

# **ANTI-BULLYING POLICY 2016/17**

## **IT'S BASIS:**

Our Mission Statement in its opening sentence lays the foundation stone for our Anti-Bullying Policy.

***“Athlone Community College with the co-operation of its educational partners will continue to provide an environment where each student is cherished equally and is nurtured to a personal intellectual and moral maturity”***

**“Our ethos encourages a mutual respect for one another.....”**

## **AN ANTI BULLYING POLICY – WHY?**

(a) A stable, secure learning environment is essential for all people. Bullying behaviour by its very nature undermines the quality of education and imposes lasting psychological damage. As such, it is an issue that must be positively and firmly addressed through a range of school-based measures and strategies through which all members of the school community are enabled to act effectively with this behaviour.

For this reason Athlone Community College believes in developing and encouraging a strong partnership between staff, management, parents, students and wider community to secure this safe working environment.

(b) Required by Department of Education and Skills

## **AN OBJECTIVE ROOTED IN PASTORAL CARE**

Our policy has its foundations in a deeply rooted pastoral environment where we aspire to cherish the dignity and uniqueness of each individual within the college by creating and nurturing a culture of respect, tolerance, understanding, friendship, support and appreciation amongst all members in their multiplicity of roles so that the physical and spiritual presence together with the gifts, talents and work of each individual are acknowledged and become part of the overall positive spirit that makes our base for education a truly individual one.

## **AIMS OF POLICY**

- ❖ To create a school ethos that 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 and parents/guardians.
- ❖ To ensure comprehensive supervision and monitoring measures through which all areas of school activity are kept under observation.

- ❖ To develop procedures for noting and reporting incidents of bullying behaviour
- ❖ 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 the school policy on anti-bullying behaviour

### **DEFINITION OF BULLYING**

Bullying is characterised as repeated or persistent inappropriate and offensive behaviour whether verbal, physical silent or through any other medium by a single individual or group against another person or persons so that the dignity of the victim or victims is undermined, or eroded.

We also deem any incident, even if not repeated, which deliberately instils fear, anxiety or humiliation into an individual as extremely serious and worthy of the same investigatory procedures as persistent bullying.

Bullying behaviour is unacceptable not only in the classroom, college building or grounds but also in any other situation where normal school rules apply e.g. local trips, foreign trips, outings, sporting events etc.

Bullying must not be confused with normal acceptable everyday humorous interaction between students themselves or between teachers/other staff and students in a situation of mutual understanding.

### **TYPES OF BULLYING**

- Verbal aggression that belittles or humiliates the victim
- Physical aggression whether real or threatened
- Interference in a persons' personal belongings or direct damage to one's belongings or property including clothing, lockers and school requirements
- Persistent name-calling
- Unwanted verbal comments, referring to victims family, personal appearance, academic ability, race, colour, religious beliefs, social status
- Derogatory remarks in relation to a person's sexual orientation including name calling, illustrations or written comments aimed at a particular individual or group.
- Rude and obscene language
- Jokes made pertaining directly to the victim
- Unwanted text messages, e-mails, phonecalls anonymous or otherwise
- Cyber - offensive comments on computer websites
- Improper use of cameras on any modern technology to ridicule another person
- Persistent staring or sniggering

- Spreading of malicious rumour or gossip to destroy the victims social standing often leading to relational bullying
- Extortion:
- Demands made on individuals for pocket money or threats made to an individual to procure money from other sources
- Demands made by a student on another for homework, gear, lunch, notes, equipment, projects etc.
- Unreasonable demands to meet targets that are beyond the individual's capability
- Isolation – student receiving the silent treatment

### **STAFF BEHAVIOUR**

A staff member may, unwittingly or otherwise engage in, instigate or reinforce bullying behaviour in a number of ways:-

- Using sarcasm or other insulting or demeaning forms of language when addressing pupils, member of staff making negative comments about a pupil's appearance or background
- Humiliating directly or indirectly, a pupil who is particularly academically weak or outstanding, or vulnerable in other ways e.g. reading out test results in public
- Using any gesture or expression of a threatening nature, or any form of degrading physical contact or exercise e.g. Name-Calling
- Teachers must at all times respect the individual quality and personality of each student

### **PARENT/GUARDIAN BEHAVIOUR**

- A parent/guardian may, unwittingly or otherwise, engage in, instigate or reinforce bullying. Our College considers this unacceptable. We will at all times endeavour to assist parents and advise if we witness undue harshness towards students

### **STUDENTS/PARENTS/GUARDIANS TOWARD COLLEGE STAFF**

- Using sarcasm or other insulting or demeaning forms of language when engaging with a staff member.
- Humiliating a member of staff directly or indirectly in the college building or grounds or when accompanying or not accompanying students in a public area e.g. derogatory name calling
- Using any gesture or expression of a threatening nature, or any form of degrading physical contact.

### **PROCEDURES FOR NOTING AND REPORTING AN INCIDENT OF BULLYING BEHAVIOUR AMONG STUDENTS**

1. Athlone Community College acknowledges that reports of bullying behaviour can be made to any individual in the school. All reports of bullying, no matter how trivial, should be referred to the Yearhead for investigation.

2. When analysing incidents of bullying behaviour seek answers to question of what, where, when, who and how? This should be done in calm manner, setting an example in dealing effectively with conflict in a non-aggressive manner
3. If a group is involved, each member should be interviewed individually and then the group should be met together. Each member should be asked for his/her account of what happened to ensure that everyone is clear about what everyone else has said.
4. If it is concluded that a pupil has been engaged in bullying behaviour, it should be made clear to him/her how he/she is in breach of the code of behaviour and discipline and try to get him/her to see the situation from the victim's point of view.
5. Yearheads who are investigating cases of bullying behaviour should keep a written record of their discussions with those involved. It may also be appropriate or helpful to ask those involved to write down their account of the incident.
6. In cases where it has been determined that bullying has occurred, if necessary, meet with the parents/guardians of the two parties involved as appropriate. Explain the actions being taken and the reasons for them, referring them to school policy. Discuss ways in which they can reinforce or support the actions taken by the school
7. The responses of the school to bullying behaviour may include the following:-
  - ❖ Interviewing all the parties
  - ❖ Sanctions (detention/suspension)
  - ❖ Counselling
  - ❖ Mediation
  - ❖ Referral to outside agencies
  - ❖ On-going monitoring
8. Arrange a follow up meeting with the two parties involved separately with a view to possibly bringing them together at a later date if the victim is ready and agreeable. This can have a therapeutic effect.
9. Non-teaching staff are encouraged to report any incidents of bullying behaviour witnessed by them, or mentioned to them, to the Yearhead, Deputy Principal or Principal.
10. In the case of a complaint by a student regarding a staff member, it should be reported directly to the Principal
11. In the case of a complaint by a member of staff against another member of staff, reference will be made to the "*Code of Practice for Dealing with Complaints of Bullying and Harassment in VEC workplaces*" (T.U.I. publication)

### **CREATING AN ANTI-BULLYING AWARENESS**

The College approach is a proactive one where a preventative attitude permeates school policy.

- ❖ The particular focus on 1<sup>st</sup> year student aims at fostering their sense of self-worth.
- ❖ An annual September Psychologist's address to parents outlines positive methods of motivation and pinpoints warning signs of student discontent
- ❖ A strong tutor/class bond in all years establishes a person of trust so that a student may be encouraged to report a bullying problem in its very early stages
- ❖ An early October non-academic meeting involving school management, tutors yearheads and parents monitors the initial settling in period
- ❖ A positive tutor/yearhead relationship provides added support for student welfare
- ❖ An active merit system with Letter of Commendation in 1<sup>st</sup> year fosters good behaviour
- ❖ The Social Personal and Health Education Programme and Civic, Social & Political Education contains information on bullying which is beneficial to all classes at Junior Cycle

- ❖ Our Religious Education Programme in all years consistently strives to encourage mutual respect
- ❖ The Yearhead interviews all 1<sup>st</sup> year students on an individual basis and is available to all other students providing advice and encouragement
- ❖ Senior Prefects monitor canteen area observing and reporting any unacceptable behaviour
- ❖ Participation in Drama, Physical Education team sports, clubs and societies, games rooms, musical performances all demand respect for peers and discourage bullying
- ❖ Student Council endorsement of our policy
- ❖ Arrangement for buddy/senior prefect training day to benefit junior students.

### **A FINAL WORD**

Bullying can be described in terms of a spectrum of behaviour. There are many related issues such as attendance, behaviour, rights, discipline, equal opportunities, ethos, guidance, health education, learning support etc. The single most important thing a school can do to prevent bullying is to have a clear policy to which staff, students and parents are committed.

While it is recognised that home factors play a substantial role in the prevention of bullying, the role of the school in preventative work is crucial and should not be underestimated. School based initiatives will either reinforce positive efforts or help counteract unsuccessful attempts of parents or guardians to control unacceptable behaviour.

### **Remember:**

- 1 Our College stands strong on the right of students to attend school without victimisation
- 2 We will endeavour to prevent all forms of bullying but in failing that we will listen and act with discretion to remedy the problem
- 3 It shows strength of character to report bullying whether experienced personally or witnessed happening to another person
- 4 A bullying situation will never be treated as trivial. It is always a serious matter
- 5 Every effort will be made to prevent **recurrence** of bullying incidents but in the event of this happening we will treat the matter with the same gravity
- 6 Our policy is a comprehensive one supporting the victim and bully making it less likely that the bullying incident will recur

### **A TEAM EFFORT**

The vigilance of the Tutor, Yearhead, Principal, Deputy Principals, College Counsellor, teaching and ancillary staff is a powerful tool in the prevention of bullying.

It is necessary that the school policy should have general acceptance by the educational partners, including teachers, parents and students. In that way, it can be effective both from the point of view of preventing as well as dealing with bullying behaviour. An understanding of the factors that give rise to bullying is needed as well as sympathetic treatment of all those involved in bullying behaviour

**Let our approach be restorative not punitive**

**Let us show understanding not harshness**

**References:**

**Guidelines on Countering Bullying Behaviour in Primary and Secondary Schools**

**(Department of Education and Science 1993)**

**Bullying at School: Key Facts: Anti Bullying Centre (2001)**

**Sticks and Stones Theatre Company Handbook (1995)**

**Bullying in our Schools, Understanding and tackling the Problem (1999)**

