

2.2 PREVENTION OF BULLYING POLICY

(Formally known as ANTI-BULLYING POLICY)

September 2011

A DEFINITION OF BULLYING

Bullying is any behaviour which hurts, or causes distress to another person or group of people by taking advantage of their vulnerability, or by making them feel uncomfortable or threatened. It is usually unprovoked and is, by definition, often repeated and can continue for a long period of time. It always reflects an imbalance and abuse of power. Bullying behaviours are aggressive although they may not seem so. These patterns of behaviour damage self-esteem both in the aggressor and the victim.

Types of bullying include: bullying related to race, religion, culture, SEN or disability, appearance or health condition, sexual orientation, young carers or home circumstances, sexual behaviour.

METHODS OF BULLYING (this list is non-exhaustive)

Here are some examples of bullying behaviour:-

Hitting, kicking, pushing people around, spitting, slapping

Name calling, taunting, teasing, insulting, 'snide' comments, putting people down in class

Intimidating, threatening, isolating or excluding from the group

Cyberbullying - Using email, text or other electronic messages, or web spaces to write or say hurtful things

Spreading rumours and writing unkind notes or letters

Taking, damaging or hiding belongings

All people have the potential to bully others or to be bullied. Bullies are often highly socially competent people, who may provide plausible explanations for their conduct. Bullying can be carried out by an individual or within the context of a group of people, where individuals have different status, with one being the leader. It is likely that the leader will be quite able and articulate. Repeated teasing should be viewed as bullying. It is, however, not bullying when two young people of about the same size and strength have the occasional quarrel. Although this kind of behaviour is not bullying it will still be taken seriously by the school.

Bullying between children occurs whenever a child is made to feel unreasonably uncomfortable in her relationship with another child, whether the bullying is deliberate or not. Bullying may be physical, verbal, or cyber-bullying (texting, email or messages on social networking sites). Cyber bullying 'involves the use of information and communication technologies to support deliberate, repeated and hostile behaviour by an individual or group, that is intended to harm others'. It is not always possible to identify the specific action that has led to the discomfort, and sometimes both children involved feel bullied by the other. It is therefore impossible to lay down a prescriptive solution to all occurrences of bullying. Nevertheless some general principles do apply.

If the information comes from the child: The child being bullied may tell one of a number of people: a senior girl (perhaps the ones who have a particular responsibility for that year group), a member of staff (chaplain, matron, school nurse, teacher, tutor, domestic staff), the school counsellor or a parent. Children are usually unwilling to admit that they are being bullied, and may feel a sense of shame that they are unable to deal with it themselves. If they do take the initiative in telling someone that they are being bullied then they are usually telling the truth¹. Every child must feel that she can identify somebody she trusts, and that she can go to him or her with her problem, but she must feel confident that her problem will not be discussed with anyone else without her specific permission. That can make it difficult for the person told, but it remains a fundamental principle, that bullying should not be discussed without the knowledge and agreement of the child being bullied if possible.

If the information comes from someone else: Anybody at school or at home may suspect bullying is taking place. The first person to inform will usually be the form teacher or tutor. He or she may want to discuss the information with the Headmistress Deputy Head, Head of Boarding or the child's parent before deciding whether to approach the child, but again in principle the child should not be discussed "behind her back" more than is strictly necessary to establish the best way forward. However, if the information has come from one of the child's classmates then it could be a front or disguise for some other related or even unrelated problem – the experience of the form teacher or tutor will help decide whether to approach the child or to maintain observation for the time being.

The Information Chain: The bullied child should be encouraged to allow at least one of the following people to know of her problems: Form Teacher/Tutor, Headmistress, Deputy Head, Head of Boarding, Parent. During discussion the child may identify others who might help. But the basic principle remains: except in very unusual circumstances, bullying should not be discussed without the knowledge and agreement of the child being bullied.

Girls are encouraged to:

Be confident that action will be taken to stop the bullying

Be confident in their own self-worth and value to the School community

Be a good friend, above all when it is known that someone is unhappy or lonely and remember to include everyone in class and in the House, especially where sharing activities or group work are concerned

All pupils are encouraged to follow these guidelines.

1. Explain to the bully that her words/actions are upsetting; she may not be aware of this. However, if the bullying continues try not to show your feelings. Stay calm.
2. Walk away quickly and confidently, even if you don't feel that way inside.
3. If you are different in any way, be proud of it – it's good to be an individual.
4. The bully will not stop if she thinks she can get away with such behaviour. Discuss the problem with your friends and if you think it is serious tell a member of staff

¹ children may "admit" to being bullied if led to it through directed questioning. Sometimes being bullied is the easier option to admit to than, for instance, lack of effort.

The children are told frequently

- That there is no need to feel that they must deal with bullying by themselves. There are many people in the school, and their parents, whom they may tell, without fear that their information will be passed on without their knowledge or agreement. There is a postbox in the office in which notes may be left. Anybody may leave a note about suspected bullying – it does not have to be the person being bullied.
- That if members of staff are told about bullying by the child being bullied they will listen, and may ask if they may pass the information on to someone in a better position to help.
- That if members of staff suspect bullying they will inform the child's form teacher or tutor, or the Headmistress, Deputy Head, or the Head of Boarding.

The bully herself may also need help if she has come to recognise her own behaviour as "bullying". She too should feel able to discuss her problems with an adult, without fear of automatic punishment or exposure. It can be as difficult effectively to help a bully as a child being bullied. But she is still a child, and needs help, not just censure. The ultimate goal must be to stop the bullying, for the sake of all concerned.

ACTION

The level of response to incidents will obviously vary according to their seriousness. In most cases a complaint may be resolved informally in the first instance – a girl who has been accused of bullying may be asked to talk about her behaviour and encouraged to change/improve it. It may sometimes be the case that the girl in question genuinely has not realised that her actions can cause distress. The situation will then be closely monitored by staff.

However, a more formal procedure may be adopted for more serious cases, or in any case where informal discussions have not resulted in a change/improvement in a girl's behaviour, with the effect of conveying to all parties how seriously bullying behaviour is taken, as follows:

The victim and the accused should be asked to record the events in writing as soon as possible;

The victim and the accused will then be spoken to individually about the complaint, and each girl will have an opportunity to give their version of events:

The girls' record of events, a note of the discussions held and outcome of the discussions should be given to the Deputy. The details will be kept on the pupils' files.

Copies of the aforementioned documents should be sent to the Deputy Head and the Headmistress where there has been an incident of fighting or aggression. Any girl involved in a serious fight may well be sent to the Deputy Head or the Headmistress. It is very important to have a clear record of events, for a girl may become a habitual offender, a fact which will not be clear unless there is consistent reporting.

In addition, parents may be informed and invited to discuss the problem with the Deputy Head or the Headmistress.

Sanctions will be imposed on pupils who are found, following an investigation, to have bullied. Ultimately a girl who is found to have committed a serious offence of bullying, or who will not change/improve her behaviour, may be required to leave the School.

When bullying has been reported and action to prevent it has been taken, the situation will be monitored closely by staff to prevent it occurring again. Everyone involved has the responsibility for helping the bully to change her behaviour. In addition, the victim may need help to deal with her feelings and to understand and overcome her vulnerability.

This policy has regard to the DSCF Guidance 'Safe to Learn: Embedding Anti-Bullying Work in Schools'