

Policy on dealing with bullying

Last reviewed by the Board on: April 12th 2021

The Board of Rockbrook Park School has adopted this policy on bullying within the framework of the school's overall code of behaviour. This policy complies with the requirements of the Anti-Bullying Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools (September 2013).

The school recognises the very serious nature of bullying and the negative impact that it can have on the lives of students and it is fully committed to key principles of best practice in preventing and tackling bullying behaviour.

The school promotes a positive and welcoming culture, promoting respectful relationships across the entire school community. The school provides effective leadership in helping the school community as a whole understand bullying and its impact, and implements appropriate education and prevention strategies. These include building empathy, respect, confidence and resilience in students, the appropriate supervision of students, and consistent recording, investigation and follow up of bullying behaviour. Supports for staff are also in place, in terms of training of staff and policies and procedures related to bullying of staff. The school encourages parents, students and staff to disclose suspected incidents of bullying behaviour. There is on-going evaluation of the effectiveness of this anti-bullying policy.

Definition

Bullying is unwanted negative behaviour (verbal, psychological or physical) conducted by an individual or group against another person (or persons) and which is repeated over time.

The following types of bullying behaviour are included in the definition of bullying:

- deliberate exclusion, malicious gossip and other forms of relational bullying,
- cyber-bullying
- identity-based bullying such as bullying of those with disabilities or special educational needs, racist bullying, bullying based on ethnicity, homophobic bullying.

Isolated or once-off incidents of intentional negative behaviour, including a once-off offensive or hurtful text message or other private messaging, do not fall within the definition of bullying and will be dealt with, as appropriate, in accordance with the school's code of behaviour.

However, in the context of this policy, placing a once-off offensive or hurtful public message, image or statement on a social network site or other public forum where that message, image or statement can be viewed and/or repeated by other people will be regarded as bullying behaviour.

Negative behaviour that does not meet this definition of bullying will be dealt with in accordance with the school's code of behaviour.

Staff tasked to deal with bullying

In Rockbrook, the staff tasked with investigating and dealing with bullying are first and foremost the relevant Year Head(s), in liaison with the Deputy Principal and/or the Principal, and working closely with any teacher or other staff member relevant to the case.

Education and prevention strategies

The education and prevention strategies that are used by the school with regard to bullying are as follows:

- Class time focused on developing student awareness and understanding of all types of bullying, including its causes and effects; this is covered especially in the school's Men of Character programme, Year Head meetings with year groups, and the school's digital literacy programme.
- Use of whole-school opportunities, such as Assembly, to address the issue.
- A school-wide culture of reporting any concerns of bullying of whatever kind.
- Educating students on appropriate online behaviour and how to stay safe while online. The school is also conscious of the scope for cyber-bullying to occur as a result of access to technology from within the school.
- It is a standing agenda item in the weekly meetings among Year Heads.
- A strong school-home working partnership which recognises and promotes the role of parents in identifying and tackling students being bullied or students engaged in bullying.
- A concerted effort to develop the social skills of all students, including those with any special needs, through classes, clubs and individual mentoring to ensure all are aware of the nature of bullying and how to report it.
- Mentors address the issue in meetings with their mentees. In particular, attention is paid to new entrants to the school to ensure they make a smooth transition, and build empathy, respect and resilience.
- Staff take the opportunity within subject teaching to highlight a respect for all, highlighting the nature of difference, prejudice, and stereotyping.
- Raising the self-esteem and positive sense of self-worth of students through extra-curricular programmes.
- Sporting activities which provide opportunities for channelling and learning how to control aggression.
- Clann leaders are alerted to their role as sources of unity within the school and across years, and as role models for younger students.
- Staff day includes the subject of bullying.
- Awareness day for students and parents may be considered appropriate.

Addressing cases of bullying

The school's procedures for investigation, follow-up and recording of bullying behaviour and the established intervention strategies used by the school for dealing with cases of bullying behaviour are outlined here.

The primary aim for the relevant Year Head in investigating and dealing with bullying is to resolve any issues and to restore the relationships of the parties involved (rather than to apportion blame). Thus in investigating and dealing with bullying, the Year Head will exercise his/her professional judgement to determine whether bullying has occurred and how best the situation might be resolved.

All reports, including anonymous reports of bullying will be investigated by the Year Head. It is made clear to all students that when they report incidents of bullying they are not considered to be telling tales but are behaving responsibly. All staff, including non-teaching staff, are encouraged to report any incidents of bullying behaviour witnessed by them, or mentioned to them, to the relevant Year Head.

Parents and students are required to cooperate with any investigation and assist the school in resolving any issues and restoring the relationships of the parties involved as quickly as possible.

All interviews are conducted with sensitivity and with due regard to the rights of all students concerned. When analysing incidents of bullying behaviour, the relevant Year Head will seek answers to questions of what, where, when, who and why, in a calm manner, setting an example in dealing effectively with a conflict in a non-aggressive way.

If a group is involved, each member will be interviewed individually at first. Thereafter, all those involved may be met as a group. At the group meeting, each member will be asked for his/her account of what happened to ensure that everyone in the group is clear about each other's statements. Each member of a group may require support through the possible pressures that they may face from the other members of the group after interview by the Year Head. In some cases, where it is helpful, those involved may be asked to write down their account of the incident.

In cases where it has been determined by the Year Head that bullying behaviour has occurred, the parents of the parties involved will be contacted to inform them of the matter and explain the actions being taken. The school will give parents an opportunity to discuss ways in which they can reinforce or support the actions being taken by the school. The actions to be taken by the school will depend on the seriousness of the particular incident and will be in line with the school's code of behaviour.

Where the Year Head has determined that a student has been engaged in bullying behaviour, it will be made clear to him how he is in breach of the school's policy. Efforts will be made to try to get him to see the situation from the perspective of the student being bullied.

In any situation where disciplinary sanctions are required, it is a private matter between the student being disciplined, his parents and the school.

Follow-up meetings with the relevant parties involved may be arranged separately with a view to possibly bringing them together at a later date if the student who has been bullied is ready and agreeable.

In cases where a staff member considers that bullying behaviour reported to a Year Head has not been adequately and appropriately addressed within 20 school days after he or she has determined that bullying behaviour has occurred, he or she will bring this to the attention of the Principal. In determining whether a bullying case has been adequately and appropriately addressed, the staff member will, as part of his or her professional judgement, take the following factors into account: whether the bullying behaviour has ceased; whether any issues between the parties have been resolved as far as is practicable; whether the relationships between the parties have been restored as far as is practicable; and any feedback received from the parties involved, their parents or the school principal.

Where a parent is not satisfied that the school has dealt with a bullying case in accordance with these procedures, the parents will be referred, as appropriate, to the school's complaints procedures. In the event that a parent has exhausted the school's complaints procedures and is still not satisfied, the school will advise the parents of their right to make a complaint to the Ombudsman for Children.

Support for students who have been bullied or have been engaged in bullying behaviour

Ongoing supports and interventions for students who have been bullied, or who have been involved in bullying behaviour, are implemented by the school.

There is ongoing contact and counselling from mentors, which is very useful in continuing to address any issues arising.

The relevant Year Heads monitors the situation closely over the following weeks, and months if need be.

Follow-up communication with both sets of parents is maintained.

Students are actively encouraged to make use of opportunities to participate in activities designed to raise their self-esteem, develop their friendships and social skills and thereby build confidence and resilience.

Students who observe incidents of bullying are encouraged to discuss them with their mentors.

Supervision and Monitoring of Pupils

Appropriate supervision and monitoring policies and practices are in place in the school to both prevent and deal with bullying behaviour and to facilitate early intervention where possible.

Prevention of Harassment

The school, in accordance with its obligations under equality legislation, takes all such steps that are reasonably practicable to prevent any and all harassment of students or staff, including that specified by law.

Review

This policy and its implementation will be reviewed by school and the Board once in every school year.