

LGBT Policy



St. Michael's College
Listowel, Co. Kerry

Reviewed	Ratified by the Board of Management	Review Date

This policy is informed by The Equal Status Acts (2000 to 2012).

Mission Statement

St. Michael's College is a caring, student-centered learning community comprised of students, their families and staff. As members of our community, we are called to work together to create a supportive, fair, honest and compassionate environment so that our students are equipped and empowered to take their place as valuable members of society. We work to reach for excellence in our areas of talent and skill while respecting the uniqueness of each person.

Rationale for this Policy

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 LGBT+ young people, this time can have additional challenges/difficulties 'Studies in Ireland show that many LGBT+ 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.

The School's Role

St. Michael's College 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 education all of its students on Relationship and Sexuality (RSE). As part of the College's RSE programme sexual orientation and societal reactions to it will be discussed.

However, it is for the individual student himself 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 LGBT+ students, it is important that if they do speak to someone about

their concerns, that this person will have handle the disclosure sensitively. It should not be assumed that a young person who is LGBT+ is necessarily troubled by their sexual orientation. The College 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/guardians or forward information about such events to parents/guardians.

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 Guidance Counsellor.

The Role of the SST and Year Head

The Year head and the SST will work to ensure that the young LGBT+ student discovering their sexual orientation feels supported and valued within the school community. The SST will assign an adult (usually the Year Head, member of the SST 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 LGBT+ 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 significant 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.

A Safe and Inclusive Learning Environment

In seeking to create a safe and inclusive learning environment for all students including LGBT+ 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.

- ⌘ Admission Policy: St. Michael's College Admissions Policy is welcoming and inclusive of all students, including LGBT+ students.
- ⌘ Staff training: staff training is encouraged empowering teachers with the knowledge, skills and confidence needed to raise their awareness of equality issues and LGBT+ students and to address homophobic harassment and bullying in our school.
- ⌘ SST, Year Heads & Guidance Counsellors: The SST, Year Heads & 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: At St. Michael's College, we ensure that sexual orientation is addressed in a positive and open way when talking about human sexuality. Wellbeing and SPHE teachers are supported in attending in-service training on sexuality and sexual orientation.
- ⌘ Wellbeing/SPHE/CSPE: LGBT+ experiences should be included in areas of the curriculum such as Human Rights, Human Dignity, Discrimination, Legal Rights, Political Campaigning and Advocacy.
- ⌘ Student Voice Team: We seek to ensure that membership of our school's Student Voice Team

LGBT+ Teachers in School

Schools that are inclusive and supportive of LGBT students are also supportive and inclusive of all LGBT 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).

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.

Research:-

- www.workplacereactions.ie
- www.belongto.org

Appendix 2 - LGBT+ Terminology

L - Lesbian. Lesbians are women or femme people attracted to women or femme people.

G - Gay. Gay is sometimes used as an umbrella term for the community as a whole. Specifically, it refers to a man (or masc person) attracted to other men or masc people.

B - Bi. Bi means being attracted to people of your own gender, and at least one other gender.

T - Transgender. Trans is not a sexuality, but a gender. While society has seen great leaps forward in LGB acceptance, Trans acceptance still lags dangerously behind. Extra care ought to be given - 45% of trans people will attempt suicide in their lives due to social stigma.

Transgender - when you are not the gender you were assigned at birth.

Cisgender - when you are the gender you were assigned at birth.

AFAB - Assigned Female At Birth. Sexed as female, societally labelled as female.

AMAB - Assigned Male At Birth. Sexed as male, societally labelled as male.

Trans Man - Someone who is / presents as / feels they are a man.

Trans Woman - Someone who is / presents as / feels they are a woman.

Non-Binary - an umbrella term for any person who does not identify as either a man or a woman (Genderqueer, non-binary, genderfluid). Many cultures throughout history have had more than two genders, including modern day India with three and modern day Indonesia with five genders. American missionaries looking to colonize

Hawaii killed anyone they found of the native peoples' third gender, the Mahu (literally: the middle).