

POLICY STATEMENT ON BULLYING

1 The Aims of the School state that the “Governors intend that Finham Park School will be a caring community in which:

- every individual is held in high esteem.
- sensitivity, tolerance, self discipline, respect and good will towards others are encouraged in all and are exemplified in the day to day life of the school”.

1.1 These aims are expressed more fully in the joint pupil/staff document “Rights and Responsibilities in the Finham Park Community” especially in points 1 to 7:

1 Everyone in the Finham Park Community is of equal value and has the right to equal opportunities. No-one should be discriminated against or bullied in any way. People should treat others as they themselves wish to be treated.

2 No-one should be treated with disrespect because:

- they are disabled or have an illness
- they are richer or poorer than others
- they are older or younger
- they are smaller or taller
- they are male or female.

3 People should not be discriminated against for any reason, e.g. because of their nationality, race, ethnicity, religion, gender or sexual orientation.

4 People should not be judged by their appearance.

5 There should be no name calling.

6 Everyone has the right to practise their religion at the appropriate time.

7 Teachers and students should respect each other.

1.2 Any policy on bullying must begin with these aims, and intend to ensure their implementation.

2 What is Bullying?

2.1 Research shows that there is no particular age group or type of school which is free from the risk of bullying. This has been borne out by the recent survey at Finham Park. It is clear that being bullied can have a devastating effect on the victim, resulting in a loss of self esteem, underachievement and absenteeism, or depression or sometimes even suicide.

2.2 “Bullying is the wilful, conscious desire to hurt or threaten or frighten someone else”. (Action Against Bullying, Scottish Office).

2.3 Three factors are implicit in bullying activities:

- “(i) It is repetitive, over a period of time.
- (ii) It involves an imbalance of power.
- (iii) It can be verbal, physical and/or psychological.” (TACADE)

2.4 How bullies exercise their illegitimate power depends on who they are, who the victim is, and the context. All bullying is aggressive, but it is more complex behaviourally than a punch up or foul language. Bullying in the form of the emotional or psychological aggression is less visible, but our survey shows that it is no less painful to the victims.

2.5 Any behaviour which is the illegitimate use of power to hurt others is bullying behaviour. However, certain types of bullying behaviour can be listed as unacceptable behaviour:

- Verbal, e.g. telling tales, name calling, racist/sexist comments, remarks about disabilities, threats.
- Looks, revealing lack of respect and non-co-operation with others.
- Cold shoulder, also revealing non-co-operation and lack of respect.
- Any threatening behaviour.
- Physical, e.g. kicking, scratching, biting, pushing, tripping, punching, fighting and intimidation.
- Interfering with others’ schoolwork or possessions.

3 Recognising Bullying

3.1 “To be seen to act is as important as taking action – silence and secrecy nurture bullying.” (Action Against Bullying, Scottish Council)

Bullies depend on a code of silence for their success. Breaking that code can be the first step in prevention.

3.2 We cannot rely on a Stereotype to tell us who is a bully, but both male and female bullies have things in common:

- bullies tend to have assertive, aggressive attitudes over which they exercise little control.
- bullies tend to lack empathy; they cannot imagine what the victim feels.

- bullies tend to lack guilt; they rationalise that the victim somehow 'deserves' the bullying treatment.

Bullies can come in gangs. This is more visible, but all bully gangs are made up of individuals needing individual responses.

3.3 Bullies pick on vulnerable people, but vulnerability is not always visible to adults. Their "difference" may be a notional one used to justify the bullying, to claim that bullying is in some way deserved or self-inflicted. Again there is no stereotype, but victims may be pupils who:

- are new to the class or school.
- are different in appearance, speech or background from other pupils.
- suffer from low self-esteem (but it's not clear whether this is a cause or effect of bullying).
- demonstrate 'entertaining' reactions when bullied, e.g. tantrums, loss of control.
- are more nervous or anxious (but witnesses who are not bullied are found to be just as anxious).

4 Taking Action

Schools which emphasise prevention have been shown to have less bullying, but "Tactics to deal with or to prevent bullying work – sometimes. There are no certain cures, only ideas which have succeeded in other contexts." (Action Against Bullying, Scottish Council).

4.1 Removing secrecy will lead to an apparent increase in bullying. To resolve this apparent increase recommended immediate responses are:

If you come across bullying what can you do?

First steps: do –

- remain calm; you are in charge. Reacting emotionally may add to the bully's fun and give the bully control of the situation.
- take the incident or report seriously.
- take action as quickly as possible.
- think hard about whether your action needs to be private or public; who are the pupils involved?
- reassure the victim(s); don't make them feel inadequate or foolish.
- offer concrete help, advice and support to the victim(s).
- make it plain to the bully that you disapprove.
- encourage the bully to see the victim's point of views.

- punish the bully if you have to, but be very careful how you do this. Reacting aggressively or punitively gives the message that it's all right to bully if you have the power.

- explain clearly the punishment and why it is being given.

Involving others: do –

- inform school management and/or other appropriate persons, e.g. the guidance staff in a secondary school.

- inform colleagues if the incident arose out of a situation where everyone would be vigilant, e.g. unsupervised toilets.

- inform/ask the Year Head to inform both sets of parents calmly, clearly and concisely; reassure both sets of parents that the incident will not linger on or be held against anyone.

Final steps: do –

- make sure the incident doesn't live on through reminders from you.

- try to think ahead to prevent a recurrence of the incident, if you uncover the trigger factor.

If you have to deal with bullying, what should you avoid?

Don't –

- be over-protective and refuse and allow the victim to help him/herself.

- assume that the bully is bad through and through; try to look objectively at the behaviour, with the bully.

- keep the whole incident a secret from the parents of the victim or of the bully.

- try to hide the incident from the parents of the victim or the bully.

- call in the parents without having a constructive plan to offer either side.

4.2 Advice from research and prevention work elsewhere mirrors the suggestions given by our own pupils in the recent survey. Therefore in implementing 4.1 we need to:

1 Raise awareness amongst staff and pupils of this policy statement, and of its thrust that bullying is NOT acceptable behaviour since it goes against the positive ethos we all wish to have at Finham Park School, "that every individual is held in high esteem". (Aims of the School)

2 Remove silence and secrecy from the bullying agenda. The most effective deterrent to bullying is other children – the victim needs to be allowed to help her/himself, and helped to become more socially skilled and assertive.

3 We need to use PSE and curricular activities as part of a prevention programme. Co-operative work and non-aggressive behaviour can be praised. Empathy can be created through role play, or exposure to relevant stories and scenarios. Language work and social education can pick up the theme of how other people feel.

4 Regular reminders in assemblies of what we are about.

5 Provision of an information box for pupils to be able to communicate their anxieties to School Council and through them to staff as relevant.

6 Raise the status of all teachers as people who can be approached and people who will get something done.

7 Be aware of what is happening around us especially in unstructured, non-timetabled time.

8 But the survey indicated an unacceptable amount of bullying in classrooms. Therefore we need to be on time to lessons as well as duties at Break.

9 Keep careful notes of all incidents since what is required is a sliding scale of responses culminating in suspension when all other strategies have failed to produce positive results.

4.3 Reports of bullying should always be taken seriously.

Bullying which is unchecked, or which teachers seem to condone by ignoring, affects not only those immediately involved but the school in general. Without a positive and caring ethos standards fall and learning cannot take place.

A positive and caring ethos demands an active anti-bullying policy.