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**TO : DISTRICT DIRECTORS
CIRCUIT MANAGERS
SCHOOL PRINCIPALS
SCHOOL GOVERNING BODIES**

**CC : CLUSTER CHIEF DIRECTORS
CHIEF EDUCATION SPECIALIST- ESSS
CIRCUIT MANAGEMENT CENTRE HEADS**

FROM : HEAD OF DEPARTMENT- EDUCATION

SUBJECT : GUIDELINES ON THE MANAGEMENT OF BULLYING IN SCHOOLS

DATE : 02 DECEMBER 2021

1 PURPOSE OF THE CIRCULAR

The purpose of this circular is to provide guidelines to schools on the management of bullying in schools.

2 INTRODUCTION

- 2.1. The Department is inundated with reports on bullying incidents in various schools within the Province. Various attempts and strategies were put in place to ensure that this unbecoming behaviour is properly managed at school level.
- 2.2. A memorandum was sent to all schools on the 15th of April 2021, providing guidance on how to identify bullying, available psychosocial support services within the Department, the roles of schools and parents as well as reporting incidents of Bullying.



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3 PHILOSOPHY BEHIND BULLYING IN SCHOOLS

Reports demonstrate that in addition to having a positive school climate and culture, schools must address prevention of bullying and intervention efforts specifically ensuring that:

- 3.1. The ethos of mutual respect and consideration is to be upheld in all schools.
- 3.2. Commitment to providing a safe and happy learning environment for all is to be promoted in all schools.
- 3.3. Non-tolerance of bullying, harassment, victimisation or discrimination of any kind is to be upheld in all schools.
- 3.4. Bullying is a whole-school issue and a whole-school approach in response should be taken.
- 3.5 All incidents of bullying are treated as equally serious and in turn, all staff, learners and parents are to play their part in preventing and tackling bullying in schools.

4 DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION PERSPECTIVE ON BULLYING

- 4.1. The Department of Education defines bullying as, 'behavior by an individual or group, repeated over time, which intentionally hurts another individual or group either physically or emotionally.'
- 4.2. It is commonly accepted that bullying is deliberately hurtful, causes feelings of distress/fear/loneliness in the victim, is difficult for victims to defend themselves against the perpetrator due to the imbalance of power between the perpetrator and victim) and is repeated over a period.
- 4.3. However, it is important to remember that, depending on its nature, a once-off incident may be considered to constitute bullying and can have precisely the same impact as persistent behavior.



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5 FORMS OF BULLYING

Bullying can include:

- 5.1. Physically hurting or attempting to hurt, harm or humiliate another person or damaging their property.
- 5.2. Verbal abuse such as name-calling, taunting, mocking or writing unkind notes.
- 5.3. Emotional manipulation such as excluding someone or spreading malicious rumours about them, building negative alliances based on gossip, or deliberately betraying former confidences to humiliate or isolate another learner.
- 5.4. Cyberbullying, i.e., via social networking websites, phone calls, text messages, photographs or emails.
- 5.5. Unpleasant remarks or actions related to any of the following:
 - 5.5.1. Race, religion or culture.
 - 5.5.2. Sexual victimisation (i.e., talking to or touching someone, who is unable to consent or refuse, in a sexually inappropriate way).
 - 5.5.3. Gender, gender identity or perceived gender identity
 - 5.5.4. Sexual orientation (e.g., homophobic bullying).
 - 5.5.5. Disability or Special Educational Needs.
 - 5.5.6. Intellectual or other abilities.
 - 5.5.7. Physical appearance or health conditions.
- 5.6. Any behaviour that a reasonable bystander would say was intended to hurt or upset the victim is wrong and could constitute bullying, including complicity that may fall short of participating directly in the bullying. **It is no justification that the perpetrator says or believes that the victim is not upset or hurt by his or her actions or words.**
- 5.7. Much bullying is performed in subtle ways, which are not easy to detect, a bully can use a simple look (*a cold stare or a stare in amazement*), word or gesture to a victim to signal an intended threat or insult. Some pupils are used at down - playing a **bullying** situation into a harmless one when an adult approaches.



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- 5.8. This makes it even more important for the victim or another pupil to come forward and report bullying. Staff and parents should be sensitive to symptoms of bullying.
- 5.9. Bullying is always hurtful to the victim and damaging to the whole school community. Anyone and everyone who engages in or witnesses bullying can be affected by it.
- 5.10. It can cause great distress, unhappiness and psychological damage and at its worst can lead to profound, psychological, emotional damage.
- 5.11. Bullying can also be a criminal offence, for example if the behaviour is threatening and amounts to harassment.

6 BULLYING AND FRIENDSHIP DIFFICULTIES.

Sometimes pupils can feel hurt or upset because they have been teased or have a fall-out with a friend. **This is different from bullying.**

6.1. Bullying

- 6.1.1. Is deliberately intended to hurt or humiliate.
- 6.1.2. Involves a power imbalance that makes it hard for the victim to defend themselves.
- 6.1.3. Is usually persistent.
- 6.1.4. Often involves no remorse or acknowledgement of the victim's feelings.

7 POSSIBLE SIGNS OF BULLYING

Changes in behaviour that may indicate that a learner is being bullied include the following amongst others:

- 7.1. Unwillingness to go to school or return to class after a break.
- 7.2. Failure to produce work, or producing unusually bad work, work that appears to have been copied or interfered with or spoilt by others.
- 7.3. Belongings suddenly going missing or being damaged.



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- 7.4. Change to established habits (e.g., giving up music lessons, sitting in the library instead of going out at playtime)
- 7.5. Diminished levels of self-confidence.
- 7.6. Inability to concentrate in class.
- 7.7. Anxiety, depression, becoming withdrawn or unusually quiet.
- 7.8. Repressed body language and poor eye contact.
- 7.9. Frequent absence, erratic attendance, late arrival to class.
- 7.10. Reluctance to leave the classroom at the end of lessons or school day.
- 7.11. Choosing the company of adults.
- 7.12. Frequent visits to the medical centre with symptoms such as stomach pains or headaches, especially at times or during lessons.
- 7.13. Unexplained cuts and bruises.
- 7.14. Difficulty in sleeping, nightmares.
- 7.15. Talking of suicide or running away.

8 PREVENTING BULLYING

A school can prevent bullying by:

- 8.1. Fostering a whole school ethos of good behaviour, mutual respect, and consideration; thereby creating a safe, happy and inclusive environment for learning.
- 8.2. Developing a culture in which diversity is championed and celebrated and in which the school takes a proactive role in educating pupils and other members of the school community in issues around equality.
- 8.3. Developing a culture in which the vulnerable are protected and incidents which might demonstrate prejudice or intolerance, are tackled and addressed.
- 8.4. Encouraging all members of the school community to have high expectations and model how to behave towards each other.
- 8.5. Raising awareness about bullying through opportunities in the curriculum, assemblies and national events such as Anti Bullying Weeks etc.
- 8.6. Developing pupils' social skills, confidence, resilience and self-esteem and defining the value of assertiveness in relationships as opposed to aggression, whether direct



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or indirect.

- 8.7. Educating pupils and other members of the school community about how to keep themselves safe when **online or using social media** or other electronic means of communication, so they take maximum precautions to help protect themselves from being victims of cyberbullying.
- 8.8. Ensuring that all pupils sign up to the school's 'Code of Conduct', which might make it clear that all forms of bullying are unacceptable. This message can be re-enforced in lessons and pastoral sessions as well as through safety sessions that might be held with parents.
- 8.9. Setting up effective procedures for reporting (*including effective use of safety boxes where these are provided*), investigating and tackling bullying, and encouraging learners to report instances of anything they perceive to be bullying.
- 8.10. Making it clear to all that incidents of cyberbullying or bullying of any kind that occurs off the school premises but **have an impact on the classroom environment or relationships between learners** will be pursued with the same seriousness as bullying occurring within school.
- 8.11 Making it as easy as possible for pupils who are being bullied to talk to someone, they trust and get help confidentially.

9 DEALING WITH BULLYING

9.1. If you are being bullied.

- 9.1.1. Stay calm and try to appear confident. Tell the bully to stop and get away from the situation as quickly as you can.
- 9.1.2. Do not suffer in silence: talk to a member of staff. This could be your class teacher, tutor or House Mistress/Master, the school nurse or counsellor, or any other member of staff you trust.
- 9.1.3. If you are unhappy about talking to a member of staff directly, you could talk to someone in your family or a friend.
- 9.1.4. **Telling** does not make you a 'grass' or 'snitch': **not telling** means that the bullying is likely to continue endlessly.



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- 9.1.5. Be assured as a learner that the school takes every report of bullying seriously and will act upon it, even if it occurred outside the school.
- 9.1.6. Be assured as a learner that the school will keep records of what has happened and will consult and support you in whatever action it (*the school*) takes. The learner remains central.
- 9.1.7. Where a learner is bullied by a member of staff, the learner should take the same action as if it were another pupil, that is, report the matter to someone you trust.

9.2. If you know that someone else is being bullied

- 9.2.1. Talk to a member of staff, so that the school can take steps to help the victim.
- 9.2.2. Stand up for them, studies show that one of the most effective ways of stopping bullying is for fellow pupils to show their support for the victim.
- 9.2.3. Be sceptical about rumours concerning other pupils. **Don't add to them.** Put yourself in the position of the person targeted.
- 9.2.4. Don't be drawn into simply standing-by.
- 9.2.5. Many perpetrators will not persist in bullying unless they have an audience to play to, and **by not taking action it could be argued that you are condoning what is happening.**

10 WHAT THE SCHOOL MUST DO

- 10.1. The exact course of action will vary with each situation. The immediate objective should be that, bullying incidents are brought into the open and strategies agreed to help resolve the problem, encouraging all involved to return to responsible, caring behavior.
- 10.2. All reports of bullying must be taken seriously and investigated immediately.
- 10.3. Bullying based on protected characteristics is taken particularly seriously.
(*Examples of protected characteristics are: Disability, age, sex or sexual orientation, race, religion etc.*)
- 10.4. Whilst it is not possible for any person who receives a report of a bullying incident to swear that it will be kept confidential, however, the action to be taken **must** be discussed with the victim **at every stage.**



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- 10.4. Everything action that has been taken must be carefully recorded and kept safely.
- 10.5. The **aim** is for a peaceful resolution ensuring that the victim is safe, revenge is not helpful or appropriate for the victim, whilst the **objective** is to stop the bullying in the entire school.
- 10.6. The victim must be supported throughout the process.
- 10.7. Sanctions may be imposed (see below) but guidance and help should also be available for the perpetrator(s) to help change her/their behaviour.
- 10.8. Staff must monitor the situation to ensure that the bullying does not continue.
- 10.9. The school **MUST** keep records of all bullying incidents, which are clearly categorized and monitored to identify trends and inform preventative work in the school and future development of policies and procedures.
- 10.10. All forms of bullying are unacceptable and all reports of bullying must be investigated and dealt with irrespective of who the person responsible for the bullying incident might be.
- 10.11. In any case of bullying, parents ought to be informed by the school and must be invited to discuss the matter. Keeping regular contact with parents until the issue is resolved might prove helpful.

11 CONSEQUENCE MANAGEMENT

- 11.1. Class teachers or any staff member must report bullying incident to the School Management as soon they become aware of the incident.
- 11.2. Serious cases that cannot be resolved by the school must be reported by the School Principal to the District Office.
- 11.3. No case must remain unresolved for a period exceeding twenty (20) school days.
- 11.4. Failure by the School to comply with these guidelines will lead to disciplinary action against the SMT by the Department



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DATE