



The Sisters of Charity
Mount Carmel Secondary School

LGBTQI+ Policy

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1. Rationale

Sexuality is an intrinsic part of what it means to be human and it is during the post-primary school years that the majority of young people go through puberty and begin the process of maturation. It is also a time when young people come to an awareness and understanding of their sexuality and their sexual orientation. For the majority this can be a challenging and exciting period. However, for many LGBTQI+ young people, this time can have additional challenges/difficulties.

'Studies in Ireland show that many LGBTQI+ students have had a negative experience in school and so, do not reach their full potential because of homophobic bullying and/or harassment. Many are in danger of leaving school early, experiencing mental health problems and becoming involved in self-harming behaviours that often go hand in hand with poor self-esteem.' (**Department of education and Skills: Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Students in Post-Primary Schools: Guidance for Principals and School Leaders**)

According to the Equal Status Acts 2000-2004 there are nine grounds on which discrimination is prohibited:

- Gender
- Marital status
- Family status
- Sexual Orientation
- Religion

- Age
- Disability
- Race
- Membership of the Traveller Community.

2. Aims

- To provide an inclusive environment in which LGBTQI+ pupils and staff are valued and respected.
- To promote understanding of and support the needs of LGBTQI+ pupils and staff.
- To raise the profile of LGBTQI+ awareness and issues through the provision of an inclusive curriculum.
- To monitor and tackle homophobic, biphobic and transphobic language and bullying.

3. Legislative Framework and Key Publications

- Department of Education and Science (2004). *Child Protection Guidelines and Procedures for Post-Primary Schools*.
- Department of Education and Science (1996). *Relationships and Sexuality Education: An Aspect of Social, Personal and Health Education Interim Curriculum and Guidelines for Post-Primary Schools*.
- Department of Education and Skills. *Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Students in Post-Primary Schools Guidance for Principals and School Leaders*
- GLEN (Gay and Lesbian Equality Network) (2016). *Being LGBT in School*
- NDP, Department of Education and Skills and The Equality Authority. *Schools and the Equal Status Acts*
- The Equality Authority. *Making Your School Safe for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Students*

4. The School's Role

Mount Carmel Secondary School strives to be supportive of all students and to put in place structures that allow students to feel happy and safe. The school has a responsibility to educate all of its students on Relationship and Sexuality (RSE). As part of the school RSE programme sexual orientation and societal reactions to it will be discussed. However, it is for the individual student herself to come to an understanding of their own gender identity. Therefore, students are not asked about their sexual orientation unless they volunteer such information themselves.

As this can be a very challenging time for young LGBTQI+ students, it is important that if they do speak to someone about their concerns, that this person will handle the disclosure sensitively. It should not be assumed that a young person who is LGBTQI+ is necessarily troubled by their sexual orientation.

The school will ensure that all allegations of homophobic or gender-based bullying are investigated as per the anti-bullying policy in the school. The school may from time-to-time host information events for parents or forward information about such events to parents.

5. The Teacher's Role

If a student chooses to "come out" to one of their teachers, the teacher will communicate a message to the young person that they are valued equally, will be treated equally to other students and that the school leadership will ensure their safety and support.

The teacher should strive to ensure a positive experience of coming out where the student is met with acceptance.

They will inform the student that the Year Head will be informed and that they will be referred to the Student Support Team/Care Team/Guidance Counsellor.

6. The Role of SST/Care Team/Guidance Counsellor/One Good Adult

The Care Team/Student Support Team will work to ensure that the young LGBTQI+ student discovering their sexual orientation feels supported and valued within the school community. The Student Support Team will assign an adult (usually the Guidance Counsellor, member of the Student Support Team or staff member with a particular connection to the student) to discuss their feelings, wishes and needs in relation to their sexual orientation/gender identity.

It is not assumed that a young person who is LGBTQI+ is necessarily troubled by their sexual orientation. Supports will be offered to the student depending on the age of the student and their identified needs. The assigned significant adult will work with the student to ensure that the student is given the time, space and support they need.

This is critical in order to safeguard the student's mental health and well-being. It is hoped that it can also lessen the fear of the student eventually disclosing their sexual orientation/gender identity to family, friends etc.

The assigned One Good Adult may:

- Identify relevant resources and supports such as information leaflets and organisations (local and national) that could be of assistance to the young person
- Consult with the young person on how they would like the school to deal with their “coming out” if, at all.
- Facilitate a meeting with the student’s family and/or friends if required. It is not the case that the family of the student will be informed of all disclosures – the same guidelines that apply to school counselling will apply to student disclosures around gender identification and sexual orientation.

7. A Safe and Inclusive Learning Environment

In seeking to create a safe and inclusive learning environment for all students including LGBTQI+ students, this protocol is supported through the following:

- **Anti-bullying Policy and Code of Positive Behaviour:** The Anti-bullying Policy is explicit in addressing all forms of homophobic bullying and harassment. The code of positive behaviour sets out the required standards for interpersonal behaviour in our school community.
- **Admissions Policy:** Mount Carmel Secondary School’s Admissions Policy is welcoming and inclusive of all students, including LGBTQI+ students.
- **Staff training:** staff training is encouraged to empower teachers with the knowledge, skills and confidence needed to raise their awareness of equality issues and LGBTQI+ students and to address homophobic harassment and bullying in our school: <https://www.belongto.org/online-training-for-youth-services-and-schools/>
- **Student Support Team, Care Team & Guidance Counsellors:** The Student Support Team, Care Team & Guidance Counsellors have sufficient training and understanding in the area of sexual identity and will identify the supports our school will make available to a young person who ‘comes out’ or begins to question their sexual identity.
- **RSE:** In Mount Carmel Secondary School, we ensure that sexual orientation is addressed in a positive and open way when talking about human sexuality. SPHE teachers are supported in attending in-service training on sexuality and sexual orientation.
- **Well-being/SPHE/CSPE:** LGBTQI+ experiences should be included in areas of the curriculum such as Human Rights, Human Dignity, Discrimination, Legal Rights, Political Campaigning and Advocacy.
- **Student Council:** We seek to ensure that membership of our school’s student council is non-restrictive and allows for the full diversity of students in the school, including LGBTQI+ students.

- **LGBTQI+ Week and ShoutOut Workshops:** In Mount Carmel Secondary School we take part in a LGBTQI+ week to make all students feel included. We also facilitate LGBTQI+ Workshops every year for 1st and 2nd Years.
- **Links with LGBTQI+ organisations and charities:** We seek to create awareness and links to LGBTQI+ organisations such as BeLonG To, TENI, and O.U.T. Opening Up Together.
- **Pride Month:** Mount Carmel Secondary School flies the Progress Pride Flag outside our building in June for Pride Month.
- **JCSP Library Resources:** Mount Carmel Secondary School has a good selection of LGBTQI+ books in our JCSP school library to supplement our school's ongoing work to promote diversity and inclusion and to support students who may be questioning their sexuality or gender identity.

8. LGBTQI+ Teachers in School

Schools that are inclusive and supportive of LGBTQI+ students are also supportive and inclusive of all LGBTQI+ people, including teachers. It is never acceptable for any comment to be addressed to any member of staff that is derogative of their sexual orientation/gender identity. Any such behaviour will be treated as a very serious breach of dignity in the workplace by school management

Important Note: The School Protocol on Child Safeguarding and Children First applies to all students regardless of their sexual orientation and gender identity. (Note: The legal age of consent in Ireland is 17 years for boys and girls irrespective of sexual orientation).

9. Monitoring:

The policy will be reviewed regularly. It will take into account any legislative changes, new policy and strategy documents either in the school or from the Department of Education and Skills, changes in advice from organisations and support groups and feedback from parents, students and staff.

10. Ratification:

This policy was ratified by the Board of Management of Mount Carmel Secondary School at its meeting on 16th May 2023 and will be reviewed on a regular basis.

Signed:



(Chairperson of the Board of Management)

Date:

16/05/2023

Dennis Fitzgerald

16/05/2023

Appendix 1 – References and Research

References:

- Department of Education and Science (2004). Child Protection Guidelines and Procedures for Post-Primary Schools.
- Department of Education and Science (1996). Relationships and Sexuality Education: An Aspect of Social, Personal and Health Education Interim Curriculum and Guidelines for Post-Primary Schools.
- Department of Education and Skills. Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Students in Post-Primary Schools Guidance for Principals and School Leaders
- GLEN (Gay and Lesbian Equality Network) (2016). Being LGBT in School
- NDP, Department of Education and Skills and The Equality Authority. Schools and the Equal Status Acts
- The Equality Authority. Making Your School Safe for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Students.
- www.workplacereactions.ie
- www.belongto.org

Research:

Dahl, O'Moore and Tuck (2008) reported that, of the sample of LGBT young people surveyed:

- over one fifth stated that they did not feel safe on their way to or from school.
- Half of all respondents reported that they had been bullied in the last three months.
- One third reported frequent (weekly/daily) verbal abuse, with a slightly higher number (34.3%) stating that they experience frequent verbal abuse about their sexuality.
- A quarter reported indirect verbal bullying through spreading of rumours and lies
- The authors commend those students who persevered and stayed on in school but highlight concern for the 10% who stated that they left school earlier than they might otherwise have done (2008: 182-184).
- Carolan & Redmond (2003) for the Dept. of Education in Northern Ireland

- 86% of their sample were aware of their sexual orientation in school
- 44% stated that they were bullied whilst in school because of their sexual orientation.

The study also highlighted that many young people left school earlier than they would have preferred and 65% of those who had achieved low results had also been bullied.

International Young Lesbian and Gay Organisation (2007).

- 61% percent of young LGBT people in Europe have experienced prejudice or discrimination at school.
- Across Europe, schools are experienced as being more unfriendly for LGBT youngsters, beating family (51.2%), community (37.7%) and friends' circle (29.8%), (IGLYO, 2007).
- Supporting LGBT+ People's Mental Health, HSE's National Office for Suicide Prevention (2009)
- 96% of respondents are out to at least one person in their lives.
- The likelihood is that students are going to tell other students. As staff we can either be supportive and protect against bullying or passively allow it – but the students themselves will not be repressing themselves while staying the school.
- - The average age at which people became aware of their sexuality / gender identity was at aged 14. The average age for knowing whether they were LGBT+ at all was 12.

Appendix 2 – LGBTQ+ Terminology

- **LGBTI+:** Lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans+ and intersex people.
- **Lesbian:** A woman who is attracted to other women. Some non-binary people may also identify with this term.
- **Gay:** Someone who is attracted to people of the same gender.
- **Bisexual:** Someone who is attracted to more than one gender e.g. both men and women.
- **Pansexual:** Someone whose romantic and/or sexual attraction towards others is not limited by sex assignment, gender identity or gender expression.
- **Queer:** An umbrella term used to describe people who are not heterosexual and/or cisgender. Queer was used as a slur against the LGBTQ+ community for many years and still can be. However, the word has been reclaimed by LGBTQ+ communities and many now embrace the term. Check if someone is comfortable with this term before referring to them as queer.
- **Asexual/Ace:** Someone who experiences limited or no sexual attraction.
- **Transgender:** A term describing a person's gender identity that does not match their assigned sex at birth. This word is also used as an umbrella term to describe some groups of people who transcend conventional expectations of gender identity or expression.
- **Intersex:** This is an umbrella term used to describe a wide range of natural bodily variations that do not fit typical binary notions of male and female bodies, for example, variations in genetic, hormonal, or physical sex characteristics.
- **Sexual Orientation:** Sexual and romantic attraction.
- **Gender identity:** Our deeply felt internal experience of our own gender.
- **Heterosexual:** Someone who is attracted to people of a different gender.
- **LGBTQ+ bullying:** Bullying based on prejudice or discrimination towards LGBTI+ people.
- **Gender expression:** How we show our gender through our clothing, hair, behaviour, etc.
- **Cisgender:** Someone who is not transgender or non-binary.
- **Non-binary:** People whose gender identity is neither exclusively woman or man or is in between or beyond the gender binary.

