Anti-bullying Policy

The Abbey School, Reading

Reviewed by:	Assistant Heads Junior School and Deputy Head Senior School	September 2025
Ratified by:	Whole School Leadership Committee and Governor Audit	September 2025
Next review: August 2026		

17 Kendrick Road, Reading, Berkshire RG1 5DZ
Tel: 0118 987 2256 - **Email:** schooloffice@theabbey.co.uk
www.theabbey.co.uk

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1 Policy statement

1.1 This policy applies to all students at the School irrespective of their age and whether or not a student is in the care of the School when bullying behaviour occurs. This policy is provided to all parents, students, staff and volunteers and is available on the School's website and is also available on request from the School Office.

1.2 This policy should be read alongside the Behaviour and Discipline policy and the Safeguarding and Child Protection policy.

1.3 This policy has been drawn up with assistance from advice issued by the Department for Education (**DfE**), *Preventing and tackling bullying* (July 2017) and will be reviewed against any new government advice issued from time to time.

1.4 Through the operation of this policy we aim:

1.4.1 to actively promote and safeguard the welfare of students at the School;

1.4.2 to maintain and drive a positive and supportive culture among all students and staff throughout the School;

1.4.3 to deter bullying behaviour, detect it when it occurs, and deal with it on a case-by-case basis by counselling and / or disciplinary sanctions;

1.4.4 to comply with the School's duties under the Equality Act 2010.

1.5 Bullying behaviour is always unacceptable and will not be dismissed as being normal between young people, as "banter" or simply "part of growing up". Bullying will not be tolerated at the School because:

1.5.1 it is harmful to the person who is bullied, to those who engage in bullying behaviour, and those who support them, and can in some cases lead to lasting psychological damage and even suicide;

1.5.2 it interferes with a student's right to enjoy their learning and leisure time free from intimidation;

1.5.3 it is contrary to all our aims and values, our internal culture and the reputation of the School.

1.6 This policy will apply to bullying behaviour outside of the School of which the School becomes aware.

2 Bullying behaviour

2.1 Bullying is persistent behaviour by an individual or group that intentionally hurts another individual or group either physically or emotionally. Bullying may be:

2.1.1 **Physical**: hitting, kicking, pushing people around, spitting; or taking, damaging or hiding possessions

2.1.2 **Verbal**: name-calling, taunting, teasing, insulting or demanding money

2.1.3 **Exclusionary Behaviour**: intimidating, isolating or excluding a person from a group

2.1.4 **General Unkindness**: spreading rumours or writing unkind notes, mobile phone texts or emails; or

2.1.5 **Cyberbullying:** bullying that takes place using technology (see section 2.3 below).

2.2 Bullying may take other forms, many of which are discriminatory:

2.2.1 sexual: talking to or touching someone in a sexually inappropriate way;

2.2.2 sexist: related to a person's gender or gender reassignment;

2.2.3 racist, or regarding someone's religion, belief or culture;

2.2.4 related to a person's sexual orientation (e.g. homophobic bullying);

2.2.5 related to pregnancy and maternity;

2.2.6 related to a person's home circumstances; or

2.2.7 related to a person's disability, special educational needs, learning difficulty, health or appearance.

2.2.8 Any behaviour that a reasonable bystander would say was intended to hurt or

upset the victim is wrong and could constitute bullying, including complicity that may fall short of participating directly in bullying. It is no justification that the perpetrator says or believes that the victim is not upset or hurt by her actions or words.

2.2.9 Sometimes students 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
- Involves a power imbalance that makes it hard for the victim to defend themselves
- Is usually persistent
- Often involves no remorse or acknowledgement of the victim's feelings

School staff are ready to help and support students who have fallen out with friends, but such situations will not be treated in the same way as a case of bullying. However, the strategies used may be similar because it is acknowledged that over a period of time the impact on the student may be the same, and the situation could become bullying if it escalates.

2.3 **Cyberbullying**: Cyberbullying is bullying that takes place using technology. This may include bullying through the use of mobile electronic devices, social media or gaming sites. An incident of cyberbullying will be dealt with in accordance with the procedures in this policy. See Appendix 1 to this policy for guidance for students about cyberbullying. The School's separate Mobile Phones and Digital Guidance and Acceptable Use policies for students set out the School rules about the use of technology including mobile electronic devices.

2.4 **Intention**: Not all bullying behaviour is deliberate or intended to hurt. Some individuals may see their hurtful conduct as "teasing", "banter", "a game" or "for the good of" the other person. These forms of bullying are equally unacceptable but may not be malicious and can often be corrected quickly with advice and without disciplinary sanctions.

2.5 **Responsibility**: It is everyone's responsibility to ensure, whatever the circumstances, that no-one becomes a victim of bullying. A person may be vulnerable to bullying because of their age, physical appearance, nationality, colour, gender, sexual orientation, religion, culture or disability, or because they are new in the School, appears to be uncertain or has no friends. They may also become a target because of an irrational decision by a bully.

2.6 **Legal aspects**: A person who makes a physical or sexual assault on another, or who steals or causes damage to the property of another, commits a criminal offence. Bullying behaviour may also be regarded as threatening behaviour or harassment which can be either a criminal offence or a civil wrong. Misuse of electronic communications could also be a criminal offence, for example it is an offence to send an electronic communication (such as a text message or email) to another person with the intent to cause distress or anxiety.

2.7 **Safeguarding**: Bullying behaviour may be of such a nature that safeguarding concerns are raised. Such behaviour may include hazing behaviour, initiation rituals or any form of sexual harassment. See the School's Safeguarding and Child Protection policy and procedures for the School's approach to child on child abuse. Concerns about a student's welfare because they are the perpetrator or victim of bullying behaviour must be reported in accordance with the Safeguarding and Child Protection policy and procedures and appropriate action taken, taking into account the Local Safeguarding Children Board's threshold document.

3 Anti-bullying culture

3.1 Our expectation of all members of the School community is that:

3.1.1 everyone will uphold the School rules;
3.1.2 a student or a member of staff or volunteer who witnesses or hears of an incident of bullying will report it;
3.1.3 a complaint of bullying will always be taken seriously;
3.1.4 no one will tolerate unkind actions or remarks or stand by when someone else is being bullied.

3.2 **In School and in every year group:**
3.2.1 discriminatory words and behaviour are treated as unacceptable;
3.2.2 positive attitudes are fostered towards people who are disabled and towards ethnic, religious, cultural and linguistic groups within and outside the School; and
3.2.3 positive attitudes are fostered towards gender and sexuality differences through the curriculum and tutorials.

3.3 **Governing Body:** The Governing Body, as proprietor, has overall responsibility for promoting and safeguarding the welfare of students at the School, ensuring that those in leadership and management positions actively promote student well-being. This includes ensuring that policies and procedures are in place and implemented effectively to:
3.3.1 minimise the risk of bullying at the School so that students feel safe and secure; and
3.3.2 deal swiftly with allegations of bullying at the School so that students feel confident that all incidents will be dealt with appropriately.

3.4 **Staff**: Through their training and experience, members of staff and volunteers are expected to promote an anti-bullying culture by:
3.4.1 celebrating achievement;
3.4.2 anticipating problems and providing support;
3.4.3 disciplining fairly, consistently and reasonably, considering any special educational needs or disabilities of the student and the needs of vulnerable students;
3.4.4 making opportunities to listen to students;
3.4.5 acting as advocates of students;
3.4.6 to use technology safely and securely and to be aware of the risks and impact of the use of technology on students.

3.5 **Students**: Through the School's pastoral care systems, students are informed and taught that bullying will not be tolerated in the School. They are encouraged:
3.5.1 to celebrate the effort and achievements of others;
3.5.2 to hold and promote positive attitudes;
3.5.3 to feel able to share problems with staff;
3.5.4 to turn to someone they trust, if they have a problem;
3.5.5 not to feel guilty about airing a complaint;
3.5.6 to be kind, considerate and tolerant towards others;
3.5.7 to be aware of the impact their behaviour can have on others;
3.5.8 to challenge their peers if they are unkind to others;
3.5.9 to use technology safely and securely and to be aware of the risks and impact of the use of technology on themselves and others.

3.6 **Parents:** The School will take active measures to promote an anti-bullying culture and message that bullying will not be tolerated in the School to parents.

3.7 Why incidents might not be reported

3.7.1 **Victim:** There are many reasons why a student who has suffered bullying may be reluctant to report it. They may become demoralised and may think, for example:
- it is telling tales;
- they won't believe me because the person I am complaining about is popular and I am not, and I will become even more unpopular;

- the things they are saying and doing are too embarrassing to discuss with an adult;
- it is all my fault anyway for being overweight / too studious etc;
- there are too many of them; there is nothing the staff can do;
- it will get back to my parents and they will think less of me;
- I will just try and toughen up and grow a thicker skin;
- I will lie low and not draw attention to myself;
- this is a normal part of growing up and going to school.

3.7.2 **Witnesses**: There are also reasons why a student who has witnessed or learned of bullying behaviour may not want to make a report. They may think:

- it is "grassing" and I will become unpopular;
- it is not my concern anyway;
- I don't like the victim and I would find it embarrassing to be associated with them.

3.8 Any of these responses would be contrary to the culture at the School. Every student and their parents are encouraged to understand that:

3.8.1 every complaint of bullying will be taken seriously;

3.8.2 members of staff and volunteers will deal with a complaint correctly and effectively in accordance with their experience and the training they have received;

3.8.3 there is a solution to nearly every problem of bullying;

3.8.4 a student who complains will receive support and advice and in many cases the problem can be dealt with on a no-names basis;

3.8.5 the primary aim will be for the bullying to cease;

3.8.6 the school may need to challenge and support the bully so that the causes of bullying behaviour can be addressed.

4 Anti-bullying systems

4.1 The School's systems for detecting and dealing with bullying are designed to operate vertically (through all year groups) and horizontally (within year groups and in the classroom and other activities).

4.2 Members of staff and volunteers are vigilant at all times but particularly:

4.2.1 before lessons;

4.2.2 in the queue for the dining hall and in the dining hall itself;

4.2.3 in School corridors;

4.2.4 at breaks and lunchtimes when on duty around the school;

4.2.5 on School transport / School trips.

4.3 Bullying is regularly discussed in staff meetings. The result of these meetings is to feedback information about friendship patterns, particular incidents, any student who seems to be isolated, any growing "power base" and any known conflict between students so that strategies can be developed to prevent bullying incidents.

4.4 Education: Measures are taken throughout each year to educate students about bullying and this policy. These measures include:

4.4.1 the PSHE curriculum includes lessons on bullying;

4.4.2 anti-bullying posters placed around the School;

4.4.3 anti-bullying messages are given in assemblies;

4.4.4 online safety is a key aspect of all areas of the curriculum. Parents are informed about online safety issues and the School's strategies to safeguard students through correspondence. See the School's Online Safety policy for further information about the School's online safety strategy.

4.5 Staff training**:** Staff guidance and training in all aspects of care is arranged on induction and at regular intervals thereafter to ensure that staff and volunteers have the necessary professional skills, especially:

4.5.1 awareness of the risk and indications of bullying, and how to deal with cases;
4.5.2 counselling skills (including bereavement);
4.5.3 awareness of the risks of child on child abuse and how bullying behaviour may give rise to safeguarding concerns.

4.6 Students' responsibilities: We emphasise with older students the role which is expected of them in setting a good example and being helpful to younger students and each other.

4.7 Record keeping and monitoring**:** School staff maintain records of the welfare and development of individual students. Every complaint or report of bullying is recorded centrally and monitored to enable patterns to be identified, both in relation to individual students and across the school as a whole and to evaluate the effectiveness of the School's approach.

4.8 In their termly and annual safeguarding reports, and in their termly safeguarding meetings with the Safeguarding Governors, the DSLs of the JS and SS will report on, and often discuss, all incidents of bullying that have occurred since the previous report, commenting on strategies used, trends, and any lessons learned from recent bullying incidents.

5 Procedures

5.1 **Guidelines:** The following procedures are a guideline except where expressed in the terms "should" or "must". The best guide is the experience and training of the staff.

5.2 Reporting bullying complaints

5.2.1 Students: A student who is being bullied, or who is worried about another student being bullied, should tell someone without delay and can do so in several ways. They can:

- Tell their parents, Form Teacher or any member of staff or volunteer at the School or responsible older student;
- contact Childline (0800 1111)

5.2.2 **Parents:** Parents who are concerned that their child is being bullied should inform their child's Form Teacher without delay.

5.2.3 **Staff:** This policy focuses mainly on the bullying of students by students although it is recognised that a staff member could be a victim and on occasion may be perceived to be guilty of bullying. Staff members who are concerned about being bullied or harassed should refer to the School's Staff Handbook. Students and parents who feel that a member of staff is bullying should report this in accordance with the procedures set out above.

5.3 Initial complaint

5.3.1 A member of staff or volunteer who learns of alleged bullying behaviour should:

- respond quickly and sensitively by offering advice, reassurance and support to the alleged victim. The member of staff should:
  - listen carefully and keep an open mind;
  - not ask leading questions; and
  - reassure the student but not give a guarantee of confidentiality;
- report the allegation to the relevant Assistant Director/Director /Junior School Assistant Head as soon as possible.

5.3.2 The student's Assistant Director/Director/Junior School Assistant Head must inform the relevant senior colleague and contact the Form Teacher to agree on a strategy for dealing with the matter.

5.3.3 If the alleged bullying behaviour raises a safeguarding concern, the matter should be reported in accordance with the School's Safeguarding and Child Protection policy and procedures before further investigation is carried out.

5.4 **Assessment**

5.4.1 The student's Assistant Director/Director /Junior School Form Teacher or Junior School Assistant Head will normally see the victim and (unless the case is very serious) any witnesses without delay and form an initial view of the allegation. The assessment will consider:

- the nature of the incident(s) - physical? verbal? exclusionary? etc
- is it a "one-off" incident involving an individual or a group?
- is it part of a pattern of behaviour by an individual or a group?
- has physical injury been caused? Who should be informed? Head? Parents? The School's Designated Safeguarding Lead? Children's Social Care? The police?
- can the alleged bully be questioned without disclosing the victim's identity?
- what is the likely outcome if the allegation proves to be correct?

5.4.2 At this stage, the possible outcomes for an incident which is not too serious include:

- there has been a misunderstanding which can be explained sympathetically to the alleged victim with advice to the alleged bully; or
- there has been inappropriate behaviour which is best dealt with using the Behaviour and Discipline policy; or
- the complaint is justified in whole or in part, and further action will be needed (see Range of Actions, below).

5.5 **Serious incidents**

5.5.1 If at any stage the alleged bullying behaviour raises a safeguarding concern, the School's Safeguarding and Child Protection policy and procedures should be followed before further investigation is carried out.

5.5.2 Otherwise, in cases where the student's Assistant Director/Director /Junior School Assistant Head believes that serious bullying behaviour has occurred involving a student or has recurred after warnings have been given to the "bully" she will refer the matter to the Deputy Head or the Head of the Junior School (as appropriate) who will then:

- interview the alleged victim, bully and any witnesses separately, in order to establish the facts of the case. They may decide to ask another senior member of staff to be present; and
- send a summary of their findings to the Head and other relevant staff.

5.5.3 Together with the Head, Deputy Head, the Head of the Junior School (as appropriate) will decide on the action to be taken in accordance with the Range of Actions set out below.

5.5.4 The parents of the victim and bully will be notified giving them details of the case and the action being taken. Such action may include further investigation in accordance with the School's Behaviour and Discipline Policy.

5.6 **Range of Actions:** When a complaint of bullying behaviour is upheld, the range of responses will include one or more of the following:

5.6.1 consideration as to whether the bullying incident should be addressed as a safeguarding concern and if so, the School's Safeguarding and Child Protection policy and procedures will be followed;

5.6.2 advice and support for the victim and, where appropriate, establishing a course of action to help the victim, including support from external services where appropriate;

5.6.3 advice and support to the bully in trying to change their behaviour. This may include clear instructions and a warning or final warning;

5.6.4 consideration of the motivation behind the bullying behaviour and whether external services should be used to tackle any underlying issues of the bully

which contributed to the bullying behaviour. If these considerations give rise to safeguarding concerns relating to the bullying, the School's child protection procedures will be followed;

5.6.5 a supervised meeting between the bully and the victim to discuss their differences and the ways in which they may be able to avoid future conflict (only with the victim's express agreement);

5.6.6 a disciplinary sanction against the bully, in accordance with the School's Behaviour and Discipline Policy. In a very serious case or a case of persistent bullying, a student may be required to leave the School permanently. Any disciplinary action will be applied fairly, consistently and reasonably, taking into account any special educational needs or disabilities and the needs of vulnerable students;

5.6.7 action to break up a "power base";

5.6.8 confiscation of mobile electronic devices, increased monitoring procedures or limiting access to the School's internet and email facilities if cyberbullying (see also the School's Digital Guidance and Acceptable Use policy for students);

5.6.9 moving either the bully or victim to another form group after consultation with the student, their parents and the relevant staff;

5.6.10 involving Children's Social Care or the police;

5.6.11 notifying the parents of one or both students about the case and the action which has been taken;

5.6.12 such other action as may appear to the Head to be appropriate.

5.7 **Monitoring:** The position should be monitored for as long as necessary thereafter. Action may include:

5.7.1 sharing information with some or all colleagues so that they may be alert to the need to monitor certain students closely

5.7.2 ongoing counselling and support

5.7.3 vigilance

5.7.4 mentioning the incident at meetings of staff

5.7.5 reviewing vulnerable individuals and areas of the School

5.7.6 liaison between Assistant Directors/Directors / Junior School Assistant Heads.

5.8 **Record keeping:** The Deputy Head or the Head of the Junior School (as appropriate) will maintain a centralised record of all allegations or reports of bullying, including details of those involved and the action taken. Notes from all interviews, parent emails and decision making meetings should be recorded on CPOMS.

6 Monitoring and review

6.1 The Head will monitor the centralised record of bullying incidents on a regular basis to identify patterns in behaviour and the effectiveness of the School's anti-bullying procedures.

6.2 The Deputy Head or the Head of the Junior School (as appropriate) will review and make revisions to this policy on an annual basis, or more regularly as required taking into account any advice published by the DfE together with the record of any bullying incidents.

6.3 The Board of Governors will consider the revisions made as part of its collective responsibility to carry out an annual review of safeguarding.

Appendix 1 Cyberbullying: guidance for students

1 Cyberbullying is bullying that takes place using technology.

2 Students should remember the following:

2.1 Always respect others - be careful what you say online and what images you send.

2.2 Think before you send - whatever you send can be made public very quickly and could stay online forever.

2.3 If you or someone you know are being cyberbullied, TELL SOMEONE. You have the right not to be harassed or bullied online. Tell an adult you trust - your parents, any member of staff or volunteer, or a helpline such as ChildLine on 0800 1111.

2.4 Don't retaliate or reply online.

2.5 Save the evidence - learn how to keep records of offending messages, pictures or online conversations. Ask someone if you are unsure how to do this. This will help to show what is happening and can be used by the School to investigate the matter.

2.6 Block the bully. Most social media websites and online or mobile services allow you block someone who is behaving badly.

2.7 Don't be a bystander - if you see cyberbullying going on, support the victim and report the bullying.

3 The following websites provide further advice:

https://www.childnet.com/young-people
https://www.thinkuknow.co.uk/
https://www.childline.org.uk - info-advice - bullying-abuse-safety and the law - types-bullying - on-line bullying

4 Please see the School's Digital Guidance and Acceptable Use policy for students which sets out the School rules about the use of technology including mobile electronic devices.