

Charitable Objects of St. Catherine's School

The Objects for which the Company is established are to promote and provide for the advancement of education by providing, conducting, governing, carrying on and maintaining in the United Kingdom, or elsewhere, a boarding or day school or schools for girls in which the teaching shall be in accordance with the principles of the Church of England.

SENIOR SCHOOL ANTI-BULLYING POLICY



This policy was revised and updated in January 2024 in line with the School's Policy Review Schedule which ensures that all policies are kept up to date, and replaces that which was written in 1999 and updated in 2001, 2006, 2010, 2012 and 2014. It also underwent revision in 2008 and further changes were made in 2009 in response to updated ISI regulations at that time. It was also reviewed by School Council in Spring 2016 and feedback taken into account in the previous version, which was revised in September 2016. Further reviews took place annually from 2018-2023.

This review has taken into account the non-statutory Department for Education (DfE) advice *Preventing and Tackling Bullying* (July 2017); *Cyberbullying: Advice for headteachers and school staff* (2014); Advice for Parents and carers on cyberbullying (Nov 2014); DSCF Safe to Learn: embedding anti-bullying work in schools (2007-2011); Every Child Matters with specific reference to the outcome (2003-2010); Stay Safe (2005 and 2011); The Equality Act 2010; and Keeping Children Safe in Education (KCSiE, 2023).

This policy should be read in conjunction with the ICT Policy "Guidelines for Use of Digital Technology" and its Appendix 1: Student & Parent Agreement.

Important note: Bullying incidents are treated as a Child Protection/Safeguarding concern where the School has good reason to believe that the child is or may be at risk of significant harm.

A Note of Reassurance

Bullying is a rare occurrence at school but any incident runs counter to the *Traditions of St. Catherine's* as published in the Parents' and Students' Handbooks and displayed in form rooms. Consequently, reported incidents will be explored very carefully. Girls are encouraged to report immediately to a teacher any instance where they feel uncomfortable and we also ask parents to bring concerns your daughter may discuss with you to us immediately, too.

Experience has shown that any episode dealt with quickly and in line with this policy has led to a positive outcome. Sensitive handling by staff is necessary, of course, and the support of parents in a 'No blame' approach, also known as restorative justice (for the first instance of bullying by an individual) is very important, too.

The guiding principles of all the adults involved must be to resolve conflict or misunderstanding, amend behaviour patterns appropriately, and help the girls involved to move on. It is an important tenet of the policy that a girl who behaves badly at any particular time is not a bad person. The behaviour can be regretted, corrected, and apologies given that will ensure that she has learned and can grow/develop as a person. Equally, any girl who has been the victim of

unkindness needs to be fully supported in School as soon as possible to regain confidence and move forward.

Aims of the Policy

We believe that all students and all members of the school staff are entitled to be in a safe and happy environment in School in which bullying is not tolerated. Our aim is to prevent bullying by being proactive in encouraging awareness of this stance and that everyone should work to prevent bullying from happening. Should an incident of bullying occur or a concern be raised, every effort is made to deal with such concerns or incidents immediately.

The topic of bullying is addressed in the PSHE (Life Matters) curriculum through discussion and the viewing of videos, through School Assemblies and the Drama curriculum, with discussion of differences between people and the importance of avoiding prejudice-based language. Discussion encourages pupils to consider how it feels to be bullied, and what might make someone act in this way. Pupils are encouraged to report any unkindness they see happening to others rather than allow such behaviour to continue. This requires parents to support the school by helping their daughter to speak to a teacher even if she is reluctant.

Definitions of Bullying

It is important that all members of the St. Catherine's community recognise that bullying is a form of abuse and a very serious matter.

We define bullying (child on child abuse) as any form of persistent behaviour which is cruel or overbearing, threatens or hurts another. It is a form of abuse that comprises repeated acts over time that involve a real or perceived imbalance of power and in circumstances where it is difficult for those being bullied to defend themselves. It can be physical, which includes such actions as hitting, pushing or damaging possessions, verbal/emotional, which involves using any insulting form of behaviour, such as comments relating to prejudice and discrimination (eg on grounds of race, religion, culture, sex, gender, homophobia, special educational needs and disability or because a child is adopted or has caring responsibilities) or incessant teasing, hostile gestures which include such actions as ignoring or rejecting another person.

Child on child abuse can occur in intimate personal relationships between peers. This may include sexual violence and sexual harassment or causing someone to engage in sexual activity without consent. Indirect verbal bullying includes spreading rumours, malicious notes or cyber bullying such as mobile phone text messages, photographs, emails or via social networking websites or other social media including consensual and non consensual sharing of nude and semi-nude images and/or videos. For specific guidance on responsible use of new technologies, please see the ICT Policy– Guidelines for the use of Digital Technology. We recognise that such behaviour could, in extreme circumstances, lead to psychological damage and even suicide.

In addition, being a bystander and doing nothing is passive bullying and any girl who observes unkindness has a duty to report it to a teacher as soon as she notices it.

Bullying Experienced Outside School

Schools cannot be directly responsible for bullying outside their premises perpetrated by others on our pupils and from which they might suffer. However, our school's anti-bullying policy encourages pupils not to suffer in silence.

We encourage our pupils to report any antisocial behaviour perpetrated by our own pupils outside the school premises, including on public transport and on coaches to and from school. Pupils are made aware that evidence should be presented fearlessly in order to help stop the bullying. Every effort will be made to safeguard those who report unkind behaviour.

As part of our Life Matters (PSHE and RSE) Curriculum we ensure that girls are given advice on how to deal with **any** experiences they have of bullying outside School perpetrated by others who are not members of the St. Catherine's Community. This includes talking to the local community police officer about problems in the locality or offering guidance on how to handle situations they may encounter outside School premises or on public transport.

The School is also happy to advise parents and pupils where they can turn in such situations.

Countering Bullying in School – Our Strategies

In school, we follow the '**No Blame**' or **restorative justice** approach in the first instance in all cases, recommended by the charity Childline. The philosophy behind this is that the 'victim' would rather the bullying stopped than someone be punished, and we have found that more girls are willing to come forward when troubled by unkindness because, through the 'no blame' or restorative justice approach, they are less likely to fear repercussions.

By following this procedure, we also move away from the notions of "bully" and "victim" to focus on each individual, building greater understanding and empathy between the girls and seeking to find a sustainable way to proceed which upholds our tradition of "*courtesy to everyone, always*", rather than merely punishment.

The 'no blame' or restorative justice approach is such an effective form of mediation that it is often used to resolve minor friendship issues too.

At St. Catherine's, our interpretation of the 'no blame' or restorative justice approach leads us to understand that:

1. It may ultimately be counterproductive to try to get to the bottom of an individual incident though it is rare that we would give up an investigation.
2. Pupils often only disclose what they think teachers want to hear and investigations often place blame on a party.
3. Punishment is often not considered an appropriate method of dealing with the problem as the 'victim' often feels revenge attacks will occur if punishment is to be given.
4. Bullying is not uncommon as a pattern of behaviour between children/children, adults/children and adults/adults, particularly as young people learn how to negotiate difficult or challenging situations.

5. We should try to keep away from the term 'bully' and 'victim' so an image is not built up.

Cyber Bullying

Inevitably these days, we may find that the unkindness has involved the use of ICT or other means which are worthy of punishment, and the School ensures that it deals with cases of cyberbullying appropriately and with regard to the Rewards and Sanctions Policy. Girls have been advised that first offences/breaches of the ICT Policy will result in a full school detention and any further offences, or a particularly unpleasant first offence, may lead to internal or external suspension.

It is important to note that once a situation of bullying is resolved/addressed, should there be any repeat of bullying behaviours the matter would become very serious indeed and strong sanctions would apply, including suspension or a request that parents remove the perpetrator from the School.

Staff Awareness

It is essential that teaching and non-teaching staff should be aware of what signs of bullying to look out for, and staff and girls should be familiar with the procedure to follow when incidents of bullying occur.

The school endeavours to reduce the instances of bullying in likely places by:

- using seating plans in lessons, which are changed regularly, and ensuring proper interaction of each girl with a wide variety of classmates;
- ensuring there are staff patrols during lunchbreaks;
- providing a wide range of supervised extra curricular activities in lunchbreaks and after school where girls will meet like-minded friends;
- providing supervised study both at lunchtime and after school;
- offering ongoing INSET training for staff together with mentoring for pastoral staff and regular sessions to refresh their awareness of the policy, so that the principles of the policy are understood, legal responsibilities are known, action is defined to resolve and prevent problems and sources of support are available;
- ensuring that resident members of staff in particular are aware of, and sensitive to, the fact that any bullying occurring within the boarding community could be sustained outside school hours and therefore harder to escape from, and that girls are appropriately supervised within their boarding houses. The Senior Boarding Housemistress would be informed immediately of such situations and actions agreed with her.

Where appropriate, the school will invest in specialised skills to understand the needs of all pupils, including those with special educational needs or disabilities, and LGBTQ+ pupils.

Staff recognise that even if there are no reported cases of child on child abuse, such abuse may still be taking place but not reported. Staff are trained to be vigilant at all times.

Pupil Awareness

The topic is explored in PSHE (Life Matters) in U3 and the 'no-blame' approach is explained.

Bullying indicators

Signs that a girl is being bullied may include:

- reluctance to attend school
- change of behaviour
- a pattern of minor illnesses
- missing property
- withdrawn behaviour
- signs of distress
- excuses for work not done
- excuses for poor/strange behaviour
- exclusion from groups

Common characteristics of bullies: (but beware of stereotyping)

They may:

- feel inadequate and lack self-esteem
- lack social skills and make demands in a non-aggressive way
- lack ability to empathise with the victim
- feel insecure
- be themselves bullied
- be victims of abuse
- be 'spoilt'
- have more home problems than others

It is also important to be aware that Bullying incidents are minimised when:

- everyone is aware that bullying is a potential problem
- there is a climate of mutual respect for all
- there is a positive climate through all areas of school life including relations with parents
- parents work quickly and collaboratively with school when a girl discloses at home that she feels bullied.
- there are opportunities at school to practise social skills
- pupils are encouraged to speak to a teacher quickly and that it is acceptable, right and responsible to do so
- staff are told to treat bullying as a priority
- there is adequate supervision of the children
- there is a culture where kindness is regularly promoted and celebrated by the whole community. This is clearly stated in the first of our School traditions – '*Courtesy to everyone always*' and in the teachings of our Christian foundation.

Procedure for Staff following a complaint of bullying

The Senior School Housemistress, Senior Boarding Housemistress, School Housemistresses, Form Tutors or Boarding Housemistresses would normally be involved with the investigation of bullying incidents, though reporting of bullying is a whole school responsibility. For Sixth Form students, the Head of Sixth Form, Sixth Form Boarding Housemistress or Sixth Form Tutors may be involved.

Investigations should be carried out in line with the following procedure which follows the 'No Blame' or restorative justice Approach:

- Listen to the 'victim' first to find out how she feels. Give time to this process to be sure that she has said everything she wants to say. Find out who is involved and anything the 'victim' would want repeated to the alleged bully/group. The 'victim' will invariably be asked to write down her perception of how she is being treated and how she is feeling and encouraged to take her time to do this carefully and fully, externalising the difficult feelings she is experiencing.
- This written account could be read to the alleged bully/group and could be presented anonymously in the first instance, allowing the alleged bully/group to indicate if they are aware who may be feeling like this and to concede that they know they have been unkind.
- Seek original evidence of notes/texts/e-mails or postings on social networking sites if applicable. Speed is of the essence when trying to acquire screenshots of social media, messaging apps and iMessages. Girls are encouraged through Life Matters lessons, form times and ICT safety lessons to take screen shots of any online bullying or unkindness.
- Speak to the alleged 'bully/bullies' and read out the 'victim's' viewpoint and take careful note of their response. If there appears to be more than one girl involved in the bullying of another it is important to separate these girls out so that entirely independent accounts can be gained.
- Any investigation which involves digital material will take time. Girls implicated will have devices removed and be supplied with school iPads to enable them to continue with their work. This happens before the interviews begin in order to avoid losing any evidence or giving opportunity for the girls to send messages to warn others. The 'bully'/group would know that there will be no punishments but that it is their responsibility to put things right. Their responses should be heard carefully just as were those of the 'victim'.
- Convene a meeting with all involved under the supervision of the member of staff who is overseeing the problem. The 'victim' has the option of attending and it may be helpful to have a friend of hers present (However, the group should not ordinarily be more than 6-8 people, including staff.) The aim of the meeting is to allow the girls to air their points of view fully in a 'safe' environment. In most cases it would be unwise to expect the 'victim' to meet more than one protagonist at a time.
- Explain the problem and use the account from the 'victim' about how she feels.
- Suggestions are needed from the 'bully'/group as to what they are going to do next. Ways forward are sought from the 'bully'/group and the 'victim' and a plan of action agreed.
- It is important that in this process, where appropriate, pupils take responsibility for their actions and apologise. Staff should ensure that the 'bully'/group knows that what they did was wrong and that any repetition or retaliation would be viewed as serious and result in a sanction.

- After an agreed time, meet up with both parties separately or together to find out how things are going and monitor progress. Arrange further meetings if necessary.
- Reassurance and continuing support must be given to the 'victim' and the 'bully' without, for the latter, condoning the action.
- Written records of these interviews, usually a student/parent discussion form, should be kept and circulated to the relevant staff, e.g. Tutor/Housemistress/Boarding Housemistress/Senior Boarding Housemistress and the Senior Management Team. They should be filed with any evidence which was acquired in the initial stages of the investigation. If necessary, a wider group of staff should be informed to ensure all parties are looked out for and supported.
- A register of incidents of bullying is kept by the Senior Housemistress.
- Each case will be addressed according to the individual circumstances.
- Parents of all parties should be informed of the progress of this procedure if not already involved and contact sheets be written.

Procedure for girls either observing bullying or being bullied

A girl who feels that she is being bullied should report it immediately to her Form Tutor, Housemistress or any member of staff she feels she can approach. We ask parents to support their daughters in doing this and if necessary to come with the girl to meet the member of staff. Girls must also remember that being a bystander and doing nothing is passive bullying. Any pupil observing an incident should report the matter immediately to her own Tutor/Housemistress/Boarding Housemistress or any other member of staff who will then take the appropriate action and will take care to preserve her identity. Remember that those bullying may also need help with whatever is causing them to behave in this way – as listed above – and to stop the behaviour.

Procedure for Parents who feel that their daughter is being bullied

Parents receive a copy of the School's Anti-Bullying Policy in the Parents' Handbook and it is also published in the Students' Handbook and on our website. It is also fully discussed with the girls in RSE (Life Matters). They, or their daughters, are asked to notify school immediately if they are concerned that she is being bullied. They should report the incident to their daughter's School Housemistress or, if it is a boarding matter, to the relevant Boarding Housemistress, or to the Senior School Housemistress or the Senior Boarding Housemistress. The appropriate measures will then be taken as set out in this policy.

Evidence from previous experience tells us that some situations escalate because parents and girls do not come forward quickly enough with their concerns. Girls may attempt to persuade their parents that the School will handle things badly, that there will be repercussions for them, or that the process does not work. We ask parents to place trust in the professional teachers and pastoral leaders, who have the knowledge of the girls and the experience necessary to handle difficult situations well. Bullying is rare at St. Catherine's and in instances where prompt action can be taken, situations do not escalate. Where, sadly, they have escalated, rigorous

investigation that reaches the heart of the matter leads to resolutions that are lasting but they can be intense for those involved. Early reporting is therefore the best way forward. We

depend on the support of parents in this matter and want to work with you as a team around your daughter.

Parents are therefore also asked to provide any material evidence of bullying that has come into their possession – screen shots for example - and to trust the School to use it discreetly to address the issues in line with the policy for the good of all.

THIS POLICY WILL BE REVIEWED IN 2024/25

Signature of Senior School Headmistress:

Mrs Alice Phillips

Date:

Appendix 1

Investigating Unkind Behaviour/Bullying

In today's connected world, news travels very fast and we have had to adapt the way we approach alleged bullying cases to ensure we get one step ahead of that communication. When once upon a time news travelled "on the grapevine" as and when one bumped into the bearer of it, it can now travel instantaneously to a number of people in our school community, and, of course, quite often to friends in other schools.

It is therefore all too easy for girls to communicate rapidly with a group of friends to agree their "story", reveal who has admitted what to whom or indeed to delete evidence. We were once in the invidious position of speaking to a girl who had received some nasty messages only to see them disappearing in front of our eyes as another pupil deleted them remotely. We quickly realised we have to get ahead of any unhelpful messaging on such situations and we look for parental support as we do so.

We are usually obliged to investigate when a number of girls or parents give us information about something going on in a peer group which they recognise is unkind/unpleasant and they want it to stop. This we can act on if we are given evidence – we usually are – and we can always protect the person who provided it. Girls will tell you we can't, but we can and do. We do not tolerate poor behaviour at St. Catherine's and girls know that it is their duty to 'call it out' if they see it. We ask parents to do the same.

Because of the fast transfer of information, when we begin an investigation, we have to remove all the girls who are in any way involved or may have witnessed something, whether online or in person. We take their devices from them immediately and store them securely, so that they cannot communicate with each other or with others who may know their passwords and delete conversations. We supply the girls with a school iPad and access to their Google Classrooms/Notability/One Note that they need to continue with lessons. This is on temporary loan until we have completed our investigations.

Once we have spoken to the pupils, we are better placed to decide whether there is need to look at the device or not. The device itself is locked or switched off at this point, so that no one can view it without the pupil being present. Before we speak to any pupil in depth, we ask them to write their perspective of what has happened. This can be very useful to the individuals in helping them to organise their thoughts, identify things on which they may wish to seek clarity from another party, and also it helps them to have it as a prompt when we reach the stage of a reconciliation meeting. The majority are usually very keen to be helped to unwind a situation and restore friendships/manage any upset so that they can all move on. This they can write down, too.

We speak to the whole group together first of all, quietly, calmly, simply setting out that we know they are upset about something or may know about it and we want them to help us resolve it and move on. Then they write their statements. At this stage we do not name anyone specifically as having upset others. This ensures that each girl's perspective is heard and she may write what she wants as her view.

Once the perspectives have been written, we ask the girls to continue with their studies using the school iPad and in silence whilst we speak to each girl individually. Girls can join the zoom

to hear what is happening in their lessons and also access all work remotely using Google Classroom. We are aware that this can be a frustrating phase for pupils while they wait to be spoken to, but we hope as parents you appreciate the importance of giving time to girls to talk things through as fully as is needed. The risk in rushing things along is that we inadvertently sweep things under the carpet. It is our experience that only by going as far back as the girls feel is necessary can we truly resolve issues which otherwise would continue to niggle away and come back to the surface.

We are sometimes asked, 'why don't you just get them all together, give them all a telling off and say they must not do this again' and leave it at that. Experience tells us that this leaves those who have been unkind feeling even stronger and those aggrieved more vulnerable. Nothing has moved on. They need close adult intervention on the details to help them reset the dials of their young teenaged experience. The strategy of a talking to which would no doubt be much more effective in a smaller family unit where everyone is living together, and could combat sibling rivalry, say, very quickly, won't work with a group of girls within a school context.

If a phone or iPad does need to be examined as part of the process, it is always done in full sight of the pupil who will be asked to talk the member of staff through any specific chats, photos or videos. We do not examine every single online conversation, group chat or camera roll – for the typical teenage device it would take an age to do so! We look only at anything which is relevant and do not open any others. A girl whose device is being scrutinised will be supported in the room by a pastoral team member of staff from her house team. A member of the IT network team will very likely be in attendance to ensure that any items needed for the investigation are snapshot/recorded.

Where offensive comments or images taken without permission are found, we will delete these from the device so that they cannot be redistributed and cause any further upset.

We will then organise a reconciliation meeting, or series of them if needed, where we facilitate a conversation between the two girls, ensuring each has an opportunity to speak and to be heard properly. Devices will be returned as swiftly as they can.

Parents will be informed if we start an investigation which involves their daughter and will be updated on the process. They will also be seen and shown any items from a device that are unacceptable.

Sanctions for improper use of ICT are a full school detention in the first instance for minor infringements. More serious matters would be dealt with as outlined in this policy.

We ask for parents' understanding that we would very much rather not use this kind of investigation at all but we will not pretend things aren't happening if they are reported to us, duly evidenced. It does not help our young people to ignore things about which they need educating and with which they understandably need help in this technological era.

Alice Phillips

Headmistress