



BALLYOWEN MEADOWS SPECIAL SCHOOL

**PARENT/SCHOOL COMMUNICATION POLICY & COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE
2024**

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INTRODUCTION

This policy was developed through consultation with the School Staff, Parents* and the Board of Management of Ballyowen Meadows Special School. The family and home are central to the educational development of the child and it is essential that effective communication regularly occurs so that both Parents and the School Staff can work in partnership to ensure that each child's educational progress and also that their health and well-being is maintained.

The Complaints Policy and Procedures provides the framework within which a Parent who has concerns about their own child/children can raise their concerns in an agreed, fair and transparent manner, and a framework within which staff should deal with complaints from Parents.

*Reference to Parents in this policy include Guardians.

RATIONALE

The need for this policy arises from:

- Section 28, Education Act 1998 – procedures for processing complaints by Parents prescribed for all schools under the Act.
- The BMSS Dignity at Work Charter (contained in the BMSS Policy on Anti-Bullying and Harassment in the Workplace).

RELATIONSHIP TO THE CHARACTERISTIC SPIRIT OF THE SCHOOL

The school promotes positive home/school contacts and endeavours to enhance the self-esteem of everyone within the school community. This policy contributes towards these ideals.

In addition, the staff of BMSS recognises through their experience of working with Parents of children with autism that the child's education is more effective when the school and the family strive to be mutually supportive and respectful of each other.

Therefore, by incorporating policy, procedures and practices in relation to communication between home and school and providing a formal complaints procedure, this document aims to encourage all the stakeholders to work together for the benefit of the child and their learning.

AIMS

The aim of this policy is to revise school procedures and practices in relation to Home/School Communication for the following reasons:

(1) To provide structure and guidance to the BMSS community – management, Parents and staff - in relation to Home/School Communication so that positive collaboration can take place to enhance each child's educational attainment and thereby foster fruitful and trusting relationships between the school and Parents.

(2) To afford Parents and staff an opportunity to express opinions/grievances through the framework of a clear and defined staged procedure in the event of a complaint or an issue arising that needs to be resolved.

(3) 'To maximise the opportunity for early resolution of difficulties by encouraging parents to liaise, in the first instance, with the Class Teacher'.

(4) To ensure that the Board of Management meets its legal obligations by providing an open and transparent process accessible to the whole school community and through which complaints or issues can be resolved in a fair, equitable and non-confrontational way.

(5) To address the concerns of School staff in relation to their safety, health and well-being in the workplace and their right to dignity at work.

(6) To provide boundaries for Parents when pursuing complaints or other issues and to clarify the process for dealing with unreasonable complainants or Parents who do not act appropriately.

This policy does not cover:

(1) Complaints that are dealt with through legal channels.

(2) Matters of professional competence, which come under the remit of the Department of Education and Skills.

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Role of Parent – Parents are encouraged to:

- Develop close links with the school that are based on trust and respect.
- Participate in meetings in a positive and respectful manner, affirming the professional role of the teaching staff and all other staff members in the school.
- Collaborate meaningfully with the school in developing the full potential of their children.
- Hold Parental expectations of the school and their child's educational progress in line with their child's developmental ability and their diagnosis of autism.
- Behave in an honest manner and ensure truthfulness in all dealings with school staff.
- Share the responsibility of seeing that the school remains true to its ethos, values and distinctive character.
- Participate in policy and decision-making processes affecting them.
- Keep informed of school developments.
- Respond promptly to written communications sent by the school, if required.
- Prioritise and attend school meetings when arranged for their child's education.
- Attend whole school events, i.e. Christmas Concert and Summer Gala Concert.
- Become actively involved in the school life.
- Behave actively in supporting the work of the school by becoming involved with fund-raising activities.

Role of School – Structures in place to facilitate open communication & consultation with Parents:

- Transition visits/meeting for new Parents and pupils.

- Information meeting for all Parents early in the school year.
- Parents receive and have opportunity to review and discuss their child's Personal Pupil Plan (PPP) at three stages during the school year, i.e. at the (1) PPP meeting in October/November
- (2) PPP review meeting in March
- (3) End of Year Parent/Teacher Meeting in June when Parents also receive their child's Annual School Report.
- Parent PPP Report Form (completed each year prior to first PPP meeting).
- Informal communication throughout the year through the Home/School Communication book
- All Parents are consulted in the development of school policies through the BMSS Policy Consultation Form. Decisions taken to change current policies and procedures or to introduce new ones will be made known to all Parents in written format.
- Written communication to keep Parents up-to-date with school events, holidays and school concerns.
- Parents are invited to events throughout the year e.g. Christmas Concert and Summer Gala Concert.
- If a Parent wishes to consult with a Teacher, he/she can contact the School Office in advance to arrange a suitable time.

IN-SCHOOL PROCEDURES FOR PARENT/SCHOOL COMMUNICATION

- **REPORTING EDUCATIONAL PROVISION AND PROGRESS TO PARENTS**

Circular 56/2011 Initial Steps in the Implementation of the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategy has been adopted by the Board of Management. References to Parent/school communication are:

Parents have the primary responsibility for their children's learning and development. Schools can strengthen the capacity of Parents to support their children in this way by sharing meaningful information with Parents about the progress that children are achieving in the education system. This information needs to draw on the different sources of evidence that staff use, such as formal assessment tasks and outcomes, documented progress on objectives and milestones reached in their short and long-term planning, documented observations of the learner's engagement with tasks, and examples of pupils' work. In turn, Parents will often be able to enrich staff's knowledge of their child's progress through providing further information about their child's learning at home.

- **PARENT/TEACHER MEETINGS**

1. Welcome Meeting for All Parents

All Parents are invited to a Welcome meeting at the end of September. This meeting takes place when class placements have been finalised and Class Teachers have had the opportunity to spend time familiarising themselves with the pupils in their new classes. Meetings take place separately for the Junior Classes and the Senior Classes, initially in the School Hall with the School Principal, followed by class group Parent meeting with the Class Teacher in the classroom. Teachers use guidelines for curriculum delivery for the meetings provided by the School Principal and prepared in collaboration collectively with the teaching staff.

2. Personal Pupil Plan (PPP) Meetings (Incorporating the Individual Education & Care Plans)

Formal Parent/Teacher PPP meetings will be held three times a year for all pupils. In the interests of best practice this provision for formal Home/School Communication exceeds the Department of

Education requirements for Parent/Teacher meetings, whereby schools must hold one formal Parent/Teacher meeting per academic year, (Circular 14/04).

The purpose of the PPP meetings are:

- To establish and maintain good communication between the school and Parents
- To let Parents know how their children are progressing in school
- To help Teachers/Parents get to know the children better as individuals
- To help children realise that home and school are working together.
- To meet demands for accountability
- To share with the Parent the problems and difficulties the child may have in school
- To review with the Parent the child's experience of schooling
- To learn more about the child from the Parent's perspective
- To learn more about Parental opinions on what the school is doing
- To identify areas of tension and disagreement
- To identify ways in which Parents can help their children
- To negotiate jointly decisions about the child's education
- To inform the Parents of assessment results according to school policy.

An outline of the format of these meetings may be referred to in the BMSS Policy on Curriculum Delivery (in-development).

The school will attempt to co-ordinate PPP meeting times where siblings are concerned; however, regrettably, the school will not be able to provide supervision for pupils or siblings during Parent/Teacher meetings.

All written communication from the school will be sent to the child's home address as given on the enrolment form, unless otherwise requested by Parents.

In the case of separated Parents, requests can be made by both Parents to meet their child's Teacher(s) individually for Parent/Teacher meetings.

Regrettably, due to the large number of these meetings and their lengthy duration, it is only possible to reschedule dates/times in exceptional circumstances.

3. Personal Pupil Plan Meetings (October & March)

Following a period of assessment (usually in September/October), Teachers devise a Personal Pupil Plan for each pupil. Parents are invited during the first term to attend a meeting to discuss their child's PPP. Each PPP meeting is scheduled to last for one hour and Parents will meet with school staff drawn from the School Principal, Deputy Principal, Class Teacher and Special Needs Assistant(s). Where a child is involved in dual enrolment, representatives from the mainstream school will also be invited to attend this meeting.

In addition to the initial PPP meeting, an PPP review meeting is held in March. Parents are invited to attend this meeting to discuss their child's progress to date in relation to their educational targets. This meeting is scheduled to last 30 minutes and is also held with school staff drawn from the School Principal, Deputy Principal, Class Teacher and Special Needs Assistants. As with the initial PPP meeting, where a child is involved in dual enrolment, representatives from the mainstream school will also be invited to attend this meeting.

4. End-of-Year Parent/Teacher Meeting (June)

The end-of-year Parent/Teacher meeting takes place in June and lasts approximately 15 minutes and is scheduled to take place either before or after the school day. During this final meeting, the Class Teacher provides a summary of the year and the Parent receives a hardcopy of their child's evaluated PPP and Pupil Report.

The school will attempt to co-ordinate meeting times where siblings are concerned; however, regrettably, the school will not be able to provide supervision for pupils or siblings during Parent/Teacher meetings.

Parents are notified by the school when booking slots for the above meetings are available. Time slots for these meetings are available on one day a week over a period of four weeks. Parents are invited to contact the School Office to book a time to suit them for these meetings to be held.

In addition to these formal meetings, if a Parent wishes to arrange a meeting at any stage during the year to discuss their child, they may do so by requesting an appointment in writing and stating the purpose for the meeting. This is to ensure that staff are adequately prepared in advance.

SCHOOL REPORT CARDS

BMSS aims to help Parents to understand fully the evidence of learning that the school reports to them, especially information gained from assessment tests. The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) has provided a range of standard report templates to assist schools in reporting information about the progress of primary pupils to Parents, including information from assessment tests. The NCCA report card templates were developed through a process of consultation with schools and Parents can take account of research commissioned by the NCCA. All primary schools must use one of the report card templates for reporting to Parents on students' progress and achievement at school.

The BMSS Pupil Report provides for reporting in four key areas:

1. The child's learning and achievement across the curriculum
2. The child's learning dispositions
3. The child's social and personal development
4. Ways in which Parents can support their child's learning.

INFORMAL PARENT/SCHOOL MEETINGS

The School encourages communication between Parents and staff.

Meetings with the class staff (teacher, SNAs) at the classroom door to discuss a child's concern/progress are discouraged on a number of grounds:

1. Staff cannot adequately supervise his/her class while at the same time speaking to a Parent
2. It is difficult to be discreet when staff and other children are standing close by.

Occasions occur where a Parent needs to speak to a staff member urgently. Sometimes these meetings need to take place without prior notice. The School Principal will aim to facilitate such meetings, making every effort to ensure that the children in the class do not lose out on any of the teaching/learning time.

If Parents wish to drop in lunch boxes, etc, this can be done through the School Office as it is important to keep class interruptions to a minimum.

Parents are strongly discouraged from taking pupils out of school during term time in order to facilitate family holidays.

TELEPHONE CONTACT

The school may, on occasion, need to contact Parents by telephone, e.g. if a child is unwell and/or excessively distressed for a period of time. Parents are requested to ensure that they or another responsible adult nominated by them (say, where they are unavoidably unavailable) are contactable by telephone at all times during the school day. The school may, on occasion, need to contact Parents urgently by telephone, e.g. if a child is unwell and/or excessively distressed for a period of time. Parents are requested to ensure that they or another responsible adult nominated by them (say, where they are unavoidably unavailable) are contactable by telephone at all times during the school day. This is particularly important in the case of an ill child for whom it is planned will transfer to respite care at the end of the school day or when a child is due to travel home by bus.

In such cases, the School Principal or Deputy Principal must be consulted by the Child's Class Teacher prior to telephoning Parents to collect their child early from school. All telephone calls will be logged in the relevant School Telephone Log File.

Parents are advised that Class Teachers are not available to make or receive telephone calls during the School day as they are required to remain in their classrooms teaching and supervising their classes. If a Parent wishes to pass information to their child's Teacher, they may do so by telephoning the School Office and leaving a message.

It is vital that the school is immediately informed if family events/situations occur that cause anxiety to your child and therefore may adversely affect his/her education. In all matters pertaining to the wellbeing and education of pupils, only the Parents/legal guardians named on the enrolment form will be consulted by staff.

REPORTING OF BEHAVIOUR/ACCIDENTS/MEDICAL INCIDENTS TO PARENTS

The reporting to Parents of incidents involving a child will follow the procedures contained in the BMSS Code of Behaviour and Safety, Health and Welfare Policies. In the case of a non-emergency, the child's Class Teacher will contact the Parents by telephone or informally, through the Home/School Communication Book. Following this, the Parent may wish to contact the school the next school day for further discussion. Should further clarification regarding an incident be required, then Parents can request a face-to-face meeting with the Class Teacher and/or School Principal.

If Parents wish to request such a meeting, then they are welcome to contact the School Office to arrange a suitable date/time.

COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE

Complaints are infrequent, but BMSS wishes that all complaints are dealt with informally, fairly and quickly. If a Parent has a concern in relation to their child the agreed complaints procedure to be followed in primary schools in in Appendix 1 together with forms.

BEHAVIOUR OF ALL STAKEHOLDERS IN THE SCHOOL

Positive and respectful communication is very important to our school. This not only extends to the children but to all of the stakeholders e.g. the staff, Parents, visiting professionals and the wider community. Anyone entering our building should feel safe to do so. While the behaviour of children in our school is of vital importance, adults in the school community also have a responsibility to ensure their own behaviour reflects mutual personal and professional respect for others and has utmost regard for the particular environment of the school and its objectives.

Good practice in this regard includes the following:

- All stakeholders are expected to speak to each other with respect. Shouting or other aggressive tones, including passive aggressiveness, are not acceptable and in addition, this extends to aggressiveness in writing and through the Home/School Communication Book, which is also not acceptable. If a stakeholder displays anger or aggression to another member of the school community, they may be asked to remove themselves from the building. In certain cases, the Gardaí must be called.
- All stakeholders will treat our children with the utmost respect while on the premises
- Staff should not be asked to speak about another Parent's child. The staff of the school will respect your child's right to privacy so it is asked that Parents respect other children's rights to privacy
- When stakeholders meet, it is important to respect that the length of meetings should be kept to a reasonable amount of time. Times of meetings will be agreed beforehand and these should be respected by all parties
- Should a Parent need to have a discussion or meeting, an appointment should be made at a convenient time for both parties. This ensures that issues can be resolved. Classes begin at 9:20 am and finish at 3:00pm and this time should not be interrupted, if at all possible.

POLICY AND PROCEDURES FOR DEALING WITH UNREASONABLY PERSISTENT, HARASSING, VEXATIOUS, UNREASONABLE OR ABUSIVE COMPLAINTS

The Board of Management, Principal and School staff are committed to the improvement of BMSS and, together with Parents, aim to address and resolve any concerns as quickly as possible. The preceding procedure provides the structure for Parents to use if they wish to make a formal complaint.

Sometimes, however, Parents pursuing complaints or other issues treat staff and others in a way that is unacceptable or behave in an unacceptable manner. Whilst we recognise that some complaints may relate to serious and distressing incidents, we will not accept threatening, inappropriate, aggressive or harassing behaviour.

The aim of the following procedure is to clarify the process for dealing with unreasonable complainants or Parents who do not act appropriately.

What do we mean by 'unreasonable complainant'?

An unreasonable complainant may be anyone who engages in unreasonable behaviour when making a complaint. This will include Parents who pursue complaints in an unreasonable manner towards school staff.

Unreasonable behaviour may include:

- Actions which are:
 - Out of proportion to the nature of the complaint, or
 - Persistent when the complaints process is underway and even when the complaints procedure has been exhausted, or
 - Personally harassing, or
 - Unjustifiably repetitious or
 - Objective, harassing or prolific
- Prolific correspondence or excessive email or telephone contact about a concern or complaint
- Repetitious complaints where the complainant has no view about what would satisfy him/her and/or no intention to resolve the complaint
- Acting in a way not in line with the school aim of reaching a resolution and working with the school
- An insistence on
 - Pursuing unjustified or unmeritorious complaints and/or
 - Unrealistic outcomes to unjustified complaints
- An insistence on
 - Pursuing justifiable complaints in an unreasonable manner, e.g. engaging in the use of abusive or threatening language
 - Making complaints in public
 - Refusing to attend appointments to discuss the complaint
 - Refusing to discuss relevant issues when in meetings

What is 'harassment'?

The Board, Principal and School staff regard harassment as the unreasonable pursuit of issues or complaints, particularly if the matter appears to be pursued in a way intended to cause personal distress rather than seek a resolution.

Behaviour will fall within the scope of this policy if:

- it appears to be deliberately targeted over a significant period of time at one or more members of school staff or others

- the way in which a complaint or other issues are pursued (as opposed to the complaint itself) causes ongoing distress to school staff or others
- it has a significant and disproportionate adverse effect on the school community
- actions are pursued aggressively or in any manner not appropriate to an effective resolution.

What can Parents expect from the school?

Anyone who raises informal or formal issues and complaints with the school can expect the school to:

- follow the school's complaints procedure
- respond within a reasonable time
- be available for consultation within a reasonable time limit, bearing in mind the needs of pupils in the school, the nature of the complaint and what is practicably possible to facilitate within school structures
- respond with courtesy and respect
- attempt to resolve problems using reasonable means in line with the school's complaints procedure, other policies and practice and in line with legislative requirements
- keep those involved informed of progress towards a resolution.

What the school expects of Parents

The school expects anyone who wishes to raise concerns with the school to:

- treat all staff with courtesy and respect
- respect the needs of pupils and staff within the school
- never to use violence (including threats of violence) towards people or property
- recognise the time constraints under which members of staff in schools work and allow the school a reasonable time to respond to a complaint
- recognise that some problems may not be resolved in a short time
- follow the school's complaints procedure
- speak politely and respectfully using appropriate language and avoid any aggression or verbal abuse
- engage truthfully with school staff
- raise concerns/complaints in an appropriate place and at an appropriate time.
- be prepared to work towards a resolution and in partnership with the school.

School's response to unreasonably persistent complaints, vexatious complainants, unreasonable complaints or harassment

The following procedures are intended to be used in conjunction with the school's complaints procedure. Taken together, these documents set out how we will always seek to work with Parents and others with a legitimate complaint to resolve a difficulty and reach a resolution.

However, in cases of unreasonably persistent complaints or harassment, the school may take any or all of the following steps, as appropriate:

- Inform the complainant informally that his/her behaviour is now considered by the school to be unreasonable and/or unacceptable and request a changed approach.
- Inform the complainant in writing that the school considers his/her behaviour to fall under the terms of the Unreasonably Persistent Complaints/Harassment policy.

- Require all future meetings with a member of staff to be conducted with a third person present. In the interests of all parties, minutes of these meetings may be taken.
- Inform the complainant that, except in emergencies, the school will respond only to written communication.
- Inform the complainant in writing that his/her behaviour is now considered to fall under the terms of this policy and that any complaint will not be investigated further until it is pursued in a manner the school considers to be reasonable.
- Place restrictions on the individual's access to school and/or school staff.
- Cease all correspondence and communication with the complainant other than that necessary for the health and safety of any child or adult in school.
- Involve the Gardai.
- The school has a duty of care to staff and pupils and will take emergency measures should these become necessary in extreme cases.

Physical and/or Verbal Aggression

The Board of Management, Principal and School staff will not tolerate any form of physical or verbal aggression or personal harassment against school staff. If staff are subject to this type of aggression the school may:

- Prohibit the individual from entering the school site, with immediate effect.
- Inform the individual that communication with them will cease other than in an emergency.
- Involve the Gardai.
- Set a timeframe and review.

Where previous behavior is modified or changed:

Communication may be resumed at a later date within a reasonable period of time. However, if the complainant's behaviour deteriorates again, the school may resume the process identified above.

If a complainant's harassing/persistent complaining behaviour is modified and the complainant still lies within the time limit specified within the BMSS Complaints Procedure, the School will use its discretion and may resume the investigation of the complaint. The School will review as appropriate, and at a minimum of once a year, any sanctions applied in the context of this policy.

Legitimate new complaints, if not pursued in a harassing or unreasonable way, will still be considered, even if the person making them is (or has been) subject to the vexatious or persistent complaints policy. The school nevertheless reserves the right not to respond to communications from individuals subject to the policy.

SAFETY, HEALTH AND WELFARE AT WORK

The Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act became operative on 1 November 1989. It is an important piece of legislation for Boards of Managements and for those who work in schools, as schools and colleges were brought under the scope of safety legislation for the first time.

The Board of Management takes its duty of care to school employees very seriously. It is recognised that school staff may be at risk from violence in the form of verbal abuse, including passive

aggressive behaviour, shouting, bullying and threats. Additionally, assaults or other forms of intimidation may occur. This behaviour may come from pupils, Parents, guardians, other staff members or intruders.

Furthermore, following incident(s) of verbally aggressive behaviour, school staff may not agree to meet with the aggressor in the future until an apology has been forthcoming or indeed, depending on the nature of the incident(s), further meetings may not be facilitated.

Whilst it is accepted that judgement will have to be exercised in each event of assault on an employee, the following procedure will be followed and when followed demonstrates a clear commitment on the part of the Board of Management to be fully supportive of staff who have been subject to violent behaviour.

- a) The incident should be immediately reported to the School Principal, who will then inform the Chairperson of the Board of Management.
- b) The details of the incident will be recorded on the relevant school form (appendix 4) kept for this purpose in the workplace. Situations in which members have been intimidated or threatened with physical violence will also be recorded.
- c) The matter should be reported to the Gardai, where appropriate. This report should be made by the employee who was assaulted.
- d) The Board of Management will be notified of the incident and where necessary an emergency meeting of the board will take place. The board will notify its legal advisors of the assault. The board's insurance company will also be notified.
- e) Where the assault is committed by a Parent/guardian, the Parent/guardian will be immediately instructed in writing not to make direct contact with the Teacher/school pending full consideration of the matter by the board. Subsequently, the board will correspond with the Parent/guardian stating that the board considers the assault unacceptable and what action the board intends to take. An outline of what pre-conditions will be met before access to the school is restored.
- f) Applications for leave of absence in relation to a Teacher or special needs assistant may be forwarded to the Department of Education.

In respect of the occurrence of the above, all staff should be aware of **DES Circular 40/97** which deals with the procedures to follow if they feel they have been subjected to any of the above behaviours. A copy of this circular can be found in appendix 3 and also in the school's Health and Safety folder and the Anti-Bullying and Harassment in the Workplace folder on the school's network.

REVIEW OF THIS POLICY

This policy will be reviewed as deemed necessary by the Board of Management and also in the event of any future DES circulars or legislation.

Last review of complaints procedure developed by DES :4 March 2024.

IMPLEMENTATION AND COMMUNICATION OF THIS POLICY

This policy was sanctioned by the Board of Management on 7th March 2019.

- It is available to all Parents and is available on request, from the School Office and on the school website.
- It is available to all School Staff in the relevant Staff folder in the Cloud Storage System.

APPENDIX 1: COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE



¹Where a complaint is received about a principal the above process commences at Stage 1.2.

SCHOOL COMPLAINTS RECORD FORMS



BALLYOWEN MEADOWS SPECIAL SCHOOL

COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE SCHOOL RECORD FORM

Stage 1 – Informal stage (Class Teacher)

To be completed by Class Teacher following meeting with Parent:

Description of the nature of the complaint:

Agreed outcome/Action:

Action by Whom:

Complaint to proceed for attention of Principal: Yes/No



BALLYOWEN MEADOWS SPECIAL SCHOOL

COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE SCHOOL RECORD FORM

Stage 1 – Informal stage (Principal)

- To be completed by Principal following meeting with Parent:
- Has the Parent discussed the complaint with the Class Teacher? Yes/No

Description of the nature of the complaint:

Agreed outcome/Action:

Action by Whom:

Complaint to proceed for attention of Chairperson: Yes/No

APPENDIX 2: BMSS DIGNITY AT WORK CHARTER



BALLYOWEN MEADOWS SPECIAL SCHOOL

DIGNITY IN THE WORKPLACE CHARTER

Every person working in BMSS has the right to be treated with respect and courtesy and to have his or her individuality valued. While we recognise that there may be personal differences between people who work in BMSS, these differences will not impinge upon good working relations in the workplace.

All staff are valued for their personal and professional experience, knowledge and expertise and for their contribution within the workplace.

Courtesy, helpfulness, co-operation, integrity, trust, generosity, kindness, friendliness and justice are among the qualities that are valued in the workplace.

All individuals who work at BMSS or who come into contact with its staff or pupils have a duty to uphold this charter and to promote its provisions.

APPENDIX 3: DES CIRCULAR 40/97 ASSAULTS ON TEACHERS/SCHOOL EMPLOYEES



Note: This electronic version was re-typed from the original in March, 2006

Circular 40/97

AN ROINN OIDEACHAIS

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

PRIMARY BRANCH

CIRCULAR LETTER TO BOARDS OF MANAGEMENT AND PRINCIPALS OF NATIONAL SCHOOLS

ASSAULTS ON TEACHERS/SCHOOL EMPLOYEES

The Minister for Education wishes to bring to the attention of the school authorities his concern at the increase in the incidents of assaults on staff in primary schools. Violence in the workplace is an issue of grave concern for employees and employers alike. As in other workplaces, school employees are also the victims of violence in the workplace. During the course of their work, school staff may be at risk from violence in the form of verbal abuse, threats, assaults or other forms of intimidation. This behaviour may come from pupils, Parents, guardians, other staff members or intruders.

The Minister is anxious that every effort would be made to create and maintain a culture in schools where acts of violence are not tolerated and where incidents, when they do occur, are effectively and speedily dealt with.

In this context, the Department of Education wishes to draw the attention of Boards of Management to the following issues:

- the Board's duty to provide a safe place of work for employees
- measures to be taken to prevent or minimise the risk of assaults to Teachers or other staff employed in schools
- measures to be taken in support of staff who have been assaulted or threatened with assault; and ensuring that appropriate action is taken to safeguard against a recurrence.

1 Board's Duty to provide a Safe System of Work

The Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act became operative on 1 November 1989. It is an important piece of legislation for Boards of Management and for those who work in schools, as schools and colleges were brought under the scope of safety legislation for the first time.

The Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act 1989 requires employers to ensure the safety and health of their employees. It requires employers to draw up a Safety Statement:

- Identifying the hazards
- Assessing the risks to health and safety
- Putting in place appropriate safeguards

In the Education Sector violence should be considered as a potential hazard and assessed accordingly and where there is a risk to health and safety from violence appropriate safeguards must be put in place. Account should be taken of the specific circumstances that pertain in each school.

There should be consultation with those at risk concerning the measures to be taken and monitoring their effectiveness. Information should be given to staff on protection and preventative measures which are essential.

The Safety, Health and Welfare at Work (General Applications) Regulations 1993, provides that the Health and Safety Authority must be notified when an accident/ incident occurs in the workplace which requires treatment from a registered medical practitioner or treatment in hospital. An accident or incident which results in an employee being absent from work for 3 days or more must also be reported to the Authority.

2 Preventative Measures

Boards are urged to consider and implement measures which would prevent or minimise the risk of assault to the employees of the Board. The effectiveness of agreed procedures should be reviewed where necessary.

(a) External Liaison

Bearing in mind that communication between home and school should be frequent, open and positive, Boards in consultation with the principal and staff of the school should promote good practice for the conduct of communication between home and school.

In this context schools should develop and circularise to Parents, policies to deal with the following matters:

- Admitting Parents/visitors to the school

Parents who wish to have a consultation with a Class Teacher should be encouraged to make a prior appointment with the relevant Teacher. In urgent cases where a pre-arranged appointment is not appropriate, Parents should be encouraged to report in the first instance to the school secretary/principal. The practice of Parents approaching classrooms directly during teaching time should be discouraged. Specifically, access to Teachers should be on an "appointment only" basis where the circumstances of a meeting are likely to provoke a confrontation.

- Parent/Teacher meetings

Arrangements for the conduct of formal Parent Teacher meetings should be addressed in the School Plan. Parents should be given adequate notice regarding the timing of such meetings and encouraged to raise issues of concern. Where sensitive issues are the subject of discussion, arrangements should be made for conducting such interviews in privacy. Conducting interviews at the classroom door, while simultaneously supervising a class of children is not conducive to open communication. Particular care should be taken to ensure that Parent/Teacher consultations do not take place within the hearing of other pupils and/or Parents.

- Code of Discipline

Under the terms of Circular 20/90 schools are requested to develop a Code of Behaviour and Discipline for Pupils. This Code should be developed by the principal and staff in consultation with Parents and approved by the Board of Management. Once finalised, this Code should be notified to Parents. Any sanction imposed on a pupil should be in accordance with the Code of Discipline. Procedures for suspending pupils should be clearly set out in the school's Code of Discipline and should be adhered to.

- Complaints Procedure

Boards of Management should have in place a clear procedure for the processing of potential complaints. Some Managerial Associations have already negotiated such a procedure with the INTO. The terms of the complaints procedure should be notified to Parents and Parents should be encouraged to utilise stages of the procedure where necessary.

(b) Internal Procedures

The issues of internal school procedures should also be discussed from time to time at staff meetings. Staff should be familiar with all relevant procedures.

In circumstances of increased risk (e.g. schools for young offenders) training should be provided for staff:

- in identifying potentially violent situations, and
- in calming down potentially violent situations.

Specific examination should be given to circumstances where staff are:

- working alone on the school premises
- working in an isolated part of the school premises
- engaged in out of class activities
- working with pupils with behavioural difficulties
- engaged in home visiting.

3 Steps to be followed in the event of an assault

Boards should develop a clearly defined procedure to be implemented in the event of an assault on an employee. This policy should include a clear commitment on the Board's part to be fully supportive of staff who have been subject to violence.

It is accepted that judgement will have to be exercised in each case. However, the following elements should be included in each procedure

- (i) The incident should be immediately reported to the principal Teacher/other colleague.

The details of the incident should be recorded in an Incident Book kept for this purpose in the workplace. Situations in which members have been intimidated or threatened with physical violence should also be recorded.

- (ii) Where necessary immediate medical assistance should be sought.
- (iii) The matter should be reported to the Gardaí, where appropriate. This report would normally be made by the Teacher who was assaulted.
- (iv) The Board of Management should be notified of the incident and where necessary an emergency meeting of the Board should take place. The Board should notify its legal advisors of the assault. The Board's insurance company should also be notified.
- (v) Where the assault is by a pupil the matter should be dealt with in accordance with the school's Code of Discipline and as provided for in Rule 130(5) of the Rules for National Schools.
- (vi) Repeatedly aggressive pupils should be referred, with the consent of Parents, for psychological assessment in order to assess the pupils' social and emotional needs and to determine how these can be best met.
- (vii) Where the assault is committed by a Parent/guardian, the Parent/guardian should be immediately instructed in writing not to make direct contact with the Teacher/school pending

full consideration of the matter by the Board. Subsequently the Board should correspond with the Parent/ guardian stating:

- that the Board considers the assault unacceptable
 - what action the Board intends to take
 - outlining what pre-conditions should be met before access to the school is restored.
- (viii) Applications for leave of absence, in relation to a member who has been assaulted, should be forwarded to Primary Payments Section, Department of Education, Cornamaddy, Athlone, Co. Westmeath. Each application will be assessed on its merits.
- (ix) Where an employee's personal property is damaged in the course of an assault, compensation for its replacement value may be paid by the Board of Management under the extended school Protection Policy.

John Dennehy,
Assistant Secretary.

September 1997.

APPENDIX 4: BMSS RECORD FORM FOR ASSAULT ON EMPLOYEES



BALLYOWEN MEADOWS SPECIAL SCHOOL
ASSAULT OF EMPLOYEE
REPORTING RECORD FORM

| | |
|-------------------------------|--------------|
| Date: | Time: |
| Name of Injured Party: | |

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF INCIDENT

State exact circumstances and what was taking place. Provide the names of all parties involved in this incident.

If you require additional space please continue on a separate sheet, sign and date this sheet and attach it securely to this form.

Was the injured person suffering from physical or psychological infirmity prior to the accident/incident?

(please tick) Yes No

If yes, please give details:

Witnesses, if any:

Was Medical Attention Required? (please tick) Yes No

If yes, please give details:

Outcome/result of Medical Attention:

ABOUT THE INJURY

| Indicate Type of Injury | Part of Body Injured | |
|-------------------------|----------------------|-----|
| Abrasion, graze | Eye | Arm |

| | | | | | |
|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|---------|--|------------------------|--|
| Biting | | Head | | Wrist | |
| Bruise | | Face | | Hand | |
| Burn/scald | | Neck | | Fingers | |
| Concussion | | Back | | Non localised/Internal | |
| Fracture | | Chest | | Leg | |
| Multiple Injuries | | Abdomen | | Ankle | |
| Open Wound | | Pelvis | | Foot | |
| Shock | | Thigh | | Toes | |
| Sprain/Strain | | Knee | | Shoulder | |
| Unconscious | | Elbow | | | |
| No Injury | | | | | |
| Other (please give details) | Other (please give details) | | | | |

| | | |
|---------------------|----------------|--------------|
| Reported by: | Signed: | Date: |
| Reported to: | Signed: | Date: |

NEXT ACTION

| |
|--|
| |
|--|