



Dignity at Work Policy: Building & Maintaining a Positive & Effective Work Environment

A. Core Principles of Policy

St Oliver Plunkett NS is committed to creating and maintaining a positive work environment where work is done in an atmosphere of respect, collaboration, openness and equality.

Adult bullying and harassment in our workplace are experiences which we as a staff at this school will seek to prevent and will be intolerant of. We believe that all employees have the right to be treated with dignity and respect. As a staff, we recognize that we all must take responsibility for modelling and promoting good behaviour, and in the event that we witness or experience inappropriate behaviour that we will play our part in explaining to the staff member responsible for this behaviour how and why their behavior is offensive. Management is committed to intervening in an appropriate manner - using one of the accepted Management/INTO procedures - to investigate and deal with allegations of bullying or harassment. The provisions of the IPPN document *'Supporting each other'* the INTO document *'Working Together'* and the DE **Circular 40/97 on 'Assaults on Staff in Primary Schools'** will be used as appropriate.

B. What is Workplace Bullying and Harassment?

The Staff and Board of Management adopts the definition of adult bullying as set out by the Task Force (2001):

"Workplace Bullying is repeated inappropriate behaviour, direct or indirect, whether verbal, physical or otherwise, conducted by one or more persons against another or others, at the place of work and/or in the course of employment, which could reasonably be regarded as undermining the individual's right to dignity at work. An isolated incident of the behaviour described in this definition may be an affront to dignity at work but, as a once off incident, is not considered to be bullying".

Harassment is covered by Employment Equality legislation and is based on a person's standing within one of the nine categories (or grounds) specified in that legislation (gender, marital status, religion, sexual orientation etc.) Harassment is defined in law as *"unwanted conduct"* related to one or more of the discriminatory grounds which *"has the purpose or effect of violating a person's dignity and creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment for the person."*

We recognise that bullying and harassment complaints may arise among work colleagues but may also arise in relation to visitors to the school. In either case, the commitment to a positive workplace, where dignity at work is respected, prevails.

C. A Positive Work Environment

We agree that we will all work to make this school a good place to work. As a good place to work, our school must have a positive work environment characterised by:

- A supportive atmosphere
- Good and open communication (e.g. through opportunities at regular staff meetings)
- Appropriate interpersonal behaviour
- Collaboration
- Open discussion and resolution of conflict
- Recognition, feedback and affirmation as appropriate
- Fair treatment of all staff (including fair systems of selection and promotion in line with agreed procedures)

Every person has a responsibility to play his/her part in contributing to a positive work environment. In this regard, a staff member who is a witness or bystander has a clear responsibility to raise concerns about dignity at work and threats to this, in an appropriate and timely manner.

The Safety Statement - as mandated under the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act 2005 – will also include a commitment to a positive work environment, in light of the Employer's obligations as outlined at Section 8 of that Act, including the duty to manage work activities in such a way as to prevent "*improper conduct or behaviour*" likely to put health and safety at risk.

We agree that the adoption of this policy in our school will be accompanied by a number of steps to examine our work environment and, as necessary, to agree changes which reflect a commitment to dignity at work. These steps will be initiated by us, as a staff and supported by Management, and be repeated by way of review at appropriate intervals.

The actions to be undertaken may generally be described as Identification, Assessment, Implementing Strategies and Monitoring.

D. Adult Bullying as a Problem

Our school recognises that Adult Bullying and Harassment are problems where they occur in any workplace.

Bullying behaviour generally amounts to psychological or emotional abuse which causes serious pain and suffering. Studies have shown that any person may become a target, irrespective of their personality or ability. In addition to its unacceptable effects on persons who are its targets, workplace bullying and harassment is extremely detrimental to our effectiveness as a team.

Bullying may include behaviours such as:

- Verbal abuse/insults, undermining remarks
- Excessive monitoring of work
- Withholding work-related information
- Exclusion with negative consequences.

Such behaviours need not and should not be part of a workplace. This policy aims to ensure that a positive environment prevents such behaviours from occurring. Where bullying or harassment does occur or is alleged to have occurred, we agree that there are means of tackling it through the agreed procedure.

E. What Happens if there is an Allegation of Bullying or Harassment?

Without prejudice to an individual's right to take such advice or steps as they themselves may decide, the ISM team and the Board of Management will take seriously any allegations of workplace bullying or harassment.

Supportive and effective procedures, in accordance with nationally-agreed practice, are in the place in this school. These procedures to address and investigate allegations will focus on the earliest possible resolution, will proceed as necessary from informal to formal stages and will have a stress on confidentiality.

F. Summary

As members of St Oliver Plunkett National School community, we all have a duty of care towards one another. Similarly, management has a duty of care towards employees. This policy seeks to set out principles and practices to support the exercise of that duty in our school.

Just as inappropriate and undermining behaviour among work colleagues is taken seriously, so is such behaviour when perpetrated against an employee of this school by any other person.

Together we are committed to building and maintaining a positive work environment where respectful, open and equal relationships are the norm.

The policy is formulated in light of a number of background documents, including the IPPN document '*Supporting each other*' the INTO document '*Working Together*' and the DE Circular 40/97 on '*Assaults on Staff in Primary Schools*' will be used as appropriate Health & Safety Authority's *Code of Practice for Employers and Employees on the Prevention and Resolution of Bullying at Work* (2007) and the Equality Authority's *Code of Practice*, given legal effect in the Statutory Instrument entitled *Employment Equality Act 1998 (Code of Practice) (Harassment) Order 2002* (S.I. No. 78 of 2002).

Appendix

Making a complaint of sexual assault

In such cases, the Board of Management recommends to its employees that they contact An Garda Síochána in the first instance. An Garda Síochána is best placed to provide appropriate support to the complainant and to conduct the subsequent investigation. The Board will fully cooperate in a confidential manner with An Garda Síochána, as required.

Actions to take regarding workplace bullying, harassment or sexual harassment:

The Board of Management recommends that actions, as outlined below, be initiated by its employees in a timely manner, i.e. with 10 school days of an offending incident. It is important to note, however, that any statutory rights remain unaffected by this Dignity at

Work policy and does not affect an employee's right to take their complaint to an outside agency.

The board will usually refer to '*Working Together – Procedures and Policies for Positive Staff Relations*'.

Stage 1: Decide to address the matter

The party (*Party A*) who considers that s/he is being bullied, sexually harassed or harassed on other specified discriminatory grounds, should decide to address the matter. However, in light of the potential effects of bullying or harassment on an individual, including loss of confidence, extreme upset, anxiety or fear, *Party A* may initially decide to seek union or other assistance, including the Employee Assistance Scheme or other counselling, in order to consider the most appropriate application of the procedures in the circumstances.

Party A should keep a record of the pattern of behaviour or instances where s/he considers that bullying/harassment has occurred. The record should contain details such as dates, times, persons present, details of what was said or what occurred.

Stage 2: Informally address the problem

The party who consider that s/he is being bullied, sexually harassed or harassed on the other discriminatory grounds (*Party A*), should request a meeting with the other party (*Party B*), in order to discuss matters.

The following should apply:

1. Where necessary the meeting may be facilitated by a third party, generally a work colleague;
2. *Party A* should clearly outline his /her difficulties and should clearly object to the bullying/harassment and request that it stop;
3. It is important that *Party A* bear in mind, that the other member of staff may not be aware that his/her behaviour is causing difficulty;
4. Both parties should seek to resolve their differences and establish a pattern of interaction exclusive of any forms of bullying/harassment;
5. *Party B* may respond to *Party A* at that meeting or if requested, should be given an opportunity to consider his/her response, in which case, the meeting may be adjourned. *Party B* should respond in a constructive manner;
6. The resolution, as appropriate, may include any of the following, e.g. a commitment to cease the particular behaviour, modify the behaviour, and plan to eliminate situations where the parties would be in conflict.
7. Matters should remain confidential between the parties.

If there is no satisfactory indication of resolutions between the parties, *Party A* should refer the complaint to stage 3, i.e. formal procedures.

Stage 3: Formally address the problem

Stage 3 provides a mechanism for the principal teacher to intervene and resolve the matter.

However, if the principal teacher is one of the parties, the Chairperson of the Board of Management should then be involved, in an individual capacity, in order to achieve another resolution. In circumstances where the Chairperson may also be involved in Stage 2, another member of the Board of Management may be designated to intervene.

Party A should advise *Party B* that he/she is proceeding with Stage 3.

1. Party A should state his/her complaint **in writing** and request that the principal teacher or Chairperson of the Board of Management, as the case may be to investigate the matter.
2. The principal teacher or Chairperson of the Board of Management, as the case may be or an investigator/Facilitator/ Mediator appointed by the Principal or the Chairperson would:
3. Obtain background details including details of what occurred at the previous stage;
4. Consider the pattern of behaviour and the timescale;
5. Hear the parties and seek to resolve the matter;
6. Act in a fair and impartial manner and deal with the matter sensitively having regard to the nature of the problem and principles of due process;
7. Exercise judgement and make decision which s/he considers necessary to resolve matters;
8. The outcome of the discussion should be noted by the parties;
9. The matter should be dealt with confidentially.

Where resolution has not been possible, and particularly where there is a likelihood of the offending behaviour continuing, either party or the principal teacher (or Chairperson of the Board of Management, as the case may be) will refer the matter to the Board in accordance with Stage 4 below.

Stage 4: Board of Management (BoM)

It is open to any of the parties or the principal teacher (or Chairperson of the Board of Management, as the case may be) to refer the matter to the BoM for investigation. The referral should be in writing and dated, and should include a copy of the written complaint. The BoM should consider the issues and investigate the matter;

The BoM may enquire into the background of the difficulties including obtaining details of the sequence of initiatives taken at previous stages.

The board or the chairperson of the board may meet teachers individually or collectively and may also request written submissions from the parties, having regard also to the principles of due process.

1. The board may request the principal teacher to furnish a written submission.
2. The board may afford the parties an opportunity to present their case orally at a board meeting, in each other's presence.
3. Following oral presentations the board of management may designate the chairperson to meet with the parties again, separately or jointly, if further clarification is required or to work towards resolution;The board of management may convene a number of meetings in order to achieve resolution.
4. The board of management shall act in a fair and impartial manner in order to achieve resolution and shall deal with the matter sensitively, having regard to the nature of the problem.
5. Having considered all matters, the board of management should reach a view on the matter not later than 20 school days after receipt of the written request/referral.
6. Where the board of management finds that bullying/harassment has not occurred, both parties should be informed accordingly. No action shall be taken against the complainant provided the allegation was made in good faith. If the complaint was brought maliciously, it should be treated as misconduct and appropriate action taken.

7. Where the board of management finds that bullying/harassment has occurred, the board should deal with the matter appropriately and effectively.

This may include:

- a) The issuing of a clear warning that bullying/harassment is not acceptable in the school workplace and that it will not be tolerated;
- b) a demand that all forms of bullying/harassment cease and that acceptable patterns of interaction be established between the parties;
- c) an instruction to the offending party that s/he apologise/ express regret or give an assurance that the bullying/harassment behaviour will cease;
- d) seeking a commitment to attend counselling or the welfare service;
- e) more serious disciplinary sanctions as may be commensurate and appropriate, such as:
 - oral warning
 - written reprimand
 - written warning
 - final written warning
 - suspension
 - dismissal

8. As part of any resolution, the board of management should monitor the situation and should put systems in place to ensure that it is kept informed that resolutions are being implemented. The board of management should keep matters under review.

The Board of Management of St. Oliver Plunkett National School has adopted this policy on 8th March 2023, following consultation with all staff members.

Signature of Principal _____

Signature of Chairperson _____

Date: _____