Code of Behaviour and Positive Discipline Policy

St. Ultan's Special School, Navan, Co. Meath 19216E

Responsibility for implementation: Principal and all staff

1. Introduction and rationale

The Board of Management, staff and parents/guardians of St. Ultan's Special School are committed to creating a safe, respectful, inclusive and positive learning environment in which every pupil can participate, develop independence and achieve their potential.

The school recognises that pupils with MGLD may experience difficulties with understanding language, expressing needs, managing emotions, interpreting social situations, coping with transitions or regulating their responses to stress. These needs vary from pupil to pupil.

The school adopts a positive, relational and regulation-first approach to behaviour. In line with NCSE Relate, staff will seek to understand what a behaviour may communicate, identify contributing factors and teach skills that help pupils participate successfully.

Behaviour is considered in the context of each pupil's developmental level, communication abilities, individual needs, circumstances and support plan. A pupil's disability or additional needs will not, in themselves, be treated as misconduct.

The school will maintain clear and consistent expectations while balancing pupil dignity, individual rights, learning, wellbeing and the safety of the whole school community.

2. Aims of the policy

This policy aims to:

1. Promote positive behaviour, mutual respect and a sense of belonging.
2. Teach pupils practical social, communication and self-regulation skills.
3. Prevent and reduce behaviours that place pupils or others at risk.
4. Ensure staff respond consistently, fairly and proportionately.
5. Recognise and address the underlying causes of behaviour.
6. Protect the safety, dignity and rights of all pupils and staff.
7. Support constructive communication between home and school.

8. Establish clear procedures for responding to incidents, recording concerns and reviewing support.
9. Ensure that any disciplinary action is educational, appropriate to the individual pupil and consistent with legislation and Department guidance.

3. Legislative and guidance framework

This policy will be read alongside the current versions of:

- Education Act 1998.
- Education (Welfare) Act 2000, particularly Section 23.
- Equal Status Acts, as amended.
- Disability Act 2005, where applicable.
- Children First Act 2015 and Children First: National Guidance.
- Child Protection Procedures for Schools 2025.
- Developing a Code of Behaviour: Guidelines for Schools, NEWB 2008, pending confirmation of the updated national guidelines.
- NCSE Relate.
- Department of Education Circular 0081/2024 and the Understanding Behaviours of Concern and Responding to Crisis Situations guidelines.
- Department of Education Circular 0042/2026 on training, monitoring and oversight relating to behaviours of concern.
- Current Department anti-bullying procedures and relevant Cineáltas guidance.
- Relevant school policies on health and safety, special educational needs, attendance, intimate care, acceptable use of technology, complaints and data protection.
- Health Safety and Welfare Work Acts

Where legislation or mandatory Department guidance conflicts with this policy, the legislation or mandatory guidance will take precedence.

4. Guiding principles

The following principles underpin the school's approach.

Respect and dignity: Every pupil will be treated respectfully, including when behaviour is challenging.

Relationships before compliance: Positive relationships, trust and connection are central to learning and behaviour support.

Regulation before correction: Where a pupil is distressed or dysregulated, the immediate priority is safety, co-regulation and recovery, not punishment or a demand for immediate compliance.

Behaviour as communication: Staff will consider what a pupil may be communicating through behaviour, including pain, anxiety, confusion, sensory overload, frustration, communication difficulties or unmet needs.

Consistency with flexibility: Whole-school expectations will be consistent, while responses and supports will be adapted to individual pupils.

Proactive support: The school will prioritise prevention, early intervention, appropriate teaching strategies and environmental adjustments.

Restorative practice: Following an incident, pupils will be supported, when ready and able, to repair relationships and learn safer alternatives.

Pupil voice: Pupils will be supported to express their views, preferences, concerns and experiences in ways appropriate to their communication abilities.

Partnership: Parents/guardians and relevant professionals will be involved in planning and reviewing support, subject to appropriate consent and safeguarding requirements.

5. Standards of behaviour expected

All pupils will be supported to develop, to the best of their ability, the following behaviours:

- Treating other pupils, adults and property with respect, in school and out of school.
- Keeping themselves and others as safe as possible.
- Using words, signs, communication devices, pictures or other agreed methods to express needs.
- Following instructions and routines with appropriate support.
- Respecting other people's bodies, personal space and belongings.
- Participating in learning and school activities at an appropriate level.
- Moving safely around the school and during transitions.
- Seeking help when upset, worried or confused.
- Developing independence, problem-solving and self-regulation skills.

These expectations will be taught explicitly using language and materials appropriate to each pupil's understanding. Visual supports, modelling, social stories, role-play, demonstrations, repetition and communication aids will be used as appropriate.

Pupils will not be expected to demonstrate skills they have not yet acquired without suitable teaching and support.

6. Promoting positive behaviour

The school will seek to create an environment that reduces unnecessary stress and supports engagement in the school day and the school curriculum.

Strategies may include:

- Predictable daily routines and visual timetables.
- Clear, short instructions and additional processing time.
- Positive adult-pupil relationships and regular check-ins.
- Recognition of effort, progress, kindness and cooperation.

- Choice-making and opportunities for pupil autonomy.
- Appropriate movement, sensory or regulation breaks.
- Access to a calm, supervised space for regulation.
- Adapted tasks, manageable learning steps and differentiated expectations.
- Support with transitions, unexpected changes and waiting.
- Access to appropriate communication systems.
- Explicit teaching of emotional literacy, social skills and problem-solving.
- Consistent responses between relevant staff members.
- Regular communication with parents/guardians about progress and emerging concerns.

Positive reinforcement will be meaningful to the individual pupil and will never involve humiliation, deprivation of basic needs or the withholding of essential communication, medical care, food, water or toileting.

7. Understanding and responding to behaviours of concern

The school recognises that behaviour can communicate distress or an unmet need. A behaviour that challenges staff will not automatically be interpreted as deliberate defiance.

Where a behaviour becomes frequent, intense, persistent or unsafe, staff should consider the following:

Record, Revise and Review:

- What happened immediately before the behaviour?
- What was the pupil being asked to do?
- Was the task, language or environment appropriate?
- Was the pupil experiencing pain, illness, tiredness, hunger or anxiety?
- Were there sensory, communication or social demands?
- What might the pupil have been communicating?
- What happened immediately afterwards?
- Which strategies helped the pupil recover?
- What changes could prevent the difficulty from recurring?

Staff should record observable facts rather than assumptions about a pupil's intentions and write exactly what happened.

For example, record "pupil pushed the chair away and shouted when the activity changed" rather than "pupil was being deliberately difficult".

The purpose of reviewing behaviour is to identify effective supports and reduce risk, not to label or blame the pupil.

8. Levels of support and response

Level 1: Everyday support

Staff use clear expectations, positive reinforcement, reasonable adjustments, reminders, choices and co-regulation.

Level 2: Additional individual support

Where difficulties recur, staff consult the class teacher and relevant school personnel, communicate with parents/guardians as appropriate, review patterns and agree targeted strategies. An individual behaviour support plan may be developed.

Level 3: Significant or persistent concern

The principal and relevant staff review risk, antecedents, environmental factors, pupil support needs and incident records. The school may seek advice from the NCSE and relevant professionals, subject to applicable arrangements. A coordinated support and risk-management plan will be developed where required.

Level 4: Immediate crisis

Staff prioritise immediate safety, reduce demands and stimulation where possible, use trained de-escalation approaches and seek assistance.
These levels are a guide to support planning, not a rigid ladder. Staff may need to move directly to an urgent safety response where there is immediate danger.

9. Responses to breaches of the code

The school's response will be proportionate, educational and adapted to the pupil's understanding and support needs.

Possible responses include:

- A calm reminder of the expected behaviour.
- Clear explanation, modelling or visual prompting.
- A supported opportunity to make a different choice.
- A short, appropriate pause in an activity to allow regulation.
- Support to return to learning when ready.
- A restorative conversation or repair activity when the pupil can participate meaningfully.
- Communication with parents/guardians.
- Review or development of an individual support plan.
- A risk assessment and consultation with relevant professionals where necessary.

Consequences will be related to the incident wherever practicable and will not be used to punish disability-related distress or behaviour arising from unmet support needs without first considering those needs.

10. Individual behaviour support plans

An individual behaviour support plan /no demand schedule will be considered where a pupil experiences recurring behaviours of concern, significant distress or behaviour that presents a risk to themselves or others.

The plan should be developed by relevant school staff in consultation with parents/guardians and, where appropriate, the pupil and relevant professionals.

Each plan should include:

1. The pupil's strengths, interests, communication methods and preferences.
2. The behaviour or situation of concern, described objectively.
3. Potential triggers, contributing factors and early warning signs.
4. Preventative environmental and teaching strategies.
5. Communication and self-regulation skills to be taught.
6. Early intervention and de-escalation strategies.
7. Agreed staff responses, including how assistance is obtained.
8. Risk-management measures proportionate to identified risks.
9. Procedures for recording and reviewing incidents.
10. Arrangements for post-incident support and communication.
11. The staff responsible for implementation.
12. A review date and criteria for evaluating effectiveness.

Plans must be individualised, proportionate and regularly reviewed. They must not be used to authorise practices prohibited by legislation or Department guidance.

11. Crisis situations, physical restraint and seclusion

The school will follow the Department of Education's Understanding Behaviours of Concern and Responding to Crisis Situations guidelines and applicable circulars.

Prevention and de-escalation

Staff should, where practicable:

- Recognise early signs of distress.
- Remain calm and use non-threatening communication.
- Reduce unnecessary verbal demands and stimulation.
- Allow space and processing time.
- Offer appropriate choices and familiar regulation strategies.
- Move other pupils away from danger where necessary.
- Call for assistance in accordance with school procedures.

Seclusion is inappropriate in schools and must not be used. A supervised, voluntary regulation space is different from an arrangement in which a pupil is involuntarily isolated and prevented from leaving.

12. Bullying, aggression and harm to others

Bullying will be addressed in accordance with the school's current Bi Cinealta Policy and the Department's applicable procedures.

Staff will distinguish, as far as possible, between bullying, conflict, accidental behaviour, communication difficulties and other behaviours of concern. This distinction does not minimise the impact on a pupil who has been harmed.

All reports of bullying, threats, aggression, harassment or repeated harmful behaviour will be taken seriously, recorded and addressed using the relevant procedures.

Where a pupil's behaviour harms another person, the school will:

- Attend first to safety and any injury.
- Provide support to the affected pupil.
- Respond to the pupil whose behaviour caused harm in a developmentally appropriate way.
- Communicate with parents/guardians in accordance with school procedures.
- Review whether further teaching, supervision or environmental changes are needed.
- Follow safeguarding or external reporting procedures where applicable.

Restorative approaches may be used where appropriate and safe. They must not require a harmed pupil to meet with another pupil or accept an apology against their wishes.

13. Communication with parents/guardians

The school values a respectful partnership with families.

Parents/guardians will be informed of significant or recurring concerns, serious incidents and relevant changes to support arrangements, in accordance with the school's procedures (Incident Report Form).

Communication should be factual, timely and respectful. Staff should explain what occurred, what actions were taken, how the pupil was supported and what steps will be considered to reduce the likelihood of recurrence.

Confidential information about other pupils or staff must not be disclosed.

Where concerns persist, a meeting may be arranged with the class teacher, principal and relevant personnel to agree a coordinated approach. Plans should be reviewed collaboratively and communicated in an accessible format where required.

14. Suspension and Expulsion

Suspension and expulsion are serious sanctions and will be used only in accordance with the school's Code of Behaviour, the Education (Welfare) Act 2000, the Education Act 1998, the NEWB Developing a Code of Behaviour: Guidelines for Schools (2008), any updated national guidance in force, and the requirements of the school's patron or management body.

14.1 Suspension

Suspension is the temporary exclusion of a pupil from attending school for a specified period. It will be considered only where the seriousness of the behaviour warrants this sanction and where the decision is proportionate and justified.

- Normal duration: An individual suspension will normally be for a maximum of three school days.
- Exceptional circumstances: A suspension exceeding three school days may be considered only in exceptional circumstances, where justified by a specific objective. The matter must be referred to the Board of Management for consideration and approval. In accordance with the NEWB guidelines, the Board may authorise the Principal, with the Chairperson's approval, to impose a suspension of up to five school days where a Board meeting cannot be convened in a timely manner and the relevant authorisation is in place.
- Longer suspensions: The Board of Management should normally place a limit of ten school days on any one period of suspension.
- Fair procedures: Before a suspension is imposed, the pupil and their parents/guardians will be informed of the alleged behaviour and given an appropriate opportunity to respond. The school will consider the facts, the pupil's individual needs, the circumstances of the incident, previous interventions and the safety and educational needs of the school community.
- Written notification: Parents/guardians will be informed in writing of the reason for the suspension, its start and end dates, arrangements for returning to school and the applicable appeal procedures.
- Return to school: The school will support the pupil's reintegration and review any additional strategies needed to prevent a recurrence.

These provisions reflect Chapter 11 of the NEWB guidelines.

Where a suspension would bring the pupil's cumulative total to 20 school days or more in the school year, the Board of Management must formally review the proposal. A Section 29 appeal may be available under the Education Act 1998, as amended. The parents/guardians will be informed of the applicable appeal rights and procedures.

The school will comply with applicable Tusla Education Support Service reporting requirements, including the reporting of suspensions of six consecutive school days or more.

14.2 Expulsion

Expulsion is the permanent exclusion of a pupil from the school. It is an exceptionally serious sanction and will be considered only in extreme cases of unacceptable behaviour, where it is a proportionate response and other appropriate interventions have been exhausted, except where exceptional circumstances justify consideration following a first serious offence.

In accordance with Chapter 12 of the NEWB Developing a Code of Behaviour: Guidelines for Schools, the following procedure will apply:

1. Investigation: The Principal will arrange a detailed investigation of the alleged serious misbehaviour. The pupil and their parents/guardians will be informed of the allegations, the investigation process and the possibility that expulsion may be considered. They will be given a fair opportunity to respond.
2. Principal's recommendation: Following the investigation, the Principal may make a recommendation to the Board of Management that expulsion be considered.
3. Board hearing: The Board of Management will consider the recommendation, the evidence, the pupil's response and all relevant circumstances. A fair hearing will be provided.
4. Board decision: The Board will consider whether expulsion is proportionate, taking account of the seriousness and persistence of the behaviour, its impact on safety and learning, the pupil's special educational needs, supports and interventions already provided, and whether reasonable alternatives have been exhausted.
5. Tusla notification and consultation: Where the Board proposes to expel the pupil, the required written notification will be sent to the Tusla Education Support Service in accordance with Section 24 of the Education (Welfare) Act 2000. The statutory consultation and waiting period must be observed.
6. Confirmation of expulsion: The Board of Management will confirm the decision only after the required statutory procedures and waiting period have been completed. Parents/guardians will be notified in writing and advised of the right of appeal.

Under Section 24 of the Education (Welfare) Act 2000, a pupil cannot be expelled before the expiry of 20 school days following receipt of the required notification by the Educational Welfare Officer. The school must follow the applicable statutory procedures throughout this period.

A decision to expel rests with the Board of Management, subject to any applicable management-body arrangements. Expulsion will not be automatic, and no pupil will be expelled without fair procedures and an individual consideration of the circumstances.

14.3 Considerations specific to our special-school setting

Before deciding on suspension or expulsion, the school will consider the pupil's developmental level, communication needs, disability-related factors, individual behaviour support plan, reasonable accommodations and the effectiveness of interventions already provided.

The school will distinguish, as far as possible, between deliberate misconduct and behaviour associated with distress, dysregulation, communication difficulties or unmet needs. The impact on other pupils and staff, including any significant safety risk, will also be considered.

The pupil's disability will neither automatically exempt them from the Code of Behaviour nor be treated as, in itself, justification for exclusion. Any decision must be lawful, evidence-based, proportionate and consistent with the pupil's right to education.

14.4 Appeals and records

The school will explain the applicable appeal arrangements to parents/guardians in writing. A Section 29 appeal may be available for expulsion and for suspension where the statutory threshold is met. The school will maintain records of the investigation, decision-making process, notification, intervention history and any appeal, in accordance with applicable requirements.

15. Attendance and absence

The school will follow its attendance policy and statutory obligations under the Education (Welfare) Act 2000.

Parents/guardians should notify the school of absences in accordance with school procedures. The school will maintain attendance records, follow up unexplained absences and make required reports in accordance with the applicable legislation and Tusla Education Support Service requirements.

Behavioural difficulties should not lead to informal exclusion, shortened school days or reduced attendance arrangements without appropriate consideration, lawful authority and compliance with applicable Department requirements. Any proposed adjustment to attendance must be considered individually, with the pupil's educational access and rights central to decision-making.

16. Staff responsibilities

All staff are expected to:

- Know and follow this policy and relevant pupil support plans.
- Model calm, respectful and consistent behaviour.
- Use agreed communication and de-escalation strategies.
- Maintain appropriate supervision and safeguarding.
- Record and report incidents in accordance with school procedures.
- Protect pupil confidentiality.
- Seek assistance when an incident exceeds their training or capacity.
- Participate in relevant training and policy reviews.
- Reflect on practice and consider how the environment or adult response may influence behaviour.

The principal is responsible for coordinating implementation, ensuring incidents are appropriately managed, supporting staff, overseeing records and reporting, and bringing significant concerns to the Board of Management.

The Board of Management is responsible for approving, monitoring and reviewing the policy and ensuring appropriate governance and oversight.

17. Record keeping and confidentiality

Records of significant incidents, support plans, communications, risk assessments and interventions will be maintained securely.

Records must be factual, relevant, proportionate and completed promptly. Access will be restricted to authorised personnel, and information will be shared only where there is an appropriate lawful basis.

The school will comply with applicable data-protection legislation, including the GDPR and Data Protection Act 2018. Behaviour records will not be used to stigmatise pupils or shared more widely than necessary.

Safeguarding records must be handled in accordance with the school's child protection procedures.

18. Policy review

The Board of Management will review this policy at regular intervals and following significant changes to legislation, Department guidance or school practice.

A review will also be considered where incident data indicate recurring concerns, where an incident raises questions about the effectiveness of current arrangements, or where feedback from pupils, parents/guardians or staff identifies areas for improvement.

The review process will consider whether the policy is being implemented consistently, whether reasonable supports are effective, whether staff training is adequate and whether pupil safety, dignity and participation are being protected.

19. Ratification

This policy was adopted by the Board of Management of St. Ultan's Special School on 9th - November - 25

Chairperson: _____

Principal: _____

Date of next review: December '27