BIRKENHEAD
SCHOOL

Anti-Bullying Policy

Reviewed by DSL: October 2026
Reviewed by Governor: Nicky Thorp, September 2026
Next review: August 2027

Statement of Intent

Birkenhead School is committed to promoting respect for every individual and safeguarding their happiness within the community. We will work to prevent and address all forms of bullying and abusive behaviour towards any member of the community. Staff and Governors do not condone bullying in any form, and Governors support the Principal & CEO in its eradication. The Designated Safeguarding Lead will maintain a central overview of bullying incidents and report relevant information to Governors at board meetings.

We aim to sustain a school ethos in which civilised behaviour is expected and bullying is recognised as unacceptable. Relationships should be founded on mutual respect, trust, care and consideration, rather than power or intimidation. Bullying must not undermine an environment in which every student is encouraged to do their best and in which self-respect and respect for others are actively promoted.

Whilst we are aware that within a large community tensions will arise, it is the responsibility of all students to be tolerant of others and to ensure that their behaviour is not hurtful to them. As part of the School community, students have a responsibility to discourage bullying and to report incidents of it.

Our approach to bullying is based on the key values of Respect and Responsibility. This policy was developed in consultation with the Student Council and should be read alongside:

- Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy
- Keeping Children Safe in Education 2026
- Behaviour Policy
- Behaviour Management System
- Online Safety Policy
- Mobile Phone Policy
- School Rules

The School may engage Family Help, Early Help, Children's Social Care or other external agencies where bullying concerns indicate wider safeguarding, welfare or family support needs. Parents will usually be informed unless doing so would place a child at risk.

Definition

Bullying is aggressive behaviour, usually repeated over time, that causes another person to feel uncomfortable, distressed or threatened, whether or not that effect was intended. It may involve one student or a group, and the individuals involved may differ from one occasion to another. A single unresolved and frightening incident may also be treated as bullying. Bullying may be overt and intimidating, hidden and subtle, or indirect, such as manipulating a third party to tease or torment someone. Students who are LGBTQ+, have SEND, or belong to religious or ethnic minority communities are statistically at greater risk; this will always be considered when concerns are reported. Children with a social worker, looked-after and previously looked-after children, young carers, and children experiencing mental health difficulties may also be more vulnerable and may require additional support.

Bullying may be criminal: in cases of physical assault, for example, or if money or property is demanded with threats, or when bullying is racial. In this case the matter can be referred to the police. A bullying incident will be addressed as a child protection concern where there is reasonable cause to suspect that a child is suffering, or is likely to suffer, significant harm.

The School recognises that bullying, including online bullying, may indicate wider or overlapping safeguarding concerns. Concerns will be assessed alongside all available safeguarding information and may indicate abuse, neglect, child criminal exploitation, child sexual exploitation, financial exploitation, modern slavery, harmful sexual behaviour, domestic abuse (including child-to-parent or carer abuse), mental health concerns, radicalisation, misogyny, incel-related ideology or other forms of harm. Where appropriate, concerns will be managed in accordance with the Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy.

The School recognises that bullying may constitute child-on-child abuse, including harassment and violence, and may form part of a continuum of harmful sexual behaviour. Such behaviour must never be dismissed as banter, having a laugh, part of growing up or "boys being boys". Reports will be taken seriously and managed in accordance with the Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy.

Bullying is often motivated by prejudice, including:

- SEND
- Misogyny/misandry
- Disability: because of, or focusing on, the issue of disability
- Homophobic or Transphobic: because of, or focusing on, the issues of sexuality and/or gender identity
- Racist/Cultural/Religious: racial, cultural or religious taunts, comments or gestures
- Background: because a child is adopted, is being fostered or has caring responsibilities or other home circumstances

We respect difference and welcome diversity in our children, young people and in society in general, and believe our School should be inclusive.

We believe that students should have the right to feel safe, secure and valued and that creating a safe environment and dealing with bullying is everyone's responsibility.

We support a range of positive strategies to deal with bullying and actively challenge the use of humiliation, fear, ridicule and other similar approaches in an effort to reduce bullying. Bullying can result in long-term psychological damage and, in extreme cases, suicide. It might be motivated by actual differences between children, or perceived differences. Any prejudice-based language is unacceptable.

This policy applies during school visits and other off-site activities connected with the School. Staff may also discipline students reasonably for conduct outside the School premises. Bullying on public transport, school buses or in the local community will therefore be addressed under this policy. Online bullying, whether it occurs at School or at home, will be managed under the School's Behaviour Policy. Where conduct may constitute a criminal offence, the School will consider referral to the police and other appropriate services.

Where bullying may constitute a criminal offence, the School will assess the circumstances and refer the matter to the appropriate services, including the Police and/or WSCP, where necessary. If a crime has been committed, the School will work with the relevant agencies in accordance with its safeguarding responsibilities.

Examples of types of bullying:

- Emotional - being unfriendly, excluding, tormenting (e.g., hiding books, threatening gestures)
- Physical - pushing, kicking, hitting, punching or any use of violence
- Verbal - name-calling, sarcasm, spreading rumours, teasing; comments may focus on disabilities, physical attributes such as hair colour or body shape, or on specific learning difficulties/educational needs
- Racist - racial taunts, graffiti, gestures; these may touch on religion or culture
- Homophobic/Biphobic/Transphobic – behaviour focusing on, or motivated by, actual or perceived sexual orientation and/or gender identity.
- Online - through misuse of the internet, apps, social networks, email, chat rooms, text messaging, calls, transfer of images, the misuse of associated technology, i.e. camera & video facilities; online bullying may also include misuse of artificial intelligence tools, deepfakes, manipulated images, voice cloning, impersonation, synthetic media and AI-generated harmful content. Such behaviour will be treated as a serious safeguarding and disciplinary matter.
- Sexual – harmful sexual behaviour, including sexual harassment and sexual violence, will be treated as a serious safeguarding and disciplinary matter and reported to the appropriate safeguarding agencies or Police, as required.
- Making or sharing nudes or semi-nudes – any incident involving nude or semi-nude images or videos, whether described as consensual or non-consensual, including threats, coercion, sextortion or AI-generated sexual imagery, will receive a safeguarding response and be categorised and managed in accordance with the Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy.

The Malicious Communications Act 1988 states that it is an offence for a person to send an electronic communication to another person with the intent to cause distress or anxiety or to send an electronic communication which conveys a message which is indecent or grossly offensive, a threat, or information which is false and known or believed to be false by the sender. The wider search powers included in the Education Act 2011 give school staff powers to tackle online bullying by providing a specific power to search for and, if necessary, delete inappropriate images (or files) on electronic devices, including mobile phones.

Why is it Important to Respond to Bullying?

Bullying can make a student's life a misery, undermine confidence and self-esteem, destroy their sense of security, and have a lifelong negative impact. Every student has the right to feel safe and to be treated with respect. Students who bully others must also be helped to understand the consequences of their actions and learn different ways of behaving.

What To Look For

Students who are being bullied may show changes in behaviour, such as becoming shy or nervous, feigning illness, taking unusual absences or clinging to adults. Their work patterns may change: they may struggle to concentrate or begin truanting from school. Clothes may be torn, books damaged or possessions may go missing, and the student may offer improbable explanations. A student experiencing online bullying may appear withdrawn or upset after using the internet or a mobile phone.

All members of the community must be alert to the signs of bullying and act promptly and firmly against it, in accordance with School policy. Surveys have shown that in the majority of bullying incidents, most people knew that what was going on was wrong. Sometimes people who are aware fail to take action, either through lethargy, peer group pressure, or tacit support for what is going on.

Stopping Bullying

If a student knows of someone being bullied, or witnesses someone being bullied, it is very important that they tell someone – either the member of staff on duty, or a member of staff known and trusted, such as a Form Tutor or Head of Year. Students are also advised and reminded to log any concerns anonymously on the CPOMS safeguarding portal, via the QR code link on Firefly.

Prefects and students in positions of authority have a vital role to play in the identification of possible bullies. An informal word at an early stage can often prevent problems developing and they must consider their 'overseeing' function as a crucial part of their role. They are often much closer to incidents than members of staff and must therefore use their insights to a positive effect. Peer mentors can be allocated to assist both victims and perpetrators overcome the effects of bullying. Bullying and behavioural issues are discussed at Student Council meetings. There is specific advice available, and peer mentors with expertise in the bullying of members of our community who are statistically more vulnerable such as LGBT students, those with SEND or those from ethnic or religious minorities.

A student who is being bullied should tell the School so that the concern can be addressed. They should speak to a trusted member of staff, such as a Form Teacher/Tutor or Head of Year. If they cannot do so themselves, they should ask a parent or friend to report it on their behalf and, wherever possible, discuss the concern with their parents. The School will investigate, identify those involved, take

appropriate action and provide the student with immediate and continuing support. Our experience is that bullying stops when it is reported and addressed, and that students do not suffer as a result of reporting it.

If the bullying constitutes cyber bullying, a screenshot should be taken of the evidence and reported to the student's Form Tutor or Head of Year as soon as possible.

The Chaplain and School Nurse are available to talk over problems. The following telephone number might be helpful if a student would prefer to talk to someone anonymously: CHILDLINE – 0800 1111 is a 24-hour, free, confidential helpline for children who are experiencing abuse, bullying or stress of any kind. Students may also seek support through CEOP, Report Remove, trusted adults, the Designated Safeguarding Lead and School safeguarding reporting systems.

What will happen in cases of bullying?

Our first priority is to stop the bullying and help the student who has experienced it to feel safe and supported. A sanction may be necessary, but some young people may not understand the distress they are causing. In such cases, clearly explaining the impact and setting firm expectations may be sufficient. Where bullying persists or is particularly serious, sanctions may range from detention to suspension or permanent exclusion, imposed by the appropriate senior leader. Parents will be involved. Students responsible for repeated or serious bullying will be required to follow the Bullying Rehabilitation Programme with the School Nurse.

Procedure:

When bullying is reported, the School will act promptly to safeguard and support the student affected, investigate the concern, record the incident on CPOMS and the Bullying Log, involve parents as appropriate, and decide whether restorative action, sanctions or referral to safeguarding partners or the Police is required. The response will be proportionate to the seriousness, persistence and wider safeguarding context of the behaviour, and the outcome will be followed up to check that the bullying has stopped.

The student who has reported experiencing bullying will be interviewed on their own by an appropriate member of staff, most likely their Form Teacher/Tutor, Head of Year or another senior member of staff. They may be asked to write an account of events. The process for responding to the concern will be explained clearly, and the student will be given an opportunity to discuss their own reactions and behaviour towards the other student or students involved. They will also be offered support and advice.

Once the investigating member of staff believes that a bullying offence has been committed, the student alleged to be responsible and any others involved will be interviewed. Students will typically be interviewed individually, although there may be occasions when it is appropriate to interview them in small groups. Where appropriate, they may be asked to write an account of events. The process for responding to bullying will be explained clearly to them.

- At Stage 1, the Form Tutor will intervene to address and change the behaviour. Restorative action may be appropriate, including a discussion with both parties to agree how behaviour will improve. The incident will be entered on the Bullying Log and recorded as Stage 1 Bullying on the student's file. The response may include the student spending time at lunch with the

Form Tutor or Head of Year to discuss the incident and how to prevent the behaviour from recurring.

- A concern will move to Stage 2 – Head of Year intervention if bullying continues or if the original incident is sufficiently severe or longstanding. A School sanction, such as a Head of Year detention, is likely at this stage. This will be an after-school detention in which the behaviour and ways to prevent its recurrence will be discussed with the student and their parents. The student affected by the bullying will continue to be supported, although restorative practice may not be appropriate.
- It is likely that parents will be involved at this stage in order to engage their support in dealing with the matter. Delaying this involvement can delay resolution.
- Where bullying raises safeguarding concerns, the School will work with safeguarding partners, Children's Social Care, health services, the Police and other relevant agencies as appropriate.

Details of the incident will be recorded on CPOMS for every student involved. The Deputy Head (Pastoral & Operations) will be copied in so that the matter can be added to the Bullying Log. Any further bullying will be recorded as Stage 3. At that point, the Head of Seniors or Head of Prep will become involved, and the parents of the student responsible will be invited to a meeting. In accordance with the School's disciplinary policy, sanctions may include detention, internal suspension, external suspension or permanent exclusion.

Depending on the seriousness and persistence of the bullying, sanctions may include:

- internal suspension (the student or students are withdrawn from the School community but are supervised on the School premises)
- external suspension (the student or students are required to remain at home for one or more days)
- permanent exclusion

Incidents of reported bullying will be followed up by Form Teachers/Tutors and Heads of Year, to monitor that the problem has been resolved. All reports of bullying, whether later confirmed as such or not, will be entered on the Bullying Log in order to keep track of trends and patterns. Bullying data will be reviewed regularly to identify patterns, trends, protected characteristics, vulnerable groups and emerging safeguarding risks.

Protecting Students From Online Bullying

All students have access to training in online safety through PSHE, Assemblies and Digital Awareness workshops. Student Council Representatives and Prefects are easily identifiable, and they will act to support and refer victims of bullying. The School Network is also monitored for any evidence of cyber bullying by use of Smoothwall. Alerts are flagged immediately with the DSL and Network manager and followed up (see separate online safety policy). Students will be provided with repeated training on consent and the making or sharing of nudes or semi-nudes to enable victims to more easily report such behaviour to an adult or student leader. Filtering and monitoring arrangements will be checked and reviewed at least annually, with the review and resulting actions recorded. The School will also assess safeguarding risks arising from generative artificial intelligence, including access controls, data

protection, age restrictions, harmful content, impersonation and the creation or manipulation of images, audio and video.

Preventative action

The key points of our Anti-Bullying policy are provided to parents of all students when they arrive at the School, on the School website and from the School Office. They are communicated to students in an age-appropriate way. This will take place in lessons, Form time, assemblies and PSHE. Safeguarding posters are displayed around the School to direct students to staff leading on Safeguarding, behaviour and pastoral care across each Section of the School.

Student Relationships

Many activities in School and visits out of School contribute towards establishing good relationships. Residential trips are organised to act as a bonding exercise to enable students to work cooperatively in teams; these trips also enable Form Teachers/Tutors and Heads of Year to observe relationships within the Year group. All students new to Year 7 have a Peer Mentor who is a member of the Sixth Form and meets them for lunch once a week. Opportunities to extend friendship groups are provided through the House system and many other co-curricular activities. Student counsellors in the 6th Form, are available to offer support to victims and perpetrators of bullying.

Curriculum

Issues regarding bullying, methods of dealing with bullying, prejudice, discrimination and stereotyping form part of our pastoral and PSHE programme at appropriate stages of student development. The PSHE Co-ordinator also provides up-to-date resources to Heads of Year and Form Tutors for use within Form time. In Prep, Circle Time can be a helpful medium for dealing with issues related to bullying.

Bullying is discussed in assemblies and anti-bullying is promoted by the Student Council (eg 'wear something blue' in Anti-Bullying Week).

When delivering lessons, staff encourage student co-operation through the use of group work and pair work. Sport and games can be particularly effective in promoting teamwork. When appropriate, students will be allocated to groups selected by the teacher, and these will be changed at regular intervals to allow students more contact with a wider circle of students in their year group. The composition of groups should show sensitivity to those who have been the victims of bullying.

Staff

All staff must remain alert to the possibility of bullying and do everything they can, through their conduct and the curriculum, to promote caring and responsible behaviour. Staff must respond when bullying occurs and ensure that their own interactions with students cannot reasonably be perceived as bullying, for example through the use of nicknames. They must not tacitly reinforce the bullying or isolation of students. Students should see that staff treat everyone with the same degree of respect and are fair, consistent and controlled when exercising discipline.

In their teaching, staff should, where appropriate, exploit opportunities to discuss bullying and reinforce the School's principles of kindness, inclusivity and respect for others. Form Teachers/Tutors especially have a major pastoral role in this respect.

All staff, however, must be watchful, know their students, and carefully observe the social relationships between them. They should be alert to possible bullying, particularly exclusion from friendship groups, and ensure that they inform the Form Teacher/Tutor of such observations. Bullies can sometimes operate in a very subtle way. They must ensure that there are adequate supervisory arrangements at times and places where bullying is most likely to take place. Conscientious carrying out of duties is an essential part of this.

Staff must be prepared to listen: accusations of bullying may come from children who have observed bullying taking place or been on the receiving end themselves, or from parents or other members of staff.

Staff should be prepared to talk: this may involve quiet discussion with children involved, further discussion with the Form Tutor or with other staff, and dialogue with parents if necessary. In some circumstances and for some age groups a reprimand from the teacher may be sufficient to resolve the problem.

Staff are given training on bullying during staff meetings and INSET. Support literature is also available on Firefly and from the Deputy Head.

Parents

Parents should take their children's concerns seriously and report any alleged bullying to the School, with the Form Teacher/Tutor as the first point of contact. A child may ask a parent not to intervene because they fear that this will make the situation worse; in our experience, it does not. Parents should therefore seek advice from the School without delay.

Action in cases of bullying

Staff should report cases of suspected bullying to the Form Teacher*/Tutor(s) concerned and, where appropriate, the Head of Year. The involvement of all staff in eliminating bullying is welcomed. The School has an established procedure to be followed when allegations of bullying are made and this will be applied once cases are reported. Any safeguarding concern arising from bullying must be reported immediately to the Designated Safeguarding Lead or a deputy, without waiting for an investigation to conclude. If a child is in immediate danger, the police must be contacted on 999.

Responses will depend on the severity of the incident(s) but should always be as prompt as possible once discovered. Parents will typically be informed of reported bullying incidents within 24 hours.

The School maintains a central record of bullying incidents and the action taken. The Deputy Head (Pastoral & Operations) and Deputy Head of Prep are responsible for ensuring that patterns are identified through the Bullying Log and individual records. In Seniors, Heads of Year conduct half-termly reviews; in Prep, patterns are reviewed by SMT. Each safeguarding record must contain a clear summary of the concern, the actions taken, the decisions made and the reasons for them, and the outcome. Information will be shared when necessary to protect a child; data protection law does not prevent appropriate safeguarding information-sharing.

** For students in Prep, the person with primary pastoral responsibility is the Form* **Teacher***; in Seniors, we refer to this person as the Form* **Tutor***, since he or she may not necessarily teach the student. In Seniors, Heads of Year represent an additional level of pastoral responsibility.*

Friendship Issues

Sometimes behaviour will not be considered bullying. This is usually the case when a friendship, or relationship is in crisis or reaches an end. Although the behaviour may sometimes be hurtful, it is often not bullying. In these cases, rather than labelling students as 'bullies' or 'victims', we attempt to assist students in coming to terms with emotional difficulties and learning how to act with emotional maturity in these situations.

Perpetrators with SEND

The same expectations of safe and respectful behaviour apply to students with SEND. When investigating concerns, conducting interviews and deciding on support or sanctions, the School will take account of the individual student's SEND profile. This does not diminish the right of every student to feel safe and happy in School or prevent the School from applying this policy where a student with SEND is considered to have bullied another.

Bullying and Unkindness – The Prep

In Little School and Junior Prep, pupils are still developing their understanding of the difference between unkind behaviour, disagreement and bullying. Reports that another child is "bullying" them are therefore taken seriously, but investigation may show that the incident was an exchange of unkind words, a disagreement or a one-off lapse in judgement rather than bullying as defined in this policy. Children develop at different rates and may find it difficult to apply consistently what they have learned about managing relationships. We actively promote kindness throughout Prep through Form Time and Circle Time, themed assemblies and PSHE.

When a child reports that another pupil has been unkind to them, Form Teachers will carefully look into the issue and discuss what has occurred with the relevant children involved and any others who may be able to offer further insight. They may also seek further guidance from the Deputy Head of Prep, but many issues are either one-off incidents or examples of thoughtlessness. The children are given guidance on how to work together to resolve any differences and parents may be informed, as appropriate. These incidents are logged on pupil pastoral files and the 'Record of Unkindness' which is kept centrally by the Deputy Head of Prep.

As children's interpretation of incidents and behaviour can vary greatly between one another, ascertaining a clear and definitive picture of what has happened can be difficult. For parents, it can be equally challenging to grasp a full understanding of events when they only hear one perspective. In these instances, we encourage parents to seek further clarification from School before any judgements are made or conclusions drawn. We place significant emphasis on the need for honesty from all involved and look to draw out the learning opportunities that these incidents can offer.

When it is clear that a child has been subject to behaviour that has gone beyond unkindness or disagreement and can be defined as bullying, the matter is taken very seriously. The Deputy Head of Prep will work with Form Teachers to investigate the allegation, recording and keeping all records

centrally. The parents of those involved are met with to discuss the issue, appropriate sanctions are arranged and support is provided to the relevant children. Whilst it is important to be clear with the child who has been bullying that their behaviour is unacceptable, it is also important to gather further insight into the motivation behind their behaviour and any underlying difficulties they may be experiencing. One to one pastoral support sessions are provided with the School Nurse as part of the rehabilitation process. Equally, support for the child who has been the victim of bullying is paramount as the effects of bullying can be long lasting and detrimental.