St. Mary's
Special School

Johnstown Educational Campus
Johnstown,
Navan,
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C15 PFK7

St Marys Special School

Code of Behaviour Policy

2026

Introduction

This policy was reviewed by a collaborative whole-school staff process in January 2026. The St Mary's Special School Code of Behaviour is the result of consultation and collaboration among the stakeholders in the school and is developed in line with current Department of Education guidelines and relevant national legislation, including the Education Act 1998, the Education (Welfare) Act 2000, and all other applicable legislation and circulars governing school behaviour and discipline. This policy is "neuro-affirmative," meaning it views neurological differences as natural variations rather than deficits to be "fixed".

A whole-school approach was taken in drafting this policy to include all the stakeholders in the school. The school invites input from bus escorts, caretakers, and office staff, who often interact with students during high-risk transition times and have insights into student behaviour which informs the code.

Code of Behaviour

The school has a central role in children's social and moral development just as it does in their academic development. In seeking to define acceptable standards of behaviour it is acknowledged that these are goals to be worked towards rather than expectations that are either fulfilled or not. We teach through modelling and demonstration of appropriate behaviour, communication strategies, social stories, reinforcement, including the need for movement and sensory breaks for individual pupils to support appropriate behaviour.

The children bring to school a wide variety of behaviours. As a community environment, in school we must work towards standards of behaviour based on the basic principles of

honesty, respect, consideration, and responsibility. It follows that acceptable standards of behaviour are those that reflect these principles.

Children need limits set for them in order to feel secure and develop the skills for cooperation; therefore, any rules will be age and ability appropriate, with clear agreed outcomes. As a school we promote Unconditional Positive Regard, which ensures that a student's value is never tied to their behaviour. They are consistently met with empathy, even during crises.

Parents/guardians are encouraged to cooperate with the school by supporting their children in understanding the need for school rules, by visiting the school when appropriate, and by communicating with members of staff. Parents/guardians are expected to support the school's approach to behaviour management by reinforcing consistent strategies between home and school. All behavioural approaches used in the school are based on Positive Behavioural Support (PBS) systems and evidence-based practice.

A Code of Behaviour is established to ensure that the individuality of each child is accommodated while at the same time acknowledging the right of each child to education in a relatively disruption-free environment. Furthermore, the Code of Behaviour is designed to ensure the safety and welfare of both children and staff in a safe learning environment, in accordance with current legislation and Department of Education requirements.

This Code of Behaviour was drafted in January 2026 by the staff of St Mary's Special School. Having regard to the opinion of all parties, the final completed copy was sanctioned and ratified by the Board of Management on:

Rationale

Essential to effective teaching and learning is a safe, supportive, inclusive and well-disciplined environment that respects the following rights:

? The right of all students to learn.
? The right of all teachers to teach.
? The right of all members of the school community to be safe.
? It is a requirement under current Department of Education guidance on school discipline, including updated circulars replacing and superseding earlier guidance such as DES Circular 20/90.
? It is a requirement under the Education (Welfare) Act 2000, Section 23(1), which requires all recognised schools to have a Code of Behaviour in place.
? It is in accordance with the Education Act 1998, the Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs (EPSEN) Act 2004, the Equal Status Acts 2000–2018, the Children First Act 2015, and all relevant current legislation and safeguarding requirements.
? It forms part of our School Self-Evaluation process and our School Plan.

- **Universal Design for Learning (UDL):** The UDL as a framework ensures that the environment and expectations are inherently accessible to all students from the outset.

This Code of Behaviour supports compliance with statutory obligations and reflects best practice in positive behaviour support within a special school setting.

Relationship to the School Mission and Spirit

St. Mary's Special School is dedicated to providing the highest quality education and care within our school community and to ensuring excellence in the learning experience of each individual pupil.

In partnership with parents/guardians, we nurture and develop the intellectual, physical, social, emotional, and spiritual potential within each child.

The dignity of every child is maintained. We believe that each child is entitled to an appropriate educational provision, regardless of individual levels of attainment or functioning. While enabling each pupil to develop his/her potential to the fullest extent possible, we also aim to ensure that pupils are happy in school and enjoy their educational experience.

We respect the dignity of each pupil and are committed to providing an education that supports them in attaining their individual potential in a safe, inclusive, creative, structured and supportive school environment.

The Code of Behaviour Policy promotes harmonious relationships and cooperation between staff, parents/guardians, pupils, the Board of Management, and the wider school community. It underpins our commitment to positive behaviour support, mutual respect, inclusion, and shared responsibility.

Aims of the Code

- To create a positive, inclusive learning environment that encourages and reinforces good behaviour in line with current Department of Education guidance and whole-school wellbeing principles.
- To promote the development of independent living skills for pupils, supporting preparation for adulthood and community participation. To promote the social skills necessary for pupils to engage safely and confidently in their local community.
- To promote self-esteem, emotional wellbeing, and positive relationships within the school community.

- To encourage consistency of approach in responding to both appropriate and inappropriate behaviour, ensuring fairness and clarity for pupils.
- To foster a sense of responsibility and self-discipline in pupils, supporting behaviour based on consideration, respect, dignity, and the rights of others.
- To facilitate the education, development, and full participation of every child in accordance with the Education Act 1998 and the Education (Welfare) Act 2000.
- To support each pupil in fully engaging and participating as valued members of our school and wider community, in line with inclusive education principles under the EPSEN Act 2004.
- To foster caring attitudes towards one another and towards the environment, promoting respect and sustainability.
- To enable teachers and staff to teach and work effectively without disruption, in a safe and supportive environment.
- To ensure that the school's expectations, procedures, and behavioural strategies are clearly communicated, widely known, and understood through accessible policies and open communication.
- To encourage active partnership between home and school in the implementation of this policy.
- To provide clear guidance for pupils, teachers, and parents/guardians on behavioural expectations and the positive strategies used to support behaviour.
- To provide for the effective, orderly, and safe operation of the school in compliance with current legislation and safeguarding requirements, including the Children First Act 2015.
- To allow the school to function in an organised, respectful, and harmonious manner.
- To create and maintain an atmosphere of respect, tolerance, inclusion, and consideration for others.
- To ensure the safety, dignity, and wellbeing of all members of the school community.

- To assist parents/guardians and pupils in understanding the systems and procedures that form part of the Code of Behaviour and to seek their cooperation in its consistent implementation.

Implementation

Every member of the school community has a shared responsibility in the implementation of the Code of Behaviour, in accordance with the Education Act 1998 and the Education (Welfare) Act 2000.

Rules will be kept to a minimum, with a strong emphasis on Positive Behaviour Support (PBS). They will be applied in a fair, consistent, transparent, and equitable manner, with due regard to the age, ability, and individual needs of pupils.

Good behaviour will be explicitly taught, modelled, reinforced, and celebrated. Where behavioural difficulties arise, parents/guardians will be contacted at an early stage to ensure collaborative problem-solving and consistency of approach.

Rules and expectations will be presented in accessible formats appropriate to the individual needs of pupils, ensuring clarity, understanding, and achievable outcomes for all learners.

Student Voice – As a school, we involve students in the *creation and review* of the code itself.

- Consultation Process: The Students feedback is sought where possible
- NCSE Relate's "Getting to Know Me" tool allows students to communicate what helps them feel safe and what triggers their anxiety at school.

Protocol for Non-Signature of Support Plans

Collaborative agreement is essential for student safety. In the event that a parent or guardian chooses not to sign off on a proposed Behaviour Support Plan (BSP):

- **Resolution Meeting:** An **urgent review meeting** will be convened to discuss concerns and seek a solution.

- **Safety Limitation:** It may be impossible to cater for a student safely without an agreed-upon plan in place. In extreme cases, if the lack of a signed BSP results in an inability to prevent significant safety risks, **suspension may be considered** under the provision that the student's presence constitutes a threat to safety.

Methods of Communicating with Parents/Guardians

Effective communication with parents/guardians is central to maintaining a positive, collaborative approach to supporting pupils. Partnership between home and school is essential to promoting consistent behaviour support strategies.

Parents/guardians and teachers will work together to develop shared strategies to address specific difficulties, while also maintaining a broader shared philosophy that can be implemented consistently across home and school environments.

A high level of cooperation, transparency, and open communication is recognised as a key factor in promoting positive behaviour within the school community. Structures and communication channels are established to maintain effective communication between staff, pupils, parents/guardians, and relevant professionals. These systems are reviewed regularly as part of ongoing school development and self-evaluation.

Parents/guardians are encouraged to inform the school of any significant developments in a pupil's life, past or present, which may impact behaviour, wellbeing, or learning, in order to ensure appropriate support.

The following communication methods are used at all levels within the school:

➢ Individual Education Plan (IEP) meetings (October and June).
➢ Annual one-to-one Parent/Teacher meetings.
➢ NCCA-endorsed report cards issued to parents/guardians at the end of the school year.
➢ Ongoing consultation throughout the year as required.

➢ Parents/guardians may contact the school secretary to arrange meetings with teachers at a mutually suitable time.

➢ School website, updated regularly.

➢ Text message/email communication via the school's Aladdin system for essential information.

➢ Informal and formal Parent/Teacher meetings.

➢ Written communication including letters and home–school notes.

➢ School notice board.

➢ ABC behaviour charts and other agreed monitoring tools where appropriate.

➢ Telephone communication.

All communication is conducted in line with data protection legislation, including the Data Protection Act 2018 and GDPR requirements, ensuring confidentiality and secure handling of information.

Affirming Appropriate Behaviour

As a school, we take a proactive, positive, and evidence-based approach to teaching and modelling appropriate social behaviours. This approach is consistent with current Department of Education guidance, inclusive education principles, and best practice in Positive Behaviour Support (PBS).

Behaviour that may present as challenging to others is understood within a functional framework. Such behaviour is considered adaptive and learned; it serves a purpose for the student and may meet a specific need. For example, a pupil may engage in challenging behaviour as a means of escaping or avoiding a task that he/she finds difficult or overwhelming. Understanding behaviour in this way allows staff to respond constructively and supportively.

The approach of staff in St Mary's Special School is to reduce challenging behaviour by teaching, modelling, and reinforcing appropriate replacement behaviours that serve the same function. For example, a pupil will be explicitly taught an appropriate way to request a break from a demanding task rather than using challenging behaviour to communicate that need.

All staff use learning opportunities throughout the school day and across all settings to teach and reinforce functional communication skills. This includes the use of appropriate supports such as visual supports, gestural prompts, structured schedules, reinforcement systems, assistive technology, and other evidence-based strategies suited to individual pupil needs.

The positive school ethos ensures that all members of the school community adopt a calm, respectful, and supportive approach when responding to challenges. Staff are committed to de-escalation, prevention, and skill-building strategies that prioritise safety, dignity, and regulation.

Every effort is made to ensure that the classroom and school environment provides frequent opportunities for pupils and staff to experience success, social praise, and positive reinforcement. Activities are structured to promote engagement, enjoyment, inclusion, and meaningful participation throughout the school day.

There is a consistent focus on recognising and reinforcing positive behaviours, strengths, and achievements, rather than concentrating on negative behaviour. This approach promotes wellbeing, self-esteem, and long-term behavioural success.

Data-Driven Review

To ensure that interventions remain effective and responsive to pupil needs, the school adopts a rigorous data-driven approach:

Review Frequency: Behavioural data, including ABC behaviour charts and progress on Individual Education Plan (IEP) goals, will be analyzed by the class team (Teachers and SNAs) daily and fortnightly.

Trigger for Review: Changes to a pupil's Behaviour Support Plan (BSP) or Emotional Regulation Support Plan (ERSP) will be directly guided by this data, ensuring that strategies are modified based on the student's progress or lack thereof.

School Rules

School rules are kept to a minimum and are developed with due regard for the health, safety, dignity, and welfare of all members of the school community. In order for the school to

function effectively and safely, expectations must be clearly communicated and implemented in a fair, consistent, and equitable manner, in line with current Department of Education guidance and relevant legislation.

Rules are taught, modelled, and reinforced in a positive manner and are appropriate to the age, ability, and individual needs of pupils.

School Expectations:

- Respect for self and others.
- Respect for others' property.
- Respect other students and their learning.
- Kindness and willingness to help others.
- Follow instructions from staff.
- No running in the school building.
- Courtesy and good manners.
- Use respectful ways of resolving difficulties and conflict.
- Ask permission to leave the classroom.
- Do your best in class.
- Take responsibility for your own work, where appropriate.
- Take responsibility for your own behaviour, as much as possible, in line with individual ability and developmental stage.

These expectations promote safety, inclusion, and a positive learning environment.

These can be summarised as 7 main rules:

1. Show respect / Be kind.
2. Do your best.
3. Be tidy.
4. Be safe.
5. Walk safely.
6. Listen.
7. Be calm.

These core rules are reinforced consistently across all areas of the school and are supported through Positive Behaviour Support strategies, visual supports, modelling, and reinforcement systems where appropriate.

Home Behaviour Impacting Other Students

The school recognises that intentional negative behaviour occurring outside of school hours can impact the school environment:

- Scope: This includes offensive or hurtful text messages, private messaging, or public statements on social networking sites that involve other students.
- School Response: When such incidents are reported, the school will assess the situation and implement teaching and prevention strategies (such as social stories, role-play, or individualized BSP goals) to prevent recurrence and maintain harmonious relationships within the school community.

Strategies / Incentives

Reinforcement strategies are developed and implemented by staff to increase appropriate behaviour, support skill development, and reinforce the teaching of new competencies. All strategies are based on Positive Behaviour Support principles and are implemented in a fair, consistent, and individualised manner.

Reinforcement systems may include, but are not limited to:

• Social praise and positive acknowledgement.
• Merit awards for achievements.
• Token or points-based systems for work completed throughout the day.
• Access to preferred items, activities, or interests on an intermittent and structured basis.
• Access to break times following appropriate requests or the completion of agreed tasks.
• Group-based reinforcement systems to encourage rule-following and positive participation.
• Individualised behaviour support plans where required.

Reinforcement strategies are regularly reviewed to ensure effectiveness and appropriateness. Where necessary, advice or input may be sought from relevant professionals, including psychologists, behaviour specialists, or other members of the multidisciplinary team, in line with the needs of individual pupils.

All reinforcement approaches are designed to promote dignity, inclusion, skill development, and long-term positive outcomes.

Board of Management's Responsibilities

The Board of Management has overall governance responsibility for the Code of Behaviour in accordance with the Education Act 1998 and the Education (Welfare) Act 2000.

The Board of Management will:

- Provide and maintain a safe, inclusive, and supportive environment for pupils and staff.
- Ensure that the Code of Behaviour is developed, implemented, and reviewed in accordance with current legislation and Department of Education guidelines.
- Support the Principal and staff in the fair and consistent implementation of the Code.
- Ratify the Code of Behaviour and any subsequent amendments following review.
- Ensure that appropriate policies relating to safeguarding, anti-bullying, and child protection are aligned with this Code.

- Ensure regular review of the policy as part of whole-school evaluation and legislative compliance.

Principal's Responsibilities

The Principal has overall operational responsibility for the implementation of the Code of Behaviour within the school and will:

- Promote a positive, inclusive, safe, and supportive school climate.
- Ensure that the Code of Behaviour is implemented in a fair, consistent, transparent, and equitable manner.
- Ensure that behaviour policies align with current legislation, Department of Education guidance, and safeguarding requirements.
- Oversee the development, monitoring, and review of the Code of Behaviour.
- Support staff in implementing Positive Behaviour Support strategies.
- Ensure appropriate record-keeping and communication procedures are in place.
- Report to the Board of Management as required regarding the implementation and review of the Code.

Classroom / Bus Staff Responsibilities

All staff, including classroom staff and bus escorts, are responsible for supporting and implementing the school's Code of Behaviour in line with Positive Behaviour Support principles.

Staff will:

- Create and maintain a safe, structured, and supportive environment for each pupil.
- Recognise, acknowledge, and affirm positive work and behaviour.

- Prepare appropriate learning materials and correct pupil work in a timely and constructive manner.
- Support each pupil in developing self-management skills through positive communication and evidence-based strategies.
- Create a safe, creative, inclusive, and positive working environment for all pupils.
- Ensure pupils have access to visual, tactile, or other necessary supports to promote understanding of routines and expectations (e.g., timetables, PECS, visual schedules, social stories, assistive technology).
- Recognise and provide for individual talents, strengths, and differences among pupils.
- Act in a courteous, consistent, fair, and professional manner at all times.
- Minimise opportunities for disruptive behaviour through proactive classroom management and structured teaching.
- Address minor behaviours promptly and appropriately using agreed school strategies.
- Maintain accurate records of serious challenging behaviour or repeated incidents in accordance with school procedures and individual support plans.
- Report incidents of concern or new behaviours promptly to the classroom teacher and, where appropriate, to the Principal.
- Provide collegial support and collaborate with colleagues to ensure consistency of approach.
- Communicate with parents/guardians when necessary and provide information on matters of shared concern in a professional and timely manner.
- Participate in relevant training, including training related to Emotional Regulation Support Plans (ERSPs) and Positive Behaviour Support.
- Adhere to the positive ethos of the school in order to maintain a safe and respectful learning environment.

- Develop an individualised Emotional Regulation Support Plan (ERSP) where required to support each pupil in achieving their potential.
- Ensure consistency in implementing the ERSP across settings and staff members.
- Inform parents/guardians of behaviour support strategies and learning goals, and provide guidance or training opportunities where possible to support consistency between home and school.
- Keep accurate records as outlined in the relevant ERSP and school procedures.
- Exercise professional judgement and common sense at all times to ensure the health, safety, dignity, and wellbeing of all members of the school community.
- Engage in regular planned meetings with parents/guardians to review strategies, progress, and goals. Parents' input will be sought and considered as part of a collaborative approach to behaviour support planning.

Pupils' Responsibilities

In line with each pupil's age, ability, and individual needs, pupils are encouraged and supported to:

- Show respect for all members of the school community.
- Follow school and class rules.
- Cooperate with school staff.
- Adhere to both school and class rules, as appropriate to their developmental level.

Pupils are supported in understanding these responsibilities through teaching, modelling, visual supports, and Positive Behaviour Support strategies.

Parents/Guardians' Responsibilities

Parents/guardians play a vital role in supporting the effective implementation of the Code of Behaviour and in promoting consistency between home and school.

Parents/guardians are reminded that staff do not accept responsibility for pupils before the official opening time of 9:00 a.m. or after the official closing time of 2:40 p.m., except where pupils are participating in an extra-curricular activity organised by the school and approved by the Board of Management.

Parents/guardians are encouraged to:

- Encourage their children to develop a sense of respect for themselves, others, and property.
- Ensure that children attend school regularly and punctually, in accordance with the Education (Welfare) Act 2000.
- Engage in, support, and encourage their children's schoolwork and learning goals.
- Be familiar with the Code of Behaviour and support its consistent implementation.
- Cooperate with class staff where a child's behaviour is causing difficulties for themselves or others, in a collaborative and solution-focused manner.
- Communicate with the school regarding any issues or circumstances that may affect their child's progress, wellbeing, attendance, or behaviour.
- Become familiar with behaviour support strategies and learning goals developed for their child, and support their generalisation across home and community settings to promote long-term success.

A strong partnership between home and school is essential to ensuring consistency, safety, wellbeing, and positive outcomes for all pupils.

Enhanced Parental Responsibilities

In addition to general support, parents/guardians are expected to cooperate with the following technical requirements:

- Medication Updates: Parents must inform the school of any medication changes or adjustments to dosages immediately.
- Medical Data Sharing: Parents are encouraged to provide medical personnel with school-collected data if a child's behaviour is suspected to be changing as a result of medication.
- Provision of Reinforcers: To maximize the success of behavioural goals, parents are asked to provide the school with items or activities that the child finds highly reinforcing. The school relies on parents to limit access to these "high-value" reinforcers at home to ensure they maintain their effectiveness during school interventions.

Code of Conduct for Parents/Guardians

Parents/guardians play a vital role in supporting a respectful, safe, and positive school community.

Parents/guardians are expected to:

- Be courteous and respectful towards all pupils, staff, and members of the school community.
- Make appointments to meet with a Teacher and/or Principal through the school office.
- Respect school property and encourage their children to do the same.
- Supervise young children on school premises when collecting pupils or visiting the school.
- Clearly label pupils' property to support organisation and safeguarding.
- Contact the school office in advance when arranging visits. Parents/guardians should use the designated entry system (e.g., buzzer/intercom) and follow school access procedures before entering the building.
- Wait in the designated area to meet staff by prior appointment. Meetings are encouraged outside of teaching time where possible to minimise disruption to learning.
- Respect the privacy and dignity of all pupils, parents/guardians, and staff of St Mary's Special School. This includes maintaining confidentiality regarding information about other

children and not sharing, publishing, or posting information, views, or opinions relating to individual pupils on any online platform or public forum.

In accordance with the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act 2005 and associated regulations, the school does not tolerate verbal or physical harassment, intimidation, or abuse in any form from parents/guardians or any other parties.

The EU definition of work-related aggression and violence is recognised as:

"Any incident where staff are abused, threatened or assaulted in circumstances related to their work, involving an explicit or implicit challenge to their safety, well-being or health."

All communication regarding a pupil should be directed through the classroom teacher in the first instance. Where appropriate, discussions involving Special Needs Assistants (SNAs) will occur through the teacher. Any meetings involving an SNA in relation to a pupil's educational matters will take place in the presence of the teacher.

Response to Behaviours of Concern

From time to time, behaviours of concern may occur in school. These may present as physical aggression, absconsion, property destruction, self injurious behaviour or other behaviours of concern.

The approach adopted by St Mary's Special School is rooted in Positive Behaviour Support. The primary goal is to reduce inappropriate behaviour by increasing appropriate skills and behaviours. This is achieved through reinforcement strategies, structured teaching, communication supports, and proactive intervention.

Despite best efforts, behaviour may occasionally escalate into crisis situations. The school recognises its duty of care to all pupils and staff. In circumstances where a pupil presents an immediate and serious risk of harm to themselves or others, it may be necessary, as a last resort, to use approved physical intervention procedures.

Ladder of Intervention

St Mary's utilizes a structured **Ladder of Intervention** to ensure consistency in responding to behaviour:

- **Level 1: Support for All:** Routine use of clear rules, positive reinforcement, and classroom management for all students.
- **Level 2: Additional Support for Some:** Targeted interventions for students at risk, including behaviour contracts, monitoring targets, or referral to the Pastoral Care team.
- **Level 3: Specialised Support for a Minority:** Intensive, systematic responses for pupils with persistent or challenging behaviour, involving the multidisciplinary team and external agencies (e.g., NEPS, NCSE, or CAMHS).

The school's **Safety Interventions Policy (CPI Policy)** governs the use of such practices. Any physical intervention will:

• Be used only when absolutely necessary.
• Be proportionate to the level of risk.
• Be the least restrictive intervention available.
• Be carried out by trained staff.
• Be in line with current legislation, safeguarding guidance, and professional standards.
• Be recorded and reported in accordance with school procedures.

The aim of Safety Interventions is to promote a safe and productive educational environment for all staff and pupils, and to provide clear guidance in circumstances where a pupil presents a serious risk of harm to themselves or others.

The school remains committed to de-escalation, prevention, early intervention, and skill-building strategies as the foundation of behaviour support.

Crisis Management

Episodes of challenging behaviour may occur from time to time at varying levels of intensity. At all times, the health, safety, dignity, and wellbeing of all pupils and staff are the school's highest priority.

For this reason, St Mary's Special School has adopted the **Crisis Prevention Institute (CPI) System**, which is **BILD-approved**. CPI is a comprehensive and fully integrated crisis prevention and intervention system designed to manage crisis situations effectively, safely, and with respect for the dignity of all involved.

All staff who carry out CPI procedures are fully trained, certified, and deemed competent to do so. Training is competency-based and includes theoretical and practical assessment. Only staff who are certified in CPI are authorised to implement CPI procedures.

Re-certification is completed annually (online or onsite as required). Instructor recertification is provided in line with CPI standards, typically every two years.

CPI provides staff with a repertoire of crisis prevention and management techniques. It is **not** a behaviour intervention programme in itself. Crisis management techniques may be prescribed as part of an individualised and comprehensive Behaviour Support Plan for a pupil with a history of intense challenging behaviour or behaviour that may pose a risk to self or others. In such cases, parents/guardians will be informed of the inclusion of these procedures within the pupil's support plan.

CPI procedures may also be used in the event of unexpected crisis behaviours to ensure the immediate safety of pupils and staff. Staff training in CPI equips personnel with the skills to respond to unforeseen or emergency situations in the safest possible manner.

Following any physical intervention or crisis incident:

• Parents/guardians will be informed by telephone where appropriate.
• A written Physical Intervention Report will be issued.
• School copies of all reports will be securely retained.

Please refer to the school's **CPI – Physical Intervention Policy** for full procedural details.

Incident Reporting Procedures

There are several incident report forms in use within the school. All forms are available from the School Secretary. Once completed by the relevant staff member, forms must be signed by the Principal or Deputy Principal and stored securely in accordance with data protection requirements.

Each form follows a specific protocol:

1. **Accident/Incident Report Form** – To be completed when a pupil or staff member is involved in an incident. *(Appendix B)*
2. **Physical Intervention Report Form** – To be completed by staff involved in any physical intervention. A copy must be sent home to parents/guardians. *(Appendix C)*
3. **Debriefing Meeting Record** – A structured debriefing meeting must be conducted following any intense or crisis-level episode of challenging behaviour. These meetings should involve relevant staff and follow the school's standardised debriefing format. *(Appendix D)*

Debriefing is considered an essential part of professional practice and supports reflective review, risk reduction, and continuous improvement.

Suspension and Expulsion

In cases of extreme challenging behaviour or repeated serious behaviour that poses a safety risk to pupils or staff, suspension may be considered. Expulsion may be considered only in the most extreme circumstances, in accordance with the Rules for National Schools, the Education Act 1998, and the Education (Welfare) Act 2000.

Before suspending or expelling a pupil, the Board of Management shall notify the Local Education and Welfare Officer (Tusla Educational Welfare Service) in writing, in accordance with Section 24 of the Education (Welfare) Act 2000.

All procedures relating to suspension and expulsion will follow current Department of Education guidance and principles of natural justice, fairness, proportionality, and due process.

There is an appeals process available to parents/guardians, as outlined in the Suspension and Expulsion sections of this policy.

Suspension and Expulsion – Legal and Procedural Requirements

A proposal to suspend or expel a pupil is a serious step and will only be considered in cases of very serious misbehaviour or where the safety and wellbeing of members of the school community are at risk.

St Mary's uses three-tier definitions to gauge behaviours

- **Minor (Low):** Everyday instances handled routinely by the class teacher.
- **Serious (Medium):** Repeated misbehaviour or incidents that impact learning, requiring principal notification and early parent involvement.
- **Gross (High):** Single instances of aggressive, threatening, or violent behaviour toward staff or students that constitute an immediate threat to safety.

The right to education is protected under constitutional provisions, national legislation, and relevant international human rights conventions. Decisions relating to suspension or expulsion are subject to appeal and may be open to judicial review by the High Court.

Schools are required, under Section 23(2) of the Education (Welfare) Act 2000, to include procedures in their Code of Behaviour relating to suspension and expulsion, ensuring transparency, fairness, and compliance with statutory obligations.

All decisions will follow:

• Clear investigation procedures.
• Documentation and record-keeping.
• Communication with parents/guardians.
• Consideration of proportionality.

• Opportunity for representation.
• Right of appeal.

The school remains committed to early intervention, positive behaviour support, and preventative strategies to minimise the need for exclusionary responses.

The Responsibility of the Board of Management

The Board of Management of St Mary's Special School has overall governance responsibility in relation to suspension and expulsion procedures and will:

- Ensure that the school has a clear and compliant policy on the use of suspension and expulsion.
- Ensure that all students and parents/guardians are informed of the school's policy and procedures relating to suspension and expulsion.
- Ensure that fair procedures are consistently applied in all cases involving suspension or expulsion.
- Take special care to ensure that fair procedures are accessible to persons with disabilities and to those from different language or cultural backgrounds.
- Ensure time and timeliness in all investigations and decision-making processes, avoiding undue delay in relation to suspension or expulsion matters.
- Ensure confidentiality in all matters relating to investigations of alleged misbehaviour, in accordance with data protection legislation and safeguarding requirements.

Suspension and Expulsion – Legal and Procedural Requirements

Schools are required by law to follow fair procedures when proposing to suspend or expel a student.

Fair procedures consist of two essential principles:

1. The Right to Be Heard

2. The Right to Impartiality

The Right to Be Heard Includes:

Students have:

Ø The right to know that alleged misbehaviour is being investigated.
Ø The right to know the details of the allegations and any information that will be considered in reaching a decision.
Ø The right to know how the issue will be decided.
Ø The right to respond to the allegations.
Ø Where the proposed sanction is of a serious nature, the right to be heard by the decision-making body (e.g., Board of Management).
Ø Where appropriate and where there is a dispute of fact, the right to question relevant information, subject to school procedures and safeguarding considerations.

The Right to Impartiality Includes:

- The right to a decision-maker free from bias.
- The right to an impartial investigation.
- The right to an impartial decision-making process.

Fair Procedures in the School Context

In a school setting, fair procedures apply to:

- The investigation of alleged misbehaviour that may lead to suspension or expulsion.
- The decision-making process regarding:
  (a) Whether the student engaged in the alleged behaviour.
  (b) What sanction, if any, should be applied.

The application of fair procedures will take account of:

• The seriousness of the alleged behaviour.
• The context of the incident.
• The age and ability of the pupil.
• What is reasonable and proportionate in the context of a special school environment.

Suspension

Suspension is defined as requiring a student to absent themselves from school for a specified and limited number of school days. During a suspension period, the student retains their place in the school.

The Board of Management has the authority to suspend a student.

Suspension must be a proportionate response to the behaviour of concern and must follow fair procedures.

The Principal will:

- Notify parents/guardians and the student in writing of the decision to suspend, including reasons and duration.
  Report all suspensions to the Board of Management, outlining the reasons and length of each suspension.
- Suspension may only be applied where there are serious grounds, such as:
- The student's behaviour has had a seriously detrimental effect on the education of other students.
  The student's continued presence in the school at that time poses a threat to safety.
  The student is responsible for serious damage to property.

A single incident of serious misconduct may constitute grounds for suspension.

Purpose and Considerations of Suspension

Suspension may:

• Provide respite for staff and the student.
• Allow time for reflection on behaviour and consequences.
• Provide time for planning additional supports and interventions.

However, suspension can be counterproductive if used without clear rationale, planning, or review. School management will consider potential unintended consequences, including the risk of increased disengagement, alienation, or escalation of behavioural or academic difficulties.

Suspension will always be used within a framework of positive behaviour support, proportionality, and review, and in line with current Department of Education guidance.

Forms of Suspension

Immediate Suspension

In exceptional circumstances, the Principal may consider an immediate suspension necessary where the continued presence of the student in the school would represent a serious and immediate threat to the safety of pupils, staff, or any other person.

Immediate suspension is a serious measure and will only be used in line with fair procedures and the school's duty of care.

Factors to Consider Before Suspending a Student

Before deciding on suspension, the following factors will be considered:

- The nature and seriousness of the behaviour.
- Whether the behaviour has escalated despite interventions and supports already implemented.
- The age, stage of development, and cognitive ability of the student.

- Whether support has been sought from the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS), external psychological services, counselling services, or other relevant professionals where appropriate.

Suspension will be considered as part of an agreed and documented behaviour support plan wherever possible, and not as a stand-alone response.

Procedures in Respect of Suspension

Schools are required by law to follow fair procedures when proposing to suspend a student.

Where a preliminary assessment confirms serious misbehaviour that may warrant suspension, the following procedures will apply:

• Inform the student and their parents/guardians about the complaint.
• Provide an opportunity for the student and parents/guardians to respond.

Informing the Student and Parents/Guardians

The student and their parents/guardians will be informed:

• Of the nature of the complaint.
• Of how the matter will be investigated.
• That the behaviour may result in suspension.

Parents/guardians may be informed by telephone or in writing, depending on the seriousness of the matter.

A meeting with the student and parents/guardians will normally be arranged. This meeting provides:

• An opportunity for them to present their account.
• An opportunity to ask questions about the evidence.
• An opportunity to discuss alternatives to suspension.
• An opportunity to explore strategies to address the behaviour collaboratively.

If parents/guardians fail to attend a scheduled meeting, the Principal will write formally to:

• Advise of the seriousness of the matter.
• Emphasise the importance of attendance at a rescheduled meeting.
• Inform them that, in the absence of engagement, the school must proceed to make a decision in line with its duty of care and policy procedures.

Procedures in Relation to Immediate Suspension

Where immediate suspension is deemed necessary for safety reasons:

• A preliminary investigation will be conducted to establish the basis for suspension.
• A formal investigation will follow immediately after the suspension is imposed.
• All standard conditions relating to suspension apply.
• Immediate suspension must not be open-ended.

Parents/guardians must be notified immediately. Arrangements must be made for the student to be collected.

The school has a duty of care to the student. Under no circumstances will a student be sent home without first notifying parents/guardians.

Period of Suspension

A student should not ordinarily be suspended for more than three school days.

Suspensions exceeding three days may only occur in exceptional circumstances where the Principal considers a longer period necessary to achieve a specific objective.

Where a suspension longer than three days is proposed:

• The matter will be referred to the Board of Management for consideration and approval.
• The circumstances and expected outcomes will be clearly outlined.

The Board of Management may authorise the Principal, with the approval of the Chairperson, to impose a suspension of up to five days where it is not possible to convene a Board meeting in a timely manner, subject to agreed guidelines.

The Board of Management will normally place a maximum limit of ten days on any one suspension period imposed.

Any suspension that results in a total of twenty days or more in a school year will be formally reviewed by the Board of Management.

Such suspensions are subject to appeal under Section 29 of the Education Act 1998.

These provisions:

• Ensure students have time to reflect on behaviour.
• Prevent excessive loss of instructional time.
• Recognise the seriousness of suspension as a sanction.
• Ensure that ultimate responsibility for significant sanctions rests with the Board of Management.

Appeals

The Board of Management will provide an opportunity to appeal a Principal's decision to suspend a student.

Where a suspension decision is made by the Board of Management, an appeals process may be available through the school Patron, in accordance with statutory procedures.

All appeals will be conducted in line with principles of fairness, natural justice, and current legislation.

Section 29 Appeal

Where the total number of days for which a student has been suspended in the current school year reaches twenty school days, the parents/guardians, or a student aged over eighteen years,

may appeal the suspension under **Section 29 of the Education Act 1998**, as amended by the **Education (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2007**.

At the time parents/guardians are formally notified of such a suspension, they and the student will be informed of their right to appeal to the **Secretary General of the Department of Education** under Section 29 of the Education Act 1998. Clear information will be provided outlining how to lodge an appeal.

The Principal is required to report suspensions in accordance with current **Tusla Educational Welfare Service (formerly NEWB)** reporting guidelines, in line with Section 21(4)(a) of the Education (Welfare) Act 2000.

Implementing the Suspension

Written Notification

The Principal will notify parents/guardians and the student in writing of the decision to suspend. The letter will clearly state:

• The period of suspension, including start and end dates.
• The reasons for the suspension.
• Any study programme or learning supports to be followed during the suspension.
• Arrangements for returning to school, including any commitments required (for example, reaffirmation of the Code of Behaviour).
• The provision for appeal to the Board of Management (where applicable).
• The right to appeal to the Secretary General of the Department of Education under Section 29 of the Education Act 1998.

All written communication will be clear, accessible, and written in plain language. Particular care will be taken when communicating with parents/guardians who may have literacy difficulties or whose first language is not that of the school.

Expulsion

A student is expelled from a school when the Board of Management makes a decision to permanently exclude the student from the school, following compliance with the provisions of Section 24 of the Education (Welfare) Act 2000.

The Board of Management of a recognised school has the authority to expel a student.

Expulsion is a very serious sanction and will only be considered in extreme cases of unacceptable behaviour, following full adherence to fair procedures and statutory requirements.

Any decision to expel must be a proportionate response to the behaviour in question.

Prior to considering expulsion, the school will have taken significant steps to address the behaviour and avoid exclusion, including where appropriate:

- Meeting with parents/guardians and the student to explore strategies for behaviour change.
- Ensuring the student understands the possible consequences of continued behaviour.
- Confirming that all reasonable alternative interventions have been considered.
- Seeking support from relevant agencies and services, where appropriate, such as:
  • National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS)
  • Health Service Executive (HSE) Community Services
  • National Council for Special Education (NCSE)
  • Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS)
  • Other relevant support services

Re-integration Plans after suspension: The period *after* a sanction is just as important as the sanction itself. The "Re-integration Plan" includes a designated staff member to support

the student upon their return to help them catch up on work and manage any feelings of resentment or anxiety that could trigger further issues, i.e. the class teacher.

Clean Slate Principle: Once a sanction is completed, the student is given a "fresh start" and is expected to behave well without being unfairly labeled by past incidents.

Grounds for Expulsion

A proposal to expel a student requires serious grounds, such as:

Ø The student's behaviour is a persistent cause of significant disruption to the learning of others or to the teaching process.
Ø The student's continued presence in the school constitutes a real and significant threat to safety.
Ø The student is responsible for serious damage to property.

Single Incident Grounds for Expulsion

In exceptional circumstances, a single serious breach of the Code of Behaviour may constitute grounds for expulsion. Examples may include:

Ø A serious threat of violence against another student or staff member.
Ø Actual violence or physical assault against another student or staff member.
Ø Supplying illegal drugs to other students in the school.
Ø Sexual assault.

Procedures in Respect of Expulsion

Step 1: Investigation

A detailed investigation will be carried out under the direction of the Principal, in accordance with fair procedures.

Step 2: Recommendation

Following investigation, the Principal will make a formal recommendation to the Board of Management.

Step 3: Board Consideration and Hearing

The Board of Management will:

- Review the investigation.
- Ensure fair procedures were followed.
- Hold a formal hearing.
- Provide the student and parents/guardians with an opportunity to present their case.

Step 4: Board Deliberation and Decision

The Board will deliberate and decide whether to proceed with expulsion.

Step 5: Notification to Educational Welfare Officer

Where the Board forms the opinion that expulsion may be appropriate, the matter must be notified to the **Tusla Educational Welfare Service**.

In accordance with Section 24 of the Education (Welfare) Act 2000:

A student shall not be expelled from a school before the passing of 20 school days following receipt of notification by the Educational Welfare Officer.

Consultations will take place within this period.

Step 6: Confirmation of Decision

If, after the 20-day period has elapsed, the Board of Management remains of the view that expulsion is appropriate, the Board will formally confirm the decision.

This function may be delegated to the Chairperson and the Principal, where appropriate and in accordance with procedure.

Appeals

A parent/guardian, or a student aged eighteen years or over, may appeal a decision to expel to the **Secretary General of the Department of Education** under Section 29 of the Education Act 1998.

An appeal may also be brought by the Educational Welfare Service on behalf of a student.

The Section 29 appeals process begins with mediation provided by a mediator nominated by the Appeals Committee of the Department of Education.

For full procedural details, documentation requirements, and appeals steps, reference should be made to current Department of Education guidance.

Comprehensive statutory guidelines are available through **Tusla Educational Welfare Service guidance on school codes of behaviour**: https://www.tusla.ie/uploads/content/guidelines_school_codes_eng.pdf

Online Learning

The Code of Behaviour applies to remote and online learning in the same manner as it applies to learning in the traditional classroom environment.

St Mary's Special School adapted to online learning during 2020 in response to the Covid-19 pandemic. While online learning is not the primary mode of instruction, it may be necessary in certain circumstances (e.g., public health requirements, emergency closures, or other exceptional situations).

In the event of online learning, all staff are expected to uphold the same standards, principles, and positive ethos that apply within the physical school environment.

Staff should:

1. Maintain the same high expectations of pupil behaviour that apply in the physical classroom.
2. Use positive praise, reinforcement, and appropriate recognition strategies to acknowledge engagement, effort, and progress.
3. Recognise that pupils may experience anxiety or additional support needs during remote learning; therefore, emphasis should be placed on maintaining positive relationships, structure, clarity, and consistent communication.

Online learning environments should be structured, inclusive, and supportive, and should reflect the principles of Positive Behaviour Support and safeguarding best practice.

All online communication and platforms used by the school will operate in compliance with relevant data protection legislation (including GDPR) and child safeguarding guidelines.

Transition Support (To be added as a new section: "Supporting Transitions")

The school acknowledges that major transitions are high-risk periods for behavioural difficulties:

- **Transition Planning:** Specific programs and supports will be implemented for pupils moving into Junior Infants, those transferring from other schools, or those moving from primary to post-primary settings.
- **Goal:** These programs aim to help students navigate new boundaries, different teacher expectations, and changes in routines to minimize anxiety and avoid unacceptable behaviour.

Limitations

This document is not intended to list every possible behavioural situation that may arise, nor to prescribe every possible intervention strategy. Instead, it serves as a guiding framework for pupils, parents/guardians, staff members, the Board of Management, the Principal, and all stakeholders.

The Code of Behaviour will be applied with professional judgement, fairness, proportionality, and in accordance with current legislation, Department of Education guidance, and best practice in Positive Behaviour Support.

The policy will be reviewed annually to ensure ongoing compliance and effectiveness. An audit is conducted using the NEWB/Tusla audit checklist to ensure the code remains compliant with evolving legislation and the school's characteristic spirit.

Ratification

Ratified by the Board of Management on: _____

Signed: _____

(Chairperson, Board of Management)

Date of Review: _____