



SHAPWICK SCHOOL

BULLYING PREVENTION POLICY

1. INTRODUCTION

Issues of definition are tedious, but an inevitable first step. Before we can do anything, there needs to be work done with the pupils about their experiences. Owning up to bullying and the particular forms it can take in the circumstances of the school is essential. Procedures are monitored and all staff undergo anti-bullying instruction annually. New staff are instructed on the correct school procedure on induction.

2. WHAT IS BULLYING

Bullying involves the abuse of power, it is persistent and it is personal to the individual child. A one off act of random violence against a child who happens to be in the wrong place at the wrong time is different (though clearly unacceptable). Bullies choose their victims for a reason; because they are vulnerable; because of some characteristic of that child. This means that bullying can take many forms according to the dynamics of that interaction:

- Physical attack
- Verbal abuse
- Extortion of money/property/threats
- Psychological abuse (e.g. speaking rumours, isolation)
- Racially motivated bullying
- Targeting or perceived weakness (e.g. disability)
- Individual bullying
- Group bullying
- Sexual harassment/sexist bullying
- 'imported' bullying (e.g. where families are in dispute)

All these forms of bullying may be a challenge to our commitment to equal opportunities. The challenge to a child's unacceptable behaviour towards others should be set in context by other schools policies (e.g. Expectation, Behaviour, Rewards and Sanctions).

The aim is to enlist the whole school in supporting those whose experience is unhappy and in challenging those whose values appear to be different. We are proactive and have a positive programme to promote equality, fairness and mutual concern.

3. HOW MUCH BULLYING IS THERE?

In secondary schools it is suggested that about 12% of children have said that they have been bullied at least sometimes, and 6% have admitted to being a bully. These figures are twice as high as primary schools. Both boys and girls are both bullies and victims; individual boys or small groups of boys

are the most frequent perpetrators; girls are more often in groups and tend to use more indirect forms of bullying. Pupils tend to bully children roughly the same age as themselves; bullies do generally perceive their victims as 'weaker' than themselves.

At Shapwick many of our children come to the school with a history of having been bullied because of their learning difficulties. They have been perceived as having been 'different' and 'picked on' as a result. They have experienced one or more of the above list of different forms of bullying. Therefore many of our children are fragile in their development and maintenance of sound peer relationships. Equally some of the children before entry have resorted to being a bully in order to compensate for their learning difficulties. Either way victim or bully, the children at Shapwick need support, guidance and structure to help them cope with the very many demands of school life.

4. VICTIM RISK FACTORS

Research has identified risk factors in victims which make bullying more likely. These include:

- Lacking close friends
- Being shy
- Coming from over-protective family
- Being in a minority racial/ethnic group
- Having special educational needs
- Behaving provocatively

In the case of our children, as has already been mentioned, the significance of being 'different' is probably most important.

Apart from our children's special educational needs this can apply to a wide variety of ways in which a child becomes a target by threatening the identity of others. This might be because they support the 'wrong' football team (or don't support a popular team) or being seen as a creep, when it is 'cool' not to bother with school work. Ironically, parents who seek to protect their children too much may end up making them a more likely victim. There is actually some truth in the assertion that children who can 'stand up for themselves' are safer.

Pupils tell their friends or parents about being bullied much more readily than they tell a member of staff, although Houseparents who obviously have a very close relationship with our children, will find the children open up to them, or indeed any other member of staff who they feel comfortable with. Research indicates that younger pupils are more likely to tell, though most have little confidence that much will be done about it. A majority of secondary pupils (11 years +) never tell anyone in authority and say that parents and teachers either don't know or don't want to know. This however, in our experience often does not apply to the majority of our children.

5. LISTENING TO CHILDREN

As with other issues of child protection, pupils need to feel that someone is listening to their version of what is going on. Absolute guarantees of a child's safety can rarely be given even in our small and caring community. Our priority is to stop the abuse, not necessarily to punish the offender, which unfortunately may lead to allegations of 'taking no notice' or being 'too soft'. However, this is exactly the same logic as is applied in parent/child abuse, when, in all but the most extreme of cases and contrary to most people's assumptions, restoring the safe functioning of the family is far more important than allocating blame and punishment to an individual.

The school experience can look very different to the pupils than it does to the staff. Breaks in between lessons, when children are not under direct supervision, are times when children may feel that they are not as safe as they are in class. In addition, bullying may arise out of boredom. Therefore it is behoven upon all staff to ensure that duties are completed efficiently and that they arrive for lessons and duties on time. We must ensure that our children do not become bored in the playground, in lessons, or in the Boarding House and therefore we must provide adequate, stimulating and evolving facilities and equipment for our children.

Instances of bullying are monitored throughout the school day and in the Boarding Houses. Students can confide in their teachers, tutors and Houseparents or indeed with any other adult they feel comfortable. If a student wishes to speak to an adult not involved within the school they can contact Rev. Trish Ollive, whose telephone number is displayed throughout the school. Year 9 students are given a Mentor with whom they can confide and discuss any problems.

6. DEALING WITH INCIDENTS

However well we attempt to address the school's general ethos and organisation, there will be incidents which require action. Strategies often have to operate within a number of constraints:

- Incidents need to be resolved, not just smoothed over
- Those who feel aggrieved want to see justice done
- Blame may not be all on one side
- It may never be possible to prove what really happened
- Few incidents can be resolved by the removal of the alleged bully from the school
- Levels of tolerance may vary enormously
- Expectations may be unrealistic
- Investigations may make demands on staff time

A variety of approaches are available in either seeking to harness the power of peer pressure or to seek direct adult involvement within the policy of Expectations, Behaviour, Rewards and Sanctions.

- i) The No Blame Approach – is deemed to be useful in dealing with incidents among younger children. This approach aims to tap into the children's capacity for empathy; using the way they

feel rather than relying on external rewards or sanctions. People who feel that such an approach is too 'soft' on the bully may need help to see that making children want to change is much more likely to be effective in the long run than instant punishments which are quickly forgotten. The approach pays little attention to what 'actually happened', they are more interested in moving things on rather than going over the past.

This method involves the following steps:

- Interviewing the 'victim' individually, getting them to describe how they feel. Use poems/pictures/stories etc. How would they want the others to feel about them? Identify who the others are and get the victim's permission to proceed.
- Convening a group of all those involved, other than the victim.

Bystanders and 'passive condoners' as well as those most directly involved will be included. A balanced group is essential so that someone with sympathy for the victim should be present. An explanation is given to how the victim is feeling and how the group is going to try and address these feeling together.

- Asking members of the group to make a commitment to doing something to improve the relationship with the victim. The group is used to reinforce the promises made.
- Leaving it up to them. It might be necessary to give the victim a way of letting staff know (the co-ordinating member of staff who has become involved in the investigation of the incident – the Head of Juniors or Deputy Headteacher at Shapwick Prep).
- Following up more formally later by reconvening the group.

ii) Incident Reporting – Children are encouraged to report acts of bullying confidentially and of 'telling' in safety. Victims or friends of victims can confide in any adult with whom he/she feels relaxed. Direct questions will be asked and the victim will be asked what action he/she would like to happen. Unless there is major concerns of a child protection issue, these wishes will be adhered to. When the allegations have been investigated, interviews with victim, perpetrator and bystanders have been completed, appropriate action will be taken within the terms of the sanctions policy. Relevant parents, Houseparents and personal tutors will be kept informed as appropriate.

iii) Assertiveness Training – In order to support the 'victim' it may be apparent that he/she may need to change his/her behaviour rather than the bully. Children may need guidance on developing defensive skills in the form of assertiveness training. This operates by giving pupils a structure within which to deal with the incidents where they feel pressured or under threat. The aim is to offer them more opportunity to take control of the situation, not by fighting back but by neutral responses which de-scale the conflict.

Developing skills to:

- Make assertive statements
- Resist manipulation and threats
- How to respond to name calling
- Walk away from a bully
- Escape safely from physical threat
- Enlist help from others nearby
- Boost self-esteem
- Keep calm when under stress

This training may be carried out by any suitable adult with whom the child feels comfortable. It may be a Houseparent, tutor, teacher, the Headmaster or Educational Psychologist.

However, incidents of bullying are dealt with, the Headmaster must be informed of developments.

This policy is monitored annually by the Headmaster and will next be reviewed on or before the 1st September 2012