



Dignity in the Workplace Policy (1.2)

May 2026



An Roinn Oideachais
agus Óige
Department of Education
and Youth



Version	Date	Description	Authors
1.0	February 2021	First Version of Policy	Board of Management
1.2	June 2023	Review of policy	Board of Management
1.2	May 2026	- Table of contents/ sections added - Section 1: Addition of 4th and 5th paragraph - Section 6.3: Updated to include reference to modern communication methods, including email and platforms such as Teams. - Section 8: Stage 2 – Expanded to emphasise that this stage reflects the principles of Working Together and should be the primary approach to resolving interpersonal issues, where appropriate. The use of mediation, whether informal or facilitated, is acknowledged as a means of supporting effective resolution, in line with guidance from the Health and Safety Authority. - Section 11: Section 11 has been updated to reflect current external support services available to staff, including access to the Employee Assistance Service and wellbeing supports. - Appendix A: Newly added	Board of Management

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1. Introduction

The Board of Management and the staff are committed to creating, maintaining and enhancing a positive work environment where work is done in an atmosphere of respect, collaboration, openness and equality.

Regarding our 'workplace,' the provisions within this policy cover our school building and grounds, work-related undertakings such as extra-curricular activities involving our pupils (sports, concerts, school trips, etc.), approved attendance at courses and conferences and 'work-related social events' (see below.)

There is a responsibility on all Mercy Convent Primary School employees to adhere to this Dignity at Work Policy. Staff members must remain sensitive to the potential impact of their personal behaviour on colleagues. Similarly, all members of the wider school community must be mindful of the right of Mercy Convent Primary School employees to be treated with respect. Within the staff there are many roles such as teachers, post of responsibility holders, principal, SNAs, secretary, caretaker, visiting teachers, coaches etc. As a democratic school, everybody has a right to be treated with equity in line with their role. This means that all employees have the right to express their opinions and be listened to. In cases where a staff member identifies harassment, he/she should follow the process outlined in the policy.

In line with current best practice in Ireland, the school recognises the importance of early, local and informal resolution of interpersonal difficulties. Staff are encouraged to engage with the procedures outlined in *Working Together: Ag Obair le Chéile (INTO, 2024)* as the primary framework for addressing staff relationship issues at an early stage.

Where concerns relate to bullying, harassment or sexual harassment, the formal procedures outlined in this policy, aligned with the *Health and Safety Authority Code of Practice for Employers and Employees on the Prevention and Resolution of Bullying at Work (2021)*, will apply.

A finding of workplace bullying, harassment or sexual harassment against a Mercy Convent Primary School employee will be regarded as grounds for disciplinary action. The Board can also take action against other persons who subject Mercy Convent Primary School employees to such behaviour during the course of their work, (including referring the matter to the Gardaí.)

2. Relationship to School Ethos

Mercy Convent Primary is a Catholic school. The Board and the Staff promote respect for all and value each member of the school community. The school's mission statement promotes the spirit of inclusiveness and the principles of equality.

3. A Commitment to Dignity and Respect

Mercy Convent Primary School is committed to creating, maintaining and constantly striving to enhance a positive work environment where work is done in an atmosphere of respect, collaboration, openness and equality.

Unkind behaviour, including adult bullying and harassment in the workplace, are phenomena which we seek to prevent. Further, we declare that such unacceptable behaviour will not be tolerated. As a team, we believe that all employees have the right to be treated with dignity and respect. As a team we recognise that we all have our part to play in modelling and promoting good behaviour and that in the unlikely event of experiencing less than nice behaviour, we will aim to explain to our partner(s) of communication that their behaviour is offensive to us and why. If it continues, those school community members who are the management team are committed to intervening in an appropriate manner.

As well as giving specific definitions of workplace bullying, harassment and sexual harassment, this policy will outline procedures for investigating and dealing with possible allegations. It also outlines our commitment to creating a positive work environment and the methods we will employ to attain this end.

The school will issue periodic reminders to staff regarding this Dignity at Work Policy, (usually at the beginning of each school year as part of staff orientation/training.) The school has also included a page on dignity in the workplace in the staff planner (Appendix A).

4. A Positive Work Environment

Mercy Convent Primary is a good place in which to work and we will strive to keep it that way, through

- A supportive atmosphere
- Good and open communication (e.g. through opportunities for consultation and 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 in the school community of Mercy Convent Primary School has a responsibility to play his/her part in contributing to our positive work environment, including a team member who may witness behaviour that is not nice. We each have a clear responsibility to raise concerns about dignity at work, and threats to this, in an appropriate and timely manner.

5. Workplace Bullying

5.1 Definition of Workplace Bullying

Our School has adopted the definition of adult bullying as set out by the Health and Safety Authority (2021):

‘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’.

5.2 Forms of Bullying

Bullying occurs in many guises and reveals itself through obvious and direct methods as well as in less direct and subtle forms. Bullying may manifest itself across the organisational and management structure of a school or within a classroom. It can occur within peer groups, from management to staff and from staff to management.

Bullying may be categorized in a number of forms including behaviour that may:

- Intimidate: physical abuse or threats of abuse, open aggression, threats, staring, shouting abuse or obscenities;
- Verbal abuse: persistent unwarranted
- Humiliate: Preventing a colleague from speaking by using aggressive and/or obscene language, sneering or ridicule including horseplay or practical jokes and criticising their efforts often in front of others
- Victimize: manipulation of a colleague's reputation by rumour, gossip ridicule and/or innuendo;
- Exclude and isolate: social exclusion and isolation
- Intrude: through pestering, spying or stalking
- Manipulate the nature of work by withholding information, setting meaningless tasks, giving repeated unreasonable assignments or duties that are obviously unfavourable to one individual, giving repeated impossible deadlines or impossible tasks, or regularly taking the credit for somebody's work, but never taking the blame when things go wrong
- Undermine a person's authority.

This is not an exhaustive list.

Bullying is not:

- An isolated incident of inappropriate behaviour
 - Exercise of proper authority by management
 - Fair and constructive criticism of an employee's performance, conduct or attendance.
- (In the workplace environment, conflicts and interpersonal difficulties can arise. Many of these may relate to 'industrial relations difficulties' - which should be dealt with through the appropriate industrial relations channels e .g. Irish National Teachers' Organisation.)

6. Workplace Harassment

6.1 Definition of Workplace Harassment

For the purpose of this Dignity at Work Policy, the definition of harassment as outlined in the Equality Act 2004 will apply as follows:

'Harassment is any form of unwanted conduct, related to any of the nine discriminatory grounds and being conduct 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.'

The Employment Equality Acts 1998-2011, place an obligation on all employers to prevent harassment in the workplace. Discrimination is defined in the Equality Act 2004 as the treatment of a person in a less favourable way than another person was, is or would be treated

on nine distinct grounds: **Gender; Age; Disability; Family status; Marital status; Membership of the Travelling Community; Race, Ethnic origin or colour; Religion; Sexual Orientation.**

The Equality Act 2004 extended the definition of harassment to include discrimination which arises where one of the nine grounds is imputed to a person or where a person who is associated with another person, and is treated, by virtue of the association, less favourably than another person. The Equality Act 2004 outlaws discrimination in the course of employment whether by an employer, another employee or by clients, customers or business contacts of the organisation. In the case of our school, this includes parents/guardians, coaches, visiting teachers and other visitors to the school.

6.2 Forms of Harassment

Many forms of behaviour may constitute harassment including:

- **Verbal harassment** – jokes, comments, ridicule or songs
- **Written harassment** – incl. text messages, emails, notices, social media postings
- **Physical harassment** – jostling, shoving or any form of assault
- **Non-verbal harassment** – gestures, posturing or threatening poses
- **Visual displays** such as posters, emblems or badges
- **Isolation or exclusion** from workplace social activities
- **Pressure to behave in a manner that the employee thinks is inappropriate** – e.g. being required to dress in a manner unsuited to a person's ethnic or religious background

This is not an exhaustive list. Harassment may consist of a single incident or repeated incidents.

6.3 Digital Harassment

It is expected that staff are aware of their own online presence and they should adhere to the guidelines of the Teaching Council's Professional Standards. However, staff are entitled to a private life online and this should be respected. For example, a staff member should not feel under pressure to "friend" another member of the school community. If members of staff agree to share contact details, they should not be expected to reply to school related communications outside of school time if they do not wish to do so. While messages may be sent via Aladdin/ teams or email at any time, staff members are not expected to check in to them or respond to them outside of working hours.

6.4 Harassment and Other Stakeholders

In Mercy Convent Primary, it is our belief that all members of our school community have the right to be happy, to feel safe and be given opportunities to learn. Anyone entering our building or grounds should be afforded these rights but, on the flip side, all adults in the school community have a responsibility to ensure that others are not denied these same rights. Pupils are also expected to take on these responsibilities, in line with their levels of social maturity and understanding. It is important that all stakeholders behave in a manner which falls within our "Dignity at Work Policy" framework. Examples of acceptable behaviour are listed below:

- All stakeholders should speak to each other with respect. Using aggressive language or tones is not acceptable. If a stakeholder displays signs of aggression in the school building or grounds, he/she may be asked to remove themselves from the building. In certain cases, the Gardaí may be called.
- Stakeholders should not interrupt teacher/pupil contact time. Should a parent/guardian wish to meet with a teacher, he/she should make an appointment to

do so through the school office or via a written communication to the teacher in question.

- When requesting a meeting with a staff member, it is good practice to outline the purpose of the meeting when making the appointment. This can save considerable time.
- Stakeholders should not isolate others or attempt to influence others against particular individuals or groups in the school.
- Violence or aggressive behaviour will not be tolerated. A Garda Síochána may become involved in any incident of violence or aggression between two parties.
- Staff members will only speak about a particular pupil with his/her parents/guardians. Other pupils will not be discussed. The staff of the school will respect your child's right to privacy, so it is asked that parents respect other pupil's right to privacy also.
- In line with our Child Safeguarding Statement, stakeholders should never approach a child in an aggressive manner.

This list is not exhaustive.

7. Workplace Sexual Harassment

7.1 Definition of Sexual Harassment

The Employment Equality Act (1998) defines sexual harassment as:

“Any unwelcome act, request or conduct, which could reasonably be regarded as sexually or otherwise on the grounds of gender, to be offensive, humiliating or intimidating to the employee in question”

Such as:

any act of physical intimacy, any request for sexual favours, other acts or conduct including spoken words, gestures, or the production, display or circulation of written words, pictures or other material that is unwelcome and could reasonably be regarded as sexually offensive, humiliating or intimidating.

Section 23 only prohibits sexual harassment of a female by a male or a male by a female. However, for the purposes of this policy, the procedure outlined applies equally to incidents of same sex harassment.

7.2 Forms of Sexual Harassment

Many forms of behaviour can constitute sexual harassment and a single incident may constitute sexual harassment.

The following is a listing of potential forms of sexual harassment

1. Unwanted physical or verbal advances.
2. Unwanted touching or physical gestures.
3. Comments and remarks of a sexual or discriminatory nature.
4. Unwelcome comments about personal appearance.
5. Displays of pin-ups and pornographic material.
6. Innuendoes of a sexual nature or based on a person's sex.

This is not an exhaustive list.

7.3 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 as they are best placed to provide appropriate support to the complainant and to conduct the subsequent investigation. The Board will cooperate fully (and in confidence) with An Garda Síochána, as required.

All Mercy Convent Primary School employees are reminded that they should contact the Garda Station nearest to the location of the offending event (or any Garda Station), and that they will have the option of speaking with a female or a male police officer. (The Gardaí can also be contacted day or night by phoning 999)

8. Resolution Process for Bullying, Harassment and Sexual Harassment in the Workplace

The Board of Management will usually refer to “Working Together Ag Obair le Chéile” (INTO, 2024). However, the Board may also seek advice and then refer to “Code of Practice on Guidance, Prevention and Procedures for dealing with Sexual Harassment and Harassment at Work made under the Employment Equality Act 1998” (Equality Authority, 2012) and the Teaching Council Professional Standards.

The following are the stages which should be followed by staff members who feel that they are being harassed, sexually harassed or bullied in the course of their employment:

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

This stage reflects the principles of *Working Together* and should be the primary method of resolving interpersonal issues, where appropriate.

Mediation, either informal or facilitated, may be used to support resolution.

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

The following should apply where necessary:

- the meeting may be facilitated by a third party, generally a work colleague;
- *Party A* should clearly outline his/her difficulties and should clearly object to the bullying/harassment and request that it stop;
- 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;
- Both parties should seek to resolve their differences and establish a pattern of interaction exclusive of any forms of bullying/harassment;
- *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;
- 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, or monitoring. Alternatively, it may emerge as a result of the discussions between the parties, that there may have been a degree of misunderstanding in relation to certain behaviours and the resolution may make provision for compromise or appropriate explanation or acknowledgement.
- Matters should remain confidential between the parties.

2. If there is no satisfactory indication of resolution 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 resolution. In circumstances where the Chairperson may also be involved at 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.
 - This can be done through the Principal or Chairperson of the Board of Management.
- *Party A* should state his/her complaint **in writing** and request the principal teacher (or Chairperson of the Board of Management, as the case may be) to investigate the matter.
- The principal teacher (or Chairperson of the Board of Management or an Investigator/Facilitator/Mediator appointed by the Principal or the Chairperson, as the case may be would:
 - obtain background details including details of what occurred at the previous stage; ▪
 - consider the pattern of behaviour and the timescale;
 - hear the parties and seek to resolve the matter;
 - act in a fair and impartial manner and deal with the matter sensitively having regard to the nature of the problem and the principles of due process;
 - Exercise judgment and make decisions which s/he considers necessary to resolve matters.

The outcome of the discussions should be noted by the parties. 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) should refer the matter to the Board in accordance with Stage 4 below.

Stage 4: Formal Complaint to 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 BOM or the Chairperson of the BOM or an Investigator/Facilitator/Mediator appointed by the BoM may meet teachers individually or collectively, and may also request written submissions from the parties, having regard also to the principles of due process;
- The BOM may request the principal teacher to furnish a written submission;
- The BOM may afford the parties an opportunity to present their case orally at a board meeting. For mediation purposes, this would happen in each other's presence;
- Following oral presentations, the BOM may designate the Chairperson to meet with the parties again, separately or jointly, if further clarification is required or to work towards a resolution; • The BOM may convene a number of meetings in order to achieve resolution;
- The BOM 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.
- Having considered all matters, the BOM should reach a view on the matter not later than 20 school days after receipt of the written request/referral.
- Where the BOM 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, (as per relevant Disciplinary Procedures.)

Where the BOM finds that bullying/harassment has occurred, the BOM should deal with the matter appropriately and effectively, (i.e. invoking the relevant Disciplinary Procedures.) This may include:

- the issuing of a clear warning that bullying/harassment is not acceptable in the school workplace and that it will not be tolerated;
- a demand that all forms of bullying/harassment cease and that acceptable patterns of interaction be established between the parties;
- an instruction to the offending party that s/he apologise/ express regret or give an assurance that the bullying/harassment behaviour will cease;
- seeking a commitment to attend counselling or seek appropriate professional assistance, perhaps through the Employee Assistance scheme;

More serious disciplinary sanctions as may be commensurate and appropriate, such as:

- Oral warning
- Written reprimand
- Written warning
- Final written warning
- Suspension
- Dismissal

(Reference also: Circular 0060/2009)

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

Where an employee is victimised as a result of invoking or participating in any aspect of the complaints procedure, including acting as a witness for another employee, such behaviour will also be subject to disciplinary action. (Ref: Working Together document.)

No record of any complaint will be registered on an employee's file unless the formal procedure outlined above has been invoked.

9. Gross Misconduct Offences

The Board of Management will adhere to the Principles and Procedures outlined in Circular 0060/2009.

10. Work-Related Social Events

At Mercy Convent Primary School 'work-related social events' are those events where the school staff as a whole/the staff in general were invited to attend by the Board, the PTA Committee or by any current member of staff (via oral invitation), school email, notice in the staffroom, etc.) Examples of such events include: staff lunch within the school, staff lunch/coffee at another venue, 'Christmas Party,' trip for school staff. (This list is not exhaustive.) Not included: private events such as weddings, house-warmings, etc.

The organiser(s)/facilitator(s) of 'work-related social events,' as well as all Mercy Convent Primary School attendees, are hereby notified that their conduct and behaviour at these events is subject to the provisions of this Dignity at Work Policy.

Every Mercy Convent Primary School employee has a responsibility in ensuring that 'work related social events' are free from bullying, harassment and sexual harassment. During work-related social events every attendee should take action to prevent or stop unacceptable behaviour as soon as it is brought to their attention.

11. External Supports for School Staff

All Mercy Convent Primary School teachers, special needs assistants and school staff are reminded of the availability of a **free and confidential Employee Assistance Service (EAS)**. This service can be accessed by calling 1800 411 057, by SMS texting 'Hi' to 087 145 2056, or via WhatsApp by texting 'Hi' to 087 3690010. Staff also have access to the Spectrum.Life wellbeing

platform, which provides a range of supports and resources to promote mental health and wellbeing.

The Dublin Rape Crisis Centre provides a free, confidential listening and support service for women and men who have experienced rape, sexual assault, sexual harassment or sexual abuse. A 24-hour helpline is available, 365 days a year, on 1800 77 8888 or via email at counselling@rcc.ie. The Centre can also provide information and referrals to appropriate local support services.

12. Refences and Resources

- 'Working Together Ag Obair le Chéile' (Irish National Teachers' Organisation, 2024)
- 'Disciplinary procedures for teachers in primary, voluntary secondary, and community and comprehensive schools,' (Department of Education & Skills Circular 0060/2009)
- 'Dignity at Work – The Challenge of Workplace Bullying,' (Health & Safety Authority, 2001)
- 'Code of Practice for Employers and Employees on the Prevention and Resolution of Bullying at Work,' (Health and Safety Authority, 2007.)
- 'Code of Practice on Guidance, Prevention and Procedures for dealing with Sexual Harassment and Harassment at Work made under the Employment Equality Act, 1998,' (Equality Authority, 2012.)

13. Ratification

This policy is subject to review by Board of Management.

This policy was adopted by the Board of Management on 11th May 2026.

This policy has been made available to school personnel through central shared folder. Parents can request a copy from the office and a folder of all school policies is available from the school office.

Signed: 
Chairperson of Board of Management

Date: 11/05/2026

Date of next review: May 2029.

Signed: 
Secretary/Principal

Date: 11/05/2026

14. Appendix A

A Reminder...



A Commitment to Dignity and Respect:

Mercy Convent Primary School is committed to creating, maintaining and constantly striving to enhance a positive work environment where work is done in an atmosphere of respect, collaboration, openness and equality.

Unkind behaviour, including adult bullying and harassment in the workplace, are phenomena which we seek to prevent. Further, we declare that such unacceptable behaviour will not be tolerated. As a team, we believe that all employees have the right to be treated with dignity and respect. As a team we recognise that we all have our part to play in modelling and promoting good behaviour, and that in the unlikely event of experiencing less than nice behaviour, we will aim to explain to our partner(s) of communication that their behaviour is offensive to us and why. If it continues, those school community members who are the management team are committed to intervening in an appropriate manner.

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A Positive Work Environment

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- Creating a supportive atmosphere
- Good and open communication (e.g. through opportunities for consultation and regular staff meetings)
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