Cyber Bullying Policy

While we must provide the highest protection possible for students using new technologies, families must also foster a balance between protecting children and teaching them to be aware of potential dangers and assessing threats for themselves. Encouraging students to talk about issues they come across online is a step towards building trust in young people's ability to use the internet and mobile phones responsibly and to safeguard themselves and their peers against those who use the internet to threaten their welfare. (Barnados, 2009)

Cyber bullying involves using the Internet or mobile phones to send hurtful messages or posting information to damage people's reputation and friendships. Cyber bullying is similar to other types of bullying, except that it takes place online and through text messages sent to mobile phones. Cyber bullies can be classmates, online acquaintances, and even anonymous users, but most often they do know their victims.
Preventing cyber bullying in our school
The Acceptable Use Policy (AUP) ensures the following

• Supervision is always in place when students are online.
• Websites are previewed and evaluated.
• Firewalls and filters have been installed in all computers and these are regularly updated.
• Students' internet usage will be monitored by checking user files, temporary files and history files.
• Students do not have access to MSN or social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter.

The ways that young people can bully online are:

• Sending someone mean or threatening emails, instant messages, or text messages.
• Sending photos without permission being sought or granted.
• Excluding someone from an instant messenger friends/buddy list or blocking her email for no reason.
• Tricking someone into revealing personal or embarrassing information and sending it to others.
• Using someone's password or breaking into someone's email or instant message account to send cruel or untrue messages while posing as that person.
• Creating websites to make fun of another person such as a classmate or teacher.
• Uploading photos to social networking sites without permission being sought or granted
• Using websites to rate peers.
• Leaving hurtful comments on social networking sites such Facebook or Twitter.

Douglas Community School teaches students that all types of bullying including cyber bullying is hurtful and wrong. Students are encouraged to treat other students on and offline with respect. The whole school community is informed and educated with regard to the school's Acceptable Use Policy. All members of the school community are fully aware of the sanctions that will be imposed for the misuse of school computers to cause hurt and distress to other members. Students are made aware of their rights and responsibilities online and offline as part of the implementation of the school's (AUP). Students are taught that the Internet is not a private place and they should guard their private information online. The AUP policy promotes the positive use of technology, discusses etiquette and personal safety issues. Our school encourages a 'telling' atmosphere, including the reporting of cyber bullying. The ethos of our school community is to encourage students to make friends and promote positive well-being and a supportive atmosphere in the school .

Parents' response to cyber bullying

• Offer support and reassurance to your son.
• Help your son to keep relevant evidence for investigation by printing webpages and by not deleting mobile messages.
• Show your son how to prevent it happening again by changing password and contact details, blocking contacts, reporting abuse on site.
• Ensure that the student knows not to retaliate or return the message.
• Encourage the student to keep personal information private online.
• Insist that your son never, ever gives his personal password to another person, even a friend.
• Insist that your son never accepts as a "an online friend" a stranger whom they do not know in real life.

Investigating incidents

Parents must take full responsibility for their son's inappropriate use of the Internet or mobile phones outside school. All incidents of cyber bullying that have their origins in school will be fully investigated, recorded and dealt with under the procedures laid down in the Code of Behaviour, the Anti-Bullying Policy and Acceptable Use Policy. Sanctions laid down in these policies will be adhered to in response to inappropriate use of media and information technology

Incidents of cyber bullying that take place outside and affect a student in school will be brought to the attention of parents/guardians. In regard to serious incidents of this type of bullying behaviour it may be appropriate to inform the Gardaí.

The school's programme of support for working with pupils affected by bullying is as follows:

a. Students who have been involved in bullying incidents will be advised by Class Tutor/Year Head/Deputy-Principal of the availability of the Guidance Counsellor/Chaplain.

b. The target of bullying may receive counseling to help him regain his self esteem where affected.

c. The student involved in the bullying may also receive counselling to give him the opportunity to learn other ways of meeting his needs without violating the rights of others.

d. Students who witnessed bullying are encouraged to discuss it with a teacher and if assistance with a Counsellor/Chaplain is required, their availability will be ascertained.