



ANTI-BULLYING POLICY (401)

Introduction

This policy was drawn up with due regard to the former DCSF policy 'Safe to Learn: Embedding anti-bullying work in schools'. It has been reviewed in the light of the DfE Guidance 'Preventing and Tackling Bullying' updated July 2017, DfE Cyber-bullying Advice, November 2014, DfE Advice: Sexual violence and sexual harassment between children in schools and colleges September 2021, National Minimum Standards for Boarding Schools September 2022, Keeping Children Safe in Education 2024, and Working Together to Safeguard Children 2023. The Senior and Pastoral Deputy Heads have been designated by the Headmistress as the staff responsible for promoting anti-bullying awareness amongst pupils and staff, and for dealing with any reported instances of bullying in the first instance. All cases of child-on-child abuse will be referred to the DSL so they can identify pupils who may need additional support. The policy applies to pupils and staff both as potential victims and perpetrators of bullying. This policy will be reviewed at least every 2 years to ensure that it is kept up to date with best practice.

Statement of Intent

We are committed to providing a caring, friendly and safe environment for all of our pupils and staff so that they can live, learn and relax in a positive and happy atmosphere, and have no hindrance to their achievement. There is no place for bullying at St Mary's and all members of our community have a role to play in creating a school where the wellbeing of every individual is protected, and all feel safe and supported.

In a boarding community where pupils live closely together for many days at a time there is more opportunity for bullying and there may inevitably be some frictions and fallings-out. Residential and teaching staff are trained to be vigilant and notice and respond to any unpleasantness between pupils and to be particularly aware of pupils with special educational needs or disabilities, or different ethnic backgrounds, or who identify as lesbian, gay, bi-sexual or gender-questioning, who may be especially vulnerable. Staff will alert Heads of House and/or the Senior/Pastoral Deputy Head and/or the DSL as appropriate. The rhythm of boarding life should generally be harmonious and if there appear to be repeated concerns about the happiness and wellbeing of any pupil in the School, these will be addressed promptly.

The Behaviour Policy (101), in particular the section on Respect for Others, makes clear what is expected of pupils at St Mary's and that bullying is serious and will not be tolerated. The ICT Acceptable Use Policy for pupils (411a), and for staff, and Telephones (220) in the School Handbook, make clear the responsibilities of all users for the safe and acceptable use of the school network, the internet, e-mail, mobile phones and other electronic devices. They give detailed descriptions of what constitutes safe and acceptable practice and the likely repercussions of misuse of any technology.

The School Rules, Discipline and Sanctions Policy (104) is explicit that the outcome of bullying may be suspension or permanent exclusion from the School. This is because bullying can have very serious consequences for the person being bullied who may become very disturbed and even consider taking their own life. Pupils know that they may not undertake any activities or pranks which may cause pain, anxiety or humiliation to another pupil or a member of staff.

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This policy aims to prevent harmful behaviour and to ensure that any instances of bullying which do occur are quickly identified and dealt with effectively so that both the pupil being bullied and the bully may resume a happy and safe living and learning experience in school.

What is Bullying?

Bullying is the use of any kind of deliberate, hostile behaviour by an individual or a group, which may be repeated over a period of time, with the intention of harassing or hurting another person either physically or emotionally. Bullying results in pain and distress to the victim. Bullying is a form of child-on-child abuse.

Bullying can take many forms, including any form of physical, sexual, emotional and financial assault or harassment, and coercive control, exercised between children and within children's relationships (both intimate and non-intimate). It may occur in person or remotely using any form of communications device. Such behaviour, including pranks and banter, innuendo, and more serious abuse, which may cause pain, anxiety or humiliation to another pupil, whether at school or outside of the school, is not acceptable and will not be tolerated.

Bullying behaviour can be any of the following:

Emotional	being unfriendly, excluding, tormenting (eg hiding belongings, unkind comments, threatening gestures and behaviour);
Physical	pushing, pinching, kicking, hitting, punching or any use of violence;
Pranking	disguising hurtful comments or activities, or initiation rituals as a joke;
Racist	racial taunts, discriminatory language, graffiti, gestures;
Sexual	unwanted physical conduct of a sexual nature or sexually abusive innuendo or comments;
Prejudice-based	because of, or focussing on the issues of sexuality or gender;
Verbal	name-calling, sarcasm, spreading rumours, teasing and making fun of;
Disability	taunting or excluding on the basis of some physical or other disability, real or perceived;
Religious	taunting or excluding on account of religious beliefs;
Cyber	using any form of electronic or digital means such as texting, e-mailing, phoning, social networking, blogging, videoing or photographing to harass or harm.

ANTIBULLYING STRATEGY

I Prevention

Education and Training

The School actively seeks to raise awareness of and prevent all forms of child-on-child abuse by educating all Governors, staff, pupils and parents about this issue. This is not an exhaustive list but includes some of the strategies or approaches used at St Mary's:

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Pupils are made aware of the seriousness of bullying and the School Anti-bullying Policy in the Skills for Life programme in years 7 and 8 in particular. All pupils have and use a pupil study diary which contains information and advice about bullying and who to tell. Periodically in School Council and in Morning Prayer there are discussions and presentations about the issue of bullying including cyber-bullying to promote the importance of respect for others including safe and acceptable use of technologies, to stress the serious consequences that bullying can have, to promote the unacceptability of any kinds of bullying behaviour, and to emphasise the importance of telling.

Each year group annually receives training on the safe and acceptable use of the school network, the internet including social networking sites such as Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, Tik Tok, e-mail, mobile phones and other electronic devices, either from a senior or qualified member of staff or an external professional agency. At the start of each academic year pupils with their tutors review the contents of the ICT Acceptable Use policy which includes that they may not use any form of electronic device to harass or harm any other person and the possible consequences of doing so.

Professional information on the safe and acceptable use of ICT is made available to parents on a regular basis by means of newsletters, advice sheets and lectures at exets or the end of half terms when parents visit school to collect their daughters. These lectures are delivered by external professional ICT trainers and offer the opportunity for questions and discussion.

All staff new to the school receive Safeguarding training as part of their induction process. All school staff receive Safeguarding training regularly. During INSET at the beginning of every school term they receive updates on topical issues or reminders of important responsibilities of Safeguarding, such as how to recognise and minimise the risk of bullying including cyber-bullying and how to respond in the case of a suspicion or an instance of bullying. The Pastoral Deputy Head undertakes relevant external training at least every 2 years.

In boarding areas, there are strong teams of Residential Members of Staff, who act in loco parentis. Staff are aware that, by their nature, a boarding house environment provides more opportunities for bullying, and they are therefore always vigilant and alert to signs of issues with or between boarders. The boarding environment is important in reinforcing a pupil's standards and values, providing the opportunity for friendly, informal discussion of matters of concern to the individual pupil outside the formal classroom.

The Anti-Bullying Working Party meets twice a term to discuss ways in which the School can raise awareness and increase pupil involvement in promoting a positive and respectful culture. It coordinates the process of appointing Anti-Bullying Ambassadors.

Anti-Bullying Ambassadors (ABA) play a vital role in fostering a supportive and inclusive school environment. As trained pupils, they act as visible points of contact for their peers, offering guidance, support and a listening ear to any pupil experiencing difficulties. They help to promote kindness, raise awareness and encourage a culture of respect, while also working closely with staff to identify and address concerns. Through peer-led initiatives, they contribute to creating a safe and positive school community.

Cyber-Bullying

Cyber-bullying covers the unacceptable use of any of a wide range of electronic and digital devices to hurt, harass or embarrass another member of the community. Unlike other bullying there need be no physical or verbal contact between the bully and the victim and consequently it can be pervasive and anonymous. Furthermore, harmful information can be disseminated quickly to a very large audience. Bystanders who receive harmful texts, e-mails or photos and pass them on, or who take part in on-line discussions, are as

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responsible as the originator and will be treated accordingly. Every member of the school community must think carefully and take personal responsibility for their use of electronic and digital devices.

St Mary's takes a robust line to prevent cyber-bullying by the use of education and preventative ICT safety measures. The ICT Steering Committee, which meets 3 times per term, the ICT Working Group which meets every 2 weeks are responsible for ensuring the safe development and use of ICT, and technical staff continually monitor new developments. They implement firewalls, password protection, anti-virus protection and filtering systems; pupils know that staff are able to monitor activity on the school network, internet and e-mail. The E-safety Committee meets three times per term to review the e-safety measures in school, the support and training necessary for pupils and staff, and any current trends and changes in guidance and legislation.

The wider search powers included in the Education Act 2011 and in the DFE Guidance: Searching, Screening and Confiscation, July 2018 give teachers stronger powers to tackle cyber-bullying. This includes a specific power to search for and, if necessary, delete inappropriate images (or files) on electronic devices, including mobile phones. The Deputy Heads in conjunction with the ICT Coordinator or the Director of Network Services may require to search electronic devices if there is evidence that cyber-bullying or other inappropriate misuse of the technology has occurred.

The Cyber and Technology Council is a pupil representative committee under the guidance of the Pastoral Deputy Head, the ICT Coordinator and the Director of Network Services which meets twice a term to raise the profile of and improve education about the safe and acceptable use of all kinds of technologies.

2 Detection

Advice to all adults and pupils on signs of bullying

Signs and Symptoms of Bullying:

A pupil may indicate by signs or behaviour that she is being bullied. Adults should be aware of these possible signs and they should investigate if a pupil:

- does not want to return to school and is school phobic
- changes their routine
- begins missing lessons
- becomes withdrawn, anxious, or lacking in confidence
- starts stammering
- develops mental health problems
- attempts or threatens suicide or runs away
- cries themselves to sleep at night or has nightmares
- feels ill in the morning
- begins to do poorly in schoolwork
- has clothes torn or damaged
- has possessions 'go missing'
- asks for money or starts stealing money (to pay the bully)
- has monies continually 'lost'
- has unexplained cuts or bruises
- becomes aggressive, disruptive or unreasonable

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- is bullying other children or siblings
- stops eating
- is frightened to say what's wrong
- gives improbable excuses for any of the above.

These signs and behaviours could indicate other problems, but bullying will be considered a possibility and will be investigated.

Advice to parents

St Mary's places an extremely high value on its relationship with parents. We believe that close communication between Home and School can enable us to deal with difficult situations as they arise. Bullying occurs in all schools and places of work from time to time. Parents should be aware that we do not tolerate any form of bullying, and we will always respond to reported incidents. If a pupil shows any unusual behaviour or attitude, we ask that parents discuss this with the School immediately. A parent's first port of call is the pupil's Head of House who will then liaise and discuss the issues/concerns with the Year Coordinator or the Pastoral/Senior Deputy Head. Similarly, if a pupil says that they are being bullied or that they know someone who is, parents should let us know swiftly so that we can take appropriate action. We invite parents to communicate any concerns to us either about their daughter or others to ensure concerns are shared promptly.

Advice to pupils - some things pupils should do if they are being bullied:

- Tell an adult you trust;
- Tell yourself that you do not deserve to be bullied;
- Get your friends together and say no to the bully;
- Stay with groups of people, even if they are not your best friends. There is safety in numbers;
- Try not to show you are upset, which is difficult;
- If possible, avoid being alone in a place where bullying happens;
- Try being assertive;
- Walk quickly and confidently even if you do not feel that way inside.
- If any pupil has a concern over bullying, whether it is happening to them or they have witnessed something that makes them feel uncomfortable, they can log on to Whisper to raise awareness either anonymously or with contact details.

Advice to academic staff

St Mary's staff make a strong stand against bullying. Staff will:

- Not allow bullying anywhere;
- Support pupils who are being bullied;
- Help the alleged bullies to change their behaviour;
- Encourage pupils to 'tell' and back them up;
- Take bullying seriously and find out the facts when told about an incident of bullying;
- Ensure that pupils, parents and teachers take responsibility for any bullying that occurs;
- Clearly identify and report bullying behaviours.

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3 Action - Procedures for dealing with reported allegations of bullying

Bullying of any kind is unacceptable at St Mary's. If bullying does occur, whether at school, outside the school, or online, all pupils should be able to tell someone about it and know that incidents will be dealt with promptly and effectively. We are a **TELLING** school. This means that anyone who knows that bullying is happening whether at school, outside the school, or online, has a duty to tell a member of staff. There is a wide range of members of staff to talk to; Section 224 'Who to talk to' in the School Handbook lists them. This information is also to be found in the pupils' study diary and on noticeboards in the common rooms and sleeping areas.

Parents, staff and pupils are actively encouraged to help prevent bullying and they should not stand by and allow bullying to happen. Anyone who becomes aware of bullying should report it immediately to a trusted member of staff. Staff should be alert to pupils who may be particularly vulnerable to bullying because of certain protected characteristics such as special educational needs or disability, different ethnic background, or sexual orientation.

Pupils should report bullying incidents **immediately** to an adult. They should choose someone they trust and feel comfortable with, for example a tutor, Head of House, Residential Member of Staff, the Head of Boarding, School Nurse, Chaplain, the Independent Person, School Counsellor, the Wellbeing Coordinator, the Senior or Pastoral Deputy Head, the DSL, or the Headmistress.

Staff who receive a report of bullying should listen carefully to the details without asking leading questions and report the matter immediately to the Pastoral Deputy Head or in their absence the Senior Deputy Head. Details of the allegation should be recorded in writing and the report given to the Pastoral Deputy Head and recorded on CPOMS.

The Pastoral Deputy Head, or in their absence the Senior Deputy Head, will investigate the report in collaboration with the relevant Heads of House. The Pastoral Deputy Head keeps records of instances of bullying and the actions taken securely, and these records are reviewed regularly to identify possible patterns of behaviour.

Outcomes

- The victim can expect the matter to be dealt with sensitively, appropriately and promptly. Each case will be monitored by relevant staff across all areas of school life to ensure that repeated bullying does not take place.
- Each case will be investigated in a manner proportionate to its degree of seriousness. Serious bullying may need to be reported to the local authority or the police.
- Parents of those involved will be contacted.
- For less serious offences the bully will be appropriately sanctioned and asked for a genuine apology. If possible, the individuals will be reconciled and encouraged to make a fresh start.
- If the bullying is of a serious nature, or no change occurs, the bully may be suspended or asked to leave the school as this is a very harmful offence.
- Both the pupil being bullied and the bully will receive support, help and guidance to enable them to move forward. The victim can expect to feel safe again and be helped to rebuild confidence. The bully can expect to learn why and how to behave in a responsible way and to take steps to repair the harm they have caused.

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- A bullying incident will be treated as a child protection concern when there is reasonable cause to suspect that a child is suffering or likely to suffer significant harm. In such cases the matter will be reported to the local authority children's social care and if there is reason to suspect a crime has been committed also to the police. See also 412a Safeguarding Policy.

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