



Rathkeale College Bullying Guidelines and Procedures

It is the responsibility of the Rathkeale College Board of Trustees to ensure that the School is a "healthy and safe environment for all students" (NAG 5).

Rathkeale College will never tolerate bullying of any kind from its students or staff, whoever it is directed at.

PREAMBLE:

As an Anglican-Christian community relationships within the Rathkeale College community should be characterised by mutual respect and compassion as well as justice.

We should be recognised for our ability and readiness not only to tolerate diversity and difference; rather we should embrace and appreciate the fact that people come in all shapes and sizes, colours and creeds and with different strengths and abilities. These differences are a cause for celebration: our community is significantly enriched by a diverse staff and pupil population.

Our core Christian values call us to treat all people with the respect that is due to them as 'sons and daughters of God, created in the image of God'.

In response to this fundamental truth and mindful of our undertaking to 'treat others as we would expect to be treated ourselves', Rathkeale College sets the very highest standards when it comes to the way pupils and staff treat each other.

As a community we see no conflict between our duty to support and care for our students and the need to discipline them where such a need arises. Both are loving responses, grounded in our acceptance of the dignity of all persons and our commitment to enable them to realise their full potential

All students and staff have a fundamental right to safety and security. Rathkeale College should be a place where all are able to find friendship, exercise their gifts and talents and live and work free of intimidation, humiliation and ridicule.

DEFINITION:

Bullying occurs when a person or group is intimidated, humiliated, frightened, excluded, hurt or discomforted by a sustained pattern of behaviours directed at them by others¹.

There are different types of bullying. These include:

1. **Physical bullying:** when physical actions such as hitting, poking, tripping or pushing, are used to hurt and intimidate. Repeatedly and intentionally damaging someone's belongings is also physical bullying.
2. **Verbal bullying:** involves the use of negative words, like name calling, insults, homophobic or racist slurs, or words used to intentionally upset someone.
3. **Social bullying:** when lies, the spreading of rumours or nasty pranks are used. This includes repeated mimicking and deliberate exclusion.

¹ We are thankful to Greg Griffiths for this definition, which we have modified slightly. See his *Bullying In Schools: The Hidden Curriculum* (2003).

4. **Psychological bullying:** involves the repeated and intentional use of words or actions which can cause psychological harm. Examples include intimidation, manipulation and stalking. This also includes labelling boys who report bullying as 'Narks'.²
5. **Cyber bullying:** is when technology is used to verbally, socially or psychologically bully. It can occur in chat rooms, on social networking sites, through emails or on mobile phones.

Bullying isn't:

- mutual arguments and disagreements
- single episodes of social rejection or dislike
- single-episode acts of nastiness or spite
- random acts of aggression or intimidation.

Bullying happens in every community: it is not just something that happens in schools; neither is it confined to teenagers or boys.

Bullying can make life intolerable: it destroys confidence, undermines self-esteem, affects learning and can lead to extreme physical and psychological dangers to the point where a person may refuse to attend school or even, in more extreme cases, contemplate and commit suicide.

Our aim at Rathkeale College is to ensure that all students and staff are safe, healthy, happy and free from physical and psychological intimidation and harm.

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PASTORAL RESPONSE:

We acknowledge that bullying is often a complex issue and our pastoral response reflects this complexity in its multi-faceted approach to the problem.

Many schools and organisations seem to have lost confidence when it comes to dealing with bullying. There many reasons for this, not least the lack of a clear moral framework within which to operate. As a result many schools have adopted policies and strategies that they have hoped will function as a sort of 'Golden-Bullet' to make the problem disappear, with no long-term benefits to their communities.

As a Christian school we are very fortunate to be custodians of a very clear, comprehensive set of values and principles, as well as an approach grounded in consistency and strong leadership. Bullying will always happen where there are human beings living in community, much like weeds in a garden; like weeds in a garden bullying needs consistent attention and on-going remedies, both positive and negative.

OUR COMMITMENTS:

- Rathkeale College will encourage a climate of openness in its communication and dealings with parents and caregivers on the matter of bullying: parents and caregivers are encouraged to contact the School if they have any concerns at all about the welfare of their children and they can expect a receptive and attentive response in all instances.
- Rathkeale will foster and maintain a culture whereby it is very clear that bullying is not tolerated and we will communicate our expectations on bullying to all at Rathkeale regularly.
- The School will undertake to educate pupils and staff as to the nature and scope of bullying and encourage a climate of accountability where bullying is concerned: bullying is something that affects a whole community and a whole-community response is paramount in dealing with the issue.

² A term originally used exclusively by criminal elements to describe those who reported their activities – a School is not a **criminal** society and such terms have NO PLACE at Rathkeale College. Any pupil labelling others in this way is colluding in the bullying and will be dealt with appropriately.

- The School will take measures to ensure adequate supervision, as well as staff and student vigilance at all times, especially in identified 'trouble-spots'.
- The School will always investigate all allegations of bullying thoroughly and respond to all proven cases of bullying swiftly and confidently, communicating with staff and parents, and outside agencies and the student body, where this is deemed necessary and appropriate.
- The School will initially take a restorative approach to the problem but we will not hesitate to move to a disciplinary response in the case of repeat offenders and to exclude students where this is deemed appropriate and necessary to ensure the safety and integrity of others.

OUR EXPECTATIONS:

- It is expected that all members of our community, staff, students and parents alike, familiarise themselves thoroughly with our policy and procedures on bullying before they take up a post or begin student life at Rathkeale.
- Staff and students alike are expected to develop their knowledge and understanding of the issue and to develop an awareness of the signs of bullying and to cultivate an appropriate level of vigilance at all times.
- Staff and students alike are expected to report incidents of bullying to the appropriate Dean, Housemaster **and** the Chaplain and Principal (who are to be copied in on all correspondence and informed of any incidents). Members of Staff are also expected to report isolated incidents of conflict or unkindness as a safeguard: there may be more to an 'isolated' incident than meets the eye and Deans, Housemasters, the Chaplain and Principal may have access to further information.
- All members of staff are expected to model respectful behaviour in their dealings with colleagues, students and any other persons associated with the College.

Bullying will be dealt with seriously.

EDUCATION AND DATA GATHERING:

Rathkeale College's Bullying Education Programme begins in Year 9 with a comprehensive presentation on bullying. Boys are informed of the nature and anatomy of bullying as well as reasons for such behaviour and strategies for dealing with bullying.

The School's ethos, expectations and procedures will also be explained at this stage so that all students begin their life at Rathkeale with a very clear understanding of what bullying is as well as a good grasp of the School's policy and procedures.

Input in Year 10 and 11 comes from different sources: Whole School and Deans' Assemblies; Chapel Services; RE and other lessons to name a few.

We also survey all Year 9, 10 and 11 students up to 3 times a year to get a clearer picture of how our pupils are feeling about life at Rathkeale. These "relationship" surveys are followed up rigorously by the respective Housemasters, Deans, the Chaplain and the Guidance Counsellor. Summaries of each survey are then presented to the Principal.

DEVELOPING SOCIAL SKILLS AND RESILIENCE:

It is sometimes necessary to address aspects of the victims' personalities and behaviour. There is never any excuse for bullying, but there are students who need guidance when it comes to the nature of their social interactions. Those who come to us with less developed social skills can sometimes find this leads to conflict.

The School's Guidance Counsellor runs communication skills workshops, often in groups, in such instances. The Guidance Counsellor also offers sessions directed towards building resilience and developing assertiveness and confidence in those who feel themselves to be vulnerable at Rathkeale.

PROCEDURES FOR DEALING WITH BULLYING.

Rathkeale College normally operates a 3 Phase Strategy for dealing with bullying when it has become clear that bullying is taking place, although it should be made very clear that the College reserves the right, in light of evidence and circumstances, to bypass normal procedure should the need arise.

1. **The Restorative Phase:** In the first instance we will respond with a restorative approach. Victim and perpetrator will be encouraged to discuss and reconcile under controlled and supervised conditions.

There are no sanctions at this stage of the procedure and this will be made clear to the perpetrator, in order to encourage an open and honest response to the School's enquiries.

It will be made very clear, however, that if there is any repetition of behaviour that can be classed as bullying (whether it is directed at the same student as before or at another student), it will be treated as a serious disciplinary issue and the perpetrator will move to the **Disciplinary Phase** of the School's Procedures.

The perpetrator will be required to sign a contract to this effect, acknowledging their involvement in bullying and their understanding that further instance of bullying will result in disciplinary action.

The perpetrator's name will be formally logged and parents of both parties will be informed of the action taken and invited to contact the school to discuss matters should they wish to do.

Both victim and perpetrator will be offered support (counselling or mentoring) if they desire such measures.

2. **The Disciplinary Phase:** Should there be a further incident of bullying on the part of the perpetrator (whether it is directed at the same pupil as before or at another pupil) the student's name will again be formally logged and it will be noted that this is a second offence.

Victim and perpetrator will be normally be encouraged to discuss and reconcile under controlled and supervised conditions.

In addition disciplinary sanctions will be applied and the parents of the student in question will be required to attend a meeting with a member of the Senior Team at the College to discuss the situation.

At this stage the College will expect the perpetrator to provide evidence that they are addressing the causes of their behaviour. They will be encouraged to attend counselling and/or mentoring in the hope that they will begin to take responsibility for their behaviour and begin to address its root causes.

The victim will also be offered counselling/mentoring support.

The Rathkeale teaching staff will be informed, collectively, of the situation in order that both victim and perpetrator can be assured of a vigilant, well supervised environment in which progress, or otherwise can be noted.

3. **The Excluding Phase:** The college reserves the right to protect the community from persistent bullies and will remove such individuals from the college on a temporary or refer them to the Board of Trustees should the need arise and no other sensible procedure be thought applicable.

Therefore, any further instances of bullying will normally be dealt with as follows:

- This will involve a period of Internal Suspension or an official Stand Down period. Parents will be expected to attend a meeting with the Principal and the seriousness of the situation as well as the likely consequences for further bullying will be clearly explained.
- In more extreme cases students will be suspended and referred to the Board of Trustees Disciplinary Committee.

The Rathkeale teaching staff will be informed, collectively of any situation in order that both victim and perpetrator can be assured of a vigilant, well supervised environment in which progress, or otherwise can be noted.

In any case where a student returns to School, he will also be required to attend counselling and/or mentoring in the expectation he will begin to take responsibility for his behaviour and begin to address its root causes.

The victim will also be offered counselling/mentoring support.

CONCLUSION:

It is our hope that disciplinary proceedings affect a change of heart where they are applied. Boys are in need of clear boundaries and they benefit from clear, firm, fair rules and a consistent application of these rules.

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from its students or staff, whoever it is directed at.***