

## 2.2 ANTI-BULLYING POLICY

2009

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, social or cyber-bullying (texting, email or messages on social networking sites). 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 truth<sup>1</sup>. 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 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 Headmaster 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.

**Action:** To do too much can cause as much damage as to do too little. Rushing in, even if well meant, can often harm the child's self-esteem more than doing nothing. It is a fine judgement, and the person best able to judge the right approach is often the child herself. Frequently it is enough that she has told somebody, that she has a friend and advisor, and no longer feels that she is dealing with the problem alone. The next step, if the child agrees, is for an adult to discuss the problem with the person doing the bullying, in as non-confrontational way as possible. It is unusual that a child is proud of being a bully, or even wants to bully. Her "bullying" may be no more than insensitivity. Pointing out, even gently, the perhaps unintended consequences of her actions can often shock her and cause distress. The word "bullying" itself should be used with circumspection. The best person to carry out the intervention is the form teacher, although sometimes it is appropriate to employ another member of staff.

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<sup>1</sup> 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.

Such discussion often opens up the problem sufficiently to allow everyone involved a safe way out. Only in the very rare cases that it does not, need further action be taken, and then the matter becomes one for the Headmaster, staff and parents to discuss and to agree together a course of action for the good of all the children involved.

**The Information Chain:** The bullied child should be encouraged to allow at least the following people to know of her problems: Form Teacher/Tutor, Headmaster, 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.

**School Policy** See the Parents' Handbook Appendix 8. 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 Headmaster, 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.