Anti-Bullying Policy

1. In accordance with the requirements of the Education (Welfare) Act 2000 and the code of behaviour guidelines issued by the NEWB, the Board of Management of St. Thomas Senior National School has adopted the following anti-bullying policy within the framework of the school's overall code of behaviour. This policy fully complies with the requirements of the *Anti-Bullying Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools* which were published in September 2013. It was reviewed and amended in September 2018 and reviewed in 2021.

2. The Board of Management recognises the very serious nature of bullying and the negative impact that it can have on the lives of pupils and is therefore fully committed to the following key principles of best practice in preventing and tackling bullying behaviour:
   a) A positive school culture and climate which
      o is welcoming of difference and diversity and is based on inclusivity;
      o encourages pupils to disclose and discuss incidents of bullying behaviour in a non-threatening environment; and
      o promotes respectful relationships across the school community;
   b) Effective leadership;
   c) A school-wide approach;
   d) A shared understanding of what bullying is and its impact;
   e) Implementation of education and prevention strategies (including awareness raising measures) that-
      o build empathy, respect and resilience in pupils; and
      o explicitly address the issues of cyber-bullying and identity-based bullying including in particular, homophobic and transphobic bullying.
   a) Effective supervision and monitoring of pupils;
   b) Supports for staff;
   c) Consistent recording, investigation and follow up of bullying behaviour (including use of established intervention strategies); and
   d) On-going evaluation of the effectiveness of the anti-bullying policy.

3. In accordance with the *Anti-Bullying Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools* bullying is defined as follows:

   Bullying is unwanted negative behaviour, verbal, psychological or physical conduct, by an individual or group against another person (or persons) and which is repeated over time.

   The following types of bullying behaviour are included in the definition of bullying:

   - deliberate exclusion, malicious gossip and other forms of relational bullying,
   - cyber-bullying and
   - identity-based bullying such as homophobic bullying, racist bullying, bullying based on a person's membership of the Traveller community and bullying of those with disabilities or special educational needs.

Isolated or once-off incidents of intentional negative behaviour, including a once-off offensive or hurtful text message or other private messaging, do not fall within the definition of bullying and should be dealt with, as appropriate, in accordance with the school's code of behaviour.

However, in the context of this policy, placing a once-off offensive or hurtful public message, image or statement on a social network site or other public forum where that message, image or statement can be viewed and/or repeated by other people will be regarded as bullying behaviour.

Negative behaviour that does not meet this definition of bullying will be dealt with in accordance with the school's code of behaviour.

Additional information on different types of bullying is set out in Section 2 of the *Anti-Bullying Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools.* Appendix 1 gives a list of specific examples of bullying behaviours – this list is not exhaustive.

4. While any teacher can act as relevant teacher if the circumstances warrant it, in general
   a. Class teachers will deal with incidents between pupils in their own class
   b. The Principal/ Deputy Principal will deal with incidents reported in the yard books or between pupils from different classes
   c. The Principal will deal with all other incidents

Education and Prevention Strategies

5. The education and prevention strategies (including strategies specifically aimed at cyber-bullying and identity-based bullying including in particular, homophobic and transphobic bullying) that will be used by the school are as follows:

School –wide approach

- Respect for all members of the school community is fostered.
- Diversity is celebrated
- The unacceptability of bullying behaviour is highlighted
- The self-esteem of all our pupils through both curricular and extracurricular activities is enhanced. Pupils will be provided with opportunities to develop a positive sense of self-worth through formal and informal interactions.
- School staff and parents/guardians are made aware of all aspects of bullying to ensure that they develop an awareness of bullying, how it impacts on pupils' lives and the need to respond to it through presentations or other exercises
- Classrooms, corridors, school grounds, school tours and extra- curricular activities are supervised and monitored. Non-teaching and ancillary staff are encouraged to be vigilant and report issues to relevant teachers.
- Involvement of Student Council in contributing to a safe school environment
- The school's anti-bullying policy is discussed with pupils and all parents / guardians are given a copy as part of the Code of Behaviour of the school on enrolment and on request.
- Whole school awareness measures will be implemented and will include posters in the classrooms, wellbeing week, information sessions for parents / guardians, pupil surveys, monthly assemblies, parents' newsletters, information via school website.

- A culture of telling is encouraged, with particular emphasis on the importance of bystanders. In that way pupils will gain confidence in 'telling'. This confidence factor is of vital importance. It should be made clear to all pupils that when they report incidents of bullying they are not considered to be telling tales but are behaving responsibly.
- Pupils know who to tell and how to tell – they can
  - Tell a member of staff
  - Hand note up with homework.
  - Put a note in the Shield box in the classroom
  - Get a parent/guardian or friend to tell on your behalf.
  - Complete a confidential Anti Bullying questionnaire which will be administered every month / 6 weeks
- Ensure bystanders understand the importance of telling if they witness or know that bullying is taking place.
- Staff/parents/guardians are encouraged to be vigilant in watching out for signs of bullying and to report any suspicion of bullying they may have to the relevant teacher. All reports, including anonymous reports of bullying, will be investigated and dealt with by the relevant teacher.
- An Acceptable Use Policy has been developed which ensures that access to technology within the school is strictly monitored. Mobile phones and pupil's own hand held devices e.g. DSs iPods, iPads etc. are generally not allowed in school. However, if a child needs a phone for after school, they must hand it up to the office in the morning and collect it at the end of the day

❖ **Implementation of curricula**

- The full implementation of the SPHE, the RSE and Stay Safe Programmes
- School wide delivery of lessons on bullying from evidence based programmes such as Stay Safe and Walk Tall Programmes etc.
- Prevention and awareness raising measures focusing on cyber-bullying by educating pupils on appropriate online behaviour and how to stay safe while online using resources from www.webwise.ie and materials on server
- Delivery of the Garda SPHE Programmes at senior class level when available . These lessons, delivered by Community Gardaí, cover issues around personal safety and cyber-bullying
- Learning Support/Resource Teachers will reinforce the lessons taught to children with Special Educational Needs as necessary
- The school will implement the advice from PDST in relation to homophobic bullying "Sexual Orientation advice for primary schools" which is in the context of the school's ethos and Relationships and Sexuality (RSE) policy and with the awareness that primary school children are probably too young to engage in any detailed discussion of sexual identity.
- Homophobic insults are treated in exactly the same way as racist or other insults – the teacher can calmly explain to the child that such insults are hurtful to the other person and are not acceptable.
- Depending on the context and the age group of the children, the teacher could ask a child or a class group what they mean by the word 'gay'

- The school response is that 'The majority of people are attracted to people of the opposite sex. This is called being heterosexual. Some people are attracted to people of the same sex. This is called being homosexual or gay.'
- An integral part of RSE is learning to respect others; this will include respect for families or individuals who are different from the norm.
- The Equal Status Acts 2000 and 2004 provide protection against discrimination on nine grounds, one of which is sexual orientation. As such, St Thomas' Senior school is obliged to protect students and staff from discrimination or sexual harassment.

❖ **Links to other policies**

The following are particularly relevant to bullying: Code of Behaviour, Child Safeguarding Statement, Acceptable Use Policy, Supervision of Pupils, After School / Out of School Activities, Relationships and Sexuality Policy (RSE)

Procedures for Investigating and Dealing with Bullying:

6. The school's procedure for investigation, follow-up and recording of bullying behaviour and the established intervention strategies used by the school for dealing with cases of bullying behaviours are as follows:

The primary aim for the relevant teacher in investigating and dealing with bullying is to resolve any issues and to restore, as far as is practicable, the relationships of the parties involved rather than to apportion blame.

❖ **Reporting bullying behaviour**
- Any pupil or parent/guardian may bring a bullying incident to any teacher in the school.
- All reports, including anonymous reports of bullying, will be investigated and dealt with by the relevant teacher.

❖ **Investigating and dealing with incidents: general approach**
- The relevant teacher will exercise his/her professional judgement to determine whether bullying has occurred and how best the situation might be resolved.
- Teachers should take a calm, unemotional problem-solving approach when dealing with incidents of alleged bullying behaviour reported to them
- The relevant teacher should seek answers to questions of what, where, when, who and why. This should be done in a calm manner, setting an example in dealing effectively with a conflict in a non-aggressive manner;
- Initial investigations may take place in class but some incidents may be best investigated outside the classroom situation to ensure the privacy of all involved;
- All interviews should be conducted with sensitivity and with due regard to the rights of all pupils concerned. Pupils who are not directly involved can also provide very useful information in this way;
- The relevant teacher does not apportion blame but rather treats bullying behaviour as a "mistake" that can and must be remedied. S/he emphasises that the intention is not to punish perpetrators but to talk to them, to explain how harmful and hurtful bullying is and to sign a promise that it will stop. If that promise is forthcoming and is honoured

there will be no penalty and that will be the end of the matter. Pupils who report bullying therefore are not getting others "in trouble" so much as enabling them to get out of trouble into which they may get if the bullying continued;

- If a group is involved, each member should be interviewed individually at first then they should be met as a group. At the group meeting, each member should be asked for his/her account of what happened to ensure that everyone in the group is clear about each other's statements;
- Pupils may be asked for a written account of what happened, as part of any investigation. This will be a standard procedure and does not necessarily imply that a pupil is guilty of misbehaviour;
- Parents/guardians and pupils are required to cooperate with any investigation and assist the school in resolving any issues and restoring, as far as is practicable, the relationships of the parties involved as quickly as possible;
- In any situation where disciplinary sanctions are required, this is a private matter between the pupil being disciplined, his/her parents and the school

Step 1:
- Where the relevant teacher has determined 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 school's anti-bullying policy and efforts should be made to try to get him/her to see the situation from the perspective of the pupil being bullied.
- The teacher records the details on the **Response to Bullying Behaviours Form**
- The pupil is asked to sign **Pupil Behaviour Promise 1** they will treat all pupils including the targeted pupil/s fairly, equally and respectfully
- The principal **must** be informed of all incidents being investigated;

Step 2:
- If a pupil chooses to break their written promise and continues the bullying behaviour, this can then no longer be considered a "mistake." The parent/guardian of the parties involved will be contacted by the relevant teacher to inform them of the matter and explain the actions being taken
- Parents will be requested to countersign **Pupil Behaviour Promise 2**. They are given an opportunity of discussing ways in which they can reinforce or support the actions being taken by the school and the supports provided to the pupils;

Step 3:
- If this promise is broken, the matter is referred to the Principal. The pupil/parents/guardians will meet with the principal. This continuation of bullying behaviour is regarded as a very serious matter and disciplinary sanctions in line with the code of behaviour will be imposed;

❖ **Follow up and recording**
- In determining whether a bullying case has been adequately and appropriately addressed the relevant teacher must, as part of his/her professional judgement, take the following factors into account:
    - o Whether the bullying behaviour has ceased;
    - o Whether any issues between the parties have been resolved as far as is practicable;

- Whether the relationships between the parties have been restored as far as is practicable;
- Any feedback received from the parties involved, their parents/guardians or the school Principal / Deputy Principal

- Follow-up meetings with those involved should be arranged separately with a view to possibly bringing them together at a later date if the pupil who has been bullied is ready and agreeable.
- Where a parent/guardian is not satisfied that the school has dealt with a bullying case in accordance with these procedures, the parent/guardian must be referred, as appropriate, to the school's complaints procedures.
- In the event that a parent/guardian has exhausted the school's complaints procedures and is still not satisfied, the school must advise the parent/guardian of their right to make a complaint to the Ombudsman for Children.

❖ **Recording of bullying behaviour**

All recording of bullying incidents will be done in an objective and factual manner. All records must be maintained in accordance with relevant data protection legislation. The school's procedures for noting and reporting bullying behaviour are as follows:
- Teachers will record negative interactions between two or more people in a class on the **Class Record Sheet**
- All reports, including anonymous reports of bullying must be investigated and dealt with by the relevant teacher;
- The relevant teacher must keep a written record of the reports, the actions taken and any discussions with those involved regarding same, using the **Response to Bullying Behaviours Form.** All meetings, interventions etc. will also be noted on the form
- The relevant teacher must use the recording template at **Appendix 3** to record the bullying behaviour in the following circumstances:
  a) in cases where he/she considers that the bullying behaviour has not been adequately and appropriately addressed within 20 school days after he/she has determined that bullying behaviour occurred; **and**
  b) Where the school has decided as part of its anti-bullying policy that in certain circumstances bullying behaviour must be recorded and reported immediately to the Principal or Deputy Principal as applicable.
- **Appendix 3** must be retained by the relevant teacher in question and a copy maintained by the principal. The records will be stored in a filing cabinet in the principal's office room and will be retained for a period of at least ten years after the child has left 6th class
- The Principal will report to the BOM setting out the overall number of bullying cases reported by means of **Appendix 3** and confirmation that all cases are being dealt with in accordance with procedure.
- Documentation relating to bullying incidents should be stored in the principal's office/ deputy principal's room

❖ **Established intervention strategies**
- Teacher interviews with all pupils
- Negotiating agreements between pupils and following these up by monitoring progress. This can be on an informal basis or through restorative practice

- Working with parent/guardians to support school interventions
- No Blame Approach
- Circle Time
- Restorative practice

7. The school's programme of supports for working with pupils affected by Bullying

- All in-school supports and opportunities will be provided for the pupils affected by bullying to participate in activities designed to raise their self-esteem, to develop friendships and social skills and build resilience e.g. Pastoral Care system, Support Teacher, Circle time, Restorative Practice, SPHE programme, NEPS
- If pupils require counselling or further supports, the school will endeavour to provide same or liaise with the appropriate agencies to organise same.
  This may be for the pupils affected by bullying or involved in the bullying behaviour.
- Given the complexities of bullying behaviour, no one approach/intervention/strategy will work in all situations. Therefore various approaches may be used including suggesting that parents seek referrals to appropriate agencies
- Pupils should understand that there are no innocent bystanders and that all incidents of bullying behaviour must be reported to a teacher

8. Supervision and Monitoring of Pupils

The Board of Management confirms that appropriate supervision and monitoring policies and practices are in place to both prevent and deal with bullying behaviour and to facilitate early intervention where possible. Bullying hot spots have been identified in the school. In relation to the acceptable Use Policy:
- All internet sessions are supervised by a teacher
- The Schools Broadband Programme has blocked all social networking sites on the basis that they waste time and take up too much of the bandwidth which has been provided for educational purposes only.
- Pupils are not allowed on computers at break time

9. Prevention of Harassment

The Board of Management confirms that the school will, in accordance with its obligations under equality legislation, take all such steps that are reasonably practicable to prevent the sexual harassment of pupils or staff or the harassment of pupils or staff on any of the nine grounds specified i.e. gender including transgender, civil status, family status, sexual orientation, religion, age, disability, race and membership of the Traveller community.

10. This policy was ratified by the Board of Management on 4th April 2014 and is revised annually. It has been amended in September 2023.

11. This policy has been made available to school personnel, published on the school website and provided to the Parents' Association in Parents' Room . A copy of this policy will be made available to the Department and the patron if requested.

12. This policy and its implementation will be reviewed by the Board of Management once in every school year. Written notification that the review has been completed will be made

available to school personnel, published on the school website (or where none exists, be otherwise readily accessible to parents and pupils on request) and provided to the Parents' Association (where one exists). A record of the review and its outcome will be made available, if requested, to the patron and the Department.

Signed: _____   Signed: _____
Chairperson of Board of Management   Principal

Date: 10/10/24   Date: 10/10/24

Date of next review: September 2025

Appendix 1: Examples of Bullying Behaviours

General behaviours which apply to all types of bullying:
- Physical aggression
- Damage to property
- Name calling
- Slagging
- Spreading rumours