Bí Cineálta Policy to Prevent and Address Bullying Behaviour

St. Mary's Boys' National School

June 2025

The Board of Management of St. Mary's BNS 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, 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.

It is very important to note that this policy is fully aligned with the ***Bí Cineálta: Procedures to Prevent and Address Bullying Behaviour for Primary and Post-Primary Schools*** and that it should be read in conjunction with the procedures. Schools are required to follow the procedures fully, as set out by the Department of Education.

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 detailed definition is provided in Chapter 2 of the **Bí Cineálta procedures.**

Each school is required to develop and implement a Bí Cineálta policy that sets out how the school community prevents and addresses bullying behaviour. Strategies to deal with inappropriate behaviour that is not bullying behaviour are provided for within the school's Code of Behaviour.

Behaviour that is not bullying behaviour

A one-off instance of negative behaviour towards another student is not bullying behaviour. However, a single hurtful message posted on social media can be considered bullying behaviour as it has a high likelihood of being shared multiple times and thus becomes a repeated behaviour.

Disagreement between two 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 including deliberate manipulation of friendship groups.

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 their behaviours are not deliberate or planned, but, in certain situations, they are an automatic response which they can't control.

Bullying behaviour that occurs outside of school

As per the Bí Cineálta Procedures, 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 bullying behaviour has an impact in school, schools are required to support the students involved.

Examples of prohibited bullying behaviours that can occur outside of school (not an exhaustive list):

- Bullying behaviour that occurs in the area immediately outside the school, the local shops and the wider local area.

- Bullying behaviour that occurs on the journey to and from school.

- Bullying behaviour that occurs in organised clubs and groups outside of school such as sports clubs.

- Online bullying (cyberbullying) behaviour, along with other types of bullying behaviour can cause significant harm and have a lasting impact on students who experience this

behaviour. Access to technology means that online bullying behaviour can happen any time and that the student's home is no longer a safe place. The nature of these technologies means that digital content can be shared and seen by a very wide audience almost instantly and the content is almost impossible to delete permanently.

Requests to take no action

A student reporting bullying behaviour may ask that a member of staff does nothing about the behaviour other than "look out" for them. The student may not want to be identified as having told someone about the bullying behaviour. They may feel that telling someone might make things more difficult for them. Where this occurs, it is important that the member of staff shows empathy to the student, deals with the matter sensitively and speaks with the student to work out together what steps can be taken to address the matter and how their parents will be informed of the situation. It is important that the student who has experienced bullying behaviour feels safe. Parents may also make schools aware of bullying behaviour that has occurred and specifically request that the school take no action. Parents should put this request in writing to the school or be facilitated to do so where there are literacy, digital literacy or language barriers. However, while acknowledging the parent's request, schools have a right to act and may decide that, based on the circumstances, it is appropriate to address the bullying behaviour.

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.

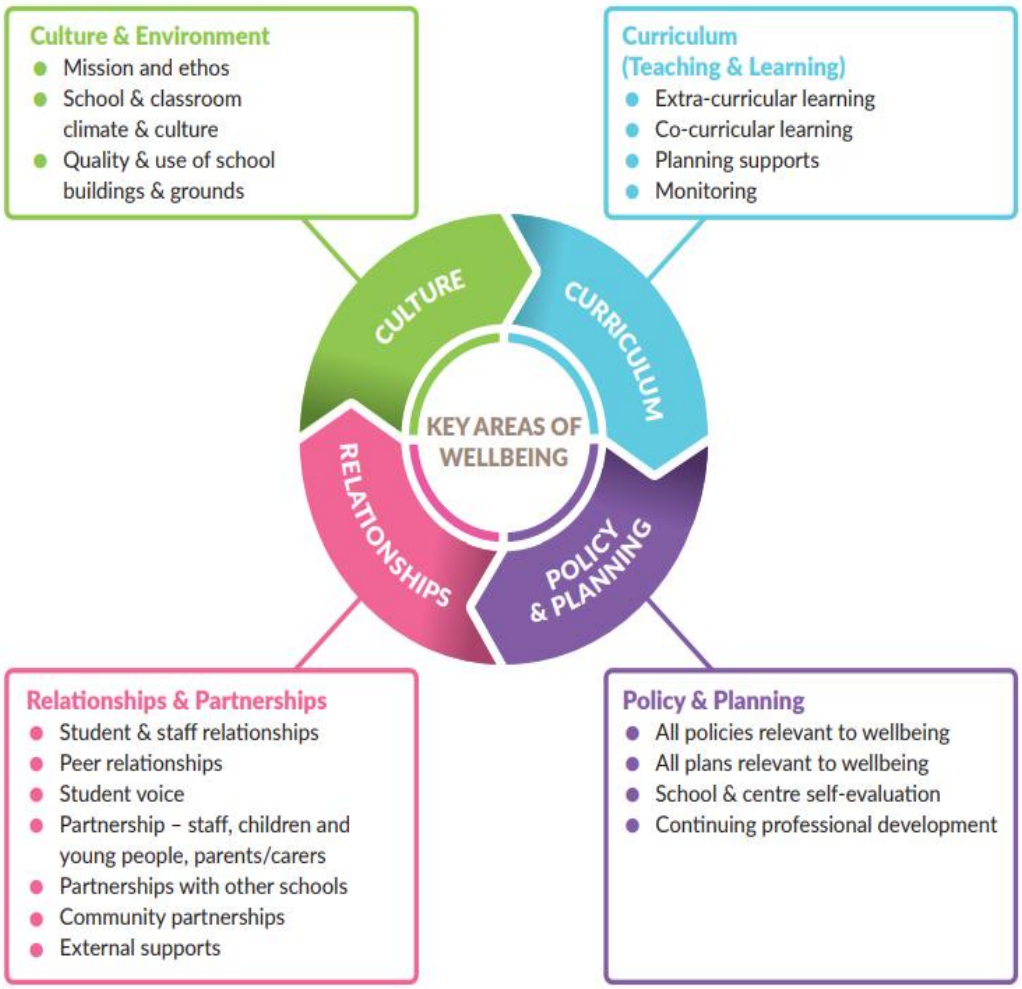
	Date consulted	Method of consultation
School Staff	Friday 14th February 2025 30th May 2025	Half-day closure for training day and to get input. Staff Questionnaires
Students	6th May 2025	Pupil Questionnaires 2nd-6th class
Parents/ Guardians	29th April 2025	Parent/ Guardian Questionnaires
Board of Management	23rd June 2025	Meeting outlining new procedure & ratification

Section B: Preventing Bullying Behaviour

The Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework for Practice provides the following four key areas that are essential for a holistic, whole-school approach to wellbeing promotion:

Culture and Environment; Curriculum; Policy and Planning and Relationships and Partnerships.

Figure 2: Whole School Approach - Four Key Areas Wellbeing Promotion



This section sets out the prevention strategies that are used by the school to prevent bullying behaviour.

Culture and Environment

• Model respectful behaviour to all members of the school community at all times.

• Display reminders for respectful behaviour around the school.

• Consistently tackle the use of discriminatory and derogatory language in the school – this includes homophobic and racist language and language that is belittling of pupils with additional needs and/or differences.

• Systems of encouragement and rewards to promote desired behaviour and compliance with the school rules and routines may be used where appropriate – Merit System, communication to children and parents/ guardians about positive behaviour.

• All staff will actively watch out for signs of bullying behaviour.

• Promote acts of kindness and celebrate kindness during that specific wellbeing month annually.

Curriculum

• Explicitly teach pupils what respectful language and respectful behaviour looks like, acts like, sounds like and feels like in class and around the school.

• The implementation of the Social Physical and Health Education (SPHE) curriculum, according to our school plan, including the Relationship and Sexuality Education (RSE), Weaving Well-being and Stay Safe Programmes.

• School-wide delivery of lessons on bullying from evidence-based programmes, e.g. Stay Safe Programme, programmes to teach about cyberbullying (e.g. Webwise teachers' resources and lessons from (www.cybersafekids.ie)

• Explicitly teach pupils about the appropriate use of social media.

• Organise seminars/workshops given by relevant professionals to older pupils and to parents/guardians, focusing on educating pupils on appropriate online behaviour, how to stay safe while online and also on developing a culture of reporting any concerns about cyber-bullying. The school-wide approach and the role of parents is of great importance in this regard.

• In younger classes, picture/story books can be used to teach important concepts (examples in Appendix 2 and in Wellbeing Folders on School Share)

• Use of programmes such as Friends for Life (which looks at social skills and resilience) the Gender Equality Matters Programme in senior classes (which looks at stereotyping in a child-friendly way), the Mind Me – Mind You Programme (by Cycle Against Suicide); the FUSE Programme (from the DCU Antibullying Policy)

• The school will specifically consider the additional needs of SEN pupils with regard to programme implementation and the development of skills and strategies to enable all pupils to respond appropriately.

Policy and Planning

• Have our pupils in senior classes actively involved in designing a child-friendly Bí Cineálta Policy which will be on prominent display around the school.

• If pupils bring mobile phones or other smart devices to school, they should be switched off at all times (or set on 'school mode' during school hours as per the school's Acceptable Use Policy).

• Encourage the children and their parents/guardians to use the Online Safety Charter (that was drawn up as a tool by the Parents' Association) at home. The charter is available in the school journal and can be used to discuss online safety and establish rules to help children use social media, games etc. responsibly and safely.

• Please refer to the school's policy documents on the Code of Behaviour (including the Acceptable Use of Devices and the Internet Policy), Child Protection Policy, Supervision of Pupils, and Attendance.

• All staff, to the best of their ability, will ensure there is adequate playground/school yard/outdoor supervision (as per the school's Supervision Policy).

• School staff and pupils can identify hot spots and hot times for bullying in the school.

- Hot spots tend to be in the playground/school yard/outdoor areas, toilet areas, corridors and other areas of unstructured supervision.

- Hot times tend to be times where there is less structured supervision such as when pupils are in the playground/school yard, arriving into the classroom or moving classrooms. During events such as Confirmation/ School Tours and Sports Day, supervision will continue to be vigilant to minimise opportunities for bullying behaviour to occur.

Relationships and Partnerships

• Staff will aim to catch the children being good - notice and acknowledge desired respectful behaviour by providing positive attention and using Merit System to reinforce and acknowledge.

• At assemblies, school rules will be reinforced on a regular basis. The staff/ Wellbeing Committee and Students Council will use Tionól to raise awareness of the definition of bullying behaviour and how the school deals with such behaviour.

• Give constructive feedback to pupils when respectful behaviour and respectful language are absent.

• Encourage parents/guardians to sign up to the voluntary agreements to defer smartphone/device ownership during the primary school years.

• Actively promote the right of every member of the school community to be safe and secure in school.

• Support the active participation of students in school life through formal and informal structures, e.g. circle-time activities, Tionól, sports' teams, Student Council, Wellbeing Committee, buddy systems and paired reading.

• Support the active participation of parents/ guardians in school life, e.g. being a member of the Parents' Association, volunteering at school events.

Section C: Addressing Bullying Behaviour

The teachers with responsibility for addressing bullying behaviour are) as follows:

Mainstream class teachers and SETs (where appropriate).

The Principal/Deputy Principal will provide support and advice and will become involved where appropriate.

The school has the following supervision and monitoring policies in place to prevent and address bullying behaviour (see Chapter 5 of the Bí Cineálta procedures):

Supervision Policy

Acceptable Use of the Internet Policy

Code of Behaviour

Child Safeguarding Statement and Risk Assessment

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 are as follows (see Chapter 6 of the Bí Cineálta procedures):

The whole school community has a responsibility to prevent and address bullying behaviour. The following approach and steps are based on the information contained in Chapter 6 of the Bí Cineálta Procedures to Prevent and Address Bullying Behaviour for Primary and Post-Primary Schools.

Approach

The primary aim in addressing reports of bullying behaviour should be to stop the bullying behaviour and to restore, as far as practicable, the relationships of the students involved, rather than to apportion blame.

When addressing bullying behaviour, the teachers with responsibility will:

- ensure that the student experiencing bullying behaviour feels listened to and reassured
- seek to ensure the privacy of those involved
- conduct all conversations with sensitivity
- consider the age and ability of the students involved
- listen to the views of the student 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.

Stage 1 - Identifying if bullying behaviour has occurred

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 detailed definition is provided in Chapter 2 of the Bí Cineálta procedures.

Where bullying behaviour is suspected, parents/guardians report it to the class teacher.

To determine whether the behaviour reported is bullying behaviour we will consider the following questions:

1. Is the behaviour targeted at a specific student or group of students?

2. Is the behaviour intended to cause physical, social or emotional harm?

3. Is the behaviour repeated?

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

Note: One-off incidents may be considered bullying behaviour in certain circumstances. A single hurtful message posted on social media can be considered bullying behaviour as it has a high likelihood of being shared multiple times and thus becomes a repeated behaviour.

If the answer to any of these 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*.

When identifying if bullying behaviour has occurred

(Stage 1), teachers should consider what, where, when and why? as follows: (Note that these steps are required – as outlined in the Procedures):

> Where one student is reported to be involved, the student should be engaged with individually at first.

>Thereafter, this student and the student who is reported to be experiencing the bullying behaviour should be met together.

> If a group of students is involved, each student should be engaged with individually at first.

> Thereafter, all students involved and the student who is reported to be experiencing the bullying behaviour should be met as a group.

> At the group meeting, each student should be asked for their account of what happened to ensure that everyone in the group is clear about each other's views

> Each student should be supported as appropriate, following the group meeting. It may be helpful to ask the students involved to write down their account of the incident(s).

> Parents will be supported by the school, if needed, with recommendations for useful resources/guides to help them support their children.

Stage 2: Where bullying behaviour has occurred

> Parents are an integral part of the school community and play an important role, in partnership with schools, in addressing bullying behaviour. Where bullying behaviour has occurred the parents of the students involved must 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.

> It is important to listen to the views of the student who is experiencing the bullying behaviour as to how best to address the situation.

> All bullying behaviour will be recorded. This will include the form and type of behaviour if known (see pages 20-24, Section 2.5 and 2.7 of the Bí Cineálta procedures for descriptions/examples of the forms and types of bullying behaviour), where and when it took place, and the date of the engagement with students and parents. The actions and supports agreed to address bullying behaviour will be documented. If the bullying behaviour is a child protection concern the matter will be addressed without delay in accordance with *Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools*.

> The record should be shared with the Principal.

Stage 3: Follow up where bullying behaviour has occurred

> The teacher must engage with the students involved and their parents again no more than 20 school days after the initial engagement. Important factors to consider as part of this engagement are the nature of the bullying behaviour, the effectiveness of the strategies used to address the bullying behaviour and the relationship between the students involved.

> The teacher 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. The date that it has been determined that the bullying behaviour has ceased should also be recorded.

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

> Ongoing supervision and support may be needed for the students involved even where bullying behaviour has ceased.

> If the bullying behaviour has not ceased the teacher should review the strategies used in consultation with the students involved and their parents. A timeframe should be agreed for further engagement until the bullying behaviour has ceased.

> If it becomes clear that the student who is displaying the bullying behaviour is continuing to display the behaviour, then consideration should be given to using the strategies to deal with inappropriate behaviour as provided for within the school's *Code of Behaviour.* If disciplinary sanctions are considered, this is a matter between the relevant student, their parents and the school.

> If a parent(s) is not satisfied with how the bullying behaviour has been addressed by the school, in accordance with the *Bí Cineálta Procedures to Prevent and Address Bullying Behaviour for Primary and Post-Primary Schools* they should be referred to the school's complaints procedures (available on our website).

> If a 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 student.

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):

We take all instances of bullying behaviour on a case-by-case basis, but we may use the following approaches generally:

All students involved will be checked-in with regularly and behaviour will be monitored carefully.

The teacher will check-in with parents too and will look for their ongoing support to monitor their child at home and to communicate with the school if needed.

We will use resources, as appropriate – including those developed by NEPS (National Educational Psychological Service), Oide (support service for schools) and from programmes/sites such as Webwise and FUSE.

Teachers will be encouraged to attend training in Restorative Practices.

Section D: Responsibility

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. (See Chapter 7 of the *Bí Cineálta procedures*).

This policy is available to our school community on the school's website and in hard copy on request. A student-friendly version of this policy will be displayed in the school from September 2025 and will also be available on our website and in hard copy on request.

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 refers.

Action:	Date:	Responsibility of:
Date policy was ratified	23rd June 2025	BoM/ Principal
Date of implementation	1st September 2025	By Wellbeing Coordinators/ Deputy Principal/ Principal/ Staff/ BoM
Date of review	23rd June 2026	Wellbeing Coordinators/ Deputy Principal/ Principal/ Staff/ BoM

Signed:

(Chairperson of Board of Management)

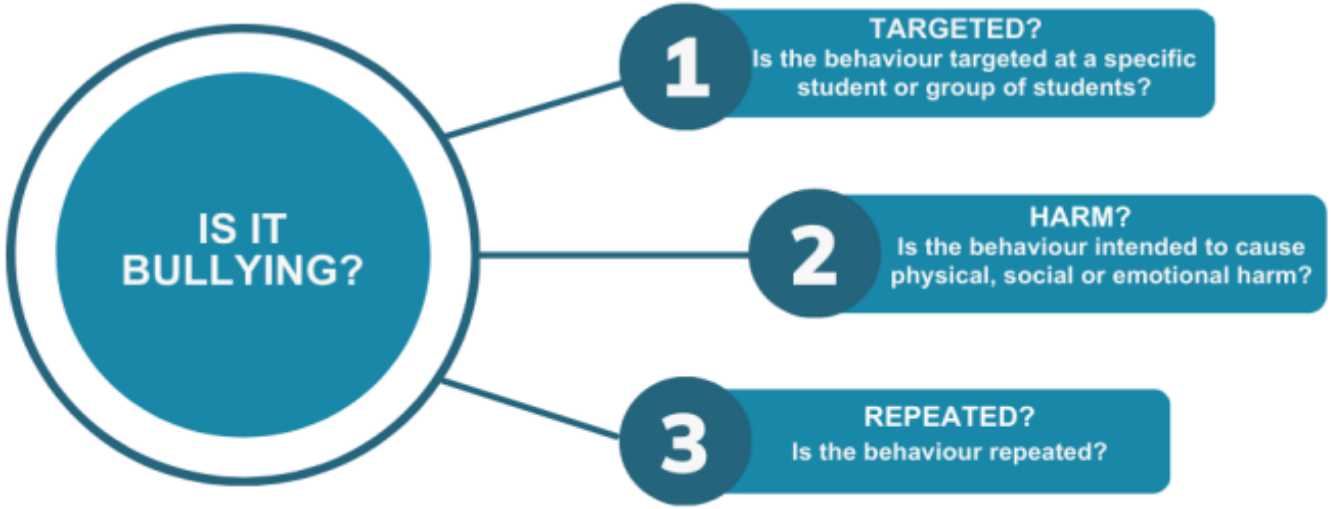
Date:

Signed:

(Principal)

Date:

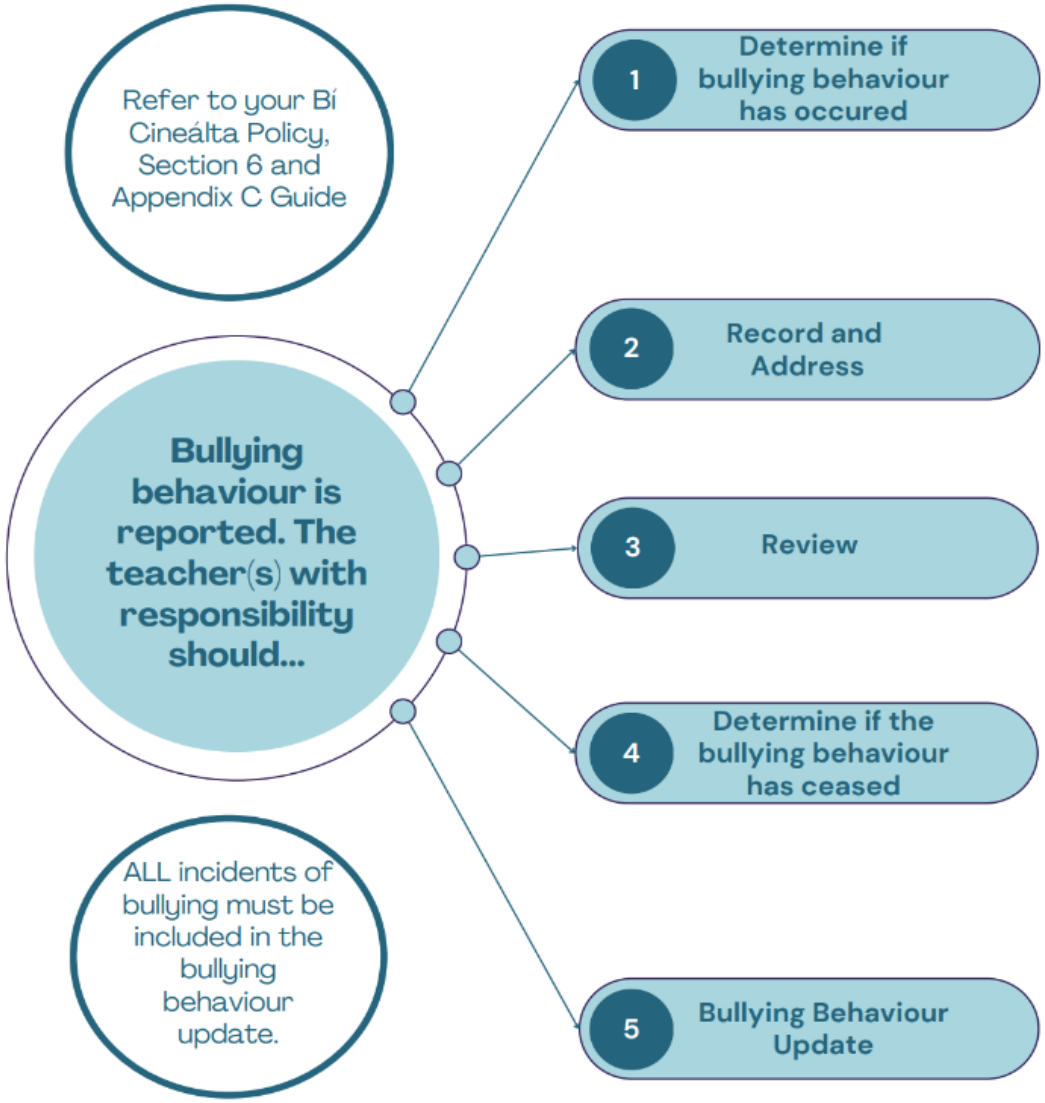
Is it Bullying?



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.

Bí Cineálta: Addressing Bullying Behaviour



Teacher(s) investigate as per school policy. Record as per Section 6.5.

If the behaviour **IS NOT** bullying, deal with in line with your Code of Behaviour.

If the behaviour **IS BULLYING,** proceed to Step 2.

Record as per Bí Cineálta policy and Section 6.5, Bí Cinealta.

Inform parent(s) of parties involved at an early stage.

Complete agreed actions, as per your Bí Cineálta policy, monitor and evaluate.

No more than **20 school days after initial engagement,** review with student(s) and parent(s).

If bullying has ceased, continue to monitor.

If bullying has **not ceased**, review strategies, seek external support, if appropriate, and review within the agreed timeframe.

Principal must include all bullying behaviour in their update to the board.

Principal provides verbal update to the board.

Review policy, if needed.