

The St Michael Steiner School

Anti-Bullying Policy

Statutory duty of schools

Independent schools are required to ensure that bullying at the school is prevented so far as is reasonably practicable, by the drawing up and implementation of an effective anti-bullying policy. The school's statutory obligations can be found [here](#) (part 3) and government guidance is [here](#).

We are also required to bring these procedures to the attention of staff, parents and pupils, and this is done through the Staff, Parents' and High School Students' Handbooks, and through Religion, Global Issues and Social Sciences lessons in the Lower, Middle and High School.

Online anti-bullying training, made available via the school's subscription to Educare, is required for all staff who work with or supervise the children, to be updated every two years as a minimum.

What is bullying?

There is no legal definition of bullying, nor does the DfE define it, so staff in schools have to come to an agreement about what kinds of behaviour are acceptable and what are not; what, for them is bullying.

Some schools take the approach of banning all physical contact between pupils. This is not our approach. We believe that a certain amount of physical interaction is a normal and healthy part of human relationships and of the process of learning what is and is not acceptable social behaviour. It is our experience that children learn primarily through experience; that it is to be expected that they will test themselves against each other in different ways and sometimes they will get hurt or hurt others in the process. We do not believe that this, in itself, is bullying.

Bullying has been defined as the systematic abuse of power by more powerful individuals or groups¹, and this is a basic principle in our school. By this definition, bullying manifests as deliberate hurtful behaviour, where those towards whom this behaviour is directed find it difficult or impossible to defend themselves. It is the use of superior strength, age or social status deliberately to subjugate, hurt or humiliate someone younger, smaller or, in some way, weaker.

There is a danger that a behaviour itself is seen as bullying, regardless of its motivation or the social context in which it occurs. This is not so. For example, a blow may be struck in self-defence; a child may be excluded from an activity because they are too young. We must be aware that bullying behaviour is intended to hurt and is typically repeated over time.² However, isolated incidents of deliberately hurtful behaviour are also treated as cases of bullying, whereas an isolated incident in which someone loses their temper, or doesn't know their own strength, and hurts someone else, however badly, will be addressed as poor behaviour but will not be treated as bullying.

Bullying can take many forms, but four main types are:

- physical (hitting, kicking, pushing, spitting, theft, inappropriate touching)
- verbal (name calling, sarcasm, threatening, making racist, sexist or other remarks designed to humiliate or intimidate)
- indirect (spreading rumours, unfair exclusion or discrimination, using peer pressure to coerce or manipulate)

¹ <http://www.kenrigby.net/Bullying-in-brief>

Useful guidance about bullying from the Anti-bullying Alliance can be found [here](#)

² <http://www.kenrigby.net/02a-Defining-bullying-a-new-look> para. 6

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- cyber bullying (using text messages, social networks etc. to spread rumours, post images, threaten or make remarks designed to humiliate or intimidate) (See Media and e-safety Policy)

Prevention

Prevention is the most important aspect of an anti-bullying policy. Staff should be alert to any issues between pupils that could develop into bullying, and be proactive in reducing the risk of that happening.

Research suggests that bullying stems from the pursuit of high status within a peer group and that its maintenance depends on the behaviour of the group³. The critical, competitive celebrity culture of the 21st century encourages the belief that to be less than the best is to fail, and that failure is humiliating and must be avoided, even if that means putting someone else down to make yourself look or feel better.

Many of the strategies that have been implemented to prevent bullying have proved ineffective because they do not acknowledge that this is an issue that affects all of us and for which the whole community has responsibility. Bullies need collaborators and their behaviour cannot persist without the support of a group. This support usually comes in a tacit form; in most cases, children who witness bullying do not report it.⁴

With these facts in mind, our approach is to be proactive and address the underlying attitudes that lead to bullying and to do that throughout the school through the curriculum and the way we talk, think and learn about people—human beings. By modelling kindness and appreciation of each other, we aim to create a culture where:

- people respect each other simply as fellow human beings
- everyone's gifts are valued and there is no hierarchy of subjects.
- failure is expected and is valued as a tool for learning.
- children are not expected to reach standardised benchmarks and are not subjected to standardised testing that ranks them against one another.
- bullying behaviour is not considered acceptable and is not supported or tolerated.

The ethos behind our education aims to foster an atmosphere of mutual understanding and respect among staff and pupils, and the long term relationship between the children and their Class Teacher in the Lower and Middle School is one of the most important contributors to the building of trust and security in the school.

Pupils and teachers are expected to treat each other with respect. Expectations of behaviour are discussed in staff meetings to ensure that students and staff understand and agree on what is acceptable and what is not throughout the school. (See Code of Conduct/Behaviour Policy).

In the Kindergarten, children feel secure and safe through strong rhythms and routines in daily activities. Young children learn through imitation, and the teachers and assistants endeavour to be role models worthy of imitation, positively supporting each other, eating together and helping the children learn to share and serve each other. There are clear and consistent boundaries throughout the daily sessions; a number of simple verbal reminders are used, for example 'hands are for work and play', 'kind voices', 'knock at the door and you may enter'. Expectations are clear—we do not hurt ourselves, another person or our environment. (See the Early Years Behaviour Management Policy for more detail)

³ KiVa Anti-Bullying program <https://www.crimesolutions.gov/ProgramDetails.aspx?ID=100>

⁴ Craig and Pepler (1997) reported that only 11% spoke out when they observed bullying taking place in the school playground.

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Our curriculum approaches study of the human being in a respectful way: saint stories and fables in Class 2 contrast the lower, animal nature of Man with the higher, noble qualities that we can strive for; comparison of the human being and the animal kingdom in Class 4 highlights the responsibilities that come with freedom and intelligence; studies of anatomy and physiology in the Middle and High School do not view the human body as a machine, but with reverence for its beauty, complexity and variety. By raising the human being above both animal and machine, we try to engender respect for all of humanity.

There is no formal assessment of pupils in the school before Class 10. All aspects of the curriculum are considered equal in status, no child struggles with—or is good at—everything, so there are plenty of opportunities for every child to shine, to meet challenges and sometimes to fail without feeling humiliated. Failure is treated as an opportunity and a necessary part of learning.

We try to provide an environment in which everyone feels supported, safe and valued and where they can learn, work and mix socially with their peers without fear. However, in spite of our best endeavours, occasional incidents of bullying are inevitable, so children and staff need to experience that bullying is not acceptable or tolerated, and that incidents of bullying are dealt with effectively.

How to know if someone is being bullied

It can sometimes be difficult to find the line between bullying and normal physical/verbal interaction. Bullying can begin in small ways —comments, jokes—that seem harmless, but which can usually be distinguished by the effect they have on the victim, or by noticing whether it is always the same person who gets hurt or receives the comment or is the butt of the joke. Even if it has not become bullying, the children need to learn that it is not acceptable to treat other people in this way.

Children who are suffering bullying will often deny it and brush it off because they are afraid of making their situation worse, but they will experience and sometimes express in other ways that they are being oppressed: they may show changes in behaviour, such as becoming withdrawn, nervous or tearful, pretending to be ill, having frequent stomach and headaches, frequent absences, clinging to adults. There may be changes in their work, a lack of concentration, deterioration in behaviour or a reluctance to come to school.

Staff need to be aware that these can be indicators of bullying and also of other issues the child may be experiencing. In any case, they need to be investigated.

Staff and parents, as well as pupils may be the victims or perpetrators of bullying. Signs of bullying in adults include lack of confidence, depression, anxiety and self-harming.

Sometimes the person who is bullied also bullies others.

Vulnerable children and people with ‘Protected Characteristics’

Nine characteristics have been identified as making people especially vulnerable to bullying and discrimination, and they are protected by law. They are: age; disability; gender reassignment; marriage and civil partnership; pregnancy; race; religion or belief; gender; sexual orientation. When incidents of bullying or discrimination occur, it is important to be aware of whether one of these characteristics is a factor.

In a school, children who are especially vulnerable to bullying include those who are physically or learning disabled, those who experience abuse or neglect, LGBTQ+ people, those from minority ethnic communities, and those growing up in care.

Others perceived to be different, for instance, in terms of their size, shape, culture, food, the way they speak, what they wear, may also be picked on. Some children and young people are bullied for

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no apparent reason and may be bullied by former friends, for example through text messages or social networks. (See the school's Media and E-safety Policy)

Where a victim of bullying is someone with a protected characteristic, this is recorded in the Bullying Log and the perpetrator should be made to understand the seriousness of what they have done. In the case of older pupils, they should be told that it is a criminal offence and that the local authority or police will be informed if it continues.

Responding to bullying

Staff need to be alert to the signs and take appropriate action when they know or suspect that someone is being bullied. Sometimes there are no outward signs, but the person will need to be able to tell someone if they want to. Staff must work towards ensuring that the school is a place where pupils and staff feel they can and should report incidents of bullying whether they themselves, or someone else, is the victim.

Communication between parents and teachers with regard to children's behaviour and welfare is essential. For example, if a child is suddenly and inexplicably reluctant to come to school, this could indicate that the child is experiencing difficulties that need to be addressed. If parents are worried about their children's emotional well-being or know of circumstances which may be affecting their behaviour, the child's Class Teacher or guardian needs to be told. Teachers should be pro-active in asking if they feel something is wrong.

To enable incidents of bullying to be identified and addressed, we:

- ensure that the whole school community understands what is meant by bullying by making this policy available to parents, staff and pupils, by discussing the dynamics within classes and between children in staff and parent meetings.
- provide a Code of Conduct for pupils and for staff and raise awareness of it by frequently discussing, in all areas of the school, how we treat each other and what is expected of everyone in terms of behaviour.
- provide a whistleblowing policy that encourages staff to report incidents of bullying by or against colleagues
- create a culture where children feel that it is right to report bullying incidents; that being a bystander does not absolve them of responsibility for it.
- encourage children to overcome the feeling that they are telling tales or that they will become victims themselves if they report bullying.
- create clear systems for people to report bullying (see below)
- ensure that all reports are taken seriously, investigated and, if necessary, acted upon.
- have a space on every weekly staff meeting agenda that prompts staff to report even minor incidents to colleagues, so that everyone is aware and can be watchful
- keep a bullying log that records all incidents reported to the DSL or mentioned in staff meetings, so that it is easy to see when the same names or types of incident arise more frequently.
- provide clear procedures for dealing with incidents of bullying.
- review and evaluate this policy annually and as needed and ensure all staff, pupils and parents are aware of any changes.
- provide the policy and procedures to new parents and High School students, and new and visiting staff through the relevant handbooks.
- bring relevant topics in lessons, especially when a new pupil joins a class.

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Procedure

1. All members of staff have a duty of care towards pupils and colleagues and must take action if they witness acts that could be bullying, or have such acts reported to them.
2. In all such cases, if necessary, the supervising staff member will intervene to stop any current incident immediately and then inform the Class Teacher(s) or Guardian(s) of the pupil(s) involved, who will, promptly:
 - Listen to the people involved. The victim should be allowed to speak first, privately if they want to or if it seems best.
 - Consider the individuals involved with regard to age, temperament, history and personal circumstances.
 - Make an assessment of the situation, for example, how serious is it? What was the attitude of the perpetrator(s)? Of the victim? Has this pupil been the victim/perpetrator of previous incidents?
 - Assess, in consultation with at least one other member of staff, what steps need to be taken, for example whether parents need to be informed (this is almost always good practice), whether other pupils should be involved, whether exclusion is appropriate.
 - Initiate the action required including, if appropriate, informing parents and planning a strategy to prevent further occurrences.
3. If any pupil becomes the victim or perpetrator of repeated (i.e. 3 within 6 months) incidents of this nature, the DSL will open a Safeguarding file for that pupil, filed securely and containing:
 - All reports and correspondence, including emails, notes and minutes of meetings and conversations etc. about bullying relating to this pupil, filed chronologically.
 - A Safeguarding Cover sheet, listing the documentation in the file
4. Sanctions will be used as appropriate to each situation, in consultation with other staff and, if appropriate, other pupils and the child's parents. The primary purpose of any sanction is to stop the behaviour and improve relationships, and measures taken will differ because what is effective in one case will not necessarily work in another.
5. All incidents that result in someone being physically hurt must be recorded in the Incident book, including sanctions and/or further steps taken if necessary.
6. Staff should report any incidents in the relevant part of the weekly department meeting
7. Reports of incidents will be taken from meeting minutes and recorded in the Bullying Log

Reporting and Support

- Pupils should be made aware that they should speak to their Class Teacher if they are being bullied or know that someone else is.
- If they prefer, they should know that they may speak to any other member of staff.
- All staff undergo training and are aware of the procedure for dealing with bullying.
- All staff have a duty to take action when incidents are reported to them.
- Sometimes a child may reveal bullying to a parent, so parents should be encouraged (e.g. at parents' meetings) to come to the Class Teacher, the DSL or any other member of staff with concerns.
- Pupils will usually be supported by their Class Teachers in the first instance, because of the relationship that is already established.
- Sometimes another teacher or member of staff will provide initial or supplementary support, for example, a boy who has a female Class Teacher may need the support of a male member of staff.

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- Sometimes the pupil's class or other pupils will be involved either in advocacy, support for the victim or in helping to plan a strategy to improve the situation.
- Action taken and the form of support given will vary depending on the pupil affected and the nature and circumstances of the bullying.
- Other members of staff will be made aware at faculty or College meetings of any difficulties pupils are experiencing, although sensitivity will be exercised about what details are given.

Steps taken to improve behaviour or alleviate suffering after an incident may include:

- Modelling of appropriate behaviour: while the child still acts out of imitation this approach can be very effective and is, anyway, necessary and appropriate at all ages.
- In the Lower school, a pedagogical story or, as the children get older, a biography of someone who has suffered or overcome a situation of hardship can work powerfully through a child's imagination.
- Older children can be spoken to directly about their behaviour to help them understand why they behave that way, that it cannot be tolerated and what the consequences will be in the short and long term if it does not stop.
- In the case of older children, their peers will usually be involved in planning a strategy to resolve conflict, prevent further incidents or to help someone who is being bullied.
- The teachers may decide to work through a Child Study or a Class study in the faculty meeting to examine the social issues in more detail.
- Sometimes the advice of the school's medical advisor or a counsellor will be sought for the victim or the perpetrator.

Sanctions

- Our first responsibility in cases of bullying is to protect the victim.
- Perpetrators of bullying will be spoken to and warned to stop the behaviour as a first step in all cases.
- If a pupil is believed to be carrying a weapon, or to have stolen something, their property may be searched, but two members of staff must be present.
- Staff will be vigilant and supportive to guide 'bullies' away from what may be habitual behaviour and towards more constructive and acceptable ways of interacting with their peers.
- The behaviour of perpetrators will be monitored (i.e. by being raised for reflection at the relevant place in faculty meetings) and further action taken if necessary, e.g. a pupil's freedom to play or interact with others at break times or in games lessons may be limited; parents may be asked to bring the pupil to school and collect them to limit the opportunity for bullying before or after school; parents of younger children may be asked to impose restrictions, for example stopping play dates.
- If the bullying does not stop, the perpetrator(s) must be removed from the situation either temporarily or permanently. The steps that may then be taken are as given in the 'Exclusion and Suspension of Pupils' policy.
- As mentioned already, in most cases, it is advisable to inform the parents of both the victim and the perpetrator(s). In many cases this is a powerful deterrent for the perpetrator. In serious or repeated cases, a meeting with them should be arranged as soon as possible. In less serious cases, or if informing parents may put the child at risk of harm, staff should consult the DSL.

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Reporting

When there is 'reasonable cause to suspect that a child is suffering, or is likely to suffer, significant harm',⁵ a bullying incident should be addressed as a child protection issue under the Children Act 1989. These concerns must be reported to the DSL who must then report it to the local authority's children's social services through their normal procedures.

When bullying involves a criminal offence, it must be reported to the police.

Raising Awareness

We are committed to raising awareness of these issues in the school community including:

- Reviewing this policy annually and as needed with regard to its effectiveness.
- Making this policy available to parents and pupils via our website.
- Ensuring that children and staff know who they can talk to if they experience, or know that someone else is experiencing, bullying.
- Providing and requiring bi-annual online training for all staff via Educare
- Providing this guidance to temporary staff.
- Ensuring that new staff are made aware of this policy as part of their induction.
- Discussing bullying regularly at faculty meetings.

Reviews

This policy will be reviewed annually and as needed to maintain its effectiveness. Staff, parents and pupils will be made aware of any changes in the school's policy. This policy is available on the school's website.

Useful links

<http://www.kenrigby.net/Home>

<https://anti-bullyingalliance.org.uk>

A resource for autistic pupils and those working with them: <https://reachoutasc.com/schools-education/>

An overview of data collected about abuse of adolescents can be accessed here: <https://learning.nspcc.org.uk/research-resources/how-safe-are-our-children>

Next review date: July 2026

⁵ Children Act 1989 Part V, s47(1)(b),(5),(5ZA).

⁶ There are no absolute criteria on which to rely when judging what constitutes Significant Harm. Consideration of the severity of ill-treatment may include:

- The degree and extent of physical harm;
- The duration and frequency of abuse or neglect;
- The extent of premeditation;
- The degree of threats and coercion;
- Evidence of sadism, and bizarre or unusual elements in child sexual abuse.