

Canbury School

An Anti-Bullying Policy

The background, aims and objectives

Bullying is entirely unacceptable at Canbury. The purpose of this document is to help define bullying, to help identify bullying and the bully, to advise where help can be found for those who need it, and to give advice to those who are asked for help. Its objective is to encourage all members of the community to share the responsibility for creating a friendly and secure environment.

Canbury School recognises the seriousness of bullying which can lead to psychological damage and even suicide.

Definitions

Bullying is the wilful desire to hurt, threaten or frighten another person. It may be verbal, physical or emotional.

Bullying is oppressive, coercive and an abuse of power. It makes victims feel alone and makes them lose confidence. It is often planned and secret.

Cyber-bullying involves the use of information and communication technologies to support deliberate repeated and horrible behaviour by an individual or group that is intended to harm others. Bullying is often hidden and subtle. It can also be overt and intimidating. Bullying can happen anywhere and at any time. We always treat it very seriously. It conflicts sharply with the school's policy on equal opportunities, as well as with its social and moral principles.

Those who regularly bully others are called bullies in this document. Others who find themselves often on the receiving end may be termed victims.

There is no such thing as a passive witness to bullying: those who take the easy way out are active in condoning bullying if they do not take a stand against the bully and give support to the victim; by immediate intervention a problem can be prevented from getting worse.

Bullying behaviour

Bullying takes many forms and may be quite ordinary behaviour but focused in order to undermine a victim. It may take the form of verbal, physical or emotional abuse, or harassment on gender or racial grounds or cyber-bullying by means of social websites, mobile phones, text messaging, photographs and emails. A victim may feel isolated because of gender, race, colour, sexuality, disability, culture, religion, physical appearance or age.

Examples may be

- punching, hitting, pushing around, spitting, throwing things at a person
- damaging their property, throwing their property around, going into their bags or lockers, writing graffiti about them
- whispering, name-calling, teasing, making jokes, insulting, writing unkind or obscene letters, making anonymous telephone calls, spreading rumours, threatening looks
- inappropriate sexual advances
- isolating, intimidating, stereotyping.

Most people have experienced many of these practices of bullying at some stage in their lives. To the vulnerable they can cause deep pain and anguish. To any victim they can cause distress and a feeling of isolation and low self-esteem. The victims may be younger, weaker, or in some way thought of as being different from the crowd. In most cases they are to some extent isolated from their peer groups.

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 (e.g. giving up music lessons, change to accent or vocabulary)
- 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 suicide or running away

Although there may be other causes for some of the above symptoms, a repetition of, or a combination of these possible signs of bullying should be investigated by parents and teachers.

How may a victim find help?

If a pupil thinks that he or she is being bullied, the first step is to talk to someone that he or she can trust. It is important to know that he or she may speak confidentially to someone. This person might be a friend, a year tutor, the School Counsellor, another teacher, a parent or the Head. A victim should never keep silent: sharing anxiety is the first and most important step.

If a pupil, teacher or parent knows someone who is being bullied he or she must take action. The first person to be told should usually be the victim's year tutor. It is the responsibility of the year tutor to handle the problem with sensitivity and with support for those involved. However, if the year tutor cannot be told for some reason, then any teacher or other member of staff, or the Head should be involved. Wherever possible parents of a pupil should be involved, though a pupil's concerns would have to be considered in this respect.

A practical response

We wish to establish an atmosphere within the school which discourages bullying and where such an activity is challenged. We hope that some of the issues raised in the Personal, Social and Health Education (P.S.H.E.) programme will help to establish a more secure environment through a preventative approach, but this is, of course, everyone's responsibility.

There will remain the need to react decisively to resolve immediate problems:

1. Unquestionably the direct response of an adult or someone with the natural authority to do so, simply telling a pupil formally and authoritatively that his or her behaviour has to stop can be productive in halting one-to-one bullying.
2. But in the case where a larger group is the source of bullying, where they are caught in a collective experience, there needs to be an attempt to encourage individual rather than group responsibility.

3. If rules have been broken or bad behaviour of individuals can be identified then some measure of punishment is clearly appropriate, unless it is not in the victim's best interests. But so often blame is more difficult to apportion. The situation is made even more difficult where a provocative victim is involved.
4. The method of shared concern is an approach that has been shown to be successful. To make each individual aware of and responsible for his or her own actions a separate talk with each member of a bullying group is necessary, in order to establish shared concern for the situation of the victim.
5. Usually one adult experienced in counselling will take on the responsibility for trying to resolve the situation. This person's task is not to blame anybody, but to find out what has been happening to the victim. Each pupil in the group is invited to talk about the victim's problem.
6. There are circumstances in which what would appear no more than usual badinage among pupils can appear victimisation to a sensitised victim. The cause of the extra sensitivity may not be the specific incident reported and may have its origin in or out of the school. It is important that the cause be identified.
7. The victim should also be invited to offer suggestions as to how he or she can be helped. Victims will need support and encouragement - sometimes by establishing a support group around him or her. Victims may need to change their own behaviour, if they themselves have been annoying others. In each case a plan can be devised, a contract made.
8. The bullies and the victim should then be watched carefully over a period of time to make sure that the situation has changed and eased. This remains the responsibility principally of the year tutor most involved.
9. It should not be forgotten that bullies need support on ways to deal with the causes of their behaviour; bullies are sometimes victims themselves and their views must be heard and respected.
10. A record will be kept on the pupil file of any serious incident of bullying.
11. The ultimate sanction lies with the Head who may, having held meetings with all parties including parents and having exhausted all other disciplinary sanctions and counselling, decide to exclude the offender from School. (See Exclusion Policy and Behaviour Policy.)

Preventative measures

We take the following preventative measures:

- We use appropriate Assemblies to explain the school policy on bullying. Our PSHE programme is structured to give pupils an awareness of their social and moral responsibilities as they progress through the School the programme is structured to enforce the message about community involvement and taking care of each other.
- Other lessons, particularly English and Drama, highlight the issue of bullying and reinforce this message by teaching moral and spiritual values that show bullying to be unacceptable and by developing social skills.
- All our pupils are encouraged to tell a member of staff at once if they know that bullying is taking place.
- All reported incidents are recorded and investigated at once. We always monitor reported incidents. They are placed in the Pupils' Files.
- Our trained School Councillor is an important part of our pastoral support service, providing specialist skills of assessment and counselling and is available to give confidential advice and counselling support to pupils who can refer themselves to her when they have social, emotional or behavioural concerns.
- Staff are always on duty at times when pupils are not in class and patrol the school site, particularly areas where bullying might occur. They are trained to be alert to inappropriate language or behaviour.
- All pupils have access to a telephone helpline, enabling them to call for support.

Making a more secure environment

Bullying sometimes takes place within the classroom; in this context, teachers and pupils need to be active in creating a safe and positive environment. It is often in the context of close working relationships in Art, Special Needs, Sport (and in small Canbury teaching and year tutor groups generally) that incidents of bullying may be seen. All in these situations need to be alert to signs of anxiety.

If a pupil feels unhappy or nervous about a teacher or other member of staff, he or she should first tell the Head.

The PSHE programme will endeavour to tackle issues and offer solutions to problems.

Punishments by staff within the school are monitored carefully to ensure that they are not a source of bullying.

If parents think that their son or daughter is being bullied, it is important to contact the school straight away, usually through the Head. The school needs the support of parents in responding to the problem.

Every pupil has the right to a safe environment in which to grow, to be happy and fulfilled. It is the duty of the school to provide these safe surroundings for all its pupils.

A successful anti-bullying policy depends upon support from parents, staff and pupils. The school encourages comment on this policy from anyone in these three groups.