



GAELSCOIL CHNOC na RÉ

Baile Uí Dhúgáin (Ballydoogan) - Sligeach

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Anti-Bullying Policy

Introduction

The world that we live in today presents us with many challenges that affect our health and well-being. Exposure to physical assault verbal assault, interference with our possessions, exclusion and isolation are part of this reality. Schools need to reflect upon how they might provide for the needs of their school community, staff and pupils, and respond appropriately to what are sometimes sensitive and emotive issues.

The *Education Act 1998* and the *Education Welfare Act 2000* emphasise that schools should promote the social and personal development of students and provide health education for them. The *Department of Education Guidelines on Countering Bullying Behaviour in Primary and Post Primary Schools* requires schools to have an anti-bullying policy as part of their code of discipline. The *Children First - National Guidelines for the Protection and Welfare of Children (Department of Health and Children, 1999)* recognize that bullying in schools is an increasing problem. It states that it is "imperative that school management and boards have in place a policy to deal with bullying and that teachers are aware of this policy and of procedures and guidelines to deal with bullying".

Stage 1

At the staff meeting it was decided that bullying was a concern, not because we felt that our school was experiencing many incidents of bullying, but because we had no set procedure for dealing with instances. We also felt that a preventative programme should be put in place. It was decided that a committee should be established to develop the policy. This committee would be representative of the whole school community. It would include the principal and another teacher, two representatives from the Board of Management and two parents from the parents' committee.

We decided as a staff that we would help study some relevant resource documents and legislation around bullying. They included:

- (a) *The Department of Education Guidelines on Countering Bullying Behaviour in Primary and Post Primary Schools.*
- (b) *Social, Personal and Health Education, Primary School Curriculum and Teacher Guidelines, i.e., Department of Education and Science/NCCA 1999.*
- (c) *Child Protection Guidelines and Procedures for Primary Schools - Department of Education and Science 2001.*
- (d) *Stay Safe Programme.*
- (e) *Children First National Guidelines for the Protection and Welfare of Children - Department of Health and Children 1999.*

We then reviewed the current situation in our school as regards bullying behaviour. We were all sure that there was no written policy or procedure on how to deal with an incident of bullying. Teachers acknowledged that they treated bullying as the breaking of a school rule, and carried out the procedure in our code of discipline for dealing with such an incident. We acknowledged that we were all teaching the Social Personal Health Education programme as laid down by the Department of Education. This is our first year to introduce the subject as SPHE but we felt that we had been covering areas such as self-esteem, friendships, etc, in Religious Education previously.

A bullying awareness committee was formed. We decided as a group that we would need the assistance of all the staff teachers, the parents, the bus drivers and all the children. We felt that we would need to consult with these groups via:

- (a) Board of Management
- (b) Parents representatives on the Board of Management
- (c) Principal
- (d) Children

We felt that there was definitely a role for additional representatives from the community to assist us in our awareness, i.e., members of the Health Board, na Gardaí Síochána, the theatre and School Development Planning. Our next step was to draw up some realistic targets for ourselves.

Our aims for stage one included:

- (a) Making our committee and staff aware of the different types of bullying.
- (b) Giving an understanding of the factors that contribute to bullying.
- (c) Finding out what are the school's role, the family's role and the community's role.
- (d) Finding out what parents' present understanding of bullying is.
- (e) Finding out whether parents perceive bullying to be happening in school at present.
- (f) Finding out what is the current situation in the school as regards bullying.

We decided that three forms of action were required in order to fulfil the above aims:

1. An awareness meeting to be held for the staff members and for the committee (we felt that all members of staff would benefit, time constraints did not allow for a separate meeting for staff).
2. A questionnaire was to be sent out to all parents via child's school bag on 25th April 2002 (See Appendix 1).
3. The principal was to consult with the School Development Planning Officer to see would it be possible to work on the topic of bullying for our planning day.

On April 30th 2002 a facilitator from the Health Board met with our committee and staff.

Stage 2

Having discussed the progress to date with our colleagues we decided that a bullying awareness week would be both an enjoyable and fruitful project for all in the school community. This involved a period of time during which there was a planned focus on bullying.

A set period of time was allocated where, through different activities and some project work, there was total focus on the following areas:

1. Raising awareness of bullying and learning about the detrimental effects it has on our lives.
2. Creating the confidence within our school which ensures that everyone will protect their own, and others' rights and take the appropriate action by reporting bullying or suspected bullying. We want all people in our school to have a high sense of self worth, people who do not bully others and do not allow themselves to be bullied.
3. Building on and adding to a climate of care and consideration for others in our school.

Policy Aims

- To create a school ethos that sees the school being a community in which mutual respect, co-operation and natural justice are integral features.
- To create a school which encourages children to disclose and discuss incidents of bullying behaviour.
- To raise awareness of bullying as a form of unacceptable behaviour with school management, teachers, pupils, parents and guardians.
- To ensure comprehensive supervision and monitoring measures through which all areas of school activity are kept under observation.
- To develop procedures for investigating and dealing with incidents of bullying behaviour.
- To develop a programme of support for those affected by bullying behaviour and for those involved in bullying behaviour.
- To work with and through the various local agencies in countering all forms of bullying and anti-social behaviour.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of school policy on anti-bullying behaviour.

Definition of Bullying

Bullying may be defined as repeated aggression - verbal, psychological, or physical - conducted by an individual or group against others.

Isolated incidents of aggressive behaviour, which should not be condoned, can scarcely be described as bullying.

Types of Bullying Include:

Physical Aggression

It includes pushing, shoving, punching, kicking, poking, tripping people up. It may also take the form of severe physical assault.

Damage to Property

This includes damage to clothing, school books and other learning materials.

Extortion

This includes demands for money, money being taken and theft of property.

Intimidation

This includes the use of very aggressive body language with the voice being used as a weapon.

Isolation

This is when a certain person is deliberately isolated, excluded or ignored by some or all of the class group. It may also be accompanied by writing insulting remarks about the victim or by whispering insults about them loud enough to be heard.

Name Calling

Persistent name calling directed at the same individual(s) which hurts, insults or humiliates is regarded as a form of bullying behaviour. Most name calling of this type refers to physical appearance, e.g., 'big ears' size or clothes worn.

School Ethos

Gaelscoil Chnoc na Ré is an all Irish Catholic Christian school. Our school is committed to the holistic development of each and every child who passes through our care. We recognize that each child is unique and we strive to develop his/her potential. We also give children the opportunity to experience Irish language and culture in a natural environment.

We aim in our school at all times to raise the self esteem of pupils by:

- Reminding each child that they are very special and that God loves them very much.
- Involving the children in "group activities" where teamwork is necessary. It also gives them the opportunity to admire and appreciate the talents of others.
- Not tolerating bad behaviour at any time, including disrespect for oneself or for others.
- Leading by example.

The school in which pupils, teachers and parents all support and respect each other is a happy environment in which a young child can grow towards becoming a confident fulfilled adult.

Raising Awareness of Bullying

In an endeavour to raise awareness of bullying we hope to give our anti-bullying programme wide publicity. To facilitate this:

- (a) We have drawn up a school policy regarding bullying in conjunction with the Board of Management, parents and children.
- (b) We intend sending parents/guardians an outline copy of the school policy.
- (c) The issue of bullying will be raised at every staff meeting. Staff will be encouraged to be watchful and discuss problems relating to bullying.
- (d) We hope to raise children's awareness of bullying through the religion and S.P.H.E. programme.
- (e) We hope to give the parents/guardians of a pupil who is the victim the confidence to approach the school. We will also send a clear message to the parents/guardians of a pupil who is engaged in bullying behaviour that they have a huge responsibility in changing their child's behaviour.
- (f) We hope to have an awareness week annually in the second term on discipline in general and on countering bullying behaviour in particular.

Supervision and Monitoring Measures Through which All Areas of School Activity are Kept Under Supervision

All pupils, and in particular senior pupils, can be seen as a resource to assist in countering bullying. As we discovered through our research, bullying behaviour is more likely to occur in the schoolyard, corridors, toilet areas and hidden corners. Therefore, it is important that all areas are supervised constantly by teachers and other staff members.

Staff Responsibilities

- To implement procedures to confront bullying in any form
- To listen to all parties involved in incidents
- To investigate as fully as possible
- To take appropriate action, or to refer the matter to the Principal for further action
- To record and inform parents of bullying incidents
- To promote the use of a range of teaching and learning styles and strategies which challenge bullying behaviour
- To promote open management styles which facilitate communication and consultation throughout the school
- To foster by example the values we as a school believe in
- To promote the use of interventions which are least intrusive and most effective
- To monitor the extent to which the above are being carried out by
- Regular discussions between management, staff, pupils and parents
- Recording incidents of bullying in a yard book.
- To retain records for monitoring purposes

Programme for Work with Victims and Bullies

As educators, we recognize the importance of a healthy self-esteem for the success and happiness of the children of our school. We are also aware that pupils who engage in bullying behaviour probably have a poor self image and may need counselling to help them learn other ways of meeting their needs without violating the rights of others. Therefore, we must promote positive rather than negative aspects of behaviour. In doing so, children learn to behave responsibly and so develop confidence and self-esteem.

For Victims

1. We, as teachers, need to be watchful for early signs of distress in pupils, e.g., deterioration of work, desire to remain with adults, complaining of being ill frequently, erratic attendance, etc. These may be early signs of bullying.
2. Teachers need to listen and record all incidents of bullying.
3. We need to offer the victim immediate support and help by putting the school's procedure into operation.
4. As a follow-up programme, victims of bullying need their self-esteem raised through activities designed to improve their social skills. They also need support from the teacher to counter feelings of inferiority and guilt.
5. Parents of victims need to co-operate fully with the school's policy on bullying.

For Bullies

1. Bullies need, through role play, to be placed in situations which require them to see things from the victim's point of view.
2. Teachers working with parents need to talk with the bully to find out why he/she is bullying.
3. Teachers need to provide the bully with opportunities to engage in activities devised to raise his/her self-esteem.
4. Class work should be geared to the child's ability with plenty of praise and encouragement for work well done.
5. If the situation is very serious the help of an educational psychologist can be sought by contacting the Health Board.

School Working with and Through the Various Local Agencies in Countering all Forms of Bullying as Anti-Social Behaviour.

Incidents of bullying behaviour extend beyond the school. We found, through our research, that the bus was a major area of concern. We are not responsible for the children on their journey to and from school. Members of the wider community who come directly in daily contact with school pupils, e.g., bus drivers and school traffic wardens, etc, are/will be encouraged to play a positive role in assisting us to counter bullying behaviour by reporting discreetly such behaviour to the child's parents and to the school.

Class discussion on the subject with a member of the Gardaí or community worker can also help considerably in countering bullying behaviour in school. This will be included in our Bullying Awareness Week.

Evaluation of School Policy on Bullying

The effectiveness of the school policy will undergo an evaluation annually.

Action Plan

Children involved in bullying others may feel justified in their actions and may be reluctant to admit them. Some children may even make false allegations of bullying against a fellow pupil to get them into trouble. It can be difficult for teaching or supervisory staff to build an accurate pictures of events or to be sure who is telling the truth. We need the class teacher and supervisor to build upon their special relationship with individual pupils to encourage honest and direct discussion.

Stage 1

- If the incident is not too serious a problem-solving approach should be tried.
- Give each pupil the opportunity to talk and keep discussion focused on finding a solution and stopping the bullying action from recurring.
- Adult at this time to remain neutral and seek to get pupil to see there was a problem and aim to get pupils to find their own solution to their personal disagreement.
- A follow-up meeting can find out whether the solution has been effective.

Stage 2

Repeated Allegations/Reports

- The class teacher to keep a small notebook handy to record who hurt who, etc - the date, place where the action took place.
- Subsequent recordings are inserted into the book and the pupil concerned is warned that if such events occur in a short period of time the parents will be contacted to see the teacher.
- Any disciplinary action by the class teacher which has taken place should be recorded as evidence that follow-up action by the school has taken place.

Stage 3

Serious Bullying Reports

- The school to use the incident book provided to record both children's comments plus, where possible, one witness. Each child's comments to be recorded independently - a suitable adult may be used as a scribe to record the events.
- At a later time the class teacher or other named staff member to collect all information and hold a brief meeting with the children concerned. The recommendations to be written up stating what follow-up action has taken place.
- If necessary, both parents of the children concerned to be informed of the incidents.
- Accurate records will be kept and the outcome reported. These records to be centrally filed.

How to Record Events

- Which pupils are involved or alleged to be involved
- Where and when it happened
- What happened
- Was it reported at the time and to whom - what action was taken
- How, if necessary, was it followed up

Ratification

The Anti Bullying Plan as part of the Revised Primary School Curriculum was presented to the Board of Management at the meeting of _____ by the Principal on behalf of the staff of Gaelscoil Chnoc na Ré.

The said plan was ratified by _____
on behalf of the Board.

Date: _____