



**JMB**

**JOINT MANAGERIAL BODY**  
For Voluntary Secondary Schools

**JMB Opening Statement to the Joint Committee on Education, Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science, on the topic “School Bullying and The Impact on Mental Health”**

The Joint Managerial Body welcomes the Oireachtas Joint Committee’s focus on the topic of Bullying and Mental Health and is grateful for this opportunity to present an opening statement on behalf of the organisation.

Our position is that student bullying, and its impact on mental health, can only be addressed when our anti-bullying policies are:

1. School-wide
2. SPHE driven, and,
3. Properly resourced

There is no ‘silver bullet’ which will resolve the problem of bullying in schools, and we need every single person in the school to attack the problem, from every possible aspect, every single day.

Anti-bullying policies in our schools reflect this school-wide approach. Just to take one example:

Our aim is to provide an environment in which all can teach, learn, and work, free from intimidation. We will achieve this by:

1. Ensuring all parents/guardians have access to this policy prior to commencing school.
2. Assigning a teacher to lead the anti-bullying ambassadors.
3. Introducing initiatives on how to recognise and deal with bullying.
4. Placing an emphasis on inclusion by Meitheal leaders in their work with 1<sup>st</sup> years.
5. Emphasising inclusion and awareness of bullying in the school environment by prefects in their work.
6. Including Bullying in the code of behaviour and in school journals.
7. Educating students through the SPHE and Well-Being programme at Junior Cycle regarding bullying in all its forms including cyberbullying, homophobic and transphobic bullying.
8. Educating students through the Relationship and Sexuality Education (RSE) programme by providing opportunities to explore and discuss areas such as human sexuality and relationships, which have particular relevance to identity-based bullying.

9. Ensuring that within the teaching of all subjects there is an attitude of respect for all: to promote the value of diversity; to address prejudice and stereotyping and to highlight the unacceptability of bullying behaviour.
10. Ensuring appropriate supervision of students.
11. Providing an anonymous comment box for general use, including bullying issues.
12. Ensuring bystanders understand the importance of telling if they witness or know that bullying is taking place.

Meanwhile, the recently published OECD report Education at a Glance 2020 ranks Ireland in last place out of 36 countries for investment in second-level education as a percentage of GDP. The Department repeatedly sets out high demands on schools in respect of anti-bullying measures but clearly the State is neglecting its responsibility to provide its schools with the resources we need to tackle bullying effectively and to support positive mental health development in our students.

Our schools have been doing more with less since the financial crash of 2009. In particular, schools have had reduced allocations of teachers and guidance counsellors which have not been restored. Yes, our teacher workforce numbers have increased but this is due to significant student population growth but at school level, the cuts in staffing have never been fully restored.

So, what do we need?

- We need our year heads and student support teams to have time for duties, ring-fenced and allocated-for
- We need our guidance and counselling provision fully restored immediately
- We need a full deputy principal in every school, not fractions
- We need to invest in team-teaching and greater learning support for students with special educational needs
- We need teacher training and ongoing expert advice, particularly around empowering students to speak out
- We need leadership development on school-wide approaches that work, and,
- We need to free-up time for the necessary in-school group meetings involved, and particularly in relation to teachers investigating incidents of bullying

Our schools will always face the challenge of bullying and, among other actions, every school continues to:

1. Review their existing policies in line with the Department's *Anti-Bullying Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools* (2013)
2. Ensure their SPHE programme is well-developed and well-delivered
3. Provide teacher professional development on anti-bullying strategies, and,
4. Provide for parent and student support in tackling online bullying in particular

The mental health of our young people has never been at greater risk. We must now invest in giving schools the resources they need to support this uniquely challenged generation.

**John Curtis, JMB General Secretary**

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