Anti-Bullying Policy

Review date: August 2023
Next review: August 2024
Reviewed by: Deputy Head - Pastoral

This policy sets out the aims of Bedford Girls' School in relation to bullying behaviour. It provides a framework within which any actions against bullying can be implemented and their effectiveness reviewed. The school values represented here are also reflected in the Positive Behaviour Policy, which incorporates the views of students. Staff are reminded of our Anti- Bullying Policy and where relevant, staff are trained in anti-bullying strategies.

Guiding Principles

The aim of our anti-bullying policy is to clarify that, within our school community, bullying at any level is always unacceptable. Bullying is included in the list of behaviours which qualify as peer-on-peer abuse. If left unaddressed it can have a devastating effect on individuals. It can be a barrier to their learning and have serious consequences for their mental health. Bullying which takes place at school does not only affect an individual during childhood but can have a lasting effect on their lives well into adulthood. By effectively preventing and tackling bullying, schools can help to create safe, disciplined environments where pupils are able to learn and fulfil their potential.

This anti-bullying policy document reflects our commitment to encouraging an environment where independence is celebrated and individuals can flourish without inhibition. Every member of the community has the right to be safe and happy in school and to be protected when they are feeling vulnerable. At BGS we aim to create an environment that prevents bullying from being a serious problem in the first place by creating an ethos of good behaviour where pupils treat one another and the school staff with respect.

The non-statutory DfE advice "Preventing and Tackling Bullying" July 2017 and "Cyberbullying – advice for headteachers & staff" 2014 has helped to guide this policy.

This policy should be read in conjunction with the school's Positive Behaviour policy, the Child Protection and Safeguarding policy and the e-Safety policy.

The objectives of our anti-bullying policy are to:

- clarify the school's collective understanding of the nature of bullying;
- involve the students themselves to share expectations and good practice to create culture of kindness in school
- underline the seriousness of bullying both physical and emotional, in its potential for causing psychological damage and even suicide;
- establish an agreed code of expectations for all school members;
- encourage staff to maintain awareness and understanding of potential for, and effects of, bullying in the classroom;
- make bullying an explicit theme in assemblies and through the curriculum e.g. Personal, Social and Health Education;

Bold   *Imaginative*   *Reflective*

- provide appropriate opportunities for pupils to share and consider relevant behavioural issues in a secure learning environment;
- encourage liaison between the school and parents;
- maintain a regular review of this policy.

What is Bullying?

Bullying is behaviour by an individual or group, repeated over time, that intentionally hurts another individual or group either physically or emotionally. Bullying can take many forms (for instance, cyber-bullying via text messages or the internet), and is often motivated by prejudice against particular groups, for example on grounds of race, religion, gender, sexual orientation, or because a child is adopted or has caring responsibilities. It might be motivated by actual differences between children, or perceived differences. Stopping violence and ensuring immediate physical safety is obviously a school's first priority but emotional bullying can be more damaging than physical; each case will be considered on an individual basis.

Many experts say that bullying involves an imbalance of power between the perpetrator and the victim. This could involve perpetrators of bullying having control over the relationship which makes it difficult for those they bully to defend themselves. The imbalance of power can manifest itself in several ways, it may be physical, psychological (knowing what upsets someone), derive from an intellectual imbalance, or by having access to the support of a group, or the capacity to socially isolate. It can result in the intimidation of a person or persons through the threat of violence or by isolating them either physically or online.

Relational conflict is a non-bullying situation. It usually involves individuals who are relatively similar in status. It is generally behaviour that happens occasionally, and offence might be accidental. In cases of relational conflict, there is usually a willingness to make things right, to reflect on what went wrong and to try to find a way forward. It is possible for relational conflict to evolve into bullying.

Definitions of bullying vary, but there are **three essential elements** that are always present:

- an unequal power relationship between the bully and target
- the deliberate and continued use of aggression
- the causing of physical pain and/or emotional distress

Cyber-bullying

The rapid development of, and widespread access to, technology has provided a new medium for 'virtual' bullying, which can occur in or outside school. Cyber-bullying is a different form of bullying and can happen at all times of the day, with a potentially bigger audience, and more accessories as people forward on content at a click.

When an electronic device, such as a mobile phone, has been seized by a member of staff who has been formally authorised by the headteacher, that staff member can examine data or files, and delete these, where there is good reason to do so. This power applies to all schools and there is no need to have parental consent to search through a young person's mobile phone.

If an electronic device that is prohibited by the school rules has been seized and the member of staff has reasonable ground to suspect that it contains evidence in relation to an offence, they must give the device to the police as soon as it is reasonably practicable. Material on the device that is suspected to be evidence relevant to an offence, or that is a pornographic image of a child or an extreme pornographic image, should not be deleted prior to giving the device to the police. If a staff member finds material that they do not suspect contains evidence in relation to an offence, they can decide whether it is appropriate to delete or retain the material as evidence of a breach of school discipline.

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If anyone receives hurtful cyber messages to tease, bully or threaten, that cause distress or discomfort, these should be saved and the matter reported to a teacher. Our ICT security system is able to trace any email on our system that is reported as being malicious.

The students are also taught in their PSHE lessons and the message reinforced in form tutorials to seek help if they experience problems, understanding that they are not accountable, nor should they feel guilty, for the actions of others in which they are unwilling participants

Who is the object of the bullying?

Any pupil is at risk, but there are certain indicators:

- lacking close friends in school
- being shy
- coming from an over-protective family environment
- being a carer or adopted
- being from a different racial, religious or cultural group
- being homosexual, lesbian, bisexual or transgender
- having a mental or physical disability
- being different in some obvious respect from the majority
- having specific learning difficulties
- being a 'provocative victim' (a child who behaves inappropriately with others)
- the obviously sensitive child

None of these factors can excuse bullying.

What are the signs of bullying?

Young people may:

- be frightened of walking to and from school
- be unwilling to go to school: feigning illness, increase in absences, late arrival at school or lessons
- change their route to school
- begin doing badly in school work
- come home with possessions missing or damaged
- become withdrawn and anxious/change in their usual behaviour
- suffer psychological damage
- have nightmares
- seem to lose a lot of possessions
- ask for or steal money
- continually appear to lose pocket money
- refuse to say what is wrong
- give improbable excuses for any of the above situations
- be anxious about checking computer messages, e-mails or texts
- self-harm
- consider or attempt suicide

Encouragement to Tell

It is important that we aim to create an atmosphere in the school where a pupil who is being bullied, or others who know about it, feel that they will be listened to and believed, and that action will be swift but sensitive to their concern. Not telling protects the bully or bullies and gives the message that they can continue, perhaps bullying others too. We encourage students to approach any member of staff with whom they feel

comfortable. We have notices in every form room alerting students to the nature of cyberbullying and giving advice on how to respond, if such situations arise.

Procedures

Bullying will lead to consideration under Safeguarding Children and Child Protection procedures if the pupil identified may be at risk or is at risk of serious harm. Restorative practice will usually be used to resolve any conflict. This enables those who have been harmed to convey the impact of harm to those responsible and for those responsible to acknowledge the impact their actions have had and to take steps to put it right. Restorative practice may also be accompanied by a disciplinary consequence for the perpetrator.

If a parent raises the concern via email, then a conversation will be arranged with the parent and an agreement to report back to them within an agreed timescale will be arranged. When setting a timescale for investigating a bullying complaint, staff need be realistic and consider other commitments within school.

If a child raises a concern, preliminary investigations will occur and then the parent will be contacted. The concern raised will be investigated and this will involve interviewing both the alleged perpetrator and the victim, as well as any witnesses including bystanders and staff deemed relevant to the concern.

Questions might include:

- How long has the bullying been going on?
- What has been happening
- Where is it happening
- Who was involved?
- Were other pupils around at the time?
- How is it affecting the child?
- Did the child tell a teacher or any other adult?

Written statements are often asked for. We make it clear to the victim that revenge is not appropriate, and to the perpetrator that her behaviour is unacceptable and has caused distress. Every effort is made to resolve the problem through counselling of both parties, where an understanding of the perpetrator's motivation should be sought and addressed. The perpetrator should be helped to face up to and accept responsibility for the harm she has caused. The victim will also be supported, for example, through mentoring or touching base with a trusted adult. The situation will continue to be monitored over a period of time.

At this stage, it is usual for the parents of all parties to be informed of what has happened, and how it has been dealt with. Details of any sanctions given to students will not be shared. It is vital that everything that happens is carefully recorded by the member of staff dealing with the incident in a clear, factual way as documents to be stored in the files of the perpetrator and victim. Conversations with parents should also be noted and added to the students' files.

It is vital to keep parents informed of the action you are taking. There's nothing more frustrating or upsetting for a parent than to wait by the phone for a promised call which never comes or to have emails ignored. This often leads to the problem escalating to the point where children are removed from school.

If the bullying behaviour continues, then further sanctions will follow (such as removal of the perpetrator from social time at break and lunch, exclusion from lessons while being kept in isolation, or in more serious cases, fixed term or permanent exclusion).

Parents

This policy is available to parents on the school website so that they are clear that BGS does not tolerate bullying, that we take any concern about bullying seriously and that parents are aware of the procedures which follow if they believe their child is being bullied. We hope parents will reinforce the value of good behaviour at home.

Teachers

At BGS staff are encouraged to identify issues which could develop and proactively gather intelligence. Teachers are advised that if they think that bullying is happening, they should talk to the students concerned and ask them what has occurred, ensuring that a written record is made and passed on to the relevant Head of Year. Duty staff are directed to be vigilant and sensitive to the potential of bullying situations. Staff training will include information about tackling bullying.

Records of bullying, including cyberbullying are kept, partly to evaluate the effectiveness of the approach adopted and to enable patterns of behaviour to be identified.

At BGS, bullying of staff, whether by pupils, parents or colleagues, is unacceptable. It is not acceptable for pupils, parents or colleagues to denigrate and bully school staff via social media in the same way that it is unacceptable to do so face to face. Staff should report their concerns to the Headmistress if they feel they have been subjected to bullying behaviour.

How the anti-bullying policy is supported in the curriculum

Issues such as bullying, friendships and related topics are raised in our Personal, Social and Health Education Programme, and in other lessons such as English and Drama.

Issues are raised in assembly themes e.g. friendship, mutual respect, being different, tolerance, often led by students, in order to place emphasis on prevention of bullying. The importance of peer disapproval of anti-social behaviour is underlined; the positive aspects of 'community-friendly' behaviour are stressed, and the importance of avoidance of prejudice-based language

Visits from police speakers to students and parents describe the criminal laws which apply to harassment and threatening behaviour, and which address issues of grooming, inappropriate internet sites and the sharing of photographs or personal information without permission

Workshops on anti-bullying are held or attended from time to time by students to raise awareness of the benefits of a positive culture of kindness.

The issue of cyberbullying is dealt with in ICT lessons, during digital citizen days and assemblies. We have an e-Safety Policy of which the students and staff are made aware. All students, when issued with iPads, are asked to sign the Student's pledge for iPad Use where they agree to follow the policy outlined in the Technology for Learning Acceptable Use Policy.

In the Senior School we believe that we educate the students to be able to use their mobile phones and iPads in a sensible way. They can keep them in their bags or pockets and should only use them in class if directed to do so. All students are trained in correct and appropriate use of their iPads.

Anti-Bullying Week leads to heightened consciousness of pupils and staff through posters, discussions in form time, in Student Voice Forum and assemblies. We address anti-bullying issues throughout the year. We refer to this national campaign alongside our anti-bullying strategies.

House points can be given to students who show characteristics of kindness or support for others.

Students are able to use computers, laptops and iPads in the Learning Resources Centre and elsewhere in the school; our ICT lessons cover the need for care and attention to appropriate language, content and correct usage.

The Pastoral and Co-curricular Sub-Committee of Governors and the students from the Girls' Leadership Group who are leading the Anti-Bullying Campaign, along with our student led Anti-Bullying Ambassadors also have an opportunity to comment on the Policy.

Useful links

CEOP (Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre)	www.ceop.police.uk
Anti-bullying alliance	http://www.anti-bullyingalliance.org.uk/
Kidscape	www.kidscape.org.uk
Restorative justice in schools	www.restorativejustice.org.uk/restorative-practice-schools
Diana award	http://diana-award.org.uk/
LGBT advice	http://www.schools-out.org.uk/