Willow Vale
School

Anti-Bullying Policy

Policy date: September 2026

Approved by: Headteacher

Review date: September 2027

Be Safe – Be Kind - Belong

1. Introduction/Rationale

Willow Vale School believes that all young peoples are entitled to learn in a safe and supportive environment; this means being free from all forms of bullying behaviour. This policy outlines how instances of bullying are dealt with, including the procedures to prevent occurrences of bullying. These strategies, such as learning about tolerance and difference as part of the school's curriculum, aim to promote an inclusive, tolerant and supportive ethos at the school.

The Education and Inspections Act 2006 outlines a number of legal obligations regarding the school's response to bullying. Under Section 89, schools must have measures in place to encourage good behaviour and prevent all forms of bullying amongst young people. These measures are part of the school's Relationships policy which is communicated to all young people, school staff and parents.

All staff, parents/carers and pupil work together to prevent and reduce any instances of bullying at the school. We have a zero tolerance policy for bullying.

2. Legal Framework

This policy has due regard to legislation, including, but not limited to, the following:

- Education and Inspections Act 2006
- Equality Act 2010
- Children Act 1989 • Protection from Harassment Act 1997
- Malicious communications Act 1988
- Public Order Act 1986
- Communications Act 2003
- Human Rights Act 1998
- Crime and Disorder Act 1998
- Education Act 2011

This policy has been written in accordance with DfE advice, including, but not limited to:

- DfE 'Preventing and tackling bullying' (2017)
- DfE (2026) Keeping Children Safe in Education
- DfE Sexual Violence and Sexual Harassment (read alongside KCSIE)
- UKCIS (2024) Sharing nudes and semi-nudes guidance
- DfE mental health and wellbeing guidance (latest)

This policy will be implemented in conjunction with the school's :

- Relationship & Behaviour Policy
- E-safety Policy

3. Definition

For the purpose of this policy, bullying is defined as persistent behaviour by an individual or group with the intention of verbally, physically, or emotionally harming another person or group. Bullying is generally characterised by:

- Repetition: Incidents are not one-offs; they are frequent and happen over a period of time.
- Intent: The perpetrator(s) means to cause verbal, physical or emotional harm; it is not accidental
- Targeting: Bullying is generally targeted at a specific individual or group.
- Power imbalance: Whether real or perceived, bullying is generally based on unequal power relations.

Vulnerable young people are more likely to be the target of bullying due to the attitudes and behaviour's some young people have towards those who are different from themselves. Vulnerable young people may include, but are not limited to:

- Young people with special educational needs and disabilities.
- Young people who are in care or adopted.
- Young people suffering from a health problem (this includes mental health)
- Young people with caring responsibilities.

Child-on-Child Abuse

This type of abuse can happen in person or online (cyberbullying, sharing media without consent) and manifests in several ways:

- Bullying: Including physical, verbal, and online bullying, or prejudice-based bullying targeting race, religion, sexuality, or disability.
- Sexual Violence and Harassment: Ranging from sexual assault and rape to non-consensual sharing of intimate images (sexting), upskirting, and sexual harassment.
- Relationship Abuse: Coercive control, emotional harm, or domestic abuse within teenage dating relationships.
- Exploitation: Grooming children for criminal or sexual exploitation, as well as gang-related or serious youth violence.
- Initiation Rituals: Hazing or physical rituals intended to humiliate or harm.

4. Types of bullying

Many different kinds of behaviour can be considered bullying and can be related to almost anything. Teasing another pupil because of their appearance, religion, ethnicity, gender, sexual-orientation, home life, culture, disability, or special educational needs are some of the types of bullying that can occur. Bullying is acted out through the following mediums:

- Verbally
- Physically
- Emotionally

- Online (Cyber)
- Racist bullying: Bullying another person based on their ethnic background, religion or skin colour. Racist bullying is a criminal offence under the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 and Public Order Act 1986
- Homophobic bullying: Bullying another person because of their actual or perceived sexual orientation.
- Transphobic bullying: Bullying based on another person's gender 'variance' or for not conforming to dominant gender roles.
- Sexist bullying: Bullying based on sexist attitudes expressed in a way to demean, intimidate or harm another person because of their sex or gender. Sexist bullying may sometimes be characterised by inappropriate sexual behaviours.
- Sexual bullying: Bullying behaviour that has a physical, psychological, verbal or non-verbal sexual dimension/dynamic that subordinates, humiliates or intimidates another person. This is commonly underpinned by sexist attitudes or gender stereotypes.

5. Cyber Bullying

Cyberbullying may be defined as 'the use of electronic communication, particularly mobile phones and the internet, to bully a person, typically by sending messages of an intimidating or threatening nature: children and adults may be reluctant to admit to being the victims of cyberbullying'. It can take a number of different forms: threats and intimidation, harassment or 'cyber-stalking' (e.g. repeatedly sending unwanted texts or instant messages), sexting (e.g. sending and receiving sexually explicit messages, primarily between mobile phones) vilification/defamation, exclusion/peer rejection, impersonation, unauthorised publication of private information/images and 'trolling' (abusing the internet to provoke or offend others online). It can be an extension of face-to-face bullying, with technology providing the bully with another route to harass their target. However, it differs from other forms of bullying in several significant ways:

- By facilitating a far more extreme invasion of personal space. Cyberbullying can take place at any time and intrude into spaces that have previously been regarded as safe and personal.
- The potential for anonymity on the part of the bully. This can be extremely distressing for the victim the potential for the bully to play very rapidly to a larger audience so the scale and scope of cyberbullying can be greater than for other forms of bullying.
- Through the knowledge that the data is in the world-wide domain, disproportionately amplifying the negative effect on the victim, even though the bully may feel his / her actual actions had been no worse than conventional forms of bullying
- The difficulty in controlling electronically circulated messages as more people get drawn in as accessories. By passing on a humiliating picture or message a bystander becomes an accessory to the bullying.
- The profile of the bully and target can be different to other forms of bullying as cyberbullying can take place between peers and across generations. Teachers can be victims and age and size are not important.

- Many cyberbullying incidents can themselves act as evidence so it is important the victim saves the information.

6. Statutory implications

The school understands that, under the Equality Act 2010, it has a responsibility to: eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct prohibited by the act; advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and people who do not share it; and foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and people who do not share it. The school understands that, under the Human Rights Act (HRA) 1998, it could have charges brought against it if it allows the rights of children and young people at the college to be breached by failing to take bullying seriously.

The National Association of Head Teachers has guidelines that recommend head teachers must 'satisfy themselves' that their school's Anti-Bullying Policy complies with the HRA; the head teacher understands that they cannot do this without fully involving their teaching staff. Although bullying itself is not a criminal offence, some types of harassment, threatening behaviour and/or communications may be considered criminal offences:

- Under the Malicious Communications Act 1988, it is an offence for a person to electronically communicate with another person with the intent to cause distress or anxiety, or in a way which conveys a message which is indecent or grossly offensive, a threat, or contains information which is false and known or believed to be false by the sender.
- The Protection from Harassment Act 1997 makes it an offence to knowingly pursue any course of conduct amounting to harassment.
- Section 127 of the Communications Act 2003 makes it an offence to send, by means of a public electronic communications network, a message, or other matter, that is grossly offensive or of an indecent, obscene or menacing character. It is unlawful to disseminate defamatory information through any media, including internet sites.

<u>Education Law:</u>

The Education and Inspections Act 2006 (EIA 2006) outlines some legal powers which relate more directly to cyberbullying. Head teachers have the power 'to such an extent as is reasonable' to regulate the conduct of young people when they are off the school site. There is not a specific law which makes cyberbullying illegal but it can be considered a criminal offence under several different acts including Protection from Harassment Act (1997), Malicious Communications Act (1988), Communications Act (2003) Obscene Publications Act (1959) and Computer Misuse Act (1990).

Other forms of bullying which are illegal and should be reported to the police include: violence or assault, theft, repeated harassment or intimidation and hate crimes.

7. Prevention

The school clearly communicates a whole-school commitment to addressing bullying in the form of a written statement (Statement of intent) which is regularly promoted across the whole school.

- All reported or witnessed instances of bullying in the school are investigated by a member of staff.
- Staff encourage pupil co-operation and the development of interpersonal skills through the use of group work and pair work.
- All types of bullying are discussed as part of the curriculum, and diversity, difference and respect for others is promoted and celebrated through various lessons.
- Grouping and seating arrangements in class will be changed and organised in a way that prevents instances of bullying.
- Potential victims of bullying are drawn into working groups with young people who do not abuse or take advantage of them.
- Opportunities to extend friendship groups and interactive skills are provided through participation in special events, for example, drama productions, sporting activities and cultural groups.
- All members of the school community are made aware of the school's Anti Bullying Policy.
- All staff members receive training on identifying and dealing with the different types of bullying.
- A safe, supervised place is available for young people to go to at any time including breaks and lunch if they are involved in conflict with their peers, or wish to avoid a bully.

As with all forms of bullying the best way to deal with cyberbullying is to prevent it happening in the first place. There is no single solution to the problem of cyberbullying but the school will do the following as a minimum to impose a comprehensive and effective prevention strategy:

- Ensure staff, young peoples and parents are educated around cyber bullying in terms of what it is, how damaging it can be, what to do about it and how to keep themselves safe online.
- Students will not have phones on them whilst in the school.

8. Signs of bullying

Some of the signs that a pupil may be a victim of bullying include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Being frightened to travel to or from college
- Asking to be driven to college
- Unwillingness to attend college
- Truancy
- Becoming anxious or lacking confidence
- Saying that they feel ill in the morning
- Decreased involvement in school work
- Returning home with torn clothes or damaged possessions

- Missing possessions
- Missing dinner money
- Asking for extra money or stealing
- Cuts or bruises
- Lack of appetite
- Unwillingness to use the internet or mobile devices
- Becoming agitated when receiving calls or text messages
- Lack of eye contact
- Becoming short tempered
- Change in behaviour and attitude at home

Although the signs outlined above may not be due to bullying, they may be due to deeper social, emotional or mental health issues, so are still worth investigating. Young people who display a significant number of these signs are approached by a member of staff, in order to determine the underlying issues, whether they are due to bullying or other issues.

9. Staff Principles

Prevention is at the forefront of the school's Anti-bullying Policy.

- Staff treat reports of bullying very seriously
- Staff do not ignore signs of suspected bullying.
- Unpleasantness from one pupil towards another is always challenged and never ignored.
- All staff take action immediately when they become aware of a bullying incident
- Follow-up support is given to both the victim and bully in the months following any incidents, to ensure all bullying has stopped.

The school will support young people who have been victims of cyber bullying by holding formal and informal discussions with the pupil about their feelings and whether the bullying has stopped. In accordance with the Education Act 2011, the school has the right to examine and delete files from young person's' personal devices, e.g. mobiles phones, where there is good reason to do so. This power applies to all schools and there is no need to have parental consent to search through a young person's mobile phone. If an electronic device is seized by a member of staff, and there is reasonable ground to suspect that it contains evidence in relation to an offence, the device must be given to the police as soon as it is reasonably practicable. If a staff member finds material that they do not suspect contains evidence in relation to an offence, the head teacher will decide whether it is appropriate to delete or retain the material as evidence of a breach of the relevant policies.

10. Key Roles and responsibilities

- It is the responsibility of all staff to be alert to possible bullying of young people and to deal with incidents as the highest priority.
- Incidents in the previous year to improve procedures.
- All staff will avoid gender stereotyping when dealing with bullying.

- All staff understand the composition of pupil groups, showing sensitivity to those who have been the victims of bullying.
- All staff have a duty to report any instances of bullying once they have been approached by a pupil for support.
- The school will involve other agencies and professionals where appropriate to support victims of bullying.
- Young people are advised to inform a member of staff if they witness bullying, or are a victim of bullying.
- Young people are taught not to make counter-threats if they are victims of bullying.
- Young people are taught to walk away from any dangerous situations and avoid involving other young people in incidents.
- Young people are advised to retain all evidence of cyber bullying
- Head Teacher to ensure that all staff are aware of the safeguarding and Prevent Duties.
- Head Teacher to ensure online safety is included in the curriculum.
- Head Teacher to ensure that there is adequate staff training around online safety and cyber bullying.
- Head Teacher to ensure that there are sufficient filters in place to prevent cyber bulling taking place in college.

11. Procedures

When investigating a bullying incident, the following procedures are adopted:

- The victim, alleged bully and witnesses are all interviewed separately.
- Members of staff ensure that there is no possibility of contact between the young people being interviewed, including electronic communication.
- If a pupil is injured, members of staff take the pupil immediately to the first aider for a medical opinion on the extent of their injuries.
- A room is used that allows for privacy during interviews.
- A witness is used for serious incidents.
- If appropriate, the alleged bully, the victim and witnesses, are asked to write down details of the incident; this may need prompting with questions from the member of staff to obtain the full picture
- Premature assumptions are not made, as it is important not to be judgemental at this stage.
- Members of staff listen carefully to all accounts, being non-confrontational and not attaching blame until the investigation is complete.
- All concerned young people are informed that they must not discuss the interview with other young people.
- Due to the potential for sexist, transphobic and sexual bullying to be characterised by inappropriate sexual behaviour, staff members involved in dealing with the incident are required to consider whether there is a need for safeguarding processes to be implemented.
- The school will support young people who have been victims of cyber bullying by holding formal and informal discussions with the pupil about their feelings and whether the bullying has stopped.

- In accordance with the Education Act 2011, the school has the right to examine and delete files from student's' personal devices, e.g. mobiles phones, where there is good reason to do so. This power applies to all schools and there is no need to have parental consent to search through a young person's mobile phone.
- If an electronic device is seized by a member of staff, and there is reasonable ground to suspect that it contains evidence in relation to an offence, the device must be given to the police as soon as it is reasonably practicable.
- If a staff member finds material that they do not suspect contains evidence in relation to an offence, the head teacher will decide whether it is appropriate to delete or retain the material as evidence of a breach of the relevant policies.

12. Sanctions

- The perpetrator is made to realise, by talking to staff, that some young people do not appreciate the distress they are causing, and that they should change their behaviour.
- All incidents are recorded on student behaviour logs on Arbor. More serious incidents including racist incidents are also logged on MyConcern and reported to the LA.
- Parents/carers are informed of bullying incidents and what action is being taken. Teachers and key workers informally monitor the young people involved over the next half-term.

13. Support

- If necessary, group dynamics are broken up by members of staff by assigning places in classes.
- The victim is encouraged to tell a trusted adult in school if bullying is repeated.
- The victim is encouraged to broaden their friendship groups.

14. Follow up support

Young people who have been bullied are supported in the following ways:

- Being listened to
- Having an immediate opportunity to meet with a member of staff of their choice
- Being reassured
- Being offered continued support
- Being offered counselling, where appropriate

Young people who have bullied others are supported in the following ways:

- Receiving a consequence for their actions
- Being able to discuss what happened
- Being helped to reflect on why they became involved
- Being helped to understand what they did wrong and why they need to change their behaviour

- Appropriate assistance from parents/carers

15. Bullying outside of school

Teachers have the power to discipline young people for misbehaving outside of the school premises. This can relate to any 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.

Where bullying outside school is reported to staff, it is investigated and acted on. In all cases of misbehaviour or bullying, members of staff can only discipline the pupil on school premises, or elsewhere when the pupil is under the lawful control of the member of staff. The Headteacher has a specific statutory power to discipline pupils for poor behaviour outside of the school premises. Section 89(5) of the Education and Inspections Act 2006 gives the Headteacher the power to regulate pupils' conduct when they are not on school premises, and therefore, not under the lawful charge of a school staff member. If the misbehaviour could be of a criminal nature or poses a serious threat to a member of the public, the police are always informed.