Gaelscoil Phortlaoise 'Bí Cineálta' Policy

To Prevent and Address Bullying Behaviour

The Board of Management of ***Gaelscoil Phortlaoise*** 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 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 following detailed definition is provided in Chapter 2 of the Bí Cineálta procedures.

If the answer to **each of the questions is 'Yes'**, then the behaviour is **bullying behaviour** and the behaviour should be addressed using the Bí Cineálta procedures.

If the **answer to any of the questions is 'No'**, then the behaviour is **not bullying behaviour**. Strategies to deal with inappropriate behaviour are provided for within the school's Code of Behaviour.

However, **a single hurtful message posted on social media can be considered bullying behaviour as it may be visible to a wide audience and has a high likelihood of being shared multiple times and so becomes a repeated behaviour.**

Bullying behaviour can take many forms which can occur separately or together. These can include the following, which is not an exhaustive list.

Types of Bullying Behaviour

There are many different types of bullying behaviour. These can include the following which is not an exhaustive list:

- **Physical Bullying:** Includes acts such as pushing, shoving, hitting, kicking, and damaging property.
- **Written Bullying:** Writing insulting remarks about a student in public places, passing around notes about or drawings of a student.
- **Verbal Bullying:** Involves name-calling, insults, threats, and teasing.
- **Relational Bullying:** Characterised by spreading rumours, social exclusion, and manipulating friendships.
- **Cyberbullying:** Includes sending hurtful messages, sharing embarrassing photos or videos online, creating fake profiles, and online exclusion.
- **Disablist Bullying:** behaviour or language that intends to harm a student because of a perceived or actual disability or additional need.
- **Exceptionally Able Bullying:** behaviour or language that intends to harm a student because of their high academic ability or outstanding talents.
- **Gender Identity Bullying:** behaviour or language that intends to harm a student because of their perceived or actual gender identity.
- **Homophobic/Transphobic (LGBTQ+) bullying:** behaviour or language that intends to harm a student because of their perceived or actual membership of the LGBTQ+ community.
- **Physical Appearance Bullying:** behaviour or language that intends to harm a

student because of their physical appearance.

- **Racist Bullying:** behaviour or language that intends to harm a student because of their race or ethnic origin, which have the effect of excluding or discriminating against individuals or groups, based on race, colour, descent, or national or ethnic origin.
- **Poverty Bullying:** behaviour that intends to humiliate a student because of a lack of resources.
- **Religious Identity Bullying:** behaviour that intends to harm a student because of their religion or religious identity.
- **Sexist Bullying:** behaviour that intends to harm a student based on their sex, perpetuating stereotypes that a student or a group of students are inferior because of their sex.
- **Sexually Harmful Behaviour:** any form of unwanted verbal, non-verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature or other conduct based on sex which affects the dignity of the student.

Behaviour that is not Bullying Behaviour

The following points seek to clarify certain behaviours that are not regarded as bullying and may be addressed under the school's Code of Behaviour:

- Disagreement between students, or instances where students don't want to be friends or to remain friends, is not considered bullying unless it involves deliberate and repeated attempts to cause distress, exclude or create dislike by others.
- Some students with special educational needs, may have social communication difficulties which may make them communicate their needs through behaviours that can hurt themselves or others. It is important to note that these behaviours are not deliberate or planned, but in certain situations, they are an automatic response which they cannot control.
- 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.
- A one-off instance of negative behaviour towards a student is not bullying behaviour. *However, a single hurtful message posted on social media can be considered bullying behaviour as it may be visible to a wide audience and has a high likelihood of being shared multiple times and so becomes a repeated behaviour.*

Bullying Outside School

A school is not expected to deal with bullying behaviour that occurs when students are not under the care or responsibility of the school. However, where this bullying behaviour has an **impact in school** and/or where **it continues in school**, the school will deal with it in accordance with the Bí Cineálta policy.

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.

Who was involved?	Date	Method of Consultation
School Staff	30/1/2025	Principal attended training days.
	4/4/2025	Staff Meeting – Half Day Closure. Surveys to be completed by teachers.
	9/4/2025	Collection of information – surveys to be completed by pupils.
	30/4/2025	Information night and surveys with the Parents Committee.
	5-9/5/2025	Analysis of all surveys and feedback.
	21/5/2025	Discussion on the pupils version (poster) of the policy.
	3/9/2025	Draft 'Bí Cineálta' Policy sent to teachers (feedback given, amendments made)
	4/9/2025	Digital version of poster sent to staff and discussed with pupils.
	1/10/2025	Posters displayed in classrooms.
Students	9/4/2025	Pupils Survey - Senior classes filling out a survey. Junior classes engaging in discussion for feedback.

	May 2025 and regular class/assembly discussions throughout the year 6/6/2025 9/6/2025 2/9/2025	Regular Classroom Discussions on topic of Friendship and Bullying Discussion about our 'Bí Cineálta' by M. Dominic and M. Shonagh (Rang a 6) at assembly. M. Dominic held a meeting with the Students Council. First draft of the poster shown to 5th and 6th class pupils. Feedback received.
Parents	30/4/2025 14/10/25	Information evening and surveys completed by the Parents Committee. Policy, pupil version (poster) and relevant links shared with parents/guardians.
Board of Management	14/10/2024 3/12/2024 10/2/2025 7/4/2025 17ú/9/2025	New 'Bí Cineálta' Policy introduced – synopsis on new guidelines given, parent consultation methods to be used/used - school/parents/students approach Bí Cineálta ratified at BOM meeting on 17th September 2025.
School Community	12/9/2025 19/9/2025 14/10/2025	Share policy with Whole-School Community – schools website etc. (Special Needs Assistants, Secretary)

Date Approved - 17/9/2025
Date Policy was last reviewed -

Section B: Preventing Bullying Behaviour

This section sets out the prevention strategies that will be used by the school as appropriate, including strategies specifically aimed at preventing *online bullying behaviour, homophobic and transphobic bullying behaviour, racist bullying behaviour, sexist bullying behaviour and sexual harassment* as appropriate (see Chapter 5 of the Bí Cineálta procedures).

The Board of Management of Gaelscoil Phortlaoise recognises the very serious nature of bullying and the negative impact that it can have on the lives of pupils and the wider school community. It is therefore fully committed to following the key principles of best practice in preventing and tackling bullying behaviour. As a school we are deeply committed to providing a safe and inclusive learning environment. The school firmly believes that bullying behaviour is unacceptable and is dedicated to preventing and addressing all forms of bullying behaviour to safeguard the well-being, academic performance, and social development of each pupil.

In Gaelscoil Phortlaoise, our aim is :

- To create a culture and school environment where pupils and staff experience a sense of belonging and where they feel safe, connected and supported. Where the relationship between all members of the school community is one that is based on respect, care, integrity and trust.
- To create a positive culture and environment as laid out in the school ethos.
- To encourage open communication in relation to creating a sense of respect, responsibility, honesty and trust between all members of our school community
- To develop and maintain the concept of a "trusted adult" in order to encourage pupils to report if they or another pupil is experiencing bullying behaviour. Staff will support this strategy by letting pupils know that they can talk to them.
- To ensure that pupils are aware that staff will support pupils always if bullying is reported in any way, shape or form. We emphasise amongst pupils that reporting is the right thing to do and will be taken seriously.
- To provide support to our pupils at all times.
- To create physical safe spaces in our school and to ensure that sufficient supervision is made available at all times on our school campus.

- To encourage children to take ownership of their work on preventing bullying behavior e.g. Seachtain Chineáltais, posters displayed in classrooms, around the school adn their dialann scoile.

Prevention Strategies

- **Report Bullying:** It is important that our school community supports a "telling environment". We actively work to overcome the barriers that prevent pupils from reporting bullying. This includes addressing fears of retaliation, social stigma, and lack of confidence in adults. We emphasise that reporting is the right thing to do and will be taken seriously. We aim to create a safe environment in Gaelscoil Phortloiase where reporting of bullying behaviour is encouraged in a non-threatening environment.
- **Open Communication:** We encourage open and honest dialogue about bullying through age-appropriate initiatives, workshops, and classroom discussions. This helps to raise awareness, dispel myths, and empower pupils to speak out against bullying.
- **Seachtain Chineáltais:** Each class will participate in 'Kindness Week' to promote kindness and our responsibilities as a school community in this area.
- **Restorative Practice:** This is at the centre of our school culture and practice. Steps and questions to implement it are displayed in every classroom and it is in practice daily.
- **Building Empathy and Respect:** We will integrate activities that foster empathy, respect, and inclusivity into our curriculum and school culture. These include collaborative learning projects, peer mentoring programs (e.g. buddy reading) and initiatives that celebrate diversity.
- **Trusted Adults:** The concept of a "trusted adult" can be an effective strategy to encourage pupils to report if they or another pupil is experiencing bullying behaviour. Staff members will support this strategy by letting pupils know that they can talk to them.
- **Bystander/Witness:** Pupils who witness bullying behaviour in person or on social media have an important role to play in helping to address the behaviour by reporting the witnessed behaviour to a trusted adult.

Ensuring a Physically Safe Environment

As a school, we recognise that creating a physically safe environment supports psychological safety and is an important measure to prevent bullying behaviour. Every effort will be made to ensure that there are no dark corners or hidden areas in the school where pupils could be bullied out of sight of staff.

Supervision

Appropriate supervision is a crucial measure in helping to prevent and address bullying behaviour. We recognise that we have a duty to take all reasonable steps to ensure the safety of our pupils and to always supervise our pupils whilst they are attending school or at school events.

Curriculum

Social Personal and Health (SPHE) and Relationships & Sexuality Education (RSE), Stay Safe and the wellbeing curricula in general aim to foster pupils' well-being, self-confidence and sense of belonging and to develop the pupils' sense of responsibility for their own behaviour. Pupils' social and emotional learning skills (SEL) can be improved through the SPHE curriculum.

The following programmes are used as an integral part of the SPHE curriculum:

- The 'Relationships & Sexuality Education' (RSE) programme.
- The 'Stay Safe' programme.
- The 'Misneach' (Walk Tall) programme.
- Anti-Bullying Lessons.
- Lessons, videos & resources from Cyber Safe Kids & Webwise.
- This is not an exhaustive list. Other programmes & lessons are used as appropriate & as needed.

Policies & Planning

The following school policies, plans and procedures have a bearing on this Bí Cinealta Policy. This is not an exhaustive list:

- Code of Behaviour
- Health & Safety Policy
- Child Protection Policy
- RSE Policy
- Special Educational Needs Policy
- IT Acceptable Usage Policy
- Substance Abuse Policy
- Equality and Inclusion Policy
- Data Protection Policy
- Remote Learning Policy

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 our parents' association, sports teams, students council, Green schools committee, school choir and various other groups.

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 e.g. Seachtain Chineáltais, that engage the pupil body in looking at their own behaviour – promoting acts of kindness and friendship, being an active help to others and looking at the causes and impacts of bullying behaviour during SPHE lessons.
- Supporting the active participation of pupils in school life and active participation of parents in school life also.
- Encouraging peer support and peer mentoring (multi-class walks together e.g. Road Safety Week, Mí Folláine, Reading together, Senior/Junior class buddies, Buddy System etc.)
- Regular visits from An Garda Síochána/visits to Garda Station to speak to pupils about Child Safety, Bullying and Staying Safe online. The Gardaí visit 5th and 6th class every year to talk about online safety and social media.
- Engaging parents and pupils in actively contributing to the formation of the 'Bí Cineálta' Anti Bullying Policy to make them active participants in the promotion and discussion of useful ways to identify and reduce bullying behaviour and highlight procedure and how to deal with it if it does occur.

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. Gaelscoil Phortlaoise proactively addresses 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 pupils about responsible online behaviour and digital citizenship (R3 - 6).
- Having regular conversations with pupils about developing respectful and kind relationships online.
- Developing and communicating an Acceptable Use Policy for Technology.
- Holding an Internet Safety Day to reinforce awareness around appropriate online behaviour.
- Promoting or hosting online safety events for parents who are responsible for overseeing their children's activities online (It is important for their child's safety, that parents are aware of their children's use of technology including smartphones and gaming consoles).

NOTE: *Digital age of Consent - In Ireland the digital age of consent is 16. 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 most of these services it is 13 years' old. Therefore technically, children under the age of 13 should not have a social media account.*

Supervision & Monitoring Policies

The Board of Management of Gaelscoil Phortlaoise confirms that appropriate supervision and monitoring policies are in place to both prevent and deal with bullying behaviour and to facilitate early intervention where possible. Although the Board ensures that there is always experienced and adequate school yard, indoor and outdoor supervision, it also acknowledges that it is impossible to supervise and monitor all pupils, all the time. As a school we expect our pupils to adhere to a standard of acceptable and respectful behaviour, whether in the presence of a member of staff, or not.

- Staff encourage students to show respect for each other at all times.
- All aspects of bullying, supervision and monitoring of classrooms, corridors, school grounds, school trips and extra-curricular activities are discussed regularly at school staff meetings.
- Regular discussion/reinforcement with students on matters of behaviour, bullying etc. as part of school assemblies
- Ensure staff supervision of pupils is effective and consistent and in accordance with school policies and procedures.
- A yard supervision rota is devised at the beginning of each year so that adequate and appropriate supervision is provided in the morning and for breaktimes.
- Staff are informed of and particularly vigilant in monitoring pupils who are considered at risk of bullying/ being bullied.
- Staff are informed of incidents & personality clashes that occur within the classroom that may spill out onto the yard, so that the teachers on duty can monitor those pupils during breaktimes and other non-classroom based activities.
- All disclosed incidents of bullying are investigated thoroughly and consistently by following the correct procedure as outlined to staff and recorded on specific school templates. Reports on bullying are stored in a specific folder in the principal's office.
- The Acceptable Use Policy, Supervision Policy, Special Education Needs Policy, Code of Behaviour, RSE Policy and the Child Safeguarding Statement all support the monitoring, supervision and implementation of the Bí Cineálta Policy.

Section C: Addressing Bullying Behaviour

The following are the steps that will be taken by the school to determine if bullying behaviour has occurred, the approaches taken to address the bullying behaviour and to review progress (see Chapter 6 of the Bí Cineálta procedures).

The class teachers are responsible for addressing bullying behaviour in the first instance. Support and assistance will then be available from the Principal, Deputy Principal and members of the school leadership team. Our primary aim in addressing bullying behaviour will be to stop the bullying behaviour and to restore, as far as is practicable, the relationships of the parties involved, instead of seeking to blame. Restorative practice which is already in use in the school has a key role here. The following process is followed.

Determining If Bullying Behaviour Has Occured

- The teacher/teachers investigates all instances of reported or suspected bullying behaviour with a view to establishing the facts and managing the behaviour.
- The teacher(s) will exercise his/her/their professional judgement to determine if bullying has occurred and how best the situation might be resolved. When identifying if bullying behaviour has occurred the teacher will consider the following: what, where, when and why? The teacher will also consider the key elements of bullying behaviour. Is the behaviour: *Targeted, Intentional, Harmful, Imbalance of power, Repeated?*
- **Key Questions: Targeted? Harm? Repeated?**
- **If the answer to all three questions is 'Yes', then the behaviour is bullying behaviour.**

Incidents can occur where behaviour is unacceptable and hurtful, but the behaviour is not bullying behaviour. Inappropriate behaviour that is not bullying behaviour will be dealt with in accordance with the school's Code of Behaviour.

Where Bullying Behaviour Has Occurred

When bullying behaviour occurs, the school will:

- ensure that the pupil experiencing bullying behaviour is heard and reassured.
- seek to ensure the privacy of those involved.
- conduct all conversations with sensitivity.
- consider the age and ability of those involved.
- listen to the views of the pupil 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 (both the parents of the pupil who experienced bullying behaviour and the parents of the pupil(s) who engaged in bullying behaviour) and keep them

updated on any progress and or developments regarding the situation.

Parents are an integral part of the Gaelscoil Phortlaoise community and play an important role, in partnership with our school, in addressing bullying behaviour. Where bullying behaviour has occurred, the parents of the parties involved will be contacted 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.

Determining If Bullying Behaviour Has Ceased

The teacher will engage with the pupils and parents involved no more than 20 school days after the initial discussion to review progress following the initial intervention. Factors that will be considered as part of the review are:

- the nature of the bullying behaviour.
- the effectiveness of the strategies used to address the bullying behaviour.
- the relationship between the students involved.

Even if the bullying behaviour has ceased, ongoing supervision and support may be required for both the pupil who has experienced the bullying behaviour as well as the pupil who has displayed the behaviour.

If the bullying behaviour has not ceased, the teacher will review the strategies used in consultation with the pupils and parents and agree to meet again over an agreed time-frame until the bullying behaviour has ceased.

Where it becomes clear that the pupil who is displaying the bullying behaviour is continuing to display the behaviour, then the school will consider using the strategies to deal with inappropriate behaviour as provided for within the Gaelscoil Phortlaoise Code of Behaviour. If disciplinary sanctions are considered, this is a matter between the relevant student, their parents and the school.

Recording of Bullying Behaviour

All incidents of bullying behaviour should be recorded using the official recording form that is part of the Bí Cineálta Policy (electronic copy anf hard copy in principals office).

The record should include the views of the students and their parents regarding the actions to be taken to address the bullying behaviour.

It should **document 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.

It is important to **document the date of each of these engagements and the date that it has been determined that the bullying behaviour has ceased.**

Any **engagement with external services/supports should also be noted.**

These records should be retained in accordance with the school's record keeping policy and in line with data protection regulations.

When Bullying Behaviour is a Child Protection Concern

When bullying behaviour becomes a child protection concern teachers have a legal obligation under the Children First Act to report harm of children that meets or is above a defined threshold to Tusla. The Children First National Guidance applies to all school staff and volunteers must report reasonable concerns to Tusla.

Complaint Process

If a parent is not satisfied with how bullying behaviour has been addressed by the school, in accordance with these procedures, they should be referred to the school's complaints procedure. Additional Information relating to schools' complaint procedures are available at the following link:
https://www.gov.ie/en/department-of-education/policy-information/schools-complaint-procedures-additional-information-for-parents-and-students/

In the event that a pupil and/or parent 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 pupil.

Support

The school will use the following approaches to support those who experience, witness and display bullying behaviour (see Chapter 6 of the Bí Cineálta procedures).

Approaches to support those who Experience, Witness and Display Bullying Behaviour

The school's programme of support for working with pupils affected by bullying and those who display bullying behaviour involves a whole school approach. Gaelscoil Phortlaoise supports restorative practice that aims to stop the bullying behaviour and to restore, as far as is practicable, the relationships of the parties involved. However, given the complexity of bullying behaviour, no one intervention/support programme works in all situations.

We try to ensure that both the victim of bullying behaviour and the person/persons responsible for the offending behaviour will be offered ongoing informal or formal support from within the School. The informal supports offered in the school may be check-ins with class teacher or other relevant member of staff. Formal supports may be in the form of

monitoring, internal counselling and/or referral to an external counselling agency, a psychologist, or other agencies, if deemed more appropriate and agreed to by parents and guardians.

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.

This policy will be available to our school community on the school's website and in hard copy on request. A student friendly version of this policy is to be displayed in the school hall, in classrooms and a pocket size copy will be available in the pupils homework diary. 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 refer.

Signed : Aoife Elster Date : 17/9/2025

(Cathaoirleach an Bhoird Bainistíochta)

Signed : Dominic Ó Braonáin Date : 17/9/2025

(Príomhoide)