

5

Preventing Bullying Behaviour



The *Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework for Practice* provides the following four key areas that are essential for a holistic, whole-school approach to wellbeing promotion: Culture and Environment; Curriculum (Teaching and Learning); Policy and Planning; and Relationships and Partnerships.

These four areas should be considered by a school when developing measures to prevent bullying behaviour.

5.1. Culture and Environment

A positive and inclusive school culture and environment is essential to prevent and address bullying behaviour. The school environment should be a space where students and school staff experience a sense of belonging and feel safe, connected and supported.

Relationships between all members of the school community should be based on respect, care, integrity and trust. Open communication between the patron, boards of management, school staff, students and their parents help to foster a collaborative approach and shared responsibilities in relation to preventing and addressing bullying behaviour.

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

Each member of 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.

Students can shape the school culture by promoting kindness and inclusion within their peer group and maintain a positive and supportive school environment for all.

Parents, as active partners in their child's education, can help foster an environment where bullying behaviour is not tolerated through promoting empathy and respect.

A Telling Environment

It is important that the school community supports a 'telling' environment.

According to research conducted in Ireland, there is a persistent tendency not to report bullying incidents²⁰. Students should feel comfortable to talk about concerns regarding bullying behaviour.

The reasons why students may not report include the following:

- > fear of retaliation from the student displaying the bullying behaviour or their friendship group
- > concerns about being seen as a "tell-tale" for reporting bullying behaviour
- > fear that the adult may make the situation worse
- > fear that the adult doesn't have the knowledge and skills to deal appropriately with the bullying behaviour
- > fear that the adult may deny access to their smart phone

20 Foody, M. Samara, M., O'Higgins Norman, J (2017) Bullying and cyberbullying studies in the school-aged population on the island of Ireland: A meta-analysis Bullying and cyberbullying studies in the school-aged population on the island of Ireland: A meta-analysis – Foody – 2017 – British Journal of Educational Psychology – Wiley Online Library.

- > not knowing what will happen when they report bullying behaviour
- > fear that they will not be believed
- > concerns about “getting into trouble” for reporting bullying behaviour
- > not having evidence to back up the allegation of bullying behaviour, this can be seen particularly with relational bullying behaviour

Schools should take these reasons for not reporting into account when developing their strategies to prevent and address bullying behaviour. Schools should be safe environments where reporting of bullying behaviour is encouraged.

A Trusted Adult

The concept of “a trusted adult” can be an effective strategy to encourage students to report if they or another student is experiencing bullying behaviour. Staff could support this strategy by letting students know that they can talk to them.

Students who witness bullying behaviour should be supported and encouraged to report the behaviour to a trusted adult in the school so that the behaviour can be addressed. Students who witness bullying behaviour on social media have an important role in helping to address the behaviour by reporting the witnessed behaviour to a trusted adult.

The trusted adult should reassure the student that they have done the right thing by reporting the behaviour. The trusted adult should, without delay, inform the member of staff who has responsibility for addressing bullying behaviour. At primary level this may be the class teacher. At post-primary level this may be the deputy principal, year head, or a member of the student support team. If unsure who to inform, the trusted adult should inform the principal or deputy principal. The trusted adult should continue to support the student, as appropriate, while the behaviour is being addressed by the relevant member of staff.

Creating safe physical spaces in schools

The creation of safe physical spaces supports psychological safety and is an important measure to prevent bullying behaviour. Spaces that have a clear line of sight make it easier for school staff to supervise students. Hidden spaces in hallways, around staircases and in the schoolyard can be areas where there is a greater risk for bullying behaviour to occur. School could consider increasing visibility in these areas such as by the use of mirrors, planting shrubs to avoid students congregating in these areas or increasing supervision.

Schools could take the following measures to create safe physical spaces:

- > ensure good lighting is present to avoid dark corners or spaces
- > remove visual barriers from windows such as posters
- > install mirrors to improve visibility and reduce blind spots
- > improve the visibility of school staff who are supervising at break times including during yard duty
- > murals, artwork and signage can help schools to promote the school’s values such as equality, diversity, inclusion and respect

Students can feel a greater sense of belonging to a school community when they are given ownership of their own space through art and creativity²¹. 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. It is important that the school grounds are well maintained to promote a sense of ownership and respect in the school community.

Supervision

Appropriate supervision is an important measure to help prevent and address bullying behaviour. Schools are required to take all reasonable measures to ensure the safety of their students and to supervise students when students are attending school or attending school activities.

Some schools offer a mix of organised activities during break times and schools are encouraged to continue to do this with a view to accommodating a range of preferences and interests.



²¹ Danko, S., Evans G., & Platten Killeen J., (2003). The Role Of Permanent Student Artwork In Students' Sense Of Ownership In An Elementary School. *Environment and Behaviour* (2): 250-263.

5.2 Curriculum (Teaching and Learning)

Teaching and learning that is collaborative and respectful should be promoted. Students should have regular opportunities to work in small groups with their peers, which can help build sense of connection, belonging and empathy among students.

The curricular subjects offered to students provide opportunities to foster inclusion and respect for diversity. Schools are encouraged to provide opportunities for students to develop a sense of self-worth through both curricular and extra-curricular programmes.

The Social Personal and Health Education (SPHE) and Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) curricula at primary level aim to foster students' well-being, self-confidence and sense of belonging and to develop students' sense of personal responsibility for their own behaviour and actions. Students' social and emotional learning (SEL) skills can be improved through the SPHE curriculum. Examples of resources that can be used as part of teaching SPHE are included in the Resources Guide which accompanies these procedures.

At post-primary level, the updated SPHE specifications aim to help students to feel empowered to create, nurture and maintain respectful and healthy relationships with themselves and others. The RSE strand of the specification also provides space for post-primary students to examine and consider relationships and human sexuality which can foster an understanding of diversity which may help to reduce gender and identity-based bullying as well as sexism and sexual harassment.

Students can also consider diversity and inclusion through the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment's Religious Education specifications/syllabus. As well as this, diversity and inclusion can be experienced via Patron's Curricula which aim to encourage respect and understanding of different beliefs, perspectives and ways of living. In Civic Social and Political Education (CSPE), there is a focus on the interdependence of people in communities, at local as well as national and international levels. History and, at Senior Cycle, Politics and Society can be used to raise awareness of racism and colonialism. By examining historical and contemporary examples of racial discrimination and colonial legacies, students can develop an understanding of the root causes of bias and prejudice. Resources and materials are also available to support incorporating Traveller culture and history across all areas of the curriculum.

See the Resources Guide which accompanies these procedures.

5.3 Policy and Planning

The wellbeing of the school community should be at the heart of school policies and plans. Chapter 4 details the requirements of a school's Bí Cineálta policy and student-friendly Bí Cineálta policy to prevent and address bullying behaviour.

There are a range of other policies such as the school's acceptable use policy, supervision policy, special education teaching policy and Code of Behaviour that can support implementation of a school's Bí Cineálta policy.

Supporting the participation of students in the development and implementation of school policies and plans can help increase awareness and ensure effective implementation.

Engaging in appropriate teacher professional learning courses can support school staff to prevent and address bullying behaviour. School staff should also share their experiences and examples of best practice. There is a range of training available for school staff which relates to promoting inclusion and diversity in schools.

See the Resources Guide which accompanies these procedures.

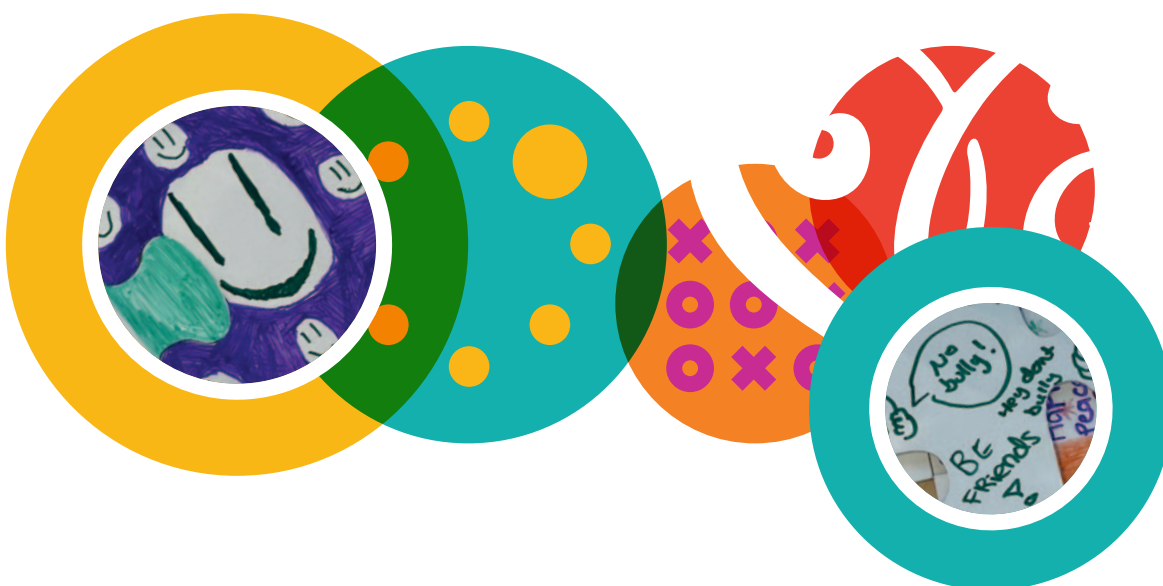
5.4 Relationships and Partnerships

Strong interpersonal connections are a vital part of effectively preventing and addressing bullying behaviour. These interpersonal connections are supported through a range of formal and informal structures such as student councils, school clubs, parents' associations and student support teams.

The following, which is not an exhaustive list, could be considered to strengthen relationships and partnerships between members of the school community:

- > age-appropriate awareness initiatives that look at the causes and impacts of bullying behaviour including those dealing with navigating friendships, identity-based bullying, racist bullying, homophobic/transphobic bullying, sexism and sexual harassment
- > supporting the active participation of students in school life
- > supporting the active participation of parents in school life, including those who may find it difficult or daunting to engage with the school due to being unfamiliar with the education system or due to language or cultural barriers
- > conducting workshops and seminars for students, school staff and parents to raise awareness of the impact of bullying
- > supporting activities that build empathy, respect and resilience
- > encouraging peer support such as peer mentoring
- > promoting acts of kindness
- > teaching problem solving
- > hosting debates

Cineáltas: Action Plan on Bullying 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 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.



It should be noted that there is a variety of prevention strategies that can be implemented. A school's Student Support Team can support the development, implementation and review of the school's strategies to prevent bullying behaviour. When implementing a prevention strategy schools should consider engaging with members of the wider school community who are in regular contact with students, such as the following, which is not an exhaustive list:

- > school bus drivers
- > education welfare officers
- > home-school community liaison officers
- > school completion project workers
- > Traveller and Roma community education workers
- > traffic wardens
- > local businesses that are close to the school

These members of the wider school community can be encouraged to report any bullying behaviour to the school as appropriate.



5.5 Preventing cyberbullying behaviour

Technology and social media have provided many positive opportunities for entertainment, social engagement and education. Technology is a part of life that can impact even the youngest members of society. However, the increase in the use of technology has led to students becoming increasingly vulnerable to cyberbullying or unacceptable online behaviour.

Schools should proactively address these challenges by promoting digital literacy, digital citizenship, and fostering safe online environments. Strategies to prevent cyberbullying behaviour include the following, which is not an exhaustive list:

- > implementing the SPHE curriculum
- > implementing the Digital Media Literacy curriculum which teaches students about responsible online behaviour and digital citizenship
- > having regular conversations with students about developing respectful and kind relationships online
- > developing and communicating an acceptable use policy for technology
- > referring to appropriate online behaviour as part of the standards of behaviour in the Code of Behaviour
- > promoting or hosting online safety events for parents who are responsible for overseeing their children's activities online*
- > holding an Internet safety day to reinforce awareness around appropriate online behaviour

The digital age of consent is the minimum age a user must be before a social media or internet company can collect, process and store their data. In Ireland the digital age of consent is 16.²²

For the purposes of data collection, students between the age of 13 and 16 years old must have parental permission to sign-up to social media services where companies use the legal basis of consent to collect process and store users' data. Most social media platforms and services have a minimum age requirement and for the majority of these services it is 13 years' old. Therefore technically, children under the age of 13 should not have a social media account.

It is important for their child's safety, that parents are aware of their children's use of technology including smartphones and gaming consoles.

*Resources have been developed to support parents and parent associations that wish to develop voluntary codes regarding smartphone use among primary school children. These are contained in the Resources Guide which accompanies these procedures.

²² Schools should refer to Circular 0042/2018 and 0043/2018 for guidance on the use of programmes and external facilitators in the promotion of wellbeing <https://circulars.gov.ie/pdf/circular/education/2018/42.pdf>

5.6 Preventing homophobic/transphobic bullying behaviour

All students including gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender students, have a right to feel safe and supported at school.

Strategies to prevent homophobic and transphobic bullying behaviour include the following, which is not an exhaustive list:

- > maintaining an inclusive physical environment such as by displaying relevant posters
- > encouraging peer support such as peer mentoring and empathy building activities
- > challenging gender-stereotypes
- > conducting workshops and seminars for students, school staff and parents to raise awareness of the impact of homophobic bullying behaviour
- > encouraging students to speak up when they witness homophobic behaviour

5.7 Preventing racist bullying behaviour

Schools have become much more culturally diverse over the last number of decades. Students attending schools come from many different cultures and backgrounds. Students from diverse backgrounds may face discrimination and prejudice and may be subject to racist bullying behaviour.

Strategies to prevent racist bullying behaviour include the following, which is not an exhaustive list:

- > fostering a school culture where diversity is celebrated and where students “see themselves” in their school environment
- > having the cultural diversity of the school visible and on display
- > conducting workshops and seminars for students, school staff and parents to raise awareness of racism
- > encouraging peer support such as peer mentoring and empathy building activities
- > encouraging bystanders to report when they witness racist behaviour
- > providing supports to school staff to respond to the needs of students for whom English is an additional language and for communicating with their parents
- > providing supports to school staff to support students from ethnic minorities, including Traveller and Roma students, and to encourage communication with their parents
- > inviting speakers from diverse ethnic backgrounds²³
- > ensuring that library reading material and textbooks represent appropriate lived experiences of students and adults from different national, ethnic and cultural backgrounds

5.8 Preventing sexist bullying behaviour

Schools should focus on gender equality as part of the school's measures to create a supportive and respectful environment.

23 <https://circulars.gov.ie/pdf/circular/education/2018/43.pdf>

Strategies to prevent sexist bullying behaviour include the following, which is not an exhaustive list:

- > ensuring members of staff model respectful behaviour and treat students equally irrespective of their sex
- > ensuring all students have the same opportunities to engage in school activities irrespective of their sex
- > celebrating diversity at school and acknowledging the contributions of all students
- > organising awareness campaigns, workshops and presentations on gender equality and respect
- > encouraging parents to reinforce these values of respect at home

5.9 Preventing sexual harassment

Preventing sexual harassment requires an approach that focuses on education, awareness and clear enforceable policies. Schools must make it clear that there is a zero-tolerance approach to sexual harassment. Sexual harassment should never be dismissed as teasing or banter.

Strategies to prevent sexual harassment include the following, which is not an exhaustive list:

- > using the updated SPHE specifications at post-primary level to teach students about healthy relationships and how to treat each other with respect and kindness
- > promoting positive role models within the school community
- > challenging gender stereotypes that can contribute to sexual harassment

Many of the preventative strategies listed above can be implemented by schools to prevent all types of bullying behaviour.

Resources to support schools to prevent bullying behaviour are contained in the Resources Guide which accompanies these procedures.

