



ANTI-BULLYING POLICY

Introduction

This policy incorporates the latest recommendations from the DfE Behaviour and Discipline in Schools February 2014, DfE Preventing and Tackling Bullying March 2014, DfE Supporting Children and young people who are bullied: advice for schools March 2014 and the Equality Act 2010.

The purpose of this policy is to provide a clear explanation of a set of attitudes and a related framework for intervention that will allow staff to manage the problem of bullying in an efficient and effective manner. This policy is intended to help staff to develop a shared understanding of the problems involved in identifying, containing, reporting and intervening on occasions when students bully one another.

In the main students who attend The Shires at Oakham do not engage in bullying behaviour. This is because their autism often means they prefer not to relate socially to one another. In addition, many of the students are working at an emotional level that is significantly below their chronological age. These students do not understand the notion of bullying, and any challenging behaviour they exhibit tends to be as a result of their frustration with the environment. Notwithstanding the fact that bullying is rare, it can happen, and staff should ensure that they are clear about the steps to be taken in the event that bullying occurs.

Statement of general principles

- ❖ everyone has the right to feel safe in school
- ❖ students and staff should be polite to one another at all times
- ❖ everyone has to take responsibility for his/her own actions
- ❖ everyone should be given respect
- ❖ bullying is unacceptable and will be treated seriously

The aims of this policy are to enable staff to:-

- ❖ provide a secure environment where students feel confident about reporting incidents of bullying
- ❖ show students that bullying is taken seriously
- ❖ respond calmly and confidently to bullying incidents
- ❖ reassure students that the school will protect and support all parties whilst the issues are resolved
- ❖ provide long term and positive programmes of personal development where it is required

What is Bullying?

There are many definitions of bullying. At The Shires at Oakham bullying is seen as inappropriate behaviour from an individual student or group of students, towards another student that is deliberate, may be repeated over time, and is hard for the individual to defend against. It is essentially an abuse of power by a stronger student(s) against a weaker one. The advantage in strength may be either physical or verbal. It might be real or imagined and can be expressed individually or collectively with others.

Examples of bullying behaviour might include:-

- ❖ hitting and punching
- ❖ kicking
- ❖ spitting
- ❖ spoiling someone else's belongings
- ❖ calling names
- ❖ excluding or deliberately isolating a student
- ❖ giving nasty looks
- ❖ making racist, homophobic or sexist remarks
- ❖ making comments about another student's family
- ❖ picking on a weakness
- ❖ spreading rumours
- ❖ preventing somebody from joining a game
- ❖ not talking to a fellow student or getting others not to talk to another student
- ❖ putting pressure on another student– for example, to run errands and do jobs, to give up possessions, to bring things from home.
- ❖ forcing a student to engage in sexualized activity or behaviour
- ❖ cyber bullying

Emotional and physical symptoms arising from bullying

It is often hard to spot children who are experiencing bullying. By its nature, it is an insidious activity that usually goes on out of sight of staff. The victim is often reluctant to come forward because they feel that 'telling' might only make matters worse for themselves and make the situation worse. The following symptoms might be an indication that a student is being bullied:

emotional signs

- ❖ loss of confidence or self-esteem
- ❖ irritability
- ❖ aggression
- ❖ panic attacks
- ❖ depression
- ❖ suicidal thoughts

physical signs

- ❖ sleeplessness
- ❖ nausea
- ❖ shaking
- ❖ heart racing
- ❖ skin complaints
- ❖ stomach aches
- ❖ migraines and headaches

Who Bullies?

Although bullies are often looked at as simply out of control children, a significant number of children use aggression in their everyday lives. There are many characteristics that define these dominant children as bullies. Rigby (1993) specifically defines bullies as those having an aggressive personality pattern, with the tendency to react aggressively in a variety of situations. They also tend to have an inability to control their inhibitions against aggressive tendencies and often have a positive attitude toward violence.

Power, Dyson and Wozniak (1997) note that, physically, aggressors tend to be older and stronger than their peers. As well as personality and physics, family situations are influential

on a child's aggression. Perren (2005) suggests that families of bullies frequently have little closeness and unity, as well as being focused on power over one another. These children often report more negative family functioning than non-bullies.

Because of the lack of parental and family support, many adolescents use bullying as a form of control and attention. These children do not know the correct form of asking for attention, love and support from others, including their peers. Brown (1986) suggests that this is often a response to family situations, as well as peer pressure. A portion of these children lack any control in their lives, except for the control they place on others.

Who are victims of bullying?

Research indicates that victims quite often find themselves in the same situation over and over again. There are possible explanations for victims and their tendency to be victimised. Primarily, victims tend to be young and smaller physically.

In addition, the home environment plays an important role in a victim's life. Parental abuse or misconduct may leave a child with no knowledge of proper relationships. Perren (2005) states that families of male victims seem to be overly protective and close, while the families of female victims lean toward unhealthy emotional abuse. Just as with bullies, a lack of family support can leave a child with deeper psychosocial problems that may manifest themselves in social environments, predicting their involvement in victimising activities.

The school environment is just as important as the home life in the development of victims. In terms of peers, Perren finds that limited popularity and social networks can be a precursor for victimisation in an adolescent social setting. Limited support from peers and adults could show a child that bullying is not only right, but also admirable. The adolescents who are bullied feel as though the whole world is against them.

Policy and practice within The Shires at Oakham

The DfE Guidance 'Preventing and Tackling Bullying' March 2014 states clearly that schools should apply disciplinary measures to students who bully to demonstrate that this behaviour is wrong and unacceptable. In The Shires at Oakham, all students have autism and some have severe learning difficulties. In the event of bullying it is essential that staff take account of the learning difficulties and special educational needs of the perpetrator and the victim, and that disciplinary measures are proportionate and appropriate.

It is the policy of The Shires at Oakham that issues about bullying are discussed with students on a regular basis and that the topic is not just addressed in the event of a bullying incident occurring. Within the classroom setting anti-bullying work is addressed via the curriculum and in particular within PSHE education lessons. In addition to the direct teaching of anti-bullying issues, incidental opportunities for reinforcing the students' learning are picked up as they arise.

All students, parents and staff must recognise that any form of bullying is completely unacceptable in The Shires at Oakham. This message will be made explicit when a child and his family/carers first come for interview and will be reiterated regularly in school assemblies and through the curriculum.

No member of staff or pupil must ever ignore a student who is being bullied or who is in distress as a result of being bullied. No tales of bullying must ever be discounted. They must be recorded in the Bullying Log Book and should be thoroughly investigated. Seeing and doing nothing is professionally indefensible. It implies support for the aggressor and is the worst response an adult can offer. It offers no help to the victim and is an act of collusion with the bully. Every case of bullying must be followed up immediately. (One study found 25% of teachers interviewed felt it was sometimes helpful to ignore bullying problems. This is not a view The Shires at Oakham subscribes to under any circumstances.)

How staff should deal with an observed incident of bullying

Staff should:-

- ❖ take immediate action if they see an act of bullying to demonstrate to all concerned that this is unacceptable behaviour
- ❖ separate the bully from the victim and other children
- ❖ ensure the victim is reassured and is taken to a place of safety
- ❖ make it clear to the perpetrator that bullying is unacceptable in The Shires
- ❖ use phrases like 'we don't treat people like that here' so that the message indicates a collective responsibility
- ❖ clarify for the perpetrator what was observed by repeating words that were exchanged
- ❖ not allow the bully to try to justify his/her behaviour by saying for example that he/she was only joking
- ❖ ensure the bully understands which part of his/her behaviour was unacceptable and why
- ❖ set an appropriate sanction which is proportionate and appropriate to the level of bullying
- ❖ explain the purpose of the sanction to the perpetrator and record in the sanctions log
- ❖ ensure that all meetings with the perpetrator are conducted in a business-like and factual manner
- ❖ seek guidance from their line manager if they are unsure about any part of the process of dealing with a bully
- ❖ subsequently monitor the bully's behaviour
- ❖ consider whether counselling would be useful to support the bully in changing his/her behaviour

When dealing with the victim of bullying it is important to remember that he/she will be very upset although he/she may not show it on the outside. If they have plucked up the courage to talk to staff then they need to know the problem will be taken seriously. How the staff member reacts and responds to that student may make the difference between resolving the issue or allowing misery to continue that could affect the rest of the young person's school life. The staff member to whom a bullying issue is reported must:-

- ❖ reassure the victim that his/her report is being treated seriously
- ❖ ask the victim to write down as much about the incident as he/she can remember – focus on other people who witnessed the incident, the location, the time etc.
- ❖ assure the victim that the incident will be investigated and that he/she will be told the outcome
- ❖ remind the victim to report any further incidents of bullying immediately
- ❖ let the victim know the timeframe for carrying out the investigation and reporting back
- ❖ remind the victim that it is important to listen to both sides of the story

How to prevent bullying in The Shires

The most successful way of preventing bullying is through planned teaching and learning opportunities that highlight the negative impact of bullying for both the perpetrator and the victim. Within The Shires at Oakham bullying is a topic that is addressed largely through the PSHE education programme. Bullying is also addressed through topics within English allowing staff to present information in a more objective way – for example considering how bullies act in stories. In addition to planned opportunities, staff should also take up any incidental opportunities that arise through the course of the day – for example, perhaps discussing the actions of characters in a TV programme the young person has recently watched.

Staff need to be clear in their own minds about what constitutes bullying and should at all times promote positive behaviour through their own interactions with other staff and students. Staff need to be vigilant in terms of picking up 'vibes' that might suggest there are issues between students and should take all possible opportunities to discuss differences with the students so that potential conflict might be avoided.

Recording incidents of bullying

Incidents of bullying should be recorded in the Bullying Log Book and when it is fully operational on Sleuth the electronic system. The member of staff dealing with the incident of bullying needs in the first instance to establish the level of severity. Serious cases involving serious physical harm to another student must be reported to a member of the senior leadership team.

Records of bullying must include the following information:-

- ❖ location of incident
- ❖ time of incident
- ❖ names of perpetrator(s) and victim(s)
- ❖ brief description of the incident
- ❖ name of staff member who dealt with the incident
- ❖ action taken

Monitoring levels of bullying and the impact of interventions

The purpose of monitoring levels of bullying and the impact of interventions is to provide intelligence about ways in which bullying can be prevented and reduced.

The teaching manager will work with the registered manager of the children's home to evaluate data relating to bullying. This monitoring will take place on a monthly basis and will form the basis of a verbal report to the monthly SLT meeting.

As part of the monitoring process, the teaching manager will contact the parents/carers of students who have either been the perpetrators or victims of bullying to ensure that they are satisfied with the way in which the matter was handled.

A trend of reduced incidents of bullying across the same group of students will indicate that this policy and strategies have been successfully implemented.

Conclusion

In conclusion the following points are worth re-iterating:

- ❖ bullying does not stop of its own accord
- ❖ bullying can be most effectively managed when staff share a common set of practices and procedures
- ❖ all students have the right to feel safe within The Shires
- ❖ no observed or reported incident of bullying should be ignored
- ❖ the ethos of The Shires should emphasise the importance of high levels of mutual respect amongst staff and students
- ❖ all incidents of bullying should be recorded
- ❖ bullying is not acceptable
- ❖ issues around positive behaviour should be regularly addressed through the curriculum