

# Adult Bullying and Harassment Policy



The Board of Management of Boolavogue National School seeks to provide a supportive work place where all staff are free from all forms of harassment/bullying.

All complaints relating to bullying/harassment will be taken seriously and investigated thoroughly and promptly. All parties involved will be treated with respect.

Victimisation as a result of a member of staff raising a complaint will be treated as harassment/bullying and subject to disciplinary action. Similarly, staff will be protected from victimisation or discrimination for assisting in an investigation.

## **Definition of harassment/bullying**

For the purposes of this policy the following definition of bullying/harassment is understood:-

"Persistent offensive, abusive, intimidating, malicious or insulting behaviour, or abuse of power, carried out by an individual or a group either directly or indirectly, which makes the victim feel upset, threatened, humiliated or vulnerable, or undermines their self-confidence and which may cause them to suffer stress".

Harassment/bullying may take subtle or insidious forms, which gradually wears a person down over a period of time. Harassment may take place where there are no witnesses and victims may be afraid to make a complaint because they fear that they may not be believed or that the harassment/bullying may themselves be afraid to come forward because they fear that they too may become victims.

Bullying /harassment is to be understood not necessarily by its intention but by the impact of the behaviour on the recipient.

Bullying may take the form of: **intra-staff bullying** or **Parent – Staff bullying**.

## **Who is involved?**

Individuals or groups of people can be responsible for or be the victims of harassment/bullying. It can occur at any level in the school.

## **Forms of Bullying**

Harassment/bullying can be verbal, gesture or physical bullying, exclusion or extortion. It can be sexual, ageist, sectarian or racial in form or in undertone, or it can offend because of a person's disability. Some examples could be:-

Using terror tactics, open aggression, threats or staring, shouting abuse or obscenities towards a colleague.

Subjecting a colleague to unreasonable scrutiny, and being excessively critical about minor things.

Regularly taking the credit for another person's work but never taking the blame when things go wrong.

Undermining a person's authority.

Maliciously removing whole areas of work responsibility from an individual or reducing her/his job to routine tasks which are below her/his skills capabilities.

Setting individuals impossible objectives, or constantly changing the work requirements and then criticising or reprimanding the individual for not meeting those requirements or objectives.

Deliberately withholding information which an individual requires in order to do her/his job effectively.

Ostracising and /or marginalising an individual, dealing with an individual only through a third party, excluding the individual from discussions, decisions, etc.

Spreading malicious rumours about an individual.

Blocking another staff member's development.

### **Effects of harassment and bullying**

#### **(a) Effects on the victim**

It is generally accepted that individuals who are constantly bullied lose their self-confidence, their self esteem and are at an increased risk of suffering stress. Stress is associated with a wide range of ill-health effects. The long term exposure to harassment/bullying can have serious effects on an individual's health. This could include resignation in order to avoid contact with the bully, or absenteeism, which in turn can have a detrimental effect on the person's career. In severe cases it can include nervous breakdown, heart attack or even suicide.

#### **(b) Effects on the School**

Individuals working in a climate of fear and resentment do not perform to their capabilities. The adverse effects of harassment and bullying may result in increased absenteeism, staff turnover, low morale or poor performance levels.

### **What can you do if you think you are being harassed or bullied.**

If you think you are being harassed/bullied at work, you should seek advice from any of the following "Contact people".

#### **Contact People**

Principal, Deputy Principal, Teachers' Representative of the Board of Management, Chairperson of the Board of Management, Nominated Board of Management member.

#### **Other specific actions you may take**

Log all incidents of bullying/harassment. Record dates, times and full details of the incident.

Write down your feelings at the time and what your own response was.

Speak to the alleged bully and make it clear that his/her behaviour is unacceptable and ask him/her to stop. If you cannot do this verbally, then do so in writing. Keep copies of any correspondence.

Ascertain if there were any witnesses to the harassment/bullying.

If possible avoid being alone with the alleged bully.

**The purpose of the policy is to deter unacceptable behaviour and to create an environment where staff can work together free from harassment/bullying.**

### **Procedures**

There are two procedures for dealing with cases of alleged harassment/bullying, one informal the other formal. Individuals should familiarise themselves with the procedures below. Any of the people who are listed as 'contact people' can advise on both procedures. If the Informal Procedure is followed and the problem persists, the complaint can then be dealt with under the Formal Procedure.

#### **(a) Informal Procedure**

If an incident occurs which offends you, it may be sufficient to explain clearly to the person engaging in such behaviour that it is unacceptable. In circumstances where this is too difficult or too embarrassing to do on your own, you should seek support from one of the 'contact people'.

If you are in any doubt as to whether a type of behaviour is harassment/bullying, do not hesitate to approach one of the "Contact People" for advice, on an informal and confidential basis.

Many incidents of harassment/bullying can be dealt with effectively in a informal way, as often the harasser/bully may be unaware of the affect her/his behaviour is having on others.

#### **(b) Formal Procedure**

Your complaint should be made in writing to the Chairperson of the Board of Management and should detail the nature of the complaint. Your chosen contact person may help you to do so. However, you have the right to initiate a formal complaint without reference to a Contact Person.

The Board of Management will make every effort to ensure confidentiality will be observed by everyone involved while the complaint is being investigated.

There will be an independent investigation carried out by the Board of Management.

The Board will set down a timetable for the completion of the investigation.

The Board may engage personnel outside the school to assist in the fact finding investigation.

The victim will be interviewed as will the alleged harasser.

Separate interviews will be conducted.

Your Contact Person or Staff Representative will provide help and support during this process if you wish.

The investigation will be thorough, impartial and objective. It will be carried out with sensitivity and with due respect for the rights of the complainant and the alleged bully/harasser.

The complaint and the alleged Harasser/bully will have the right to be accompanied at all interviews. The alleged harasser/bully will be given full details of the nature of the complaint and will be given the opportunity to respond. Every effort will be made to ensure that meetings are conducted sensitively.

Strict confidentiality will be maintained throughout the investigation into the allegation. Where it is necessary to interview witnesses, the importance of confidentiality will be emphasised.

At the completion of the investigation, a report will be prepared, which will include the nature and details of the complaint, the response of the alleged harasser, the result of the investigation and the conclusion. A copy will be sent to both the complainant and the alleged harasser.

If the report concludes that harassment/bullying did take place, the harasser will be subject to a formal interview and the complaint will be treated as a disciplinary matter using the Board of Management's Disciplinary Procedure.

However, in some circumstances the use of the Disciplinary Procedure may not be appropriate. In such cases the outcome could result in training, counselling and a period of monitoring and appraisal.

If the period of appraisal is not satisfactory, then the Disciplinary Procedure may then be invoked.

There will be a right to appeal a decision using the agreed Appeals Procedure.

Nothing in the Formal or Informal procedure can override an employee's statutory rights.

### **Implementing and Monitoring the Code**

All staff in Boolavogue National School have a duty to ensure that their working environment is free from harassment/bullying.