ST. BRÍD'S SPECIAL SCHOOL

CODE OF BEHAVIOUR

Positive Behaviour, Safety and Support

School	St. Bríd's Special School
Address	Pavilion Road, Castlebar, Co. Mayo, F23 NX99
Roll Number	19375B
School Year	2026/2027
Policy Status	Draft for consultation and Board of Management ratification
Review Cycle	Annual, and earlier where legislation/guidance or school need requires

Policy approach

This Code recognises that behaviour is communication and that pupils in a special-school setting may require highly individualised, developmentally appropriate supports. The school will promote positive behaviour, protect access to education, and respond to risk in a fair, proportionate and rights-respecting manner.

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1. Purpose, scope and guiding principles

This Code of Behaviour applies to all pupils of St. Bríd's Special School while they are under the care or responsibility of the school, including during the school day, school activities, educational visits, community-based learning and other school-related activities. Where relevant, expectations may also apply to behaviour connected with school transport or behaviour outside school that has a clear and significant impact on school life.

The purpose of the Code is to create a safe, calm, respectful and predictable environment in which every pupil can participate in education to the greatest extent possible, while recognising the diverse communication, sensory, developmental, medical and behavioural needs of pupils attending a special school.

- Positive behaviour support, prevention and teaching are the first response wherever possible.
- Behaviour will be understood in context, including communication, regulation, sensory, medical, environmental and developmental factors.
- Expectations and responses will be individualised to the pupil's level of understanding and capacity.
- The dignity, safety and rights of pupils, staff and others will be protected.
- Consequences will be fair, proportionate and educational rather than punitive.
- Fair procedures will apply where suspension or expulsion is being considered.
- Parents/guardians and relevant professionals will be engaged as partners in supporting the pupil.
- The school will maintain accurate records to support planning, review, accountability and requests for additional support.

2. Legislative and policy framework

This Code should be read in conjunction with current legislation, Department guidance and school policies. In particular, it has been updated with regard to:

- Education Act 1998, as amended, including section 29 appeals.
- Education (Welfare) Act 2000, particularly sections 23 and 24 concerning codes of behaviour, suspension and expulsion.
- Tusla/NEWB, Developing a Code of Behaviour: Guidelines for Schools (2008).
- Department of Education, Understanding Behaviours of Concern and Responding to Crisis Situations: Guidelines for Schools in Supporting Students (2024), Circular 0081/2024 and Circular 0042/2026.
- Department of Education, Bí Cineálta Procedures to Prevent and Address Bullying Behaviour, in effect from the 2025/2026 school year.
- Looking at Our School 2022: A Quality Framework for Primary Schools and Special Schools.
- Current Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools and Children First requirements.
- Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act 2005 and Department/HSA school safety guidance.
- Equal Status Acts and other relevant equality, disability and data protection requirements.

Important

Where legislation, Department circulars or statutory procedures change, the most current requirement takes precedence over any wording in this Code. The Board of Management will update the Code as required.

3. Understanding behaviour in St. Bríd's

St. Bríd's uses the term behaviours of concern rather than challenging behaviour. Behaviours of concern are understood as behaviours that may indicate a risk to the safety or wellbeing of the pupil or others, or that significantly interfere with the pupil's participation, learning or inclusion.

The school recognises that behaviour can communicate a need, difficulty or state of regulation. Staff will seek to understand what happens before, during and after behaviour and what environmental or interpersonal factors may be relevant.

Possible factor	Examples to consider
Communication	Difficulty expressing pain, refusal, choice, anxiety, frustration, preference or need.
Regulation	Overload, fatigue, dysregulation, anxiety, change, uncertainty or difficulty recovering from demands.
Sensory factors	Noise, crowding, lighting, touch, movement, smells, food or other sensory experiences.
Medical factors	Pain, illness, sleep difficulties, medication effects, hunger, toileting needs or other health concerns.
Learning demands	Task difficulty, pace, duration, transitions, waiting, lack of predictability or insufficient support.
Social/environmental factors	Peer interactions, staffing changes, unfamiliar adults, transport, family changes or wider environmental pressures.

4. Standards and expectations

Expectations will be communicated in forms each pupil can understand. Staff will use visual supports, modelling, social narratives, AAC, Lámh, PECS, objects of reference, simplified language or other individual communication systems as appropriate.

- Pupils are supported to treat themselves, others and property with respect, insofar as they are able to understand and demonstrate this.
- Pupils are supported to participate in learning and daily routines to the best of their ability.
- Pupils are supported to move safely around the school and to follow individual safety plans.
- Pupils are supported to develop communication, self-regulation, independence and social skills.
- Expectations will be reasonable, realistic and adapted to individual ability, disability and communication needs.

5. Whole-school promotion of positive behaviour

- Predictable classroom routines and visual timetables.
- Appropriate pupil engagement throughout the day, with purposeful learning, movement, sensory and leisure opportunities.
- Clear transitions, advance warning of change and access to regulation supports.
- Active supervision and appropriate staff deployment.
- Positive, respectful adult-pupil relationships and consistent responses across staff.
- Use of pupil interests, strengths, preferred activities and meaningful reinforcement.

- Environmental adaptations, including reduced demands or reduced stimulation where appropriate.
- Regular review of seating, groupings, timetable, staff supports and known triggers.
- Opportunities for pupil voice and choice in an accessible form.
- Consistent implementation of Student Support Plans, behaviour support plans, risk assessments and healthcare plans.

Prevention first

The school will actively examine whether aspects of the environment, communication, supervision, staffing arrangements, demands or routines may be contributing to dysregulation. Staff practice will be reviewed alongside pupil behaviour.

6. Individualised behaviour support

Where a pupil displays recurring or significant behaviours of concern, an individualised support process may include:

1. Gathering objective information through incident records, ABC charts, observations and consultation with parents/guardians.
2. Identifying patterns, likely functions, triggers, early warning signs and protective factors.
3. Reviewing communication, sensory, medical, environmental and curricular needs.
4. Agreeing proactive strategies, de-escalation approaches and responses for staff.
5. Developing or updating a Student Support Plan, Behaviour Support Plan and/or individual risk assessment.
6. Seeking multidisciplinary or external professional input where appropriate.
7. Reviewing effectiveness at agreed intervals and after significant incidents.

Where appropriate, the Principal may seek an MDT meeting at an early stage so that school, family and relevant professionals can share information and agree coordinated supports.

7. Roles and responsibilities

Role	Key responsibilities
Board of Management	Ratifies the Code; ensures appropriate policies, training and oversight; considers serious disciplinary matters; retains authority in relation to expulsion and significant suspensions as set out below.
Principal	Leads implementation; supports staff; monitors serious incidents and patterns; liaises with families and agencies; ensures fair procedures; reports to the Board as required.
Teachers	Lead classroom planning and behaviour support; ensure appropriate routines, engagement and supervision; direct classroom staff; maintain records and communicate concerns promptly.
SNAs and other staff	Implement agreed supports, follow teacher direction and school policy, supervise actively, report concerns promptly and contribute objective observations and records.

School nurses	Provide health-related oversight within their role, support healthcare planning and advise where medical factors may be relevant to a pupil's presentation.
Parents/Guardians	Share relevant information, engage with meetings and plans, support consistency where possible and communicate changes that may affect the pupil.
Pupils	Participate in planning, reflection and decision-making to the greatest extent possible and in a manner suited to their communication and developmental level.

8. Communication with parents/guardians

Communication should be timely, respectful, factual and proportionate. Not every minor event requires individual reporting; however, significant incidents, injuries, marked changes in presentation, repeated patterns of concern and matters relevant to health or safety should be communicated in accordance with school procedures.

- Parents/guardians may identify a preferred practical method of routine communication where feasible.
- Staff will distinguish observation from interpretation and avoid speculative or emotive language.
- Where a serious or recurring concern arises, communication will normally involve the class teacher and/or Principal.
- Meetings may include key support workers, social workers, therapists or MDT members where appropriate and lawful.
- Confidential information about other pupils or staff will not be disclosed.

9. Responding to behaviours of concern

Responses should move from least intrusive to more intensive supports, according to the pupil and the level of risk. Staff should remain calm, reduce unnecessary language and demands, preserve dignity, and prioritise safety.

8. Recognise early signs of distress and intervene early.
9. Use the pupil's known communication and regulation supports.
10. Reduce demands, audience, noise or stimulation where appropriate.
11. Offer clear choices, time, space or a preferred regulation activity.
12. Remove hazards and, if necessary, move other pupils to safety.
13. Call for additional staff support in accordance with local arrangements.
14. Use only proportionate responses necessary to manage the immediate risk.
15. After the incident, support recovery, check for injury or medical need, record the incident and review the plan.

Language matters

Staff should avoid confrontation, threats, humiliation, public reprimand, power struggles or language that frames disability-related distress as deliberate misconduct without considering context and capacity.

10. Crisis situations, physical intervention and seclusion

The Department of Education guidelines on behaviours of concern and crisis situations apply to all recognised schools. St. Bríd's will follow the current Department requirements, including the principles below.

- Physical restraint is not a disciplinary sanction and must never be used to punish, compel compliance or teach a lesson.
- Physical restraint may only be considered in a crisis where there is an immediate risk of serious harm and where less restrictive options are ineffective or not practicable.
- Any intervention must be necessary, proportionate, use the minimum force required and last only for the shortest time necessary to reduce the immediate risk.
- The pupil must remain appropriately supervised and monitored throughout and after the incident.
- Seclusion - involuntarily placing a pupil alone in an environment and physically preventing them from leaving - is inappropriate in school and will not be used.
- Incidents involving physical restraint must be reported to the Principal and recorded on the required documentation.
- The Principal will ensure reporting and oversight by the Board of Management and the NCSE in accordance with current Department requirements.
- Risk assessment, individual planning and staff training will be reviewed following incidents involving physical restraint or repeated crisis situations.

Emergency response

Where there is a medical emergency, serious injury, immediate danger or a situation beyond the school's capacity to manage safely, the school may contact emergency services and parents/guardians and take other reasonable steps required to protect life and safety.

11. Post-incident support and review

- Attend first to the pupil's regulation, dignity and medical needs.
- Check whether any other pupil or staff member requires first aid, medical attention or support.
- Provide an accessible debrief for the pupil where this is meaningful and appropriate.
- Offer staff debrief/support following significant incidents.
- Notify parents/guardians as appropriate.
- Complete incident records and ABC information promptly and objectively.
- Review triggers, environmental factors, staffing, communication, timetable and support strategies.
- Update risk assessments and individual plans where needed.
- Escalate to the Principal/MDT/Board where the frequency, severity or risk profile indicates that further intervention is required.

12. Recording, monitoring and data protection

Accurate records are essential in a special-school setting. They allow the school to understand patterns, evaluate interventions, advocate for supports and provide evidence when requested by relevant authorities or professionals.

- Incident Report Forms should be completed for significant incidents in accordance with school procedures.
- ABC Charts should be used where patterns, triggers or functions of behaviour need to be established.
- Records should identify date, time, location, antecedents, objective description of behaviour, response, outcome, injury/damage and persons notified.
- Records should avoid judgemental labels and should distinguish direct observation from interpretation.
- Records will be stored and retained in accordance with the school's data protection and record-retention procedures.
- Information will be shared only where there is a lawful and legitimate educational, safeguarding, health, safety or statutory purpose.

13. Recognition, rewards and proportionate consequences

Positive acknowledgement should be individualised and meaningful. Examples include praise, preferred activities, choice, visual reinforcement, celebration of progress, positive communication with home and other developmentally appropriate systems.

Where a consequence is appropriate, it should be connected to the behaviour, understood by the pupil where possible, proportionate, time-limited and consistent with the pupil's needs and rights. The school will avoid punitive measures that are unlikely to teach an alternative skill or that escalate distress.

- Re-teaching or practising an alternative skill.
- Reparation or restoration where appropriate and meaningful.
- Temporary removal from an activity where necessary for safety or regulation, with supervision.
- Adjustment or withdrawal of a privilege where the pupil can understand the link and the response is proportionate.
- Increased support, supervision or environmental adaptation.
- Referral to the Principal and/or multidisciplinary support for serious or persistent behaviour.
- Suspension or expulsion only in accordance with the sections below.

14. Suspension

Suspension is a serious sanction. It is not a routine response to disability-related distress or behaviours of concern. Before deciding on suspension, the school will consider the nature and seriousness of the behaviour, the pupil's age and developmental profile, special educational needs, known triggers, interventions already tried, the impact on others, the safety context and whether suspension is proportionate and likely to serve a legitimate purpose.

14.1 Authority to suspend

The Board of Management holds the authority to suspend and may delegate authority to the Principal in writing within defined limits. Unless the Board resolves otherwise, the Principal may impose a suspension of up to three school days. A suspension longer than three days should ordinarily be referred to the Board for consideration and approval. The Board may, by formal decision, authorise the Principal, with the approval of the Chairperson, to impose up to five days where a Board meeting cannot be convened in a timely manner. The Board should normally place a ceiling of ten school days on any one period of suspension.

14.2 Grounds and fair procedures

- Serious behaviour that presents a real and significant risk to safety.
- Serious or persistent behaviour that significantly disrupts the learning or functioning of others.
- Serious damage to property or other behaviour of comparable gravity.
- Any other serious breach where suspension is proportionate after considering the individual circumstances.

Where suspension is being considered, the pupil and parents/guardians will be informed of the concern and how it will be investigated, and will be given a meaningful opportunity to respond before a decision is made, except that an immediate suspension may be imposed in exceptional safety circumstances following a preliminary assessment. A formal investigation must then follow promptly.

14.3 Immediate suspension

The Principal may consider immediate suspension where the pupil's continued presence at that time would represent a serious threat to the safety of the pupil, other pupils, staff or another person. Parents/guardians must be notified and safe collection arrangements made. A pupil will not be sent home without prior contact with a parent/guardian or other authorised arrangement. No suspension will be open-ended.

14.4 Notification, review and return

- Parents/guardians will receive written confirmation of the reason, duration, start/end dates, arrangements for return and appeal/review information where applicable.
- The school will consider educational continuity during suspension where practicable and appropriate.
- A return-to-school meeting or plan may be used to review supports, risks, expectations and agreed interventions.
- The Board will formally review a proposal where cumulative suspension would bring the total to 20 school days or more in a school year.
- A suspension totalling 20 school days or more in a school year is subject to a Section 29 appeal.

15. Expulsion

Expulsion is the permanent exclusion of a pupil from the school and is an exceptional measure. The authority to expel is reserved to the Board of Management. The Board will apply fair procedures and the statutory process under section 24 of the Education (Welfare) Act 2000.

15.1 Grounds

A proposal to expel may arise only on serious grounds, including where behaviour is a persistent cause of significant disruption, where the pupil's continued presence constitutes a real and significant threat to safety, or where there is serious damage to property. The school will consider the individual context, special educational needs, impact of disability, interventions tried, professional advice and the likely impact of expulsion.

Special-school context

Before expulsion is proposed, the school will carefully document the supports and interventions attempted, seek relevant professional and agency support where appropriate, and consider whether all reasonable alternatives have been explored. Serious safety concerns may nevertheless require the Board to consider expulsion where risk remains real and significant.

15.2 Procedure

16. A detailed investigation carried out under the direction of the Principal, with written notice to parents/guardians and an opportunity to respond.
17. A recommendation by the Principal to the Board of Management where the Principal forms the view that expulsion may be warranted.
18. Consideration by the Board and a fair hearing, with reasonable notice and access to relevant information.
19. Board deliberation after the hearing. If the Board forms the opinion that the pupil should be expelled, the Educational Welfare Officer is notified in writing with reasons.
20. Consultations arranged by the Educational Welfare Officer during the statutory period, including consideration of continued education and alternatives.
21. After at least 20 school days have elapsed from receipt of the notification by the Educational Welfare Officer, and if the Board remains of the view that expulsion should proceed, formal confirmation of the decision and immediate written notification to parents/guardians, including appeal information.

16. Appeals

The school will provide information on applicable review and appeal mechanisms when a serious sanction is imposed. A parent/guardian, or a student aged 18 or over, may appeal an expulsion or a suspension totalling 20 school days or more in a school year under section 29 of the Education Act 1998, in accordance with

current Department procedures. Any patron-level or Board-level review process applicable to shorter suspensions will also be communicated.

17. Attendance and punctuality

- Parents/guardians are required to notify the school of a pupil's absence and the reason for the absence in accordance with the school's attendance procedures.
- The school will maintain attendance records and make statutory reports as required.
- Persistent attendance concerns will be addressed through supportive engagement with parents/guardians and relevant services.
- Poor attendance or lateness will not, by itself, be treated as grounds for expulsion.

18. School transport and school-related activities

Where behaviour on school transport is reported to the school, the Principal will work with parents/guardians, transport personnel, the School Transport Section/Bus Éireann where relevant, and other supports as appropriate. The school will consider whether behaviour is linked to communication, sensory, medical, regulation or environmental needs and will seek practical supports where possible.

The standards and principles of this Code also apply, in a developmentally appropriate manner, on school tours, community outings, swimming, sporting activities, therapy-related activities and other school-organised events.

19. Bullying behaviour and Bí Cineálta

Bullying behaviour is addressed under the school's separate Bí Cineálta Policy to Prevent and Address Bullying Behaviour. The current Department procedures are child-rights based and apply to primary, post-primary and special schools. Staff should follow the Bí Cineálta policy for prevention, recording, responding, communication and Board oversight.

Where behaviour may meet the definition of bullying, it should not be treated solely as a Code of Behaviour matter. Where it does not meet the bullying definition, the behaviour may still be addressed under this Code, the pupil's support plan and/or other relevant policies.

20. Child protection, health and safety

- Any concern that may constitute a child protection concern will be managed under the current Child Protection Procedures and Children First requirements, not solely through this Code.
- The Board of Management, as employer, will address staff safety through the school Safety Statement, risk assessment and health and safety procedures.
- Behaviour support planning will consider foreseeable risks to pupils, staff and visitors and the controls reasonably required to reduce those risks.
- Where a pupil presents with medical, medication, pain, sleep, feeding, toileting or other health factors that may affect behaviour, the school will seek appropriate health information and professional input within the limits of its role.

21. Implementation, training, review and ratification

- All staff will be made aware of this Code and of their responsibilities under it.
- Induction for temporary, substitute and new staff will include relevant behaviour, safety and crisis-response procedures.

- The school will support staff access to Department/NCSE training on behaviours of concern and crisis situations as available and appropriate.
- The Principal will monitor patterns of serious incidents, suspensions, restraint use and other relevant indicators and report to the Board as required.
- The Code will be reviewed annually and sooner where legislation, Department guidance, school experience or a serious incident indicates that revision is needed.
- Consultation with staff, parents/guardians, pupils in an accessible manner and the Patron will take place as appropriate before Board ratification.

Date approved by Board	_____
Chairperson	_____
Principal	_____
Next scheduled review	_____

Appendix A - Incident and ABC recording expectations

For significant incidents, records should be completed as soon as practicable while details are fresh. At minimum, staff should record:

- Date, time and location.
- Who was present and who directly observed the incident.
- Antecedent/context: what was happening immediately before the behaviour.
- Objective description of the behaviour: what the pupil did or said, without interpretation.
- Immediate safety response and de-escalation strategies used.
- Any physical intervention/restraint, including duration and reason, using the required form.
- Outcome and how the pupil returned to regulation.
- Any injury, first aid, medical treatment or property damage.
- Who was informed: parent/guardian, Principal, nurse, MDT, Board or external service as appropriate.
- Follow-up actions: plan review, risk assessment, MDT request, environmental change, additional support or other action.

ABC reminder

A = Antecedent or what happened before. B = Behaviour described objectively. C = Consequence/response and what happened afterwards. ABC recording is intended to identify patterns and improve support, not to assign blame.

Appendix B - Suspension decision checklist

Check	Question
Seriousness	Is the behaviour sufficiently serious to warrant suspension?
Context	What was happening before and during the incident? Are communication, disability, sensory, medical or environmental factors relevant?
Safety impact	What was the actual or reasonably foreseeable risk to the pupil, peers, staff or others?
Interventions	What preventative and support strategies have been tried, for how long, and with what outcome?
Proportionality	Is suspension proportionate and likely to serve a legitimate educational/safety purpose?
Fair procedures	Have the pupil and parents/guardians been informed and given an opportunity to respond?
Authority	Is the proposed duration within the Principal's delegated authority or does Board approval apply?
Written notice	Will the reason, duration, return arrangements and appeal/review information be confirmed in writing?

Return planning	What additional supports or changes are needed before/after return?
Cumulative days	Will this bring the pupil to 20 or more suspended school days in the current school year?

Appendix C - Expulsion process checklist

22. Detailed investigation under the direction of the Principal.
23. Written information to parents/guardians and opportunity to respond.
24. Principal recommendation to the Board, with records of supports and interventions.
25. Board hearing with fair notice and fair procedures.
26. Board deliberation without the Principal or presenting party taking part in the final decision beyond clarification where appropriate.
27. If the Board forms the opinion to expel: written notification with reasons to the Educational Welfare Officer.
28. Observe the statutory minimum period of 20 school days from EWO receipt of notification.
29. Participate in EWO consultations and consider alternatives/continued education.
30. If the Board remains of the view to expel after the statutory period: formally confirm the decision.
31. Notify parents/guardians immediately in writing and provide Section 29 appeal information.
32. Maintain a complete, confidential record of the process and decision.

Appendix D - Parent/Guardian acknowledgement

I/We acknowledge receipt of St. Bríd's Special School Code of Behaviour. I/We understand that the school will apply the Code in a manner that takes account of the pupil's individual needs, level of understanding and the requirements of law and Department guidance.

Pupil name: _____

Parent/Guardian name: _____

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Policy reference sources

This policy should be read with the most current versions of the following documents:

• Tusla/NEWB - Developing a Code of Behaviour: Guidelines for Schools (2008).

• Department of Education - Understanding Behaviours of Concern and Responding to Crisis Situations: Guidelines for Schools in Supporting Students (2024).

• Department of Education Circular 0081/2024 - Understanding Behaviours of Concern and Responding to Crisis Situations.

• Department of Education Circular 0042/2026 - update on training, monitoring and oversight arrangements.

• Department of Education - Bí Cineálta Procedures to Prevent and Address Bullying Behaviour (effective from September 2025).

• Department of Education - current Section 29 appeal procedures.

• Department of Education - current Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools.