



NORLIGHTS
INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL
Oslo

School Environment

(§ 9A) Strategy Plan

Introduction and definitions

Part 1

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Purpose

Primary and secondary education is mandatory in Norway. Therefore, it is important that all students have a safe and good school environment. The school environment shall promote health, well-being and learning for the students. The student has an individual right to a safe and good psychosocial and physical school environment. It is the individual student's subjective experience of being offended that is the basis for the school's handling of the **Education Act § 9 A - Students' School Environment** (Opplæringsloven Kapittel 9 A – Elevenes skolemiljø.)

This Strategy Plan only deals with the “psychosocial environment”, hereinafter referred to as the “school environment”. We provide information on what the school should do if a student is not safe and good at school, and about the ability of students and parents to report the matter to the County governor.

Chapter 9A of the Education Act is intended to help the students feel safe and good at school so that the students enjoy the school and experience good learning. The regulations give the student an individual right and contains a procedure for how the school and County governor should handle the cases in the best possible way.

The regulations on the school environment have been approved by the Government, and it is not optional for schools to follow them. The regulations shall ensure the legal certainty of the students in matters relating to the school environment. The school must work systematically to follow up the pupils' school environment and implement measures to comply with the new requirements of the Education Act.

The school environment includes the interpersonal relationships, the social environment, and how students and staff experience this environment at NLIS. The school environment will positively affect the students' health, well-being and learning, security and social belonging. NLIS has a zero tolerance against various forms of offense. Although zero incidence is probably unrealistic, will the school's zero tolerance and active pursuit of a safe learning environment be essential to strengthen the welfare of the students.

Students at NLIS shall not be exposed to offensive words or actions such as bullying, discrimination, violence, racism or exclusion at school or on the way to school.

At NLIS, the student's school environment will be under continuous, long-lasting, and systematic review. When children feel that the adults put the same limits for bullying and undesirable behavior, then it is preventive. Therefore, parents have a big responsibility and are a very important resource in the efforts the school put into preventing bullying.

Introduction to the acts

The Education Act:

Chapter 9a underlines that each pupil has the right to a good physical and psychosocial environment. If the students believe that their rights are not properly protected, they or their parents may ask the school to take immediate action. The school must act according to the *Duty to act* and the student / parents may report the matter to the County Governor. The County Governor makes individual decisions in the case, with a right to appeal to the Directorate for Education (UDIR).

The Public Administration Act:

The objective of the act is to strengthen each individual's legal protection in relation to the public administration. The act lays down rules for administrative procedures which are also useful to the administrative authorities. Under this act, every school has a duty to inform parents and pupils of the routines for taking administrative decisions and the possibility for appealing against such decisions.

The Act relating to the Municipal Health Services and the "Regulations relating to environment-related Health Care in Kindergartens and Schools etc."

Here the health authorities specify the requirements to the school's physical and psycho-social environment. These provisions and chapter 9a complement each other and should therefore be assessed jointly.

A look into Chapter 9 a – Students' School environment:

§ 9 A-1 The scope of the chapter

The chapter applies to students in primary and secondary school (grunnskole og videregående). This chapter also applies to students participating in homework support programs and after school care programs (leksehjelp og SFO), with the exceptions of sections 9A-10 and 9A-11.

The rules on the students' school environment apply for school hours and recess/break time at school and school-based after school care programs (ASCP). The rules also apply when the school or ASCP have activities outside the school's buildings / area, or are on premises outside the school area.

Chapter 9 A does not apply in the students' free (outside school) time, but if the students experience something in their free time, which means they do not feel safe at school, the school still has to act according to the duty to act until the student is safe and good at school again.

When the students are on the school road, the rights and duties do not apply, according to The Education act, sections 9 A-2 and 9 A-4.

§ 9 A-2. The right to a safe and good school environment

All students are entitled to a safe and good school environment that promotes health, well-being and learning

Every student in the primary, lower secondary and upper secondary schools in Norway is granted a statutory right to a good school environment. Anyone who feels that the indoor climate or any other aspect of a school building or playground causes discomfort, can now apply to the school and ask for any deficiency to be remedied. In the same way, all those who feel that they do not have a safe and good school environment can ask for measures to be taken regarding this.

Both students and parents can contact the school and ask for improvements of the school environment. The advice is that it should be done in writing. The school has a duty to take such requests seriously and handle them in conformity with the rules of the Education Act and the procedures set forth in the Norwegian Administration Act. This means that the school must as soon as possible reach a decision on any complaint by starting an administrative process. The person who has asked for measures to be taken is entitled to receive written notification of this decision. The parents have the right to appeal to the County Governor if the school does not react to their request. If the County Governor supports the complainant, the school must comply with the County Governor's orders.

§ 9 A-3. Zero tolerance and systematic work

The school will have zero tolerance for violations such as bullying, electoral violence, discrimination and harassment.

The school will work continuously and systematically to emphasize the health, the environment and the safety of the students so that requirements in or in compliance with the chapter are fulfilled. The principal is responsible for this being done.

The school will have zero tolerance for violations. The examples mentioned in the law are bullying, violence, discrimination and harassment, but the school must have zero tolerance for even less serious violations. Neither direct actions such as hate speech, nor more indirect violations, such as exclusion, isolation and talking behind someone's back should be tolerated. What offensive behavior is should be interpreted widely, but not so that all critical statements or disagreements are offensive behavior. The school's task is also to teach students to think critically and to respect the opinions and beliefs of others.

The requirement for systematic work is partly due to the need to establish a good practice to fulfill the requirements and partly to commit the schools to take an overall responsibility for the school environment. In order to achieve the goal of a safe and good school environment that promotes the health, the environment and the safety of the students, the systematic work must be an integral part of the school activities at the individual school.

The systematic work must be adapted to local conditions at the individual school.

§ 9 A-4. Duty to act to ensure that students have a safe and good psychosocial school environment

Everyone who works at school should follow up on whether the students have a safe and good school environment, and intervene against violations such as bullying, electoral discrimination, and harassment if possible.

Everyone working at school should notify the principal if they suspect or know that a student does not have a safe and good school environment. The principal shall notify the school owner in a serious case.

In case of suspicion or knowledge that a student does not have a safe and good school environment, the school shall promptly investigate.

When one student claims that the school environment is not safe and secure, the school must take the most appropriate measure for the pupil to have a safe and good school environment. The same is valid when a survey shows that one student does not have a safe and good school environment.

The school will ensure that students involved are heard. What is best for students should be a fundamental consideration in the school's work.

The school will make a written plan when it is going to take action in one case. This plan shall contain:

- *Which problem the action shall solve*
- *Which measures the school has planned*
- *When the actions shall take place*
- *Who is responsible for ensuring the action happens*
- *When the actions shall be evaluated*

The school shall document what is being done to ensure the duty to act is met.

All students are entitled to a safe and good school environment that promotes health, well-being and learning. To ensure the pupils this right, the school has a duty of activity after completion. § 9 A-4. The purpose of this activity is to ensure that the schools act quickly and correctly when a student is not safe and at school. The **action plan** is the replacement for the Single decision (*Enkeltvedtak*) which was written earlier.

The right to make a complaint, § 9 A-6

If a student feels that he or she does not have a safe and good school environment, the student may report the matter to the County governor. Before that, the case must be raised with the principal, and it must have been at least one week before the matter is reported to the County governor. The County governor investigates and decides whether the school has fulfilled its duty of activity. Students and parents may report to the County governor orally or in writing, on paper or electronically. If the student / parents report orally, the County governor shall write down what the pupil / parents report and all information relevant to the case.

The purpose of the opportunity to report the matter to the County governor and to get it treated there is to ensure students and parents an opportunity to get their case tried by an authority outside the school. The County governor has the means and authority to ensure that the student's school situation changes when necessary. The County governor is a security net that can locate the issues the school itself cannot solve quickly and correctly.

If the County governor believes that the school has not fulfilled its duty of activity, this can be followed up by a decision on what the school should do to ensure that the student is given a safe and good school environment.

Private individuals may appeal to the County governor's decision to the Directorate for Education.

Consequences when the duty to act is not met

The school is obliged to ensure the student's right to a good psychosocial environment under § 9a-1. If the school does not safeguard the action the school will be responsible for this. Depending on the issue and how serious the omission is, this could have consequences for the school. Education Act §9a-12 and §9a-13 gives authority to punish with fines or imprisonment of up to three months, if staff / school accidental or deliberate have not fulfilled their action duty.

Goals for NLIS' work for a good school environment

- NLIS should be safe for students and staff - a good place for learning and development.
- All students at NLIS will experience each school day without bullying or other forms for violations.
- NLIS will actively work to prevent, detect and stop insulting words and actions.

Students who feel they are being subjected to bullying, violence, racism or various forms of discrimination, should be able to rely on that NLIS takes violations seriously. The school must, possibly in collaboration with other bodies, take appropriate measures to stop such behavior.

It is important to emphasize that this provision is about more than bullying. Bullying, violence, racism and discrimination are just examples of "offensive words or actions." The law also applies to other forms of abusive words or actions, such as negative, individual statements about a person's appearance or disability, clothing, beliefs, dialect etc.

Offensive behavior and definitions

Offensive behavior is a generic term that encompasses all forms of bullying, violence, racism and discrimination. Offensive behavior also includes other forms of abusive words or actions, such as negative, individual statements about a person's appearance or disability, clothing, beliefs, dialect etc.

Offensive behavior can occur as single acts or repeated. If a student is violated or not, depends on the student's subjective experience. This plan deals with offensive words or actions that come from peers and staff.

So, what is it meant with offensive words at NLIS?

BULLYING means that one or more pupils say or do hurtful or unpleasant things to another pupil. In bullying this happens repeatedly and the person who is victimized has difficulties defending himself/herself.

Violence, racist statements, discrimination and ostracism can be offensive elements used in bullying repeatedly and over time, victimizing a person who cannot defend himself/herself.

EXCLUSION means that someone deliberately is excluded from a group.

VIOLENCE means the use of physical power to hurt others.

RACISM means that someone is treated unequally or nuisance, for example because he/she has different skin color or speaks a different language.

DISCRIMINATION means that a person is treated unfairly or harassed, for example because of gender, disabilities, faith, skin color or origin (national or ethnic).

OSTRACISM means that a person is nearly always excluded from a group or class.

CYBERBULLYING means that someone uses digital technology to send and spread malicious messages or pictures of a person / situation.

It is not always easy to distinguish between the offensive acts mentioned in section 9a-3. The list above is merely an indication. The most important thing is to remember that every pupil has a right not to be subjected to offensive words and deeds and that all employees at the school have a duty to react if they learn of or suspect that a pupil is being victimized. They must look into the matter, notify the school's management and if necessary intervene themselves. The school's management has a duty to prepare plans against such violations and to inform both pupils and parents of their rights in relation to this.

This provision also applies to offensive words and actions that are not bullying, violence, discrimination or racism, such as for example single utterances about looks or disabilities. Words or actions that basically are not intended to be offensive, would nevertheless be construed as. Different age groups and social and cultural groups will have different norms of behavior.

A statement or action that would be acceptable within the group, could be offensive or intimidating for students outside the group. It can be a challenge to find the balance between humor and offense.

This provision applies to situations where offensive words or actions come from peers and where they come from staff. NLIS staff shall annually discuss together what "offensive behavior" means at our school, as well as understanding of what it means to "Intervene".