

## Behaviour Policy

### Introduction

This document is a statement of behavioural supports and approaches to behaviour management in place at Saplings Special School, Goresbridge. It was developed through a process of consultation with the teaching staff and behaviour analyst in line with guidelines as set out in the National Educational Welfare Boards booklet “Developing a Code of Behaviour, guidelines for school” (May 2008). The draft policy was then submitted to the Board of Management for their consideration. It has since been reviewed on an annual basis.

*This policy has been developed in the context of Saplings Special School being a school which caters for children with autism and complex needs. A number of our children may exhibit challenging behaviour from time to time. Each child will have a behavioural support plan which directly links to the school’s code of behaviour policy. Please note that it is a requirement of enrolment that parents agree to the schools Behaviour Policy.*

### Rationale

Saplings Special School, Goresbridge is required under the Education Act (1998), and the Education Welfare Act (2000) to develop a policy on behaviour and discipline. Saplings, Goresbridge is a special co-educational school that caters for children with autism and complex needs. In devising this approach to behavioural support, consideration has been given to the challenges experienced by the children, keeping in mind individual circumstance and need. However, it is acknowledged that each child has the right to an education in a relatively disruption free environment.

This policy on behavioural support allows for implementation of individual behaviour support plans, but when the safety and duty of care to others is compromised, the procedures outlined in this policy takes precedence.

### Relationship to school ethos

This policy is based upon mutual respect of all stakeholders, students, parents, Board of Management and staff, and supports the ethos of our school, which is a caring and enabling community that seeks to help children to reach their full potential, and assist them to participate safely in community life. Saplings Goresbridge is dedicated to providing the highest quality of learning, teaching and pastoral care. In partnership with the parents/guardians and families we seek to provide emotional, social, physical and spiritual development whilst maintaining the dignity of the child.

### Vision and Aims

- ✓ To create a safe, harmonious, secure and ordered environment which will facilitate the educational, moral, emotional, behavioural and social development of all students.
- ✓ To foster an atmosphere of respect, tolerance and consideration for others.
- ✓ To identify the individual difficulties of each child as he/she presents with those difficulties. To assist the children to overcome these problems and to facilitate them receiving an appropriate education.

- ✓ To provide guidance for pupils, teachers and parents on behavioural expectations.
- ✓ To assist parents and pupils to understand the systems and procedures that form part of policy on behaviour support and to seek their co-operation in the application of these procedures.
- ✓ To ensure that the school's expectations and strategies are widely known and understood throughout the availability of organisational policies and an ethos of open communication.
- ✓ To ensure consistency of approach to both appropriate and inappropriate behaviour, and encourage the collaboration of home and school.
- ✓ To ensure the safety and wellbeing of all members of the school community.

#### **Organisational Procedures and Strategies**

Saplings Goresbridge utilises a number of strategies and organisational procedures in order to make provision for the needs of the individual and reduce the occurrences of inappropriate or challenging behaviour.

- ✓ Development of Individual Education Plans and Behaviour Support Plans for each student.
- ✓ Individual assessments to identify which areas may be problematic for students, especially in the areas of sensory and behavioural needs.
- ✓ Positive behaviour management strategies and crisis prevention methods utilised throughout school
- ✓ Data collection on individual educational targets and behavioural targets where deemed necessary to monitor progress and allow for adaptation of approach.
- ✓ Advice sought from visiting professionals regarding individual children as necessary.
- ✓ Development of close relationships with parents to ensure consistency of approach and generalization of skills.
- ✓ Individual sensory regulation programmes to enable the child to regulate and be available for learning.
- ✓ Structured teaching environment
- ✓ Use of visual supports throughout the school, with individual visuals specific to cognitive ability and learning style (ie. Icon, photo, object schedule).
- ✓ Individualised modes of communication, communication books, PECS, Lámh, Speech, I-Pad apps.
- ✓ Emphasis placed on social and life skills education (eg, Social stories, SPHE programmes)
- ✓ Pre-teaching requisite self-management and relaxation skills
- ✓ Natural social rewards, such as praise, smiles, positive attention and encouragement
- ✓ Visual representations and reminders of consequences.
- ✓ Personalised reward systems.
- ✓ System of Prompting/Fading: verbal, gestural, environmental and hand over hand assistance

#### **School Rules**

School rules are kept to a minimum and are devised with regard for the health, safety and welfare of all members of the school community. If a school is to function efficiently, it

is necessary that rules and regulations are clearly stated and enforced consistently and fairly. There are six main rules;

- We are kind and friendly
- We sit nicely
- We have quiet hands
- We use a quiet voice
- We listen
- We try hard

*Please note that these rules are presented at the most simplistic level, but language and expectations surrounding these basic rules will be adjusted according to the level of receptive language of the individual, and that details of rules that need to be amended will be outlined in the behaviour support plan.*

#### **Before/after school**

Parents are reminded that the staff of the school does not accept responsibility for pupils before the official opening time of 9.10am or after the official closing time of 3pm unless pupils are involved in an extra-curricular activity arranged by the school and approved by the Board of Management. Pupils involved in such activities are expected to behave in accordance with school behaviour policy during these times.

#### **Possible Consequences for inappropriate behaviour**

- ✓ Reasoning with pupil
- ✓ Visual representation of consequences and verbal reminders
- ✓ Temporarily moved to a quiet space/another room to practice pre-taught self-management skills. NB This is different to requesting a break or sensory breaks.
- ✓ Reduction/difference in array of reinforcers available
- ✓ Loss of privileges where developmentally appropriate.
- ✓ Teacher communicating with parents.
- ✓ Exclusion from school (In accordance with Rule 130 of Rules for National Schools as detailed in Curricular and Education Welfare Act 2000).

*NB: Pupils will not be deprived of engagement in a curricular area, except on the grounds of health/safety.*

#### **Challenging Behaviour**

The school ethos supports a functional approach to the management of challenging behaviour. Behaviours which may present a challenge to others are adaptive and functional for the student; that is to say that the behaviour exists in the student's repertoire because it has been learned and serves a function for the student (e.g. a student may engage in assaultive or destructive behaviour as a means of escaping a task that he/she finds particularly demanding). The approach in Saplings Special School Goresbridge is to decrease challenging behaviour by teaching and reinforcing appropriate replacement behaviours that serve the same function (e.g. teaching the student an appropriate means of asking for a break from a demanding task without resorting to challenging behaviour).

Within Saplings Special School Goresbridge, the staff capitalise on learning opportunities throughout the day across all school settings. The aim is to teach appropriate functional communication using whatever supports necessary (e.g. gestural/visual prompts; schedules of reinforcement etc.), in order to reduce as much as possible instances of challenging behaviour for all students.

All members of the school community should adopt a positive, calm approach to challenges that may be encountered from time to time. Every effort should be made to ensure that the classroom and school environment is enriched with frequent opportunities for students and staff to encounter social praise and acknowledgement for achievements and to experience a varied schedule of activities to be enjoyed across the school day.

#### **Strategies/incentives.**

Personalised reinforcement strategies are developed by staff to increase appropriate behaviour and/or reinforce the teaching of new skills whilst being cognizant of developmental age and learning style. These may include, but are not limited to:

- ✓ Social praise and acknowledgement
- ✓ Merit awards for achievements
- ✓ Token/points economies for work completed throughout the day
- ✓ Access to preferred items/activities intermittently throughout the day
- ✓ Access to a work break following an appropriate request or the completion of a particular task
- ✓ Group-based reinforcement contingencies for rule-following/appropriate behaviour.

*Assistance from the behaviour analyst may be needed to develop additional reinforcement strategies as required.*

#### **Reducing challenging behaviour.**

Our approach in response to challenging behaviour is to affect a decrease in inappropriate behaviour by increasing appropriate behaviour. This should be achieved through the employment of reinforcement strategies. Only when data indicates that these positive measures have been tried and exhausted; or have been unsuccessful in eliminating or sufficiently reducing problem behaviour, should a reductive consequence be considered. Reductive consequences refer to specific consequences that are applied contingent upon the occurrence of an undesired behaviour with the purpose of decreasing the likelihood of it recurring in the future. These consequences may include:

- ✓ Verbal reminders
- ✓ Loss of privileges
- ✓ Reduction of access to an array of preferred items/activities
- ✓ A report to a parent/school principal
- ✓ The requirement of the completion of an additional task in order to regain access to reinforcement schedules
- ✓ Restitution of the environment following disruptive behaviour
- ✓ Removal of attention from the teacher/non-exclusionary time-out.
- ✓ Detention (where appropriate to the individual)

These measures would be detailed in the individual behaviour plan and will have been discussed and agreed with parents in advance, and with children as appropriate.

Consultation with external professionals may be sought by the Principal and Board of Management in this regard if deemed necessary. The implementation of any behaviour plan should be in compliance with the ethical guidelines for best practice specified by the Behaviour Analyst. Due regard should be given to the age and needs of the individual child, the Health and Safety of all students and staff, and the resources available to the school, in developing an appropriate behaviour plan that is feasible to implement with a view to a successful outcome for the student.

### **Crisis management**

The focus of all Behaviour Support at Saplings Special School Goresbridge is on positive programming, affirming appropriate behaviour, enabling students to self-regulate their behaviour and the anticipation and prevention of behavioural crises.

The code of crisis management at Saplings Special School Goresbridge is that of the Professional Crisis Management Association (PCMA) as established by Fleisig (1980) and the Intensive Residential Behavioural Treatment Centre, Pembroke Pines, Florida, USA, approved for use under the regulation of the British Institute for Disabilities and the Irish Department of Education and Skills. The Board of Management Saplings Goresbridge will sanction restrictive practices up to and including BARR procedure. For further information please see school policy on crisis management and prevention.

In extreme cases, where all internal processes have been exhausted, and external professionals have been involved, and the Board of Management is of the opinion that the school does not have the resources to meet the challenges posed by the welfare of the pupil, other pupils or staff, the Board will follow the procedures and guidelines as stipulated in the Education Welfare Act 2000, Section 24 with regard to suspension and expulsion. This action will be taken only when there is no alternative and with due consultation with the parents, the National Educational Welfare Board and staff. Please find full details of these procedures in **Appendix A**

It should be noted that in Saplings Goresbridge, suspension will be part of an agreed plan to address the behaviour of the student. It is not intended to be punitive, but should:

- ✓ Provide the staff with an opportunity to liaise with the parents in devising an action plan.
- ✓ Provide the staff with an opportunity to plan other interventions and to organise physical space to minimise the risks to others.
- ✓ Enable the school team to identify behavioural goals with the parents and student.
- ✓ Allow time for adaptations to any risk assessments in place for that student.
- ✓ Allow time to share pertinent information on behavioural strategies which have been amended with relevant personnel.
- ✓ Allow staff to seek further support from external professionals where appropriate.

### **Implementation**

Every member of the school community has a role to play in the implementation of behaviour support. Rules will be kept to a minimum and will emphasise positive behaviour. They will be applied in a fair and consistent manner, with due regard to the abilities of the pupils and to their individual difficulties. Appropriate behaviour will be encouraged and rewarded. Where difficulties arise, parents will be contacted at an early stage.

### **Roles and Responsibilities**

The adults encountered by the children at school have an important responsibility to model high standards of behaviour, both in their dealings with the children and with each other, as their example has an important influence on children. As adults, we should aim to:

- ✓ Create a positive climate with realistic expectations.
- ✓ Promote, through example, honesty and courtesy, encouraging relationships based on kindness, respect, and understanding of the needs of others.
- ✓ Provide a caring and effective learning environment
- ✓ Ensure fair treatment for all regardless of age, gender, race, ability or disability.
- ✓ Show appreciation for the efforts and contributions of all.

### **Board of Management**

- ✓ To provide a safe and comfortable working environment.
- ✓ To ensure the safety and wellbeing of all in Saplings Goresbridge in accordance with their responsibilities under the Health and Safety at Work Act.
- ✓ To fulfil responsibilities in terms of applying the sanctions of suspension and expulsion.
- ✓ To ratify and review the code as appropriate.
- ✓ To support the Principal and staff in implementing the code.

### **Principal and Teachers**

- ✓ To promote a positive atmosphere in the school, based on a climate of empathy, and respect for others.
- ✓ To collaborate, behavioural support plans that are individualised and take into account cognitive ability and learning style, which work in the context of the classroom.
- ✓ To ensure that the behavioural support procedures are implemented in a fair and consistent manner.
- ✓ Ensure parents are informed of behaviour support strategies and learning goals to support their child.
- ✓ Communicate with parents where necessary, and provide reports on matters of concern.

### **Behaviour Analyst**

- ✓ As above.
- ✓ To communicate contents of behaviour support plans to auxiliary staff, and to train them in the implementation of same as agreed with class teacher.
- ✓ To keep staff informed of updates to behaviour support plans.
- ✓ To provide training and support to parents where possible and after consultation with the Principal.
- ✓ Undertake training of staff in appropriate crisis intervention procedures.

### **Auxiliary staff**

- ✓ Support and implement the school's behaviour policy
- ✓ Recognise and affirm good work
- ✓ Recognise and make provision for individual differences among pupils.
- ✓ Be courteous, consistent and fair

- ✓ Provide support for colleagues
- ✓ Keep opportunities for disruptive behaviours to a minimum, and deal appropriately with minor behaviours as outlined in behaviour support plan or under direction of the teacher.
- ✓ Ensure consistency in implementation of behaviour support plans.
- ✓ Collaborate with the teacher to record instances of challenging behaviour or repeated instances of inappropriate behaviour.
- ✓ Undertake training in PCM
- ✓ Exercise judgement and common sense in order to maintain the Health and Safety of everyone on the premises.

#### **Parents/Guardians**

- ✓ To encourage children to have a sense of respect for all members of the school community.
- ✓ To ensure that children attend regularly and punctually. The school will comply with the statutory requirements regarding the notification of student absences.
- ✓ To be interested in, and support and encourage their child's school work.
- ✓ To be familiar with the school policy on behaviour and support its implementation.
- ✓ To co-operate with the class staff in instances where the behaviour of their child is causing difficulties for themselves and others.
- ✓ Communicate with the school in relation to any problems which may affect the progress or behaviour of a child.
- ✓ Become familiar with the support strategies and learning goals necessary to support their child and ensure success and generalisation outside the environment of the school.

#### **Data Protection in respect of suspension and expulsion**

Formal written records will be kept of:

- The investigation
- The decision making process
- The decision and the rationale for the decision
- The duration of the suspension and any conditions attached to the suspension.

The Principal will report all suspensions to the Board of Management, with the reasons for and the duration of each suspension. The Principal will report suspensions to TUSLA when a student has been suspended for 6 days and for 20 days accumulatively. These records will be kept in hard copy and stored in a pupil file in a locked cabinet, accessible only by Principal and Deputy Principal. They will also be stored electronically on Principal's laptop, and will be kept in line with legal requirements for retention of school records.

#### **Ratification and Review**

This **Behaviour Support Policy** was reviewed and re-ratified by the Board of Management of Saplings Special School at its meeting held on **28<sup>th</sup> April 2025**. It was subsequently communicated to all stakeholders via agreed minutes and is available to view on request. It will be reviewed annually.

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_  
*Principal*

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_  
*Chairperson, Board of Management*

## Behaviour Policy - Appendix A (Education Welfare Act 2000, Section 24)

### Suspension

Suspension is defined as 'requiring a student to absent him/herself from school for a specific number of school days. The Board of Management has the authority to suspend a student. This authority to suspend for a period of up to and including three days is formally delegated to the Principal by the Board of Management.

Before serious sanctions such as detention, suspension or expulsion are used, the normal channels of communication between school and parents will be utilised. Communication with parents may be verbal or by letter depending on the circumstances.

Suspension will be an appropriate response to the behaviour that is causing concern such as:

- ✓ The student's continued presence in the school at this time constitutes a threat to the safety of others.
- ✓ The student's behaviour has a serious detrimental effect on the education of the other pupils.
- ✓ The student is involved in a serious incident of challenging behaviour.

For extreme challenging behaviour or repeated instances of serious challenging behaviour which poses a safety risk to students and staff, suspension may be considered. The Chairperson of the Board of Management will be informed and the parents will be requested in writing to attend at the school to meet the Chairperson and the Principal. Parents are required to give an undertaking to cooperate with the school in developing strategies to address the problem behaviour. Prior to suspension, where possible, the Principal may review the case in consultation with members of the staff involved, with due regard to records of previous challenging behaviour, their pattern and context, reductive consequences and other interventions used and their outcomes, and any relevant medical information. Suspension will be in accordance with the Rules for National Schools and the Education Welfare Act 2000.

### Immediate suspension

In the case of extreme challenging behaviour, where it is necessary to secure the safety of the pupils and staff, the Board may authorise the Chairperson or Principal to sanction an immediate suspension for a period not exceeding three school days, pending a discussion of the matter with the parents. In cases where suspension is to take effect immediately and in the interest of health and safety:

- ✓ Parents/Guardians will be informed by phone and asked to collect the student
- ✓ Parents will be invited to meet with the Principal and class teacher to receive the explanation for the suspension.
- ✓ Student (where appropriate) and parents will be given the opportunity to respond
- ✓ Fair procedures will be followed at all times.

### Removal of Suspension (Reinstatement)

Following or during a period of suspension, the parent/s may apply to have the pupil reinstated to the school. The application will be considered with reference to any necessary support and resources required by the school (e.g. physical changes, consulting other experts

where applicable etc). The Principal and the behaviour analyst will facilitate a review of the existing behaviour plan for the pupil if required and will re-admit the pupil formally to the class.

### **Written Notification**

All suspension decisions will include a formal letter of notification with the following:

- ✓ Notice of suspension.
- ✓ Duration of suspension.
- ✓ Dates on which the suspension will begin and end.
- ✓ Reason for the suspension.
- ✓ Arrangements for returning to school including any commitment to be entered into by students (where applicable) and parents.
- ✓ Information of the appeal rights and procedures following suspension.
- ✓ A statement that the Education welfare Board has been informed if appropriate.

### **Right to appeal**

A pupil or his parents / guardians may appeal the Principal's decision to suspend to the Board of Management. Such an appeal must be made in writing to the Chairman of the Board of Management stating the grounds on which the appeal is being made. However, the school may insist that the pupil remain at home while the appeal proceeds. In the event that an appeal is successful, the suspension will be lifted and if the suspension has already been served, it will be expunged from the pupil's record. An appeal of a suspension decision may also be made under Section 29 of the Education Act where a student has been suspended for 20 days or more. Information regarding this right of appeal will be provided with a formal notification of the suspension, if applicable. Beyond success in such appeals, a suspension may be rescinded in the following circumstances:

- ✓ New circumstances come to light after the suspension has been applied that would have mitigated the sanction had they had known beforehand.
- ✓ Other mitigating factors consistent with the application of the Principles of Natural Justice.

### **Expulsion**

The Board of Management has the authority to expel a student. As a matter of best practice, the authority will be reserved to the Board of management and will not be delegated. We recognise that expulsion of a student is a very serious step and one that will only be taken by the Board of Management in extreme cases where the Health and Safety of other children and staff is compromised. The school will take every possible step to address the behavioural difficulties and to avoid the expulsion of a student, and it will be considered only when every other avenue of support, including involvement of external bodies has failed.

Procedures for expulsion will proceed in accordance with the Rule for National Schools and the Education Welfare Act 2000. Before suspending or expelling a pupil, the Board shall notify the Local Welfare Education Officer in writing in accordance with Section 24 of the Education Welfare Act.

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

- ✓ The student's behaviour is a persistent cause of disruption to the learning of others or to the teaching process.

- ✓ The student's continued presence in the school constitutes a real and significant threat to safety.

Given the seriousness of expulsion as a sanction, the Board of Management should undertake an extremely detailed review of a range of factors in deciding whether to expel a student. Where a preliminary assessment of the facts confirms that expulsion may be warranted, the procedural steps will include:

- ✓ A detailed investigation carried out under the direction of the Principal.
- ✓ A recommendation to the Board of Management by the Principal.
- ✓ Consideration by the Board of Management of the principal's recommendation and the holding of a hearing.
- ✓ Board of Management deliberations and actions following the hearing.
- ✓ Consultations arranged by the Educational Welfare Officer.
- ✓ Confirmation of the decision to expel.

In investigating an allegation, in line with fair procedures, the Principal will:

- ✓ Inform the student and their parents about the details of the alleged misbehaviour, how it will be investigated and that it could result in expulsion.
- ✓ Give students (where appropriate), and their parents every opportunity to respond to the complaint of serious misbehaviour before a decision is made and before a sanction is imposed.
- ✓ Parents will be informed in writing of the alleged behaviour and the proposed investigation in order to have a permanent record of having let them know. This also ensures that parents are very clear about what their son or daughter is alleged to have done. It serves the important function of underlining to parents the seriousness with which the school views the alleged behaviour.

*If a student and their parents fail to attend a meeting, the principal will write advising of the gravity of the matter, the importance of attending a re-scheduled meeting and, failing that, the duty of the school authorities to make a decision to respond to the inappropriate behaviour. The school should record the invitation to the parents and their response.*

#### **A recommendation to the Board of Management by the Principal.**

Where the principal forms a view, based on the investigation of the alleged misbehaviour, that expulsion may be warranted, the principal makes a recommendation to the Board of Management to consider expulsion. The Principal should:

- ✓ Inform the parents and the student that the Board of Management is being asked to consider expulsion.
- ✓ Ensure that parents have records of; the allegations against the student; the investigation; and written notice of the grounds on which the Board of Management is being asked to consider expulsion.
- ✓ Provide the Board of Management with the same comprehensive records as are given to the parents.

- ✓ Notify the parents of the date of the hearing by the Board of Management and invite them to that hearing.
- ✓ Advise the parents that they can make a written or oral submission to the Board of Management
- ✓ Ensure that the parents have enough notice to allow them to prepare for the hearing.

### **Consideration by the Board of Management of the Principal's recommendation and the holding of a hearing.**

It is the responsibility of the Board of Management to review the initial investigation was properly conducted in line with fair procedures. The Board will undertake its own review of all documentation and the circumstances of the case.

If the Board of Management decides to consider expelling a student, it will hold a hearing. The Board meeting for the purpose of the hearing will be properly conducted in accordance with Board procedures. At the hearing, the Principal and the parents, or a student aged eighteen years or over, put their case to the Board in each other's presence. Each party will be allowed to question the evidence of the other party directly. The meeting will also be an opportunity for parents to make their case for lessening the sanction.

In the conduct of the hearing, the Board will take care to ensure that they are, and are seen to be, impartial as between the Principal and the student.

Parents may wish to be accompanied at hearings and the Board should facilitate this, in line with good practice and Board procedures.

After both sides have been heard, the Board will ensure that the principal and parents are not present for the Board's deliberations.

### **Board of Management deliberations and actions following a hearing.**

Having heard from all parties, it is the responsibility of the board to decide whether or not the allegation is sustained and, if so, whether or not expulsion is the appropriate sanction. Where the Board of Management, having considered all of the facts of the case, is of the opinion that the student should be expelled, the Board will notify the Educational Welfare Officer in writing of its opinion and the reasons for this opinion. (Educational Welfare Act 2000, s24 (1)). The Board of Management will refer to National Educational Welfare Board reporting procedures for proposed expulsions. The student cannot be expelled before the passage of twenty school days from the date on which the EWO receives this written notification (Education welfare Act 2000, s 4A).

The Board will inform parents in writing about its conclusions and the next steps in the process. Where expulsion is proposed, the parents will be told that the Board of Management will now inform the educational Welfare Officer.

**Confirmation of the decision to expel.**

Where the twenty day period following notification to the educational welfare Officer has elapsed, and where the Board of Management remains of the view that the student should be expelled, the Board of Management will formally confirm the decision to expel (this task might be delegated to the chairperson and the Principal).

Parents will be notified immediately that the expulsion will now proceed. Parents and the student will be told about the right to appeal and supplied with the standard form on which to lodge an appeal. A formal record will be made of the decision to expel the student.