



BIRKENHEAD SCHOOL

Anti-Bullying Policy

Statement of Intent

At Birkenhead School we are committed to promoting respect for the individual and their happiness within the community and therefore we will strive to eradicate all forms of bullying and abusive behaviour towards any member of the community. Staff and Governors do not condone any form of bullying. Governors support the Principal & CEO in the eradication of all thereof. To this end, the Designated Safeguarding Lead will keep a centralised overview of instances of bullying, and this will be reported to Governors at board meetings.

We aim to develop a school ethos that encourages civilised behaviour and views bullying as unacceptable. This ethos is one in which relationships are based on mutual respect, trust, care and consideration for others rather than on power and strength. We will not allow bullying to impinge on an environment in which all students are encouraged to do their best and where self-respect and respect for others is 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 and this policy was drawn up in consultation and agreement with the Student Council. This policy should be read in conjunction with:

- Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy
- Behaviour Policy
- Stages of Behaviour management flowchart
- 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, normally repeated over time, which makes other people feel uncomfortable, distressed or threatened, whether intentional or not. It can be the action of one student or a group, or different students on different occasions. It can be an unresolved single frightening incident, or a series of such incidents. It may be overt and intimidating but is often hidden and subtle. Bullying may also be indirect, e.g., manipulating a third party to tease or torment someone. Statistically, those students who are LGBTQ+, SEND or from religious or ethnic minority communities are more at risk of bullying, and this will always be considered when bullying is reported. Children with a social worker, looked after children, previously looked after children, young carers and children experiencing mental health difficulties may also be more vulnerable to bullying 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 be an indicator of wider safeguarding concerns. Bullying concerns will be assessed alongside other safeguarding information and may indicate abuse, neglect, child criminal exploitation, child sexual exploitation, harmful sexual behaviour, domestic abuse, mental health concerns, radicalisation or other forms of harm. Where appropriate, concerns will be managed in accordance with the Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy.

The School recognises that some bullying incidents may constitute child-on-child abuse and such incidents will be 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.

School visits are a part of everyday school life and, as such, this policy applies in full when students are off site, on work connected to the school. Moreover, teachers have a power to discipline students in a reasonable way for conduct on and off the school premises. As such, any bullying incidents occurring off the premises, such as on public transport, school buses or in the local community, will fall under this policy and be treated accordingly. If the matter involves criminal activity, the police will always be informed. Online bullying, whether occurring at school or at home, will be subject to the school's behaviour policy.

Bullying which is deemed to be illegal must be reported to the police, and we will refer to the appropriate services, including the police and/or WSCP where necessary and when a crime has been committed.

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 - focussing on the issue of sexuality.
- 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 will be treated as a serious safeguarding and disciplinary matter and will be reported to the IFD or Police, as required.
- Coercive - requesting or threatening to share nude or semi-nude images, including AI-generated sexual imagery, or sextortion.

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 hurts and can make the lives of its victims a misery; it undermines their confidence and self-esteem and destroys their sense of security; it can have a life-long negative impact on young people's lives. No one deserves to be a victim of bullying. Everybody has the right to be treated with respect. Moreover, students who are bullying need to learn different ways of behaving and understand the consequences of their actions.

What To Look For

Students who are being bullied may show changes in behaviour, such as becoming shy and nervous, feigning illness, taking unusual absences or clinging to adults. There may be evidence of changes in work patterns, lacking concentration or truanting from school. Students who are being bullied may come home with clothes torn or books damaged, and possessions may 'go missing'. They may offer improbable excuses for any of the above. Students who are victims of cyber-bullying may appear withdrawn or upset after using the internet or 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 you know of someone being bullied, or see someone being bullied, it is very important that you 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.

If someone is being bullied, it is very important that we know so that we can help. Keeping quiet will not make the problem go away. If possible, go to one of the members of staff mentioned above, or talk to a member of staff whom you know well. If you cannot do this, ask your parents or a friend to do it for you. It is very important in any case that you talk this issue over with your parents. We will identify the bully, investigate the facts and act accordingly. We will give you immediate and continued support. Our experience is that bullying does stop when it has been reported and dealt with, and that the victims of bullying do not suffer as a result of reporting this behaviour.

If the bullying constitutes cyber bullying, a screenshot should be taken of the evidence and reported to your 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 you would prefer to talk to someone anonymously: CHILDLINE – 0800 1111 is a 24hr, 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 priority is to stop the bullying behaviour and to enable the victim to feel safe and happy again. This may involve sanctioning the bully. However, young people can make mistakes or may not appreciate the distress they are causing. For them to stop it may be sufficient to make it clear the impact their behaviour is having and that we consider this to be unacceptable. However, if this is not sufficient, if bullying persists or if the bullying behaviour has been particularly severe, various sanctions may be applied, ranging from detention to exclusion from School by the Deputy Head or Headmaster or the Head of the Prep in the case of students up to Year 6. In these cases, parents will be involved. Repeat or serious offenders will be required to follow the 'Bullying Rehabilitation Programme' with the School Nurse.

Procedure:

- The victim will be interviewed, on their own, by an appropriate member of staff, most likely their Form Teacher/Tutor or Head of Year, or other Senior member of staff. They may be asked to write an account of events. The process for dealing with bullying will be explained clearly to them. The victim is also given the opportunity to discuss his/her own reactions and behaviour towards the bully. The victim is given support and advice.
- Once the investigating member of staff believes that a bullying offence has been committed, the bully and any others involved will be interviewed. Typically, students will be interviewed individually, but there may be occasions when it is appropriate to interview within small groups. They may be asked to write an account of events (where appropriate). The process for dealing with bullying will be explained clearly to them.
- Attempts will be made to change behaviour at Stage 1 (Form Tutor Intervention). Sanctions may be restorative at this stage, including facilitating discussions with both parties to agree improved behaviour moving forward. This will be logged as such on the Bullying Log and will be recorded as Stage 1 Bullying on the student's file. This may include time during lunch spent with the Form Tutor or Head of Year to discuss the incident and ways of preventing this behaviour from reoccurring.
- If there is further bullying or the incident itself is deemed sufficiently severe or longstanding, then students will be moved to Stage 2 – Head of Year intervention. It is likely that a School Sanction such as Head of Year detention will be applied at this stage. This will be an afterschool detention where the behaviour, and ways of preventing it, will be discussed with the student and their parents. The victim will 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 on all the students' files. The Deputy Head (Pastoral & Operations) is copied in so that it can be recorded as a bullying incident. Further bullying will result in Stage 3 Bullying, where the Head of Seniors or Head of Prep will become involved and the parents of the perpetrator will be contacted for a meeting. The following sanctions may be applied, in line with the School's disciplinary policy:

- detention
- 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 sharing of illicit images to enable victims to more easily report such behaviour to an adult or student leader.

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 be alert to the possibility of bullying taking place and do everything they can, both in their own attitudes and via the curriculum, to encourage caring, responsible behaviour. Staff need not only to be alert to bullying taking place and to respond when it does, they must also ensure that their dealings with students do not display elements of what may be or perceived to be bullying (e.g. using nick-names). Staff must avoid tacitly reinforcing the bullying or isolation of students. Students must see that staff treat all students with the same degree of respect and that, even in exercising discipline, staff are fair, consistent and controlled.

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 must take their children's concerns seriously and should not hesitate to seek advice from the School and to report any concerns or incidents of alleged bullying. Children may try to persuade parents not to intervene for fear that this may make the situation worse. In our experience this is not the case. The first point of contact should be the Form Teacher/Tutor.

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.

Responses will depend on the severity of the incident(s) but should always be as prompt as possible once discovered.

The School keeps a central record of bullying incidents and actions taken. The Deputy Head (Pastoral & Operations) and the Deputy Head of Prep are responsible for maintaining a record of incidents and reports of bullying so that any patterns can be identified. They do this through the completion of the 'Bullying Log' by Heads of Year, their own records and half-termly reviews by Heads of Year (Seniors) and SMT (Prep).

** 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

Students with SEND will be dealt with in the same way as other perpetrators. We will always take a student's SEND profile into account, especially when conducting investigations and interviews. However, the right of students to feel safe and happy in School necessitates us applying this policy regardless of the SEND profile of a student who is considered to have bullied another.

Bullying and Unkindness – The Prep

As pupils make their way through the Little School and Junior Prep years, they are constantly learning and developing their understanding of what constitutes unkind or bullying behaviour. As children develop at varying rates, their grasp of what bullying is, is not always a clear one. Often, children accuse others of bullying with little consideration for how bullying is defined. Such accusations are taken seriously, but often the reality is the incident has been an exchange of unkind words or a disagreement between two children. We actively promote kindness throughout Prep through Form Time and Circle Time, themed assemblies and PSHE; however, children are at a key developmental stage in their understanding of managing relationships and, at times, they can find consistent application of kind behaviour challenging.

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.

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