or Autism. They may experience social communication difficulties and high levels of anxiety which may make them communicate their needs through behaviours of concern that can often hurt themselves or others.

It is recognised that some behaviours may not be deliberate or planned but can instead be automatic responses that students find difficult to regulate. For example, some students may experience challenges in managing their reactions to peers due to sensory sensitivities such as noise or unpredictability.

During puberty, some students with additional needs may struggle to fully understand social boundaries or the private nature of certain types of touch. In rare instances, this may result in behaviour that is inappropriate, such as attempting to touch others in private areas. It is vital that such behaviours are understood in the context of developmental needs, while also ensuring that every student feels safe, respected, and protected.

The school takes a preventative and educational approach. Through SPHE, RSE, and Stay Safe lessons, staff model and reinforce appropriate interactions, and students are supported to develop an awareness of personal boundaries, public and private behaviours, and respectful relationships. Clear and sensitive communication with parents/guardians about these matters is central to ensuring that they feel included, respected, and supported.

Therefore, our definition of what is perceived as bullying behaviour in SMH Special National School Skerries will consider the following observable behaviour:

- A student repeatedly removing preferential reinforcers or chosen objects from another child on a routine basis to deliberately provoke or annoy them.
- A student persistently targeting another student as a focus for negative behaviour during their own behavioural outburst.
- A student persistently seeking to negatively influence the behaviour of another child, deliberately triggering behaviours to annoy a peer or seeking to get another student into trouble by provoking a negative response.

In our ongoing commitment to fostering a safe and respectful learning environment for all our students our staff have engaged in reflective practice to ensure our interactions consistently support student wellbeing.

As part of this, staff have identified a range of behaviours that, while sometimes subtle, could be perceived as bullying if they were to occur. These behaviours are not part of our school culture. Rather, this list is used to raise awareness among staff and to guide professional conduct, ensuring we remain vigilant and sensitive to the unique needs and vulnerabilities of all our students with special educational needs.

The following are examples of behaviours staff are mindful to avoid in order to maintain a positive and supportive learning environment:

- Nagging
- Name calling
- Shouting
- Threatening consequences
- Emotional isolation
- Criticising

- Dismissive or condescending comments
- Expecting students to achieve targets that are too difficult, thereby setting them up for failure
- Favouritism
- Unnecessary physical handling
- Issuing ultimatums
- Talking about students in their presence as if they could not hear
- Talking negatively about students or their families
- Physically standing over or is seen to intimidate a student

By clearly identifying and reflecting on these behaviours, staff continue to uphold a high standard of care and professionalism, ensuring every student feels safe, respected, and supported.

## 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	11/6/2025	<p>Feedback sought from staff prior to staff meeting through a Questionnaire</p> <p>Staff meeting - staff provided with the opportunity to discuss the new Bí Cineálta action plan, key changes &amp; requirements. Sharing of draft policy with staff to discuss and amend</p> <p>New Draft Policy created following this meeting and shared with staff for final comments or amendments.</p> <p>Workshop activity: Lots of practical suggestions regarding a Child Friendly Poster to be completed and displayed in September along with Bí Cineálta flag</p>
Students	September 2025	<p>A range of child-friendly questionnaires were distributed at the staff meeting for discussion.</p> <p>Staff discussed language, format and imagery to be used. The decision was taken to trial a questionnaire with the more senior students. This questionnaire to be compiled in September</p>
Parents/Guardians	May 2025 September 2025	<p>Questionnaire re anti bullying sent to parents</p> <p>Bí Cineálta policy draft shared with parents</p>
Board of Management	May 2025 June 2025  September 2025	<p>Update presented to BoM on the new policy, half day closure for in-service, and its new implications for our board.</p> <p>Increased oversight and reporting mechanisms to track incidents</p> <p>Redrafted policy presented and ratified at BoM on September 23<sup>rd</sup>.</p>
Wider school community as appropriate, for example, bus drivers	May 2025	Questionnaire given to bus escorts, secretary, caretaker and cook
Date policy was approved:	September 2025	Board of management meeting 23/09/25
Date policy was last reviewed		

## **Section B: Preventing Bullying Behaviour**

*The following strategies are in place to prevent bullying behaviour in St. Michael's House Special National School, Skerries:*

### **Culture and Environment**

A positive and inclusive school culture and environment is essential to prevent and address bullying behaviour. Our school environment is a space where students and school staff experience a sense of belonging and feel safe, connected and supported. The school motto is "We are a happy friendly school".

The whole school community fosters kindness and inclusion and maintains a positive and supportive school environment for all. Parents/Guardians, as active partners in their child's education, can help nurture an environment where bullying behaviour is not tolerated through promoting empathy and respect.

Relationships between all members of the school community is based on respect, care, integrity and trust. Open communication between the patron, boards of management, school staff, students and their parents/guardians helps to foster a collaborative approach and shared responsibilities in relation to preventing and addressing bullying behaviour. There is a strong and active culture of child protection.

The in-school leadership team influences the school culture and sets the standards and expectations for the school community when preventing and addressing bullying behaviour.

Each member of the school staff has a responsibility to develop and maintain a school culture where bullying behaviour is unacceptable and to take a consistent approach to addressing bullying behaviour.

Each member of the school staff has a further responsibility to report bullying or possible bullying behaviour.

### **Awareness and prevention**

- Close and careful observation by all staff of students at all times throughout the school day.
- Staff anticipating and preventing negative behaviour.
- Careful planning of class groups each year – openness to changing this mid-year if necessary.
- Recognition that some students do not 'get on' with others.

- School transport – close liaison and shared communication with escorts, drivers, parents and school staff.
- Developing student profiles at the end of the year to hand over to next teacher/classroom team.
- Certified training provided to staff of how to quickly intervene in certain situations.
- Staff awareness of students who have documented history of engaging in risky behaviours and support provided to them to manage incidents where necessary.

### **Creating safe physical spaces in schools**

Our school will continue to strive to create safe physical spaces thus supporting the safety of our students. This is seen as an important measure to prevent bullying behaviour. Spaces that have a clear line of sight make it easier for school staff to supervise students.

We look forward to our new school build which will provide better physical spaces for all our students. In the meantime, we will look at taking the following measures to create safe physical spaces in our current building.

- Be aware of low visibility areas in the playground – bike storage area, behind the gazebo, alleyway to playground, etc.
- Remove visual barriers from windows such as posters (Being mindful that a temporary barrier may be required on occasion to reduce distraction during a behaviour of concern and to help a student regulate).
- Keep classes as clutter free as possible and ensure there are no blind spots where students can be sitting or lying down out of sight.
- Ensure good lighting is present to avoid dark corners or spaces. Our sensory rooms are designed to use less light and there is an expectation of extra vigilance in these areas.

### **Supervision**

Appropriate supervision is an important measure to help prevent and address bullying behaviour. Students are supervised closely by school staff at all times during school hours to ensure their safety and general wellbeing and identify and risk assess 'HOT SPOTS' and 'HOT Times' e.g. playground, corridors, transitions from one activity to another, visiting other areas of the school where the presence of another child causes anxiety. Staff implement strategies to reduce identified risks such as delaying some students at home time, providing additional supervision on the playground.

## **A Sense of Belonging**

Students can feel a greater sense of belonging to a school community when they are given ownership of their own space through art and creativity. This helps students to identify and to feel a sense of responsibility for their school environment. The inclusion of spaces within schools for collaborative learning can also play a part in fostering a sense of belonging. We come together both for assemblies and to celebrate cultural events on a regular basis. Our outside areas and school grounds are well maintained to promote a sense of ownership and respect in our school community.

## **Curriculum (Teaching and Learning)**

Teaching and learning that is collaborative and respectful is promoted in our school. Students have regular opportunities to work in small groups with their peers, which can help build a sense of connection, belonging and empathy among students. We strive to provide opportunities for students to develop a sense of self-worth through curricular programmes e.g. SPHE, Education in Human Values (EHV), Stay Safe and RSE.

We use the following in our teaching approaches:

- Awareness of staff on the importance of taking time to listen to students (including pre-verbal) and to give them time to process what is said to them.
- Developing social stories on building empathy, respect.
- Praising positive behaviours - Being a “kind friend”.
- “Kind hands” maxim reinforced throughout the school.
- Direct and explicit teaching of the language of emotions.
- Modelling positive language.
- Implementation of NCSE “Relate” approaches to dysregulated behaviour.
- Class rules are created for each class supported by visuals.
- Low- arousal approach.
- “Change of face” approach.
- Promotion of best practice in preventing and addressing behaviours of concern.
- Positive Behaviour Support Plans (PBSP) in place where necessary and reviewed regularly.
- Careful monitoring by bus escorts of behaviours on school transport.

## **Relationships and Partnerships**

Strong interpersonal connections are a vital part of effectively preventing and addressing bullying behaviour. SMH Skerries School recognises the importance of positive relationships across the whole education community to promote empathy, understanding and respect. The meaningful involvement of the board of management, staff, students and their parents/guardians in the development, implementation and review of their school’s BÍ

Cineálta policy and student friendly version is essential to effectively prevent and address bullying behaviour.

When implementing a prevention strategy, we will consider engaging with members of the wider school community who are in regular contact with students, such as the following:

- school bus drivers and escorts, caretaker, cook, secretary

These members of the wider school community can be encouraged to report any bullying behaviour to the school as appropriate, generally the school principal and/or the deputy principal.

### **Policy and Planning.**

The wellbeing of the whole school community is at the heart of SMH Skerries School's plans and policies. Other Policies which support this Bí Cineálta policy are:

- Code of Behaviour
- Acceptable Use Policy including Remote Learning Policy
- Child Safeguarding Statement
- Dignity in the Workplace
- Working Together 2024
- Wellbeing
- Child Protection
- School Outings

## Section C: Addressing Bullying Behaviour<sup>1</sup>

The whole school community has a responsibility to prevent and address bullying behaviour. Schools should work in partnership with their patron, board of management, staff, students and their parents/guardians to develop and implement the Bí Cineálta policy.

The teacher(s) with responsibility for addressing bullying behaviour is (are) as follows:

- Principal
- Deputy Principal
- Assistant Deputy Principal II
- Primary 1 Class Teacher
- Primary 2 Class Teacher
- Primary 3 / Senior 1 Class Teacher
- Senior 2 Class Teacher
- Senior 2A Class Teacher
- Senior 3 Class Teacher
- Art Teacher

### **Identifying if bullying behaviour has occurred**

To determine whether the behaviour reported is bullying behaviour you should consider the following questions:

1. Is the behaviour **targeted** at a specific student or group of students?
2. Is the behaviour **intended** to cause physical, social or emotional harm?
3. 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

### **Where bullying behaviour has occurred**

SMH Special National School Skerries's primary aim in addressing reports of perceived bullying behaviour should be to stop the behaviour and to restore, as far as practicable, the relationships of the students involved, rather than to apportion blame. It is important for school staff to be fair and consistent in their approach to address bullying behaviour. Both the student who is experiencing what they perceive as 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 with without delay so that they feel listened to,

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<sup>1</sup> *Bullying in St Michael's House Special National School, Skerries is understood to mean behaviour that is unwanted and causing distress or behaviour that may be perceived as targeted*

supported and reassured. School staff should identify the supports needed for the student who is displaying bullying behaviour to better manage relational difficulties/communication challenges/sensorial overload and ensure that their needs are met also.

When addressing bullying behaviour teachers should:

- inform the In-school leadership team
- seek to ensure the privacy of those involved
- conduct all conversations with sensitivity
- consider the age, ability and communication skills of the students involved
- take action in a timely manner
- inform parents/guardians of those involved
- document the incident
- be mindful of the impact behaviours can have on students with special needs who are witnesses to it and who cannot communicate their reactions to it. Staff need to be aware that witnesses experience fear and apprehension of witnessing repeat performances and be fearful entering or passing certain parts of the school

Parents/Guardians 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/guardians of the parties involved will be contacted by the school 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. It is preferable that this is done by making a phone call. Additionally, school practice is to document the call in the office in our Communication Book.

We acknowledge that there may be communication barriers that may exist when communicating with parents/guardians, for example, literacy, digital literacy, cultural or language barriers and we will endeavour to be sensitive to these in our approach to addressing the situation.

In circumstances where student expresses concern about their parents/guardians being informed, the school will develop a plan to support the student and for how their parents/guardians will be informed appropriate to the student and the situation. While we have had students in the past who would have been able to express concern about involving parents/guardians, our student cohort has changed and with it the ability of students to communicate these concerns. This has meant that extra caution and vigilance is required to try to avoid potential bullying. Staff teams discuss students' changing needs on a regular basis and plan to address their various communication, sensory and behavioural needs.

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*

### **Follow up where bullying behaviour has occurred**

- The teacher will engage with the students involved and their parents/guardians again no more than 20 school days after the initial engagement to investigate if bullying has ceased.
- Important factors to consider as part of this engagement are the nature of the bullying behaviour, the effectiveness of the strategies used to address the bullying behaviour and the relationship between the students involved. It is important to note that sometimes the relationship between the students may never be restored to how it was before the bullying behaviour started.
- The teacher will document the review with students and their parents/guardians to determine if the bullying behaviour has ceased and also the views of students, where possible, and their parents/guardians in relation to this.
- The date that it has been determined that the bullying behaviour has ceased will also be recorded.
- Any engagement with external services/supports will also be noted.
- Ongoing supervision and support may be needed for the students involved even where bullying behaviour has ceased.
- If the behaviour has not ceased, the teacher will review the strategies used in consultation with the class team, the ISLT team and the parents/guardians of the students involved. A timeframe will be agreed for further engagement until the bullying behaviour has ceased
- If it becomes clear that the student who is displaying the bullying behaviour is continuing to display the behaviour, then SMH Special National School, Skerries will consider 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/guardians and the school
- If a parent(s)/guardian(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 will be referred to the school's complaints procedures.
- If a parent(s)/guardian(s) 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.

### **Recording bullying behaviour**

A record of any engagement with all parties concerned will be kept including the initial 'Bullying Incident Report Form' (Appendix 1). This record will include:

- What **form and type** of bullying behaviour was reported
- **Location, time and date** of incidents
- **Engagement with students and parents/guardians** including their views on actions taken
- **Follow-up reviews** to determine if bullying has ceased
- **External service/supports involved**, if applicable

Records must align with the school's data protection policies. Where a PBSP is in place, it should be updated to reflect response strategies.

## 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)

## Appendix 1: Bullying<sup>2</sup> Incident Report Form

1. Name of student allegedly being targeted/affected: \_\_\_\_\_
2. Class: \_\_\_\_\_
3. Staff dealing with the situation: \_\_\_\_\_
4. Witnesses: \_\_\_\_\_

5. Name(s) and class(es) of students allegedly engaged in bullying behaviour:

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6. Source of bullying concern/report (tick as relevant):

Student concerned	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other student(s)	<input type="checkbox"/>
Teacher	<input type="checkbox"/>
Parent/Guardian	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other	<input type="checkbox"/>

7. Location of incident(s) (tick as relevant)

School Yard	<input type="checkbox"/>
Classroom	<input type="checkbox"/>
Bus	<input type="checkbox"/>
Toilets	<input type="checkbox"/>
Out-of-school	<input type="checkbox"/>
Changing Rooms	<input type="checkbox"/>
Corridor	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other:	<input type="checkbox"/>

8. Name of person(s) who reported the alleged bullying concern:

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<sup>2</sup> *Bullying in St Michael's House Special National School Skerries is understood to mean behaviour that is unwanted and causing distress or behaviour that may be perceived as targeted*

9. Form and type of bullying behaviour.

Forms of Bullying		Types of Bullying	
Physical		Homophobic/transphobic (LGBTQ+)	
Verbal		Physical appearance	
Exclusion/isolation		Racist	
Relational		Poverty	
Emotional		Sexual harassment	
Written bullying		Cyber-bullying	

10. Brief description of bullying behaviour:

11. Impact of bullying behaviour:

12. Details of action taken:

13. Details of follow up actions, if any.

Date submitted to Principal/Deputy Principal/APII: \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix 2: Bullying Behaviour Update for board of management meeting

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Total number of new incidents of bullying behaviour reported since the last board of management meeting.	
Total number of incidents of bullying behaviour currently ongoing.	
Total number of incidents of bullying behaviour reported since the beginning of this school year.	

### **Report writing prompts:**

- *Trends and patterns identified such as the form of bullying behaviour, type of bullying behaviour if known, location of bullying behaviour, when it occurred, etc.*
- *Strategies used to address the bullying behaviour*
- *Any wider strategies to prevent and address bullying behaviour*
- *Have any serious incidents of bullying behaviour occurred which have had a serious adverse impact on a student?*
- *Has a parent/guardian informed the school that a student has left the school because of reported bullying behaviour?*
- *Is any additional support needed from the board of management?*
- *Does the school's *Bí Cineálta* policy requires urgent review in advance of the annual review?*