

St. Mary's NS Cobh  
**Draft** Anti- Cyberbullying Policy

### **Introductory Statement**

This Anti-Cyberbullying Policy is an expanded expression of the protocols contained in the Anti-Bullying Policy of St. Mary's N.S. Cobh and should be read in conjunction with that document. It is also linked to the Codes of Behaviour and Discipline and to the school's policies on Child Protection, Mobile Phone Usage and Acceptable Use of the Internet .

### **Scope of this Policy**

While this policy addresses issues related to cyberbullying of pupils(i.e. situations in which one or more pupils are victims of cyberbullying), the policy applies to teaching and other school staff, parents/guardians, and others insofar as measures under the policy relate to them. It is important that all members of the school community are aware that cyberbullying is unacceptable and will not be tolerated.

### **General Aims**

- To foster an atmosphere of respect, understanding, and encouragement between all who teach, work and learn in the school, so that the development and contribution of every individual can be acknowledged, and all can work together to benefit personal growth and the common good.
- To promote each pupil's right to enjoy his/her learning and leisure free from cyberbullying, both in school and while engaged in school related activities.
- To ensure every member of staff has the right to enjoy his/her work and association with St. Mary's NS.
- To enable pupils and staff alike to support each other by reporting all instances of cyberbullying.
- To offer help, advice and support to victims of cyberbullying.
- To confront perpetrators of cyberbullying and give them realistic, firm and consistent guidelines to help control their behaviour.
- To work with, and through, the various local agencies in countering all forms of cyberbullying.

Education on cyberbullying is included in the Social Personal & Health Education (SPHE) curriculum of the school.

The school may also invite speakers with particular expertise in this area to address pupils and/or parents/guardians.

This policy applies throughout the school year, for all school activities, on the school premises and anywhere where pupils are under supervision of staff (trips, tours, sports outings, etc). It should also be kept in mind that the school may take a view upon any items published, by any means, if those items could bring the name of the school into disrepute. This is not confined to term-time only.

The school draws a distinction between incidents which originate from within the school environs and those which occur outside. While the same standards apply at all times and in all places, it needs to be

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recognised that the school cannot be held responsible for pupils' actions when not on the premises or under supervision of school staff. The school takes seriously the responsibility of regularly informing pupils about internet protocol and best practice in the area of internet usage.

The school values parents' support in reinforcing best practice in this area. Any cyberbullying incident involving a pupil as perpetrator or victim is of concern, especially when both perpetrator and victim are pupils.

Equally, social comment about a member of staff which falls under the definition of cyberbullying as outlined in this policy, will not be tolerated.

### **Definition of Cyberbullying**

Cyberbullying is defined as using Information and Communication Technologies (ICT), including social network sites, internet, email, etc to demean, humiliate, exclude, or otherwise undervalue or upset another person through direct or indirect methods. It can be an extension of face-to-face bullying, with technology providing the bully with another route to harass their target. In many ways features of cyberbullying replicate aspects of bullying behaviour. However, it does differ in several significant ways from other types of bullying: the potential invasion of home and personal space, the difficulty in controlling electronically circulated messages, the potential size of the audience and the perceived anonymity which is often involved.

### ***Examples of Cyberbullying***

- a) threats and intimidations,
- b) harassments or 'cyberstalking' (e.g. repeatedly sending unwanted texts or instant messages),
- c) vilification / defamation, ("flaming")
- d) exclusion or peer rejection,
- e) impersonation ("masquerading")
- f) unauthorised publication of private information or images ("outing").

### ***Media used in Cyberbullying***

- a) Mobile phones
- b) Instant Messenger and Voice over Internet Protocols
- c) Chat rooms and message boards
- d) Email
- e) Webcam
- f) Social networking sites
- a) (g) Video hosting sites
- b) (h) Virtual learning environments
- a) Gaming sites, consoles and virtual worlds
- b) (j) Blogs and Wikis

### **Differences between Cyberbullying and other forms of bullying behaviour**

- Impact: the scale and scope of cyberbullying can be greater than other forms of bullying
- Targets and perpetrators: the people involved may have a different profile from traditional bullies and their targets.
- Location: cyberbullying may take place anytime and, given the nature of electronic communication, its effects may be felt in any location.
- Anonymity: the person being bullied will not always know who is attacking them.
- Evidence: unlike some other forms of bullying, the target of the bullying is likely to have evidence of its occurrence.

Some cyberbullying is clearly deliberate and aggressive, but it is important to recognise that some incidents of cyberbullying may well be unintentional and the result of simply not thinking about the consequences.

What may be sent as a joke may not be received as one, and indeed the distance that technology allows communication means the sender may not see the impact of the message on the receiver. There is also less opportunity for either party to resolve any misunderstanding or to feel empathy. Pupils need to be aware of the effects of their actions.

In many cases of cyberbullying, bystanders can easily become perpetrators, e.g. by passing on or showing to others images designed to humiliate, or by taking part in online discussion groups. Such people may not recognise themselves as participating in bullying, but their involvement has the potential to compound the unhappiness for the person being targeted.

'Bystanders' or 'accessories' who actively support cyberbullying are liable to face sanctions themselves. Pupils who become involved in this respect need to be aware that their actions may have severe and distressing consequences, and that participating in such activity will not be tolerated.

### **School Response to Cyberbullying**

The Procedures outlined in the school's Anti-Bullying Policy for Noting and Reporting an incident of Bullying behavior and for Investigating and Dealing with Bullying will also be used in response to incidents of Cyberbullying.

*It should be noted that it is a criminal offence to use a mobile phone and /or other electronic communication to menace, harass or offend another person. As such, if action as sanctioned by the School in this regard is deemed ineffective, as with all such incidents, the school may consider it appropriate to involve the Gardaí.*

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### **Preventing Cyberbullying**

Respect other people. Remember that when a message is sent to someone, the impact of words or images on the other person cannot be seen. That is why it is important to always show respect to people and be careful what is said online or what images are sent. What may be thought of as a joke may really hurt someone else. Always ask permission before taking a photo of someone.

Do not forward. If a rude or offensive message or picture is received about someone else, it should not be forwarded. This could assist the bully and the person forwarding may also be accused of cyberbullying. This could also be breaking the law.

Think first before sending. It is important to think before sending any images or text by email or mobile phone, or before posting information on a website. Remember that what is sent can be made public very quickly and could stay online forever. Parents, teachers, friends or future employers may be able to access photos in years to come.

Protect passwords. It is good practice to change passwords on a regular basis and not to disclose them to other people. It is also sensible to give mobile phone numbers only to trusted friends. Parents/Guardians should always have access to their child(ren)'s passwords.

Block the bully. Most responsible websites and services allow blocking and/ or reporting of someone who is behaving badly.

Do not retaliate or reply. Replying to bullying messages, particularly in anger, may well be what the bully wants and can easily escalate matters very quickly.

Save the evidence. It is important to keep records of offending messages, pictures or online conversations. If an abusive email or text (or any other form of unacceptable electronic communication) is received, a copy of the message with full headers, plus dates and times, should be saved wherever possible. If it is intended to make a complaint, they will help to demonstrate what is happening and can be used by the school, Internet service provider, mobile phone company or the Gardai to investigate the cyberbullying.

Report. Make sure incidents of cyberbullying are reported. Pupils and other members of the school community have the right not to be harassed and/or bullied online and incidents of cyberbullying should be reported.