

BULLYING POLICY



This policy should be read in conjunction with the Behaviour, Safeguarding, Acceptable Use of Technology for Pupils and PSHE Policies.

Birchfield School does not tolerate bullying and ensures in so far as reasonably practicable that bullying is prevented. All connected with the School will work together to create a happy and secure environment for all pupils; this Policy is designed to help the School to achieve this goal and is a fundamental part of the day to day running of the School. This policy has been written with regard to guidelines from 'Preventing and Tackling Bullying' (DfE July 2017) and relates to all pupils, including those in the Early Years Foundation Stage.

Aims and Objectives

- to provide a happy, calm and secure learning environment where bullying does not take place, or in the event that an incident or perception of an incident does arise, that the matter receives early identification and is dealt with quickly and efficiently.
- to promote trust and mutual respect for everyone, treating everyone as an individual and offering the relevant support.
- to deal with both the victim and the bully to offer a range of support systems and guidance.
- to work with staff and pupils to avoid instances of bullying behaviour appearing in school.
- to encourage parents and pupils to talk about perceived or actual bullying at the earliest opportunity and to recognise the role they can play.

What the School Will Do

- * Every allegation of bullying will be investigated by the Assistant Head and pupils, parents and teaching staff are encouraged to discuss their concerns. Information will then be given to the Class Teacher and relevant staff. The victim, the bully and any witnesses will be interviewed to find out the truth of what has occurred.
- *Bullying incidents reported to the school which occur off site or outside school hours will be followed up as a matter of course. This may involve the school speaking informally with the parents of the pupils involved and taking action, as deemed necessary.

- * A full written record of the incident will be kept and further action will be taken as appropriate. The Headmistress will be kept fully informed. Parents may be involved, and asked to attend a meeting to discuss the problem.
- * The School acknowledges that prevention is better than intervention. We will use appropriate methods during form periods/circle time, assemblies and PSHE lessons to help children prevent bullying.
- * The reasons for bullying will vary from case to case, so it would not be appropriate to use the same strategies on every occasion. Our aim is for the bully to recognise and stop his/her behaviour.
- * We will all work together to create a happy and secure environment for all pupils. We will endeavour to create this atmosphere by :

- ensuring all staff are aware of the policy's guidelines
- challenging stereotypical views
- encouraging tolerance to difference
- close communication with playground supervisors and all duty and class-based staff
- emphasising the link between consequence and actions
- teaching children to take responsibility for their own actions
- emphasising respect for self and others

What is bullying?

Bullying is defined as behaviour which may be repeated over time and intentionally hurts another pupil or group physically or emotionally and is often motivated by prejudice against particular groups such as on grounds of race, religion, culture, sex, gender, homophobia, special educational needs and disability or because a child is adopted or is a carer. It may also result through cyber-technology such as social websites, mobile phones, text messages, photographs and email. The school also acknowledges the seriousness of bullying, both physical and emotional which may cause psychological damage.

It is important for teachers, pupils and parents to recognise that one-off incidents of name-calling and other examples cannot always be classed as incidents of bullying. Whilst the School is eager not to overlook any incident, the true nature of it is established through discussion with parents and pupils at an early stage. Training will be provided for staff as appropriate and discussions at staff meetings will focus upon pupils where concern lies and help to raise overall awareness and explain the principles of the school's policy, including legal responsibilities. If needed, the school will invest in specialised skills to better understand the needs of the pupils, including those with special educational needs or disabilities, and lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) pupils;

Bullying can take many forms, but is often said to present as four main types; physical, verbal, social and psychological and includes :

Prejudice-based bullying – where preconceived opinions are made which are not based on reason or experience

Racial Bullying – related to race, religion or culture

Pupils may experience racist or faith-based taunting and teasing. They may be from minority ethnic groups and face hostility such as name-calling and comments related to their culture from others.

Sexual Bullying – sexual, sexist and related to sexual orientation

Pupils of both genders can be subject to sexual and/or sexist bullying and comments may relate to name-calling and comments about appearance, particularly during puberty. It may also include uninvited touching, innuendo and inappropriate images. Homophobic bullying may also be evident in the same way with pupils victimised by peers.

Disability – related to those with special educational needs or disabilities

Such pupils may be subjected to taunting related to their disability. Social Confidence – the school recognises the need to support children with low self-confidence and low self-esteem. This can lead to social exclusion for such pupils. Equality of opportunity should be stressed. This also applies to young people with health or visible medical conditions, such as eczema, and can relate to comments made about size or weight.

Cyber-bullying – related to any use of technology

Cyber bullying can be defined as the use of information and Communications Technology (ICT), particularly **mobile phones** and **the internet**, deliberately to upset someone else. The technology can be used to bully for reasons of race, religion, sexuality, disability and against other protected characteristics. It can occur both inside and 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.

Pupils are not allowed to bring mobile phones into school. A bank of iPad tablets are available for pupils' learning and stored in locked units. Each pupil is given and discusses an iPad User Guide in Computing lessons and signs an agreement to meet the school's expectation for safe use. iPads are not available to the pupils outside of lesson time and use of them is always supervised. Pupils are not allowed to take mobile phones on educational visits. However, with parental permission, pupils may carry mobile phones on a school minibus journey – please refer to the Minibus Code of Conduct. More explicit advice can be found in our Acceptable Use of Technology Policy for Pupils.

Workshops are run regularly for parents and/or pupils relating to keeping safe online and themed assemblies target how young people can deal with pressure from social media. A Safety Online assembly is presented each year and the subject is written into the PSHE programme of study to make pupils aware.

For periods of remote learning (such as during the COVID-19 pandemic), staff are encouraged to be additionally vigilant for any child at risk or any occasion when online

bullying may have the potential to take place. Pupils discuss a Home User Agreement for Remote Learning with their teacher and at home and then sign it and return it to the Head of Computing. In addition, a Virtual Classroom Code of Conduct is issued with advice and guidance for pupils and parents in the safe and appropriate use of online learning. Staff are also inducted via a demonstration video from the Head of Computing and receive written guidance on best practice. Pupils and staff are encouraged to report any concern as soon as possible to the Designated Safeguarding Lead/Assistant Head and to be aware that cyberbullying is potentially a safeguarding issue.

Further information on cyber-bullying avoidance is provided in the separate Acceptable Use of Technology Policies and Safeguarding Policy which deal with online safety.

Safeguarding

Teaching staff should be aware that sexualised abuse, including verbal abuse, by peers upon peers is a potential safeguarding issue and should consult with the Designated Safeguarding Lead as soon as possible when further advice can be sought from Shropshire Safeguarding Community Partnership (SSCP) as necessary. As is specified in the school's Safeguarding Policy, an immediate referral to children's social care and/or the police should be made if a child is deemed to be in immediate danger.

The School is absolute in wishing to ensure that **all** forms of bullying are treated with equal gravity. The serious nature of bullying, both physical and emotional, is acknowledged: in rare and extreme cases, it can lead to psychological damage, self-harm and even suicide. In recognition of this, staff and pupils are also made aware of how to identify different methods of bullying through in-house and guest speaker assemblies, inset, themes within school, PSHE, posters and project work, links to historical figures and circle time occasions for younger ones. Ongoing links with the NSPCC also help in this area and Childline posters are displayed around school to raise general awareness.

Detection of Bullying

Bullying can take different forms. It is important that staff, both teaching and domestic, are vigilant at all times. Parents or relatives, too, should be aware of the first signs of a child under pressure of this nature. Updates, where relevant, will be provided for staff in staff training sessions with awareness given to the vulnerabilities of those pupils with Special Educational Needs or disabilities or LGBT pupils.

In some cases, the signs of a child being bullied may be very obvious. However, it is also common for children to try to hide their emotions and keep problems to themselves, which may lead to serious concerns in the long term.

Detection of psychological bullying may be the most difficult for adults to identify immediately. There are a number of signs of which the staff should be aware. The child may:

- I. Be frightened to go to school

2. Begin to do poorly in their schoolwork for no apparent reason
3. Become withdrawn
4. Develop a nervous twitch or start stammering
5. Become visibly distressed at odd times
6. Lose their normal appetite
7. Have unexplained bruises, scratches etc
8. Have their possessions go missing
9. Refuse to say what is wrong for fear of recriminations
10. Give improbable excuses to explain any of the above

It is, of course, possible that any of the above signs may not be linked directly to bullying. However, it is important for adults to follow up any suspicions which they might have. It is better to be proved wrong than to let a child who is being tormented suffer in silence. There are no schools where bullying does not occur. We must be in a position to detect it as soon as is humanly possible so that further corrective steps can be taken for both the bully and the victim. Staff are responsible for ensuring they are fully aware of the School's policy and know how to apply its guidelines and where to seek support. Amendments and updates are regularly discussed with staff as required and training given as needed.

The Message About Bullying – The Children's Awareness

It is important that every pupil knows that the School condemns bullying. It is also important that the pupils learn to discern what is bullying and what is "children being children". However, our pupils are still very young and need considerable guidance in understanding this complex distinction. They will learn with experience and are encouraged to tell their concerns and anxieties, whatever the nature, to whoever they feel most comfortable speaking to, be that a mentor, an adult, an official body or an independent person. Pupils are encouraged to avoid the use of prejudice-based language.

Pupils who experience bullying can expect to be listened to always and assured that steps will be taken to help them feel safe again. They will be given strategies for how to deal with the problem. They will learn to :

- ask the pupil firmly to stop doing what is hurting or upsetting them
- tell an adult if the behaviour continues
- help other children in distress

Older pupils are shown how to act as buddies for younger pupils in the playground. Either two or three members of staff, depending upon the break time, supervise play areas, where bullying issues may most commonly arise.

The discouragement of bullying is talked about frequently in school and staff kept informed of any developments relating to individual pupils, with messages shared in staff briefings where appropriate. It is broached using educational elements such as personal, social, health and economic education (PSHE), assemblies, projects, drama, stories, literature, with discussion of differences between people and the importance of avoiding prejudice-

based language. In addition, Friendship Ambassadors from the School Council also sit on the Anti-bullying Council (ABC) and meet with the Assistant Head regularly to discuss and share ideas for implementation in school.

The School firmly believes that prevention is better than cure and acknowledges that pupils will learn best in a safe and calm environment which is free from disruption. Many issues will naturally arise through discussion in the PSHE programme, but also through drama/role play activities and cross-curricular links, as in History lessons. Discussions centre around differences between people and the importance of using language which avoids references to prejudice. Form/Circle time and interactive displays are also used when needed to canvass pupils' views and raise awareness. Assemblies are also an important stage for explaining the School's stance in this matter building resilience within its pupils and this is considered in detail in the provision of assemblies which are themed to ensure regular inclusion. The theme of bullying may be dealt with in assembly either by the Headmistress, the annual Anti-Bullying Week focus by the Assistant Head or Headmistress, a member of staff or the pupils themselves in the preparation of special themed assemblies or through fund-raisers.

Posters are displayed in classrooms which detail the differences between definitions of what behaviour constitutes someone being rude, mean or bullying and these are discussed with the pupils each year. Communication boxes in classrooms also offer opportunities for pupils to share any concerns they may have and these are followed up weekly by the Form Tutor and shared with the Assistant Head for any action to be taken.

New pupils receive a Pupil Diary which includes a 'Say No to Bullying' advice sheet if they feel uncomfortable or feel that they are being bullied or what to do if they find themselves as bystanders to an incident. Through the leaflets, pupils learn how they can help as bystanders and to whom they should report a problem. Posters 'What To Do if You are Worried' appear in each toilet block with advice for pupils on how they can contact, including ChildLine or an independent person known to the school. Different styles of posters are available for younger and older pupils. A copy of the key points is also within the pupils' House Cards. The policy is available on the School website or may be requested in hard copy and an environment of good behaviour and respect is created, with helpful examples set by staff and older pupils and celebration of success. The theme is also built in to the Assembly Programme.

Bullying should be talked about whenever it is necessary in the day to day running of the school. Class teachers and the Assistant Head play an important role in supporting the Headmistress. Open explanation and discussion are encouraged so that the pupils become better informed.

Parents may find it helpful to refer to the DfE publication Preventing and Tackling Bullying (July 2017) as it offers supplementary advice documents in respect of online bullying, including a fact sheet so that they are aware about the part they can play in preventing bullying.

Procedure to Follow

Incidents of bullying of any kind are to be reported to the Assistant Head immediately (and the Designated Safeguarding Lead if the incident relates to a sexualised abuse, including verbal abuse) and staff should note and record the event or write it up immediately. Pupils are encouraged to report incidents of bullying, including cyber-bullying and bullying outside school, to the Assistant Head or other adult as soon as possible. The Assistant Head is then responsible for investigating the matter fully and informing the Class Teacher and also the Headmistress. The incident will then be recorded in the Behaviour Log or Serious Behaviour Log and minuted, with copies made for relevant staff and the Headmistress as well as a copy being placed on the relevant pupils' file/s. The Assistant Head will, at regular intervals, keep notes of the effectiveness of the approach adopted and consider incident notes in respect of any apparent trends in bullying and act accordingly.

The steps taken by the Assistant Head may include the following:

1. To speak to the victim of the bullying as well as the pupil/s accused of bullying. It may be that an underlying concern is leading to the behaviour and the Assistant Head will work very closely with the pupil/s, parents and class teacher as necessary to support them. The pupils involved will be spoken to separately and/or together depending upon the nature of the incident and the sensitivity of the pupils in question. Full records of meetings and action points will be kept.
2. To talk with other witnesses of the bullying – this may include staff or other children and, in some instances, parents who have become involved. It is very important to get the facts clear and correct before further action is taken and that pupils and parents understand the school's procedure. False accusations can lead to further problems and wrongful punishment of an alleged perpetrator. Once the facts have been clearly established the following action will then be taken.
3. The pupil/s carrying out the bullying will be spoken to by the Assistant Head, once an initial conversation has taken place with the class teacher to establish the situation. Once it is clear that bullying has taken place, it is important to establish why the bully acted in the way they did. There may be reasons which are not at first obvious, e.g. problems at home. This will be followed up accordingly and handled sensitively. Whilst it will be made clear that sanctions may follow, pupils carrying out bullying will be shown how to behave in order to avoid future harm as well as how to repair the harm they have caused.

If this is the first incident in which the pupil has been involved and if it is only a minor incident, mild sanctions such as a missed playtime may be appropriate. A reprimand, in itself, may be sufficient to deter a pupil from name-calling or mild teasing. A repeat meeting may be appropriate to follow up on strategies and ensure that progress is made. Counselling or problem-solving approaches may also be appropriate at this stage, especially if the bullying is of a more serious nature.

Involvement of parents may be necessary if the bullying has resulted in physical damage to the victim.

4. Should the bullying continue, further sanctions will be applied according to the severity of the incident and the personalities involved. Sanctions will be in line with the Behaviour Policy and may involve a detention, a suspension or the placing of a child on a behaviour card for a limited period. However, depending upon the individual case, it may simply involve a discussion.

The School's primary objective is for the bullies to alter their pattern of behaviour and contracts or special arrangements may be more appropriate in specific cases. Counselling of the bully will also continue. He/she may be put under the threat of suspension and his/her parents will be informed.

5. Where there is no response or improvement in behaviour or for severe and persistent bullying, an exclusion may be necessary. This will be used only as a last resort and will be considered in line with the Behaviour Policy and Exclusion of Pupils Policies. Disciplinary sanctions will be set which reflect the seriousness of the incident.

A bullying incident will be treated as a child protection concern where there is reasonable cause to believe that a pupil is suffering or likely to suffer significant harm and external agencies (such as police/children's social care) may be involved. Reference should be made to the school's Safeguarding Policy.

Whilst dealing with the bully, it must be remembered that the victim may still be feeling insecure. The Headmistress and all staff will be responsible for ensuring that the victim is no longer under threat and that any after effects of the original incident are properly addressed.

An ethos of good behaviour is promoted in school, particularly during Awards Assemblies each weekly, as well as the use of various awards for pupils displaying the school values, Send Ups to the Headmistress and House points and the modelling of good behaviour by peers and teachers.