

## ANTI BULLYING POLICY (INCLUDING EYFS)

At St Mary's, we believe that every child has the right to learn in a school free from bullying of any kind and in which they feel safe and supported in an environment of good behaviour and respect.

Providing a safe and happy learning environment is integral to achieving the wider objectives of the school: high academic attainment, outstanding school attendance, and excellent mental health and well-being of all members of the school community.

The school adopts the attitude that bullying can happen everywhere. We take a zero-tolerance approach.

### **What do we mean by Bullying?**

The Department for Education defines bullying as 'behaviour by an individual or group, repeated over time, that intentionally hurts another individual or group either physically or emotionally'.

This definition highlights the fact that bullying can be by an individual or a group against another individual or group. It is commonly accepted that bullying is deliberately hurtful (including aggression), causes feeling of distress/fear/loneliness in the victim, is difficult for victims to defend themselves against (as there is an imbalance or perceived imbalance of power between the perpetrator and victim and repeated over a period of time.

Bullying often involves an imbalance of power between the perpetrator(s) and the victim(s). 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 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 socially, physically or online.

Jostling, aggressive use of body language (such as turning your back on someone) and offensive words can all have significant impacts on people. If left unchallenged or dismissed as banter or horseplay, they can lead to bullying behaviour. Early intervention is crucial in setting out clear expectations of the behaviour that is and isn't acceptable and in stopping negative behaviours escalating.

**Forms of bullying include:**

- Physically hurting or attempting to hurt, harm or humiliate another person or damaging their property
- Verbal abuse such as name-calling, taunting, mocking or writing unkind notes
- Emotional manipulation such as excluding someone or spreading malicious rumours about them, building negative alliances based on gossip, or deliberately betraying former confidences to humiliate or isolate another pupil
- Cyberbullying, i.e. via social networking websites, phone calls, text messages, photographs or emails

Unpleasant remarks or actions related to any of the following (also known as prejudice-based bullying):

- Race, religion and culture
- Sex (i.e. talking to or touching someone in a sexually inappropriate way)
- Gender, gender identity or perceived gender identity
- Sexual orientation (e.g. homophobic bullying)
- Disability or Special Educational Needs
- Intellectual or other abilities
- Appearance or health conditions
- Being adopted or a carer

Any behaviour that a reasonable bystander would say that was intended to hurt or upset the victim is wrong and could, if repeated, constitute bullying. This includes complicity that may fall short of participating directly in the bullying. It is no justification that the perpetrator says or believes that the victim is not upset or hurt by her actions or words.

Much bullying is performed in subtle ways, which are not easy to detect; a bully can use a simple look, word or gesture to a victim to signal an intended threat or insult. Some pupils are adept at changing a bullying situation into an apparently harmless one when an adult approaches. This makes it all the more important for the victim or another pupil to be able to come forward to report bullying, and for staff and parents to be alert to the signs of bullying.

Bullying is always hurtful to the victim and damaging to the whole school community. Anyone and everyone who is involved in, or witnesses bullying is affected by it. It can cause great distress, unhappiness, and psychological damage and, at its worst, lead to suicide. It can be a criminal offence, for example if the behaviour amounts to harassment or threatening behaviour.

**How does bullying differ from teasing or friendship difficulties?**

Sometimes pupils can feel hurt or upset because they have been teased or have fallen out with a friend. This is not the same as bullying. Bullying:

- Is deliberately intended to hurt or humiliate
- Often involves a power imbalance that makes it hard for the victim to defend themselves
- Is persistent
- Often involves no remorse or acknowledgement of the victim's feelings

School staff are ready to help and support pupils who have fallen out with friends, usually through using the Girls on Board approach (see below). Friendship turbulence between girls is painful and regrettable but it is not the same as bullying and will therefore not be treated as such. However, if friendship turbulence remains unresolved it can turn into bullying and the school will always be aware that the approaches it uses to help girls maintain strong and healthy friendships do not always work and will not hesitate to investigate a case of bullying if the evidence warrants it.

If bullying does occur, all pupils should be able to tell someone, and know that incidents will be dealt with promptly, firmly and effectively. Disciplinary sanctions may be imposed.

## **Preventing Bullying**

We aim to prevent bullying by:

- Fostering a whole school ethos of good behaviour, mutual respect, and consideration. We aim to create a safe, happy, and inclusive environment for learning
- Developing a culture in which diversity is championed and celebrated and in which the school takes a proactive role in educating pupils and other members of the school community in issues around equality
- Developing a culture in which the vulnerable are protected and incidents which might demonstrate prejudice or intolerance are tackled and addressed, for example by challenging inappropriate or prejudicial language
- Encouraging all members of the school community to have high expectations of mutual respect and model how to behave towards each other
- Raising awareness about bullying through opportunities in the curriculum, the PSHE programme, assemblies, and national events such as Anti-Bullying week, amongst others
- Developing pupil's social skills, confidence, resilience, and self-esteem; and defining the value of assertiveness in relationships as opposed to aggression, whether direct or indirect
- Educating pupils and other members of the school community about how to keep themselves safe when online or using social media or other electronic means of communication, so they take maximum precautions to help prevent themselves being victims of cyberbullying
- Ensuring that all pupils sign the school's Acceptable Use Agreements, which make it clear that cyberbullying is unacceptable. This message is regularly reinforced in lessons and pastoral sessions. The school also runs parents' information sessions on e-safety etc
- Making it clear to all that there are effective procedures for reporting, investigating and tackling bullying, and encouraging pupils to report instances of anything they perceive to be bullying
- Making it clear to all that incidents of cyberbullying or bullying of any kind that occur off the school premises but have an impact on the classroom environment or relationships between pupils will be pursued with the same seriousness as bullying occurring within school
- Making it as easy as possible for pupils who are being bullied to talk to someone they trust and get help confidentially
- Having a strong pastoral team dedicated to pupil welfare and experience in dealing with bullying issues. All our staff are trained in recognising and responding to bullying

and staff awareness is raised through regular discussion of pupil issues in pastoral meetings. Action is taken to reduce the risk of bullying where and when it is known to be most likely to occur. The member of staff with overall responsibility for anti-bullying work are the Assistant Heads of Senior School (Pastoral and Pupil-Development and Safeguarding & Pupil-Wellbeing) and the Assistant Head of Lower School Pastoral.

- Taking pupils views into account through the school council and developing the roles that pupils can play in anti-bullying work, for example in our mentoring scheme and Girls on Board
- Ensuring that the IT filtering and monitoring systems are effective in protecting members of the school community
- Working in line with national guidance, and the requirements of our regulatory bodies

### **Girls on Board**

Girls on Board is an approach which helps girls, their teachers and parents to understand the complexities and dynamics of girls friendships. The approach empowers the girls to solve their own friendship problems and recognises that they are usually the only ones who can. Girls on Board sessions are non-judgmental and reflective; they are designed to raise empathy amongst the girls and it is that empathy that fuels the search for harmony and resolution. Girls on Board acknowledges that bullying can often arise from persistent friendship turbulence and therefore that an initial empathy-based approach can be very effective.

### **Being Aware – Possible Signs of Bullying**

Changes in behaviour that may indicate a pupil is being bullied include:

- Unwillingness to go to school or return after a break
- Failure to produce work, or producing unusually bad work, work that appears to have been copied, or interfered with or spoilt by others
- Belongings suddenly going missing or being damaged
- Change to established habits (e.g., giving up music lessons, sitting in the library instead of going out to play)
- Diminished levels of self-confidence
- Inability to concentrate
- Anxiety, depression, becoming withdrawn or unusually quiet
- Repressed body language and poor eye contact
- Frequent absence, erratic attendance, late arrival to class
- Reluctance to leave the classroom at the end of lessons or school day
- Choosing the company of adults
- Frequent visits to the medical room with symptoms such as stomach pains or headaches, especially at particular times or during particular lessons
- Unexplained cuts and bruises
- Difficulty in sleeping, nightmares
- Talking of suicide or running away

Although there may be other causes, teachers, parents and peers should be alert for these possible signs of bullying and contact a member of the pastoral team if they are concerned.

Some pupils are more vulnerable to bullying, and less likely to speak out – including LGBTQ+ pupils and those with SEND. Again, staff, parents and peers should bear this in mind in cases of possible or suspected bullying.

### **Dealing with Bullying**

This is how we advise the pupils if they are being bullied

- Stay calm and try to appear confident. Tell the bully to stop and get away from the situation as quickly as you can
- Do not suffer in silence: talk to a member of staff. This could be your class teacher, form tutor, Phase Lead or the Assistant Head of Lower School Pastoral/Assistant Heads of Senior School (Pastoral & Pupil-Development and Safeguarding & Pupil-Wellbeing). If you are unhappy to talk to a member of staff directly, you could talk to someone in your family, or a friend. Telling does not make you a 'grass' or a 'snitch': not telling means that the bullying is likely to continue. Remember you may not be the only victim
- We take every report of bullying seriously and will act upon it, even if it occurred outside the school. We will keep records of what has happened, and consult you and support you in whatever action we take
- Remember being bullied is not your fault – nobody ever deserves to be bullied
- If you feel you are being bullied by a member of staff, you should take the same action as if it were another pupil, that is, report the matter to someone you trust. All forms of bullying are unacceptable, and all reports of bullying are investigated and dealt with irrespective of who the person responsible for the bullying incidents might be

### **If you know that someone is being bullied**

- Talk to a member of staff, or help the person being bullied to talk to a member of staff, so that the school can take steps to help
- Defend the individual and question the bullying behaviour– studies show that one of the most effective ways of stopping bullying is for fellow pupils to show their support for the person being bullied
- Try to defuse the situation: intervene as a group; walk away taking the person being bullied with you; take away the audience; distract the perpetrator or use humour to lighten up a serious situation
- Leave the chat if on-line
- Be sceptical about rumours concerning other pupils. Put yourself in the position of the person targeted. Don't add to them.
- Spend time with the person being bullied and be kind to them
- Don't be a bystander. Many perpetrators will not persist in bullying unless they have an audience to play to, and by not taking action, it could be argued you are condoning what is happening

### **When reporting an incident of bullying be clear about**

- What happened
- How often it has happened
- Who was involved
- Who (if anyone) saw what was happening
- Where it happened; and

- What you have done about it already

### **What the school will do:**

The exact course of action will vary with each situation. The immediate objective should be that bullying incidents are brought into the open and strategies agreed to help resolve the problem, encouraging all involved to return to responsible, caring behaviour. The pupil will be reassured that they have done the right thing by telling someone.

- All reports of bullying will be taken seriously and investigated immediately
- Bullying on the basis of protected characteristics is taken particularly seriously
- It is not possible for any person who received a report of a bullying incident to promise that it will be kept confidential. However, the action to be taken will be discussed with the victim at every stage
- Everything that happens will be carefully recorded
- The most important thing is to stop the bullying and ensure the victim is safe
- We aim for a peaceful resolution: revenge is not helpful for the victim or appropriate
- The victim will be supported through the process
- Sanctions may be imposed but guidance and help will also be available for the perpetrator(s) to help change her/their behaviour
- Staff will monitor the situation to ensure that the bullying does not continue. If bullying recurs, further action will be taken
- The school will keep a log of all bullying incidents, which is categorised and monitored in order to identify trends and inform preventative work in the school and future development of policies and procedures.

### **Sanctions**

It is important that those found responsible for bullying are held to account and accept responsibility for the harm caused. Action taken in response to bullying will be intended to communicate unambiguous disapproval of the bully's activities, and this will usually include sanctions. Sanctions may help reassure the victim that the bullying will stop; they help those responsible recognise the harm caused by their behaviour and deter them from repeating it; they demonstrate to the school community that bullying is unacceptable and that the school has effective ways of dealing with it, so deterring others from behaving in a similar way.

If sanctions are warranted, the person(s) responsible will receive a sanction in accordance with the school's behaviour policy. Any sanction imposed will be fair, proportionate, and reasonable, take account of any special educational needs or disabilities that pupils may have, and consider the needs of the vulnerable pupils. We are aware that some neurodiverse pupils struggle with social and emotional understanding more than their neurotypical peers, and therefore reasonable adjustments such as explicitly taught kindness and social skills session will take place to prevent bullying or further incidents.

In any serious cases of bullying the Principal or Vice Principal will be informed and the school will work with the parents of both the victim and the perpetrator. The school will remain in regular contact with parents until the situation is resolved.

In the most serious cases, the sanction may be fixed term or permanent exclusion. In this instance, the Principal will be involved.

A bullying incident will be regarded as a child protection concern when there is 'reasonable cause to suspect that a child is suffering, or is likely to suffer, significant harm' (Children Act 1989) Where this is the case, the Principal, Vice Principal, or DSL/DDSLs may deem it necessary to make a report to Social Services and in certain cases the police.

Some pupils who have been subjected to bullying are provoked into violent behaviour. A pupil can be excluded for violent behaviour; it is a matter for the Principal's judgement, taking account of the evidence available, all of the circumstances of the case and the need to balance the interests of the pupil concerned with those of the whole school community.

### **Involving Parents, Staff and Pupils**

Parents, staff and pupils (even if only involved as bystanders) should know that the school will not tolerate bullying, and takes a positive, active approach to educating the girls to reject it. We believe that working with parents/guardians is essential to establish the school's anti-bullying ethos and resolve any issues that arise

- Parents are encouraged to reinforce the principals of the Anti-Bullying Policy at home
- Parents are asked to let class/form tutors know directly if they have cause for concern, either on behalf of their own children or because rumours about others

In any serious case of bullying parents will be informed by the school and may be invited in to discuss the matter. We will keep in regular contact with parents until the issue is resolved.

Please note that the school will not tolerate parents bullying members of the school staff. Further guidance can be found, regarding expectations, in the Parent Code of Conduct.

This policy has been written in line with DfE guidance July 2017 Preventing and Tackling Bullying.

### **Related Procedures/Policies**

- Acceptable Use Agreement
- Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy
- ICT/On-line Safety Policy
- Behaviour Policy

Reviewed/Approved: June 2025  
Next Review: Summer 2026

## **Appendix 1**

### **Cyberbullying Annex**

The school's response to cyberbullying, both preventative and reactive, is integrated into its response to its anti-bullying work as a whole, as outlined in the main Anti-Bullying Policy. However, there are some points that are specific to online abuse which are covered in this annex.

#### **What do we mean by cyberbullying?**

Cyberbullying can be defined as:

'the use of technologies by an individual or by a group of people to deliberately and repeatedly upset someone else'

The use of technology as a tool for bullying has increased significantly and, inevitably, changes rapidly as technology use and trends evolve. The kind of bullying can be particularly devastating to the victim, as they are unable to escape the (sometimes anonymous) perpetrator(s) as the taunts and intimidation follow them home, invade their personal space, and can extend to a wide audience. Single incidents of abuse can quickly escalate into cyberbullying by reposting, sharing, and commenting, and once something is posted on the internet it is likely to leave a lasting digital trail.

Cyber is not a rare occurrence. It is now a modern tool used to supplement traditional forms of bullying.

The school regards this type of bullying very seriously and will take action whether reported cyberbullying takes place in or out of school, during or outside school hours. The Education Act 2006 includes legal powers that allow the Principal to regulate the behaviour of pupils when they are on site. Any disrespectful or inconsiderate behaviour online is both wrong and in direct contravention of the school's Acceptable Use Agreements. Furthermore, criminal laws apply to a range of behaviours linked to cyberbullying including stalking, threats, accessing computer systems without permission, and circulating sexual images. Where cyberbullying could potentially constitute a crime, the school will report the case to the police.

#### **Forms of cyberbullying**

There are many forms that cyberbullying can take, including:

- Threats and intimidation by mobile phone, email, within online games, or via comments on websites, social networking sites or message boards
- Harassment or stalking, eg by repeatedly sending unwanted messages or making calls (including silent calls) – or using public forums to post derogatory or defamatory statements
- Vilification/defamation – including posting upsetting or defamatory remarks about an individual, or name-calling and general insults
- Ostracising/peer rejection/exclusion – e.g. setting up a closed group to deliberately exclude an individual, excluding people from online conversations, or talking behind their back
- Identity theft/unauthorised access and impersonation



- Publicly posting, sending or forwarding personal or private information or images

Cyberbully is often linked to discrimination, including on the basis of gender, race, faith, sexual orientation, a gender identity or special educational needs and disabilities. Girl's report experiencing a higher incidence of cyberbullying than boys, and in particular are disproportionately subject to online sexual harassment.

### **Protecting yourself from cyberbullying**

Following good online safety precautions can, to some extent, protect you from online bullying. Privacy settings should be kept up to date and personal information such as mobile numbers and email addresses only shared with trusted friends. It is also advisable to monitor your screen time and avoid dependence on social media – which is designed to be addictive.

You should also consciously protect yourself from being drawn into bullying others online. It is far easier to post or send an unkind electronic message than to say something hurtful face to face. Initial incidents can have unintended consequences, and one upsetting post or message may escalate into cyberbullying involving many people over time. Cyberbullying also attracts virtual bystanders, i.e. those who participate in the abuse through their involvement in online surveys and discussion groups, or by passing on images or messages. This adds to the humiliation felt by the victim and will be treated as collusion in bullying by the school.

### **What to do if you are being bullied online**

Whatever form bullying takes, it is very important to report it to a member of staff, parent or another adult you trust. There are also anonymous reporting routes you can use. Should you wish to disclose any information or ask for help then please speak to any member of teaching staff, who will then inform the DSL/DDSL to investigate fully.

Do not retaliate or return the message. However, you should keep a record of abusive incidents, particularly: the date and time, content of the message(s), and where possible the senders ID or the web address of the content and a screenshot. Keeping evidence will be important in identifying the perpetrator(s) and taking action to stop the bullying. You can also block abusive contacts and consider changing your user ID, nickname or profile.

### **What the school will do**

If a cyberbullying incident does not constitute a criminal offence, the school will take steps to contain it by removing upsetting material from devices and services as quickly as possible. If the incident does constitute a criminal offence, it will be reported according to the relevant protocols and the evidence secured appropriately.

The school can confiscate, retain or dispose of a pupil's devices as a disciplinary penalty, where this is reasonable. The Principal, and members of staff formally authorised by the Principal can search a pupil's device without consent if there are reasonable grounds that it contains items specified as prohibited (note these powers only apply in England). Locally held content can be delete, if it is not to be retained as evidence.

## **Cyberbullying of staff**

The school has a responsibility to safeguard staff as well as pupils against the threat of cyberbullying. Malicious conduct against staff online will be pursued with the same vigour as that against pupils. Staff are reminded of the importance of keeping privacy and security settings up to date, regularly checking their online presence, and observing the guidelines in the Social Media Policy. Any member of staff subject to online abuse should keep evidence of the incident and report it to their line manager or a senior member of staff as soon as possible.

## **Advice for parents**

Protect your daughter(s) by making sure she understands how to use technology safely and understands the risks and consequences of misuse. Be open and curious about your child's activity online, so that she feels she can talk to you if something goes wrong. There are also safety features you can install on devices to help protect her.

If you are concerned, search your daughter's name online, look at her profiles and posting on social media and community sites, review web pages or blogs, and watch out for nervous or secretive behaviour, such as rapidly switching screens or displaying anxiety when being kept away from the internet, and for attempts to hide online behaviour, such as empty file history. Be aware that your daughter may as likely cyberbully as be a target of cyberbullying. If you suspect or discover that your daughter is cyberbullying or being cyberbullied, contact the school. Parents can also take action by reporting abusive content to service providers or social networking sites.

## **Further sources of advice and support**

Cyberbullying: understand, prevent and respond (Childnet)

Cyberbullying: advice for headteachers and school staff (DfE)

CEOP for making a report about online abuse

UK Safer Internet Centre for reporting and removing harmful online content

Professional Online Safety Helpline (POSH) Tel: 0344 381 4772

Education Support Partnership Tel: 08000 562 561

Stop Online Abuse provides advice for women and LGBTQ people