



St Margaret's School Exeter

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ANTI-BULLYING POLICY

The mission statement of St Margaret's School emphasizes that we provide a caring Christian environment. Every pupil should be given the confidence and opportunity to develop his or her potential academically and personally. Any behaviour which damages a boy or girl's confidence, distracts them from schoolwork or prevents them developing in any way would be incompatible with the mission statement.

Whilst bullying may be a relatively rare phenomenon at this school, it is necessary to monitor the situation, to provide opportunities in Circle Time, PCCE and elsewhere in the curriculum for the subject to be discussed and for assertiveness to be taught. Above all, pupils and staff need to be aware that bullying is unacceptable at any level. Pupils and parents must be confident that any reports of bullying will be investigated thoroughly and dealt with sensitively.

Everyone connected with St. Margaret's School accepts responsibility for each member's welfare and happiness. All staff, whatever their role in school, believe it is their responsibility to prevent the occurrence of bullying and to take immediate steps to deal with it should evidence of bullying be found.

Defining the Terms

Bullying may be defined as "Behaviour by an individual or group, usually repeated over time, that intentionally hurts another individual or group either physically or emotionally". (DCSF 'Safe to Learn'2007)

Bullying is a complex dynamic affecting individuals differently so that not all recipients would feel bullied. Definitions of bullying vary, but they are all clear in that bullying is more than just physical aggression. Any behaviour that harms others who do not have the skills or resources to counter this behaviour could be seen as bullying. It may be exhibited as:

- Physical Harm – pushing, kicking, hitting, punching
- Threat of Physical harm
- Racial taunts, graffiti, gestures
- Cultural comments or acts designed to be hurtful
- Religious comments or acts designed to be hurtful
- Sexual unwanted physical contact or sexually abusive comments
- Purposefully making sexist or homophobic comments designed to insult
- Nasty name calling or teasing, sarcasm, spreading rumours
- Extortion, demand for money or favours
- Exclusion, deliberately leaving someone out of an activity
- Sending of malicious messages via mobile phones or e-mails or social-networking sites

It is not bullying when:

- There is no intention to hurt or harm
- There is a one-off fight/argument between pupils of equal stature or strength
- There is a good reason why others cannot be included in a group activity
- A pupils is called a nickname with which they are happy

Although bullying can take place in the classroom, is more likely to occur in the less structured parts of the school day such as at break and lunchtime in cloakrooms, corridors and outside areas. It can also take place on school trips and on the school buses. Bullying can lead to isolation, loss of self esteem and, at its most serious, school non-attendance, injury or suicide

Aim - Prevention and Quick Identification of Bullying

Staff are aware that some children are more likely to be the victims of bullying than others and that all children are more susceptible to bullying at times where they are experiencing emotional or other problems at home or school. Some children are also more likely to become bullies than others; these children typically have problems, with which they may need help.

Work around issues connected with self-expression and bullying across the curriculum is valuable. Assertiveness techniques have been identified as being of use to both potential victims and potential bullies as ways of protecting children from bullying behaviour. Assertiveness and work which raises awareness of bullying and how to deal with it is included in the PCCE programme.

Staff awareness of bullying issues will be raised via INSET and there is a staff briefing meeting twice a week where staff can raise concerns. The Pastoral group meet weekly and this can be used to share bullying concerns.

Indicators of the bullying include changes in behaviour or standards of work, isolation, and reluctance to participate in some or all activities or lessons and absences from school or specific lessons. It is important that all staff are vigilant and that suspicions that a child is unhappy or isolated are acted on promptly. We aim to prevent bullying by:

- promoting the 'telling' atmosphere
- being vigilant in supervision of areas around the school, being on duty (supported by sixth-formers) and by being in classrooms in good time for the children. The Chapel may be regarded by pupils as a quiet, 'safe' area.
- Reminding children about the behavior that is expected, stressing that all the children should be friendly and support each other
- Using information gathered from reported incidents as pointers to improvements that can be made within the school's general organization.
- Building the confidence of children by valuing them and their work as individuals
- Using assemblies, RS and PCCE lessons, projects, drama, stories, literature, historical events and current affairs to promote values, differences, beliefs and moral issues.
- Teachers offering a positive role model, refraining from name-calling, teasing, sarcasm
- Reporting all incidents concisely and consistently
- Supportive procedures and clear communication when dealing with complaints from parents

Procedures for Dealing with Bullying

It is important that pupils know that:

- bullying will not be tolerated
- reporting bullying is not telling tales
- they will be taken seriously and that they realize that silence will encourage bullies.

Bullies and their victims must be listened to.

Pupils must be free to talk to any member of staff they feel able to. The role of the form teacher is important. Form tutors (class teachers in the Prep and/Pre-Prep must be kept informed of the situation and progress. The Pastoral support group, which comprises the Key Stage Co-ordinators, Chaplain and the School Matron, should be informed. The Headmistress must be informed at every stage of an investigation into bullying as she may well receive communications from parents.

In the first stage of an investigation all parties must be listened to. Witnesses or others involved may need to be heard.

The aim should be to change the behaviour and thus achieve the best outcome for the victim. The ideal outcome is that happy working relationships can be re-established, and the No Blame approach has been adopted in school as a means of resolving bullying problems.

The No-Blame Approach

This approach is recommended when teachers feel the situation warrants it.

When bullying has been observed or reported then a teacher or facilitator uses a simple seven-step procedure. Each step has been carefully planned as a single part of the whole and variations may undermine the success of the method. The steps are summarized below:

STEP ONE – TALK WITH THE VICTIM

When the facilitator finds out that bullying has happened, he or she starts by talking to the victim. During this conversation the listener encourages the victim to describe how they feel with reflective comments such as. 'That must have been very hard for you So you must have felt really upset.'

The purpose is not to discover factual evidence about this or other events: if the victim wants to include evidence in the account this is always reframed to establish the resulting distress. For example, a comment like, 'They have all been ignoring me, nobody will talk to me,' might be replied to with a response like, 'So you felt really lonely and you were upset you had nobody to talk to.' It is important that the victim understands and gives consent to the process. Sometimes there may be a fear that it could lead to further victimization but when the non-punitive aspect is fully explained the victim usually feels safe, and relieved that something is being done. He or she may want the perpetrators to understand how much distress has been caused. Talking to someone else who has been through the experience might give further reassurance.

The facilitator should end the meeting by:

- Checking that nothing confidential has been discussed which should not be disclosed to the group
- Asking the victim to suggest the names of those involved, some colluders or observers and some friends who will make up the group
- Inviting the victim to produce a piece of writing or picture which will illustrate his or her unhappiness
- Offering the victim an opportunity to talk again at any time during the procedure if things are not going well.

The victim is not invited to join the group to present his or her own account as it is possible that he or she will make accusations, provide denial or justification and undermine the problem solving approach.

STEP TWO- CONVENE A MEETING WITH THE PEOPLE INVOLVED

The facilitator arranges to meet with the group of pupils who have been involved and suggested by the victim. A group of six to eight works well.

This is an opportunity for the facilitator to use his or her judgement to balance the group so that helpful and reliable young people are included alongside those whose behaviour has been causing distress. The aim is to use the strengths of the group members to bring about the best outcome.

STEP THREE – EXPLAIN THE PROBLEM

The facilitator starts by telling the group that she or he is worried about 'Jane' who is having a very hard time at the moment. The story of the victim's unhappiness is recounted and uses the piece of writing or a drawing to emphasize that distress. At no time does he or she discuss the details of the incidents or allocate blame to the group.

STEP FOUR – SHARE RESPONSIBILITY

When the account is finished, the listeners may look downcast or uncomfortable and be uncertain about the reason for the meeting. Some may be anxious about possible punishment. The facilitator makes a change in the mood here by stating explicitly that:

- No-one is in trouble or going to be punished
- There is a joint responsibility to help 'Jane' to be happy and safe.
- The group has been convened to help solve the problem

STEP FIVE – ASK THE GROUP MEMBERS FOR THEIR IDEAS

Group members are usually genuinely moved by the account of Jane's distress and relieved that they are not in trouble. No one has been pushed into a defensive corner by accusations and the power of the group has shifted from the 'bully leader' to the group as a whole, whose members withdraw consent for the behaviour to continue.

Each member of the group is then encouraged to suggest a way in which the victim could be helped to feel happier. These ideas are stated in the 'I' language of intention. 'I will walk to school with her' 'I will ask her to sit with me at lunchtime'. Ideas are owned by the group members and not by the facilitator. He or she makes positive responses but does not go on to extract a promise of improved behaviour.

STEP SIX – LEAVE IT UP TO THEM

The facilitator ends the meeting by passing over the responsibility to the group to solve the problem. No written record is made – it is left as a matter of trust. The facilitator thanks them, expresses confidence in a positive outcome and arranges to meet with them again to see how things are going.

STEP SEVEN – MEET THEM AGAIN

About a week later, the facilitator discusses with each student, including the victim, how things have been going. This allows monitoring of the bullying and keeps the young people involved in the process.

These meetings are with one group member at a time so that each can give a statement about her contribution without creating a competitive atmosphere. It does not matter if everyone has not kept to their intention, as long as the bullying has stopped. The victim does not have to become the most popular person in school, just to be safe and happy.

Parents will be contacted

The Chaplain and School Matron provide some limited counselling in school. The School also has contact with counsellors from outside and these can be brought in if the Headmistress considers it may be helpful or pupils referred to outside agencies. This is often as a result of a request by the Pastoral Support Group.

If punishment is eventually considered to be appropriate then the usual hierarchy of punishments will apply. (See Behaviour Policy). It is vital that bullies cannot appear to get away without consequences, and that bullies recognize the hurt they have caused. However, it may be that a sincere apology is of more value than a formal punishment. For serious or persistent cases the Headmistress may consider suspension or exclusion. It is envisaged that this will be a last resort as the bully is likely to have problems which need to be resolved and our mission to provide a caring Christian environment will not be served by rejecting any individual. The Police should only be contacted by the Headmistress or someone acting on her behalf with her permission.

Recording and Monitoring

Outline records must be made and kept on the files of students involved. It must be possible to spot patterns of bullying or victim behaviour.

It will be the responsibility of a member of the Pastoral Support team to see pupils involved in serious cases, to check that there have been no re-occurrences. Pupils involved in more than one incident, however minor, must also be monitored regularly. In the Prep/Pre-Prep this responsibility may be passed to the class teacher or Head of Prep/Pre-Prep.

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