



ANTI-BULLYING POLICY (including Anti-Cyberbullying)

Policy Custodian: *Deputy Head (Pastoral)*

Approving Body: *MTS Senior Leadership Team*

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Introduction and Key Principles

Merchant Taylors' School respects and upholds the right of every pupil to enjoy all aspects of their education free from interference by other pupils. Every pupil has a responsibility to help create a happy atmosphere and a well-ordered way of life at School for all to enjoy. All pupils are expected to base their behaviour on respect for others regardless of differences in age, status, race, religion or gender. Bullying, whether emotional or physical, has no place in the School and all members of the School must do all in their power to prevent it.

Bullying is a category of child-on-child abuse ([Keeping Children Safe in Education 2025, DfE](#)) and a safeguarding concern. All staff should be aware that children can abuse other children and that it can happen both inside and outside of school and online. All staff should understand that even if there are no reports in the School, it does not mean it is not happening; it may be the case that abuse is not being reported. As such it is important that when staff have any concerns regarding child-on-child abuse they should report these to the DSL via CPOMS.

Staff should challenge and report inappropriate behaviours between children that are abusive in nature. Downplaying certain behaviours, for example dismissing sexual harassment as “just banter”, “just having a laugh”, “part of growing up” or “boys being boys” can lead to a culture of unacceptable behaviours, an unsafe environment for children and in worst case scenarios a culture that normalises abuse, leading to children accepting it as normal and not coming forward to report it.

Allegations of bullying will always be investigated thoroughly and following the School's Safeguarding Policy. Staff should be able to reassure children reporting bullying that they are being taken seriously and that they will be supported and kept safe. All children involved in such incidences will be treated as “being at risk” and supported appropriately, without judgement, and procedures put in place to minimise the risk to all parties. Referrals will be made to Children's Social Care and/or the Police services, where appropriate.

This policy forms part of a set of documents and policies which relate to the safeguarding responsibilities of the School. As well as all school pastoral policies and health and safety policies, there are particular links with the following:

The Safeguarding Policy

Mobile Phone Policy

Pastoral Curriculum Policy (including FBV and RSE Policies and Schemes of Work)

Promoting Good Behaviour

E-safety Policy

Use of AI Policy

Policy aims

- To ensure that the School's measures designed to prevent and respond to bullying follow the Government guidance in Keeping Children Safe in Education (2025, DfE) and [Preventing and Tackling Bullying \(2017, DfE\)](#)
- To ensure that bullying concerns are escalated appropriately using the local safeguarding partner's threshold guidance, such as Hertfordshire's [Continuum of Need](#).
- To provide guidance to staff, pupils and their families about what we should all do to prevent and respond to bullying.
- To emphasise the seriousness of bullying and to recognize that bullying may result in serious psychological harm;
- To maintain and drive a positive, supportive and caring culture among all pupils and staff throughout the School;
- To deter bullying behaviour, to detect it when it occurs, and to deal with it by counselling and/or disciplinary sanctions. If necessary, this will mean the permanent exclusion (expulsion) of those found guilty of bullying others.
- To safeguard pupils by putting procedures in place to prevent cyberbullying and deal with it should it occur.
- To ensure parents and carers are aware of the particular risks of cyberbullying occurring when pupils are not in school.

Definition of bullying

Bullying is deliberately hurtful behaviour by an individual or group, repeated over a period of time, that intentionally hurts another individual or group physically or emotionally. Bullying is often motivated by prejudice against particular groups, for example, on grounds of race, religion, culture, sex, gender, homophobia, special educational needs and disability, or because a child is adopted or is a carer. Bullying can take a number of forms:

Emotional	being unfriendly, excluding, tormenting, making threatening gestures
Physical	pushing, kicking, hitting, punching or any use of violence
Racist	racial taunts, graffiti, gestures
Sexist/sexual	sexual harassment in any form is bullying
Homophobic	reference to, or focusing on, the issue of sexual orientation
Verbal	name-calling, sarcasm, spreading rumours, teasing, 'banter'
Ableist	reference to, or focusing on, the issue of disability
Cultural	Bullying behaviour centred on religion, ethnicity or culture

Cyberbullying (Online Bullying)

Cyberbullying occurs when an individual or group uses online technology (e.g. social media, generative AI, text messages, photographs and email) to cause distress or harm others through repeated and hurtful behaviours. These include, but are not restricted to, humiliation; threats and intimidation; harassment; cyberstalking; vilification/defamation; exclusion; and rejection. Merchant Taylors' School treats cyberbullying, like all bullying, very seriously, whether the activities take place whilst pupils are on or off the school site and within or outside of school hours.

Cyberbullying is also covered under the school's E-safety Policy, the Data Protection Policy, the Privacy Policy and the IT Acceptable Use Policy for Pupils; Anti Bullying Policy should be read in conjunction with these policies.

Signs and symptoms

A boy may indicate by signs or behaviour that he is being bullied. Staff should be alerted to the possibility of bullying if a boy:

- is frightened of other pupils, or of staff
- changes their usual routine
- is unwilling to come to school (school phobic)
- begins to miss commitments
- becomes withdrawn, anxious, or lacking in confidence
- starts stammering
- is having problems sleeping
- attempts or threatens suicide or runs away
- feels ill in the morning
- begins to do poorly in school work
- has clothes torn or books damaged
- has possessions which are damaged or 'go missing'
- asks for money or starts stealing money (to pay bully)
- has money continually 'lost'
- has unexplained cuts or bruises
- cuts meal times or is reluctant to sit with peers at meals
- becomes aggressive, disruptive or unreasonable
- bullies others
- stops eating
- is frightened to say what's wrong
- gives improbable excuses for any of the above
- begs staff members to do nothing about what they have seen or been told
- is afraid to use the internet or mobile phone
- is nervous and jumpy when a text or email message is received

These behaviours and signs might indicate other problems, but bullying should be considered a possibility and should be investigated.

Reporting bullying of oneself or others can be wrongly considered informing or 'snitching' by pupils. Staff investigating bullying should be aware of this stigma and should do what they can to maintain the confidentiality of all pupils involved. This includes not speaking to pupils about incidents in front of others and not removing pupils publicly from lessons when investigating an incident. The School also works to educate pupils on bystander effect and encourages them to call out and report bullying without fear of reprisal. The Student Voice service allows anonymous reporting of possible bullying to encourage this.

Procedures

1. Pupils and parents should report any suspected incidents of bullying to the appropriate tutor or Head of Section. All incidents of bullying must be taken seriously. They should be investigated by the member(s) of staff who first become aware of an incident. Staff receiving such a report

should immediately establish the facts: What sort of bullying is alleged? When did it take place? Where? Who is involved? What happened? Were there witnesses?

Cases of bullying will be handled sensitively and it is recognised that these are difficult and complex situations which need to be dealt with in a thoughtful manner.

In all cases the details of the incident and any action taken by a member of staff should be reported to the Head of Section via CPOMS as soon as possible, under the 'child-on-child-abuse' category.

2. Where appropriate, statements should be taken from everyone involved in or who witnessed the bullying. Boys may be asked to make written statements – in this case steps should be taken to prevent collusion in the writing of these statements.
3. Independent witnesses must be afforded protection. The information in their statements must be treated confidentially and steps should always be taken to prevent evidence being traced back to the independent witness.
4. The Heads of Section will, in more serious bullying cases, investigate the matter themselves in consultation with the Deputy Head (Pastoral) who is the Designated Safeguarding Lead. A bullying incident will be treated as a child protection concern when there is 'reasonable cause to suspect that a child is suffering, or is likely to suffer, from significant harm'. In such circumstances the Designated Safeguarding Lead will follow the usual processes of consultation and, if necessary, referral to the relevant external agencies.
5. Victim(s) of bullying should be given support and made safe from further bullying and parents of all pupils involved should be notified of potential bullying incidents as soon as possible.
6. When investigating incidents of bullying which have a cyber element the School's investigation will comply with the broader framework of UK law (see Appendix 2). Where deemed necessary, the DSL will use (or provide information on) external reporting routes: mobile phone company, internet service provider, Childline or the Child Exploitation & Online Protection Centre (CEOP). If images are concerned, the Designated Safeguarding Lead will consult to determine whether they might be illegal or raise child protection concerns. If so, s/he will contact The **Defence Cyber Protection Partnership (DCPP)**, which may then involve the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO), the local police in cases of actual/suspected illegal content, or CEOP. The DfE Guidelines [Sharing nudes and semi-nudes: advice for education settings working with children and young people \(updated March 2024\)](#) will be referred to when the cyberbullying involves image-based sexual abuse.
7. All teachers and pupils are aware of these procedures and that in these situations the School reserves the right to search drives, confiscate mobile devices, and obtain access to online storage and accounts. Pupils, parents and staff should be aware of the need to preserve evidence and records of abuse (e.g. saving screenshots of messages, retention of emails, recording dates and times).

Staff and parents or carers must not intentionally view, download, save or share any nudes and semi-nudes. Wherever possible, responses to incidents should be based on what DSLs (or equivalents) have been told about the content of the imagery.

8. All instances of bullying, or observations relating to potential bullying, must be entered into CPOMS as an incident under the category 'child-on-child abuse', 'bullying'. The incident should be linked to all potential perpetrators and victims unless doing so would risk the confidentiality of the pupils involved. Incident are also tagged if there is evidence of discriminatory or prejudicial language or behaviour.
9. All pupils involved may benefit from counselling - referral to the School Counsellor should be considered.

10. MTS pastoral staff are trained in restorative justice and a restorative approach may be used alongside or instead of sanctions, where deemed appropriate by the Head of Section and/or Deputy Head (Pastoral).
11. All pupils involved in a bullying incident should be monitored over the longer-term to ensure behaviour has improved and there are no 'consequences' for the victim because they have been deemed to have 'snitched'. This includes regular check ins with tutors, Heads of House or Heads of Section and, if deemed appropriate, Pastoral Support Plans or Risk Assessments being put in place. All pupils who have been victims of bullying will be monitored by the Safeguarding Team until it is deemed that they are no longer at risk.

Advice for Pupils

If you are being bullied

- *try to stay calm* and look as confident as you can
- *get away* from the situation as quickly as possible
- *tell your tutor or a teacher* what has happened straight away

After you have been bullied

- *tell your tutor, a teacher or another adult* in the school
- *tell your family*
- *if you are scared* to tell an adult by yourself, ask a friend to come with you
- *report the incident on the Student Voice app*
- *keep speaking up* until someone listens and does something to stop the bullying
- *don't blame yourself* for what has happened
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When you are talking to an adult about bullying, be clear about

- *what* has happened to you
- *how often* it has happened
- *who* was involved
- *who* saw what was happening
- *where* it happened

It is best if you can talk to someone at school or home but, if not, then you can ring **ChildLine**, Freephone 0800 1111, or go to the website www.childline.org.uk, This is a *confidential* helpline.

MTS uses a Student Voice app which pupils can use to report bullying, either for themselves or on behalf of a peer. The report may be made anonymously or giving the pupil's name. The Student Voice app is monitored by the Pastoral team and all reports made on the app are recorded on CPOMS and investigated by the appropriate staff.

Pupils are given age-appropriate advice through forums such as PSHE lessons, tutorial lessons, ICT Lessons and Assemblies

Prevention

A number of strategies are used at Merchant Taylors' School including:

- Effective supervision of pupils.
- Engendering a culture in which bullying is seen to be unacceptable.
- Tutors remind boys that any boy who becomes aware of bullying, or suspects that it is happening, has a duty to speak to someone in authority (or report concerns via the Student Voice app). To withhold such information is to aid and abet bullying and may be treated as such.
- Bullying is covered through the School's PSHE programme.
- The level of bullying is monitored through the keeping of records of incidents and alleged incidents, through confidential questionnaires to parents and pupils and through an annual Anti-Bullying Week survey (the results of which are discussed with SLT and Pastoral Committee).
- Bullying is an item on the agenda of Senior Leadership Team Meetings and Pastoral Committee Meetings when issues arise. It is also discussed at School Council Meetings.
- Periodically whole school assemblies and year group assemblies focus on the problem of bullying to raise awareness of the issue.
- Childline and Student Voice posters are on display at various points around the school.
- Counselling is available through the School Counsellor.
- Staff receive regular training on the school's Anti-Bullying procedures and it is a regular item for discussion in staff meetings and various pastoral committees.
- The Safeguarding Team visit other schools to investigate best practice around bullying detection and prevention.
- The school recognises that certain groups of pupils may be more likely to experience discriminatory bullying such as homophobia, racism, antisemitism, islamophobia, and ableism. The numbers of bullying incidents involving discrimination are monitored and discussed at Pastoral Committee, SLT and Governing Board meetings and the school responds to trends with, for instance, year group assemblies and the PSHE curriculum.

In addition, the School has in place specific procedures to tackle cyberbullying:

- All pupils, parents, and staff sign the Acceptable Use Policy before they are allowed to use school connectivity or devices.
- Parents are kept up to date about the part they can play to prevent bullying, including when they find themselves as bystanders e.g. with newsletters from the Deputy Head (Pastoral) and Heads of Section. From time to time the School holds evenings for parents on how to combat bullying and how best to act in partnership with the School.
- All staff receive training to develop e-safety practices and identify and deal with cyber bullying. They can recognise non-verbal signs and indications of cyber bullying and receive regular safeguarding update training.
- Pupils are involved in developing our response to cyber bullying via the School Council. They receive age-appropriate E-safety education through lectures and talks and through the PSHE programme (reinforced in Computing); this programme is reinforced by section assemblies, initiatives like Anti-bullying Week, E-safety days involving both pupils and parents, Safer Internet Day and through the wider curriculum. Pupils are encouraged to be ambassadors of best E-safety practice and to support each other in matters of cyber bullying, particularly those that extend outside the confines beyond the School setting. Anti-cyber bullying resources are available on the School Intranet.
- The School's Filtering and Monitoring systems are set up to detect words and images commonly used by cyberbullies.
- The School blocks access to social networking sites or newsgroups unless there is a specific approved educational purpose. MTS does not allow pupils independent access to Tik Tok,

- Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Ask.FM, Tumblr, Instagram, and private messaging services, not limited to but including Snapchat, WhatsApp, Discord, Kik, Sureport and Viber.
- The AUP and anti-bullying policy are reviewed annually; interim changes due to the emergence of a new technology are communicated to pupils, staff and parents via email and newsletters.
- Full records are kept of all cyber bullying incidents in CPOMS.

Sanctions

Bullying is a serious offence and as such is likely to lead to either a Saturday Detention or an exclusion; in cases of severe and persistent bullying the exclusion may be permanent. Incidents of bullying will be dealt with seriously. The guiding principle behind the school's response will be to bring the bullying to a halt and to help the bully understand the inappropriate nature of his actions.

Useful sources of information about bullying:

<https://www.nationalbullyinghelpline.co.uk/>

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

<https://www.nspcc.org.uk/what-is-child-abuse/types-of-abuse/bullying-and-cyberbullying/>

<https://www.childline.org.uk/>

Appendix 1 - Cyber Bullying: Legal Powers and Responsibilities

- Although cyber bullying is not a specific criminal offence, there are criminal laws that can apply in terms of harassment as well as threatening and menacing communications. The School will contact the police if there is evidence to suggest the law has been broken. There are a number of offences that may be committed in the course of cyber bullying, some may be covered by more than one piece of legislation and the age of the perpetrator is not necessarily relevant although the general age of criminal responsibility (10 years) applies and prosecutions are unlikely for children under 14 years old.
- Pupils are entitled to their freedom of expression and respect for their private lives but they must not infringe the rights of others. Infringement includes, among other things, libel and slander, bullying, harassment and victimisation, inciting hatred on racial, religious and homophobic grounds, breach of confidentiality and breach of copyright.
- The following legislation may have a bearing in any of the above examples: Obscene Publications Act 1959, Protection of Children Act 1978, The Contempt of Court Act 1981, the Public Order Act 1986, the Malicious Communications Act 1988, the Computer Misuse Act 1990, the Protection from Harassment Act 1997, and the Communications Act 2003. All legislation concurs that the touchstone of a malicious communication is that it cause distress.
- UK law recognises that there is no clear boundary between behaviour within a school and the external behaviour of its pupils. The School has statutory powers to investigate incidents of bullying which occur outside of school hours and may apply appropriate sanctions.
- The Education and Inspections Act 2006 (EIA 2006) outlines the power of Head teachers to regulate the conduct of pupils when they are off site and provides defence in relation to the confiscation of mobile phones and other items. Head teachers have the power "to such an extent as is reasonable" to regulate the conduct of pupils when they are off site or not under the control or charge of a member of staff.
- Schoolteachers have the right to confiscate mobile phones as a disciplinary penalty and have a legal defence in respect of this in the EIA, 2006. Merchant Taylors' teachers are aware that they cannot search the contents of a pupil's mobile phone without the consent of that pupil. Should a pupil or member of staff refuse to allow the contents of his/her phone to be searched, the matter may be referred to the police, who have more extensive search powers, should the School deem it sufficiently serious.
- Whilst the School is obliged to protect all its members and provide a safe, healthy environment, *Leah Bradford-Smith v West Sussex County Council*, 2002 establishes that,

“the school does not have the charge of its pupils all the time and so cannot directly protect them from harm all the time. At a day school that charge will usually end at the school gates... the school cannot owe a general duty to its pupils, or anyone else, to police their (the pupils) activities once they have left its charge. That is principally the duty of parents and, where criminal offences are involved, the police”.