Review April 2012

Athy College

**Draft School Policy on Countering Bullying Behaviour**

**Introduction**

This policy document is being prepared through partnership between all the members of the school community. These include students and their parents/guardians, teaching and non-teaching staff members, Board of Management and community agencies.

# Rationale / School Ethos

**Bullying behaviour is unacceptable in Athy Community College and will not be tolerated. All members of the school community are required to show cooperation and commitment in countering bullying behaviour to ensure this whole school approach fosters a positive school climate for everyone.**

Athy Community College sets out its ethos as a **caring school** in its **Mission Statement:**

**In a caring school, we are dedicated to fostering educational excellence, empowering all students to reach their full potential – academic and social, physical and spiritual. Through partnership and co-operation we openly respect and nurture the dignity and uniqueness of each individual.**

This statement is at the centre of our positive school climate where respect for all members of the school community is encouraged and individual differences are valued, thereby enabling students and staff to reach their full potential.

Bullying or discrimination towards any member of the school community will not be tolerated on any of the following grounds:

* + - * **Gender**
      * **Marital status**
      * **Family status**
      * **Sexual orientation**
      * **Religion**
      * **Age**
      * **Disability**
      * **Race**
      * **Member of the Travelling Community**
      * **Physical appearance**

**Aims of the School Policy on Countering Bullying Behaviour**

1. To protect the right of every child to be educated in a safe, supportive and caring environment.
2. To promote a friendly and helpful environment within the school, where there is a mutual respect between staff and students and where students show respect for each other, their property and school property.
3. To promote awareness and disseminate information to staff, parents and students about bullying and their roles in its prevention.
4. “We are a telling school” - students will be encouraged to always tell of incidents.
5. To put in place the necessary strategies which will prevent and reduce the incidents of bullying behaviour.
6. To foster an open, safe environment where those who become victims of bullying, also witnesses and parents/guardians, are enabled and supported in reporting such incidents.
7. To outline the procedures for noting and reporting of an incident of bullying behaviour.
8. To outline the steps that will be taken by school staff in dealing with bullying incidents, including strategies for supporting victims, bullies and witnesses.
9. To allow for review of the policy on a regular basis.

**Definition of Bullying**

***Bullying*** is **repeated** aggression, verbal, psychological or physical conducted by an individual or group against others. (Dept. of Education Circular 20/’93)

Bullying behaviour must be judged to have these common elements:

* Repeated actions over time targeted at one or more persons
* A desire to hurt, to be malicious
* Imbalance in power, favouring the bully
* Organised and systematic
* Carried out by an individual or group

# Types of Bullying

Bullying may take many forms. The following **types of bullying** can be identified:

* **Verbal bullying:**  some examples are: name-calling, taunting or jeering, teasing, obscene phone calls, threats, rumour spreading, sexual or racist comments, graffiti.   
  This bullying can leave people feeling angry, frightened and powerless.
* **Physical bullying:**  e.g. pushing, kicking, pinching, horseplay, biting, hitting, punching, and pulling hair.  
  This is the most visible form of intimidation, used by boys and girls of all ages.
* **Gesture bullying:** This behaviour can often go unnoticed by teachers or parents, as it is non-verbal and can be very subtle. Such behaviour includes the stare, cut-throat gesture, finger gestures or just a look.
* **Exclusion bullying:** This type of bullying leaves a student isolated from other students (often for no apparent reason) and is particularly hurtful as it can affect a person’s self-confidence.
* **Extortion bullying:** This behaviour may also go unnoticed as it generally occurs secretively. Younger students are most vulnerable to demands for money, food, possessions, equipment, etc. Some students are even forced into bullying for others.
* **New technologies and cyberbullying**: this form of intimidation via texts or emails is very prevalent. Verbal abuse via the use of the internet on social networking sites has become a constant   
  (Separate policy recommended about Internet safety)
* **Cyberbullying:** verbal abuse via the use of the internet on social networking sites  
  (Separate policy recommended about Internet safety)
* **Racial bullying:** drawing attention in a negative or unwanted way to a person’s racial, ethnic or religious background.
* **Sexual bullying:** discussing a person’s sexual behaviour, or drawing attention in a negative or unwanted way to a person’s appearance or sexual orientation.

***Bullying*** occurs almost anywhere. In school, bullying behaviour may occur in:

* + **Classrooms**
  + **corridors and toilets**
  + **School grounds**
  + **En route to or from school**
  + **New technologies, e.g. social network sites and mobile phones**

**Indications of Bullying**

The following signs/symptoms **may** suggest a student is being bullied:

* Deterioration in educational performance, loss of concentration and loss of enthusiasm for school.
* Refusal or unwillingness to go to school, mitching, avoiding certain classes.
* Anxiety about travelling to and from school, requesting a lift, changing route of travel, going earlier or later to school.
* Pattern of physical illness, such as headaches, stomachaches.
* Mood changes in school and at home: angry, tearful, withdrawn, aggressive.
* Torn or missing clothing or school belongings.
* Physical injuries not consistent with the explanation.
* Visible signs of distress: stammering, nightmares, bedwetting, difficulty in sleeping, not eating, vomiting, weight loss, panic attacks, bowel problems.
* Aggressive, out-of-character comments about either teachers or other students.
* Increased requests for money or stealing of money.
* Refusal to talk about school, activities or peers.
* Artwork and individual writing expressing inner turmoil.
* Lingering behind in school after classes are over.

**Guidelines for Students**

* **We are a telling school - Tell an adult** you trust about every bullying incident. **This is not telling tales**. It is being **responsible.**
* Staying silent about an incident will only make it easier for the bully to repeat their actions.
* Tell yourself **nobody, including yourself, deserves to be bullied.**
* Try to look confident and assertive. The bully wants a scared reaction. Silence or an assertive reaction may bore the bully and then they may stop.
* If one or more students target you, do not fight back.
* **Do not tolerate children who bully in your group of friends**. Young people who bully will soon stop when they realise their behaviour is unpopular with everybody.
* Stay with a group of people. There is safety in numbers.
* Do not try and buy off a bully with sweets or possessions or give into demands for money.
* Keep a record of bullying incidents: when?, where?, what?

**Guidelines for Parents/Guardians where the Child is a Victim or Witness**

* Look out for **unusual behaviour** in your child. Be aware of the signs and symptoms of bullying. (See Indications of Bullying above)
* Always take an active role in your child’s education. **Talk** to them on a daily basis about their everyday activities.
* If you feel you son/daughter may be the victim of bullying behaviour, inform the school immediately in a discreet manner (letter, telephone or e-mail) to prevent further anxiety for your child.
* Encourage your child to keep a record – date, time, incident, who involved.
* It is important to advise your child not to retaliate. This only makes matters worse. Your child may get injured or punished.
* Assure your child that there is nothing wrong with him/her and that he/she is not responsible for the bullying behaviour.
* It is important to build up your child’s confidence and encourage your child to be assertive. Get them to practise saying ‘No’ and standing up to the bully.
* Advise your child to stay in a group of friends. Take an active interest in their friends by encouraging your child to invite their friends home.
* Encourage your child to report all incidents of bullying behaviour immediately whether or not he/she was the victim/witness. Remind them that this is responsible behaviour.

**If you are informed that your child has been involved in doing the bullying…………**

* Encourage your son/daughter to own up to the problem. Tell him/her that this behaviour is wrong and will not be tolerated.
* Encourage your child to recognise and name feelings.  
  Talk to him/her about how he/she feels about himself/herself.
* Bullies tend to see things from their own viewpoint. They need your help to become aware of the effect of their actions on others. Build empathy in him/her.
* Assure your child of your continued support and love. You accept and love the person but you do not accept the behaviour.
* Co-operation with any disciplinary measures taken by the school is very important.

**Guidelines for Witnesses to Bullying**

* Be an active witness to bullying behaviour and stand up for your fellow students against bullies.
* Take responsibility and report incidents of bullying that you have witnessed.
* Use the Comments and Concerns Box in the secretary’s office.
* Build up your courage to say, “Stop”, “Lay off”, “Get out of here”.

**Action to be Taken**

If bullying occurs, the victim, the bully and any witnesses will be interviewed. A calm, problem-solving approach will be adopted when dealing with incidents of bullying behaviour.

**The Victim**

* Victim is listened to by tutor/ year head/ HSCL and/or other teacher and allowed tell their story.
* Student is asked to write own account. Teacher reassures victim that nobody deserves to be bullied and works with them to plan for a solution to the problem.
* Teacher assures victim of continued support and continued security - through the limited hours of the Guidance Counsellor, HSCL coordinator, year head and possible outside agency.
* Teacher explains to the victim that the incident will be fully investigated with help from others present at the incident, i.e. witnesses. Other people may have to be informed, i.e. Principal, parents, year heads.
* Victim will be kept informed of how the matter is proceeding.
* If and when ready, the victim may get an apology from the bully.

**The Bully**

* Bully will be helped to see how their actions are damaging. They will be constantly reminded that **bullying behaviour is not acceptable in Athy College.**
* Disciplinary sanction will be imposed on the bully.
* Tutor and year head will make an agreement with the Bully on how to stop the bullying behaviour.
* In time, when the victim is ready and when the bully has come to an understanding of their actions, the bully may apologise to the victim.
* Tutor/year head will seek the support of the parents of the bully to reinforce the sanctions imposed.
* Principal/deputy Principal may be involved if the incident is found to be very serious or if the parents of the bully do not offer their support.
* If no agreement is reached, the incident may be referred to the Board of Management.
* Failing agreement again, the incident may be referred further to the V.E.C. committee.

**The Witness**

* Tutor /year head/ HSCL/ Guidance Counsellorwill interview witnesses to help get a full account of an incident.
* Witnesses will be asked to write their account.
* Witnesses will be encouraged to come forward at all times and to stand up for the victims.

**Procedures for Noting and Reporting an incident of Bullying Behaviour**

* Students are to be supported and encouraged to report all incidents of bullying to their tutor/ year head/ HSCL coordinator/ Guidance Counsellor(or any member of staff), which then **must** be investigated. In this way students will gain confidence in reporting.  
  A teacher who witnesses bullying will also report the incident to the class tutor.
* The teacher who witnesses or to whom the bullying incident is reported, in conjunction with the tutor, will inform the year head in writing.
* The year head will investigate and deal with the incident in accordance with the school’s Code of Discipline.
* A serious bullying incident will be referred to the Principal or Deputy-principal. The expertise of outside agencies may be sought where needed.
* Parents/guardians of victims and bullies will be informed by the year head/ HSCL coordinator at the earliest opportunity to allow for discussion of the matter.
* Non-teaching staff members are encouraged to report any incidents of bullying behaviour witnessed by them. .

**Procedures for Investigating and Dealing with Bullying Behaviour**

(In accordance with Code of Discipline)

1. All parties are interviewed separately (victim/bully) by **tutor and year head.**
2. If a group is involved, each person will be interviewed separately and asked for their account of the incident.
3. Interview will be conducted in a non-leading and non-confrontational manner.
4. The school personnel will keep a **written record** of the interview. Students involved will be asked to write down their account of the alleged incident.
5. After investigation, if behaviour is considered to be a bullying situation, the year head may inform parents/guardians of the individuals involved.
6. Students involved in bullying behaviour will be informed that they are in breach of the Code of Discipline.
7. Victim will be offered continuing support, as deemed necessary, in consultation with parents. Eg. Via the tutor, year head, principal, HSCL Co-ordinator.
8. As well as being disciplined, the bully will be supported in developing awareness of the effects of their behaviour on others and of the necessity to stop this behaviour.
   * Support may be sought from: Kildare Youth Services  
      Health Board Child and Adolescent Guidance  
      ServiceGarda Juvenile Liaison Officer

**Disciplinary Measures against the Bully**

* The student who has engaged in bullying behaviour will be disciplined with an appropriate sanction, as detailed in the Code of Behaviour
* This student will be asked to look at the situation from the victim’s point of view.
* The parents of a student involved in bullying behaviour may be invited to come to the school to discuss ways in which they can reinforce or support the action being taken by the school.

# Effects of Bullying

The consequences of bullying are wide-ranging and severe. Below are some of the common reactions to being bullied.

## Physical Effects Emotional/Psychological Effects

### Frequent minor illnesses Anxiety

Aggression Anger

Violence Loss of confidence

Fights Loneliness

Physical damage Fear

Loss of or damage to property Social isolation

Depression

Suicidal thoughts/behaviour

**Recommendations to implement the Anti-bullying School Policy**

* 1. Development of an Anti-Bullying implementation team
  2. The creation of a positive anti-bullying ethos and the raising of awareness about Bullying during an Anti-bullying Awareness Week – promotion of the ethos that Athy College is a “Telling School”.
  3. Active and dedicated Care Team.
  4. Procedures for noting and reporting incidents.
  5. Procedures for investigating and resolving bullying problems.
  6. Procedures for supervision.
  7. Comment Box in secure but accessible location
  8. Curricular work in S.P.H.E., Social Education and other areas.
  9. Strategies for supporting victims and bullies.
  10. Inservice offered to all teachers on Bullying issues.
  11. Regular communication and involvement with parents through meetings, newsletters, etc.
  12. Inclusion of a School Charter in the students’ journals and/or in all classrooms to counter bullying behaviour

**Review of Policy on Countering Bullying Behaviour**

An evaluation of the effectiveness of the school policy on countering bullying will occur **regularly** , to allow the school community to respond to changing needs and in the light of bullying incidents encountered. It is envisaged that review will occur every two years.

Random surveys may be held to determine the level and type of bullying behaviour in the school.

While this policy deals specifically with incidents involving student bullying, it recognises that other forms of bullying can occur within schools:

bullying of children by adults

bullying of adults by children

bullying of adults by other adults

**Incidents involving adults and children should be reported directly to the Principal.**

A separate policy, **the Staff Welfare Policy**, deals with bullying or harassment issues amongst the staff in the school.

**Sample School Charter for Students to Counter Bullying Behaviour**

(Possible to do this as an activity at class level)

* We will not bully other students
* We will care for each other’s safety and well being
* We will try to help students who are bullied
* We will make every effort to include students who are left out
* We will report all incidents of bullying behaviour – Athy College is a **telling school**
* We will not touch another student’s belongings without their permission.

**Sample School Charter for a Positive School Climate**

* The school acknowledges the right of each member of the school community to enjoy school in a secure environment.
* The school disapproves of vulgar, offensive, sectarian or other aggressive behaviour by any of its members.
* The school has a clear commitment to promote equity in general and gender equity in particular in all aspects of it’s functioning.
* The school acknowledges the uniqueness of each individual and his/her worth as a human being.
* The school recognises the need to co-operate with and keep parents informed on procedures to improve relationships within the school community.
* The school recognises the right of the parents to share in the task of equipping the student with a range of life-skills.
* The school recognises the role of other community agencies in preventing and dealing with bullying behaviour.
* The school promotes habits of mutual respect, courtesy and co-operation.
* The school promotes qualities of social responsibility, tolerance and understanding amongst all its members both in and out of school.

Policy review: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Ratified by BOM: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Next review of policy: May 2014