Wellbrook School: Anti-bullying Policy

Compiled:	January 2024
Reviewed by:	C. Howells, Headteacher
Last Review Date:	November 2024
Approved by:	Governance Committee
Approval Date:	December 2024
Next Review date:	June 2025
Version Number:	Version 1
Policy Number:	3
Document Owner:	C. Howells, Headteacher

Introduction

At Wellbrook School, we strive to provide every child with the opportunity to unlock their potential. We honour and celebrate their individuality and tailor our instruction to their personal needs. Our goal is to nurture self-confidence and provide students with the support necessary to help them reach heights they didn't think were possible. We want parents to imagine the possibilities when they walk through our doors and be filled with hope as they see their children achieve beyond their expectations. We strive to be a place where children feel they belong and can thrive.

One of the potential barriers to achieving these goals is bullying. We have compiled this policy to outline the procedures we will follow to prevent and tackle bullying.

Bullying, if left unaddressed, can have a devastating effect on individuals. It does not only get in the way of learning; it can also affect social, mental, and emotional health. There is evidence to suggest that pupils that are badly bullied in school are more likely to be bullied out of school, for instance either on their way to or from school or through cyberbullying wherever they are. Bullying can have a lasting effect on lives well into adulthood.

This policy outlines the procedures we will take to effectively prevent and tackle all forms of bullying and ensure that our school is a safe, disciplined environment where pupils are able to learn and fulfil their potential. This policy must be read alongside the school's behaviour policy. An up-to-date copy of this policy will be published on the school website.

What is bullying?

- Bullying is behaviour by an individual or group, repeated over time, that intentionally hurts another individual or group either physically or emotionally. Although it might not seem so, emotional bullying can be more damaging than physical.
- Bullying is often motivated by prejudice against particular groups, for example on grounds of race, religion, gender, sexual orientation, special educational needs, or disabilities, or because a pupil is adopted, in care or has caring responsibilities.
- It might be motivated by actual differences between pupils, or perceived differences.

Many experts say that bullying involves an imbalance of power between the perpetrator and the victim 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),
- derived from an intellectual imbalance,
- about having access to the support of a group,
- 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 either physically or online.

Bullying can take many forms. Even low-level disruption and the use of offensive language can have a significant impact on its target. If left unchallenged or dismissed as banter or horseplay it can also lead to reluctance to report other behaviour. Early intervention can help to set clear expectations of the behaviour that is and isn't acceptable and help stop negative behaviours escalating.

For this reason, we do not tolerate any form of bullying. We have robust strategies to prevent all forms of bullying and intervene in any incidents of bullying to ensure that pupils feel safe within the school.

Forms of bullying

Bullying can take many forms and for the purposes of this policy these have been categorised into 4 groups.

Verbal Bullying:

Verbal bullying is a type of bullying where the perpetrator relies mainly on words to try to hurt their victim. In previous times, pupils may have been taught the mantra "Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words can never hurt me", however this mantra is now considered to be counterproductive. Verbal bullying can have a serious effect on the mental health of victims and may actually have more of a lasting effect than physical bullying. Verbal bullying serves to lower self-esteem and undermine the confidence of the victim.

Types of verbal bullying include name-calling, routine criticism, teasing, hurtful comments, and verbal threats. Verbal bullying does not always have to be spoken out loud; it can also take the form of hurtful notes and similar things that are passed to the victim.

Physical Bullying:

Physical bullying is the name given to any act where the perpetrator uses their physicality to try to hurt or irritate the victim. Physical acts can range from seemingly minor actions, such as flicking items at someone repeatedly, up to actions which put the victim's life at risk. It is worth noting that minor physical actions can still have a severe effect on the mental health of the person who is being targeted.

Other types of physical bullying include hitting, pushing, tripping, and throwing objects at the victim. In addition to physical threats and actions against the victim, the perpetrators of the bullying may also seek to use their physicality to damage personal items that belong to the victim. For example, they might steal the victim's school bag or rip up a book which belongs to their target.

Social Bullying:

Social bullying is a type of bullying where the perpetrators try to isolate their victim from wider social networks. To do this, they damage that person's relationships or reputation. By ostracising a person from a specific group, the perpetrator is reducing the opportunity for their victim to seek support. In some cases, the bully may appear to be friendly when they are communicating directly with their victim, but they could be manipulating other people to act against that person.

Social bullying can include ostracising a person from an existing social group, spreading rumours about a person, sharing secrets that were told in confidence, giving a person "the silent treatment", and deliberately embarrassing someone in public. 'The bad eyes', someone glaring or giving you threatening looks, this is very difficult to prove but can be just as distressing.

Cyber-bullying:

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.

This type of bullying makes it much harder for victims to get away from their tormentors. Victims may feel like they cannot stop using social media or their mobile phone, because these things are now considered to be very important forms of communication. Cyber bullying also allows greater anonymity for the perpetrators. It is possible for cyber bullies to target people who are thousands of miles away and who they may never have met in real life.

Examples of cyber bullying include:

- Internet abuse: Using social networking sites to show pictures, embarrass others, set up groups and encourage others to take part in bullying online. This can be VERY DANGEROUS as sometimes people give out personal information that can get into the wrong hands. Also, fake social media accounts being made about the victim, catfishing, hacking and computer virus attacks.
- Instant Messenger: Bullies can come into your home and abuse you on IM.
- Chat rooms: using chat rooms to spread gossip and hurt people's feelings.
- Abusive text messages: nasty text messages, these can be particularly scary when you don't know who they are off.
- Happy Slapping: this is when you use a phone or a video camera and film someone being slapped or attacked unknowingly. This is assault and this should be reported to the police.
- Silent or abusive phone calls: these too can be quite scary and worrying.

Bullying which occurs outside school premises

As a school we have the power to discipline pupils for misbehaving outside the school premises. This may include bullying incidents occurring anywhere off the school premises, such as on school or public transport, outside the local shops, or in a town or village centre. All disciplinary sanctions will be implemented on the school premises or when the pupil is under the lawful control of school staff, for instance on a school trip.

Vulnerable Pupils

Although bullying can happen to all pupils some pupils are more likely to experience bullying than others. They are more likely to be the target of bullying because of the attitudes and behaviours some people have towards those who are different from themselves. This leads to specific forms of bullying.

Prejudice-based bullying

It is when bullying behaviour is motivated by prejudice based on an individual's actual or perceived identity; it can be based on characteristics unique to a child or young person's identity or circumstance.' Prejudice-based bullying includes the 9 protected characteristics outlined in the Equality Act 2010, but prejudice can and does extend beyond these and can lead to bullying for many other reasons.

Appearance related bullying

Appearance related bullying is bullying that targets an aspect of a person's appearance. It could be that they are bullied for their size, height, or disfigurement.

Homophobic, biphobic and transphobic (HBT) bullying

Homophobic, biphobic and transphobic (HBT) bullying is bullying directed at someone who is or is perceived to be lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, questioning, intersex, or asexual (LGBTQIA+).

Looked after children (LAC)

Care-experienced pupils are among the groups who are most vulnerable to bullying.

SEN & Disability

Disabled pupils and those with SEN are more likely to experience bullying in school. In addition, pupils with special educational needs or disabilities can often lack the social or communication skills to report such incidents so it is important that staff at Wellbrook School are alert to the potential bullying this group faces. We will also ensure that our mechanisms for reporting are accessible to all.

We recognise that the standard definition of bullying is not always helpful when considering pupils with social, emotional, and mental health needs (SEMH) and autism as most pupils with these conditions have little understanding of how their actions impact on the way other people feel and it is typically difficult to be sure that the behaviour was 'intentionally hurtful'. For example, pupil A may shout at pupil B not because he/she wants to upset him but because he/she enjoys watching pupil B's reactions. However, a pupil with autism may sometimes 'target' another pupil with teasing, taunting, physical aggression, and/or unwanted attention, etc. Even though the pupil may not be intending to bully, his/her actions are correctly described as bullying-type behaviour and should not be tolerated. These behaviours need to be addressed so the young person learns about the impact of their actions and how to interact more appropriately.

The target pupil may not realise that he/she is being bullied; there are instances of pupils with autism in schools being regularly relieved of their lunch money by other pupils that they describe as their 'friends'. Children and young people on the autism spectrum have difficulty 'reading' social situations and knowing how to engage in ever-changing social contexts. They find it hard to predict other people's behaviour and to interpret their body language and expression to guess what they are thinking or feeling. This makes it difficult for children and young people on the autism spectrum to understand other people's intentions and makes them an easy target for bullies.

40% of parents who have a child on the autism spectrum say their child has been bullied. Bullying is often under-reported. In addition, people on the autism spectrum can have difficulty communicating. Staff should therefore treat increased anxiety or not wanting to participate as potential indicators of bullying. People on the autism spectrum are often more able at logical tasks including ICT than they are at understanding social situations. This can leave people on the autism spectrum at risk of cyberbullying through mobile phones and social networks.

Some examples of bullying behaviours that are more commonly seen in pupils with social emotional and mental health needs and/or autism:

- Hitting, kicking and any display of aggressive behaviour that is often directed towards a specific pupil
- Persistently imitating the behaviours of another pupil.
- Persistently interrupting or obstructing another pupil thereby preventing them taking part in activities
- Persistently taking possessions from another pupil without permission
- Persistently uttering remarks and comments that another pupil finds hurtful.

Race and Faith Targeted Bullying

Race and faith targeted bullying is bullying that is perceived by the victim or any other person to be racist or bullying that targets a person's faith.

Young Carers

Young carers are pupils under 18 years old who provide regular and ongoing care to a family member who is physically or mentally ill, disabled or misuses substances. These pupils are often the same pupils who might need greater support to deal with the impact of bullying, for example those who are going through a personal or family crisis.

We are aware that there is a range of other local and individual factors that result in some people being more vulnerable to bullying and its impact than others. We will be vigilant in identifying these factors so we can develop strategies to prevent bullying from happening.

Signs of bullying

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

- Unwillingness to return to school
- Displays of excessive anxiety, becoming withdrawn or unusually quiet
- Failure to produce work, or producing unusually bad work, or work that appears to have been copied, interfered with, or spoilt by others
- Books, bags, and other belongings suddenly go missing, or are damaged
- Change to established habits
- Diminished levels of self confidence
- Frequent visits to the medical room with symptoms such as stomach pains, headaches
- Unexplained cuts and bruises
- Frequent absence, erratic attendance, late arrival to class
- Choosing the company of adults
- Displaying repressed body language and poor eye contact
- Difficulty in sleeping, experiences nightmares
- Talking of harming themselves, suicide or running away

Prevention

- At Wellbrook School our anti-bullying procedure does not start at the point at which a pupil has been bullied. We proactively gather intelligence about issues between pupils which might provoke conflict and develop strategies to prevent bullying occurring in the first place.

- We talk to pupils about issues of difference, through the curriculum, through dedicated events and projects. We openly discuss differences between people that could motivate bullying, such as religion, ethnicity, disability, gender, sexuality, or appearance related difference. We also talk about pupils with different family situations, such as looked after children or those with caring responsibilities. We teach pupils that using any prejudice-based language is unacceptable.

- We promote good behaviour and encourage pupils to treat one another and the school staff with respect because they know that this is the right way to behave. We work hard to ensure that this culture extends beyond the classroom, and beyond the school gates including travel to and from school.

- We involve parents to ensure that they are clear that the school does not tolerate bullying and are aware of the procedures to follow if they believe that their child is being bullied. We ensure that parents feel confident that the school will take any complaint about bullying seriously and resolve the issue in a way that protects the child. We also ask that they reinforce the value of good behaviour at home.

- We make sure that our pupils understand the school's approach and are clear about the part they can play to prevent bullying, including when they find themselves as bystanders.

- We make it easy for pupils to report bullying so that they are assured that they will be listened to, and incidents acted on. We create an environment in which pupils feel that they can report bullying which may have occurred outside school including cyber-bullying. We create an inclusive environment where they can openly discuss the cause of their bullying, without fear of further bullying or discrimination. We celebrate success in order to create a positive school ethos around the issue.

- All our staff complete CPD training from the Anti-Bullying Alliance which covers the following topics: What is bullying; Bullying and the Law; Bullying and SEN/disability; 10 principles to reduce bullying; Preventing bullying; Responding to bullying; Cyberbullying (Online bullying)

- We regularly evaluate and update our approach to take account of developments in technology, for instance updating 'acceptable use' policies for computers

- We work with the wider community including the police and children's services to agree a clearly understood approach to cases where bullying is particularly serious or persistent and where a criminal offence may have been committed.

Procedures for reporting bullying

Pupils at the school are encouraged to speak to any staff member about bullying including:

- teachers
- support staff
- school leaders
- administration staff
- any adult that they feel safe to talk to you at the school.

Each Pupil has a Key Worker who has a one-to-one review session with them once a week. They will invite pupils to share any concerns they might have during this session.

Pupils are able to report bullying anonymously through our "Feedback Box"

Pupils will also be reminded regularly that they can also contact organisations such as:

Childline: (0800 1111) - the UK's free, confidential helpline for children and young people. They offer advice and support, by phone and online, 24 hours a day.

EACH: (0808 1000 143) - a freephone Helpline for children experiencing homophobic, biphobic or transphobic bullying or harassment

Procedures for dealing with reported bullying

If an incident of bullying is reported, the following procedures are adopted:

- The member of staff to whom it was reported or who first discovers the situation, will control the situation, reassure, and support the pupils involved.
- He/she will inform the Headteacher as soon as possible.
- The target will be interviewed on their own and may be asked to write an account of events.

- The alleged bully, together with all others who were involved, will be interviewed individually, and may be asked to write an immediate account of events.
- The member of staff will calmly explain the range of disciplinary measures that are potentially involved.
- The incident will be recorded together with the action taken.
- All relevant staff will be informed of the incident.
- In very serious incidents, the Proprietor will be informed, and a decision will be made as to any further action that is required in accordance with the range of actions set out below.
- The parents of the victim and the alleged bully will be notified and informed of the action being taken.

Range of actions that can be taken

- A disclosure to the school's Designated Safeguarding Lead (S Hughes - Assistant Headteacher) and involving Social Services – this will happen where a pupil's behaviour, or the harm caused to another pupil by that behaviour, is deemed to be or could be a form of abuse. The DSL will proceed according to the school's Safeguarding Policy.
- Calling the police - this will happen in cases where the bullying actions fall within criminal activity for example physical violence, destruction of property, the possession or distribution of pornographic images just to name a few
- Seizing and searching mobile phones – this will happen when it is suspected or alleged that the mobile phone contains evidence that a pupil is being bullied or is bullying someone else. The law allows staff members to do this with authorisation from the Headteacher without having to ask for consent from parents.
- Exclusion - this will happen as a last resort, after following the procedures outlined in the school's exclusion policy to exclude bullies
- Inviting parents to the school – this will happen to make sure that they are informed and given the opportunity to discuss the matter with a member of leadership team so they can provide support in resolving the issues
- Restorative practice – where appropriate will be used to resolve conflict between those involved and focus on repairing the harm that has been done
- Working with external agencies – this will be done to provide relevant support for the targets of bullying to repair the harm that has been done and for the perpetrators to resolve the underlying causes of bullying. Examples include counselling, anger management
- Disciplinary sanctions - these will be applied where appropriate, according to the school's behaviour policy

Ensuring the safety of those directly involved

We secure and ensure the safety and wellbeing of those involved in a bullying incident by making several considerations. Are all pupils involved safe? Is anyone's physical health or wellbeing at risk? Have you needed to use the safeguarding policy? Did you access any outside support? e.g., NHS, police. Have you recorded the incidents themselves? Did you tell the pupil/s being bullied that you are taking it seriously, it's not their fault and they don't have to put up with bullying? Have you asked the pupil/s being bullied how they're feeling and how they think it can be resolved? Have you informed the pupil/s being bullied what you will do next?

Preventing the bullying from reoccurring

Once we've secured the safety of those involved, the next step is about working with the group of individuals involved to prevent the bullying from reoccurring. Bullying is a group behaviour. It rarely happens between two individuals in isolation. So, it's important to consider the wider peer group at this stage.

School learning and reflection

It allows us to reflect upon our school practice to ascertain if there is anything we can do to prevent a similar situation in the future. We use the following questions to guide this reflection. What has this incident taught us? Does this reveal any issues in school? Do staff need any training? Do you need to refresh your school policy and procedures? Have you identified any gaps? Do parents have a good understanding of what bullying is and isn't? Do they know the school approach to anti-bullying? What needs to happen/who do you need to speak to in order to make this happen? By when and how?

Review

This policy will be reviewed annually to assess its effectiveness and update it as necessary.

Complaints

We hope that parents and pupils will not have any complaints about the operation of our anti bullying policy; nevertheless, copies of the school's complaints procedure can be sent to parents on request and can be found on our website.