GDST School Anti-Bullying Policy

September 2026

Statement of Philosophy

- Our school community is based on an ethos of mutual respect and consideration. The school and the GDST are committed to providing a safe and happy learning environment for all
- We do not tolerate bullying, harassment, victimisation or discrimination of any kind and work hard to prevent these or to tackle them if they occur
- Bullying is a whole school issue and we take a whole school approach in response. Any member of the community may bully or be a target of bullying: we regard all incidences of bullying equally seriously and in turn expect all staff, pupils and parents to play their part in preventing and tackling bullying.

Aims of Policy

This policy aims to:

- Try and prevent bullying, as far as possible, and
- Help staff, pupils and parents deal with bullying when it occurs.

What do we mean by bullying?

The Department for Education defines bullying as 'behaviour by an individual or group, repeated over time, that intentionally hurts another individual or group either physically or emotionally'.

This definition highlights the fact that bullying can be by an individual or a group against another individual or group**.** It is commonly accepted that bullying is deliberately hurtful (including aggression), causes feelings of distress/fear/loneliness, is difficult for the person being bullied to defend themselves against (as there is an imbalance or perceived imbalance of power) and repeated over a period of time. However, it is important to remember that, depending on its nature, a one-off incident may be considered to constitute bullying (although this is not recognised in the DfE definition) and can have precisely the same impact as persistent behaviour. The imbalance of power can manifest itself in several ways. It may be physical, psychological (knowing what upsets someone), derive from an intellectual imbalance, or by having access to the support of a group, or the capacity to socially isolate. It can result in the intimidation of a person or persons through the threat of violence or by isolating them either physically or online.

Forms of bullying can include:

- Physically hurting or attempting to hurt, harm or humiliate another person or damaging their property
- Verbal abuse such as name-calling, taunting, mocking or writing unkind notes

- Emotional manipulation such as excluding someone or spreading malicious rumours about them, building negative alliances based on gossip, or deliberately betraying former confidences to humiliate or isolate another pupil
- Cyberbullying, i.e. via social networking websites, phone calls, text messages, photographs or emails
- AI and deepfake abuse such as creating digitally altered images, videos or audio designed to mislead or impersonate and bully, harass or damage reputations.
- Unpleasant remarks or actions motivated by prejudice against particular groups, for example on grounds of:
    - Race, religion or culture
    - Sex
    - Gender, gender identity or perceived gender identity
    - Sexual orientation
    - Disability or Special Educational Needs
    - Intellectual or other abilities
    - Appearance or health conditions
    - Being adopted or a carer

Sexualised bullying, sexual violence and harassment or similar behaviour aimed at other protected characteristics will be considered child on child abuse and addressed as set out in the *Safeguarding Policy*. The school takes a zero tolerance approach towards such behaviour, which will not be passed off as 'just having a laugh,' 'banter' or 'part of growing up.'

Any behaviour that a reasonable bystander would say was intended to hurt or upset is wrong and could constitute bullying, including complicity that may fall short of participating directly in the bullying. It is no justification that the perpetrator says or believes that their target is not upset or hurt by his or her actions or words.

Much bullying is performed in subtle ways, which are not easy to detect; the perpetrator can use a simple look, word or gesture to signal an intended threat or insult. Some pupils are adept at changing a bullying situation into an apparently harmless one when an adult approaches. This makes it all the more important for pupils to be able to come forward to report bullying they have experienced or witnessed, and for staff and parents to be alert to symptoms of bullying.

Bullying is always hurtful to the individual(s) being bullied and damaging to the whole school community. Anyone and everyone who is involved in or witnesses bullying is affected by it. It can cause great distress, unhappiness and psychological damage and at its worst lead to suicide. It can also be a criminal offence, for example if the behaviour amounts to harassment or threatening behaviour.

How does bullying differ from teasing or friendship difficulties?

Sometimes pupils can feel hurt or upset because they have been teased or have fallen out with a friend. This is not the same as bullying. Bullying:

- Is deliberately intended to hurt or humiliate
- Involves a power imbalance that makes it hard for their target to defend themselves

- Is usually persistent
- Often involves no remorse or acknowledgement of the other's feelings

School staff are ready to help and support pupils who have fallen out with friends, but such situations will not be treated in the same way as a case of bullying. However, the strategies we use may be similar because we acknowledge that over a period of time the impact on the pupil may be the same, and the situation could become bullying if it escalates.

Preventing Bullying

We aim to prevent bullying by:

- Fostering a whole school ethos of good behaviour, mutual respect, and consideration. We aim to create a safe, happy, and inclusive environment for learning
- Developing a culture in which diversity is championed and celebrated and in which the school takes a proactive role in educating pupils and other members of the school community in issues around equality
- Developing a culture in which the vulnerable are protected and incidents which might demonstrate prejudice or intolerance are tackled and addressed, for example by challenging inappropriate or prejudicial language
- Encouraging all members of the school community to have high expectations and model how to behave towards each other
- Raising awareness about bullying through opportunities in the curriculum, the PSHE programme, assemblies, and national events such as Anti Bullying Week, amongst others
- Developing pupils' social skills, confidence, resilience and self-esteem; and defining the value of assertiveness in relationships as opposed to aggression, whether direct or indirect
- Educating pupils and other members of the school community about the ethical use of technology and how to keep themselves safe when online or using social media or other electronic means of communication, so they take maximum precautions to help prevent themselves being involved in cyberbullying
- Ensuring that all pupils sign up to the school's Acceptable Use Agreements, which make it clear that cyberbullying is unacceptable. This message is regularly reinforced in lessons and pastoral sessions. This message is regularly reinforced in lessons and pastoral sessions. An annual Information Evening on E -Safety is run for parents with a child in any year group to attend
- Making it clear to all that there are effective procedures for reporting (including anonymous reporting), investigating and tackling bullying, and encouraging pupils to report instances of anything they perceive to be bullying
- Making it clear to all that incidents of cyberbullying or bullying of any kind that occur off the school premises but have an impact on the classroom environment or relationships between pupils will be pursued with the same seriousness as bullying occurring within school

- Making it as easy as possible for pupils who are being bullied to talk to someone they trust and get help confidentially
- Having a strong pastoral team dedicated to pupil welfare and experienced in dealing with bullying issues. All our staff are trained in recognising and responding to bullying and staff awareness is raised through regular discussion of pupil issues in pastoral meetings. Action is taken to reduce the risk of bullying where and when it is known to be most likely to occur. The member of staff with overall responsibility for anti-bullying work is Elizabeth Clark in the senior school and Meghan McHenry in the junior school.
- Taking pupils' views into account through the school council, and developing the roles that pupils can play in anti-bullying work, for example through wellbeing surveys, assemblies and tutor time
- Ensuring that the IT filtering and monitoring systems are effective in protecting members of the school community
- Working in line with national guidance, and the requirements of our regulatory bodies.

Being aware – possible signs of bullying

Changes in behaviour that may indicate a pupil is being bullied include:

- Unwillingness to go to school or return after a break
- Failure to produce work, or producing unusually bad work, work that appears to have been copied, or interfered with or spoilt by others
- Belongings suddenly going missing or being damaged
- Change to established habits (e.g. giving up music lessons, sitting in the library instead of going out at playtime)
- Diminished levels of self confidence
- Inability to concentrate
- Anxiety, depression, becoming withdrawn or unusually quiet
- Repressed body language and poor eye contact
- Frequent absence, erratic attendance, late arrival to class
- Reluctance to leave the classroom at the end of lessons or school day
- Choosing the company of adults
- Frequent visits to the medical centre with symptoms such as stomach pains or headaches, especially at particular times or during particular lessons
- Unexplained cuts and bruises
- Difficulty in sleeping, nightmares
- Talking of suicide or running away

Although there may be other causes for these symptoms, teachers, parents and fellow pupils should be alert for these possible signs of bullying and contact a member of the pastoral team if they are concerned.

Sadly, some individuals are more vulnerable to bullying, and less likely to speak out – including LGBTQIA+ pupils and those with SEND. Again, staff, parents and peers should bear this in mind in cases of possible or suspected bullying. Further guidance for staff on preventing, identifying and dealing with such types of bullying can be found in the Anti-Bullying Guidance on the GDST intranet.

Dealing with Bullying

If you are being bullied

- Stay calm and try to appear confident. Tell the perpetrator to stop and get away from the situation as quickly as you can
- Do not suffer in silence: talk to a member of staff. This could be your class teacher, tutor or year group head, the school welfare officers or counsellor, or any other member of staff you trust. If you are unhappy about taking to a member of staff directly, you could talk to someone in your family, a friend or you could contact an organisation such as Childline. Telling does not make you a 'grass' or 'snitch': not telling means that the bullying is likely to continue. Remember you may not be the only one affected
- Be assured that we take every report of bullying seriously and will act upon it, even if it occurred outside the school. We will keep records of what has happened, and consult you and support you in whatever action we take
- Remember being bullied is not your fault – nobody ever deserves to be bullied
- If you feel you are being bullied by a member of staff or other adult you should take the same action as if it were another pupil, that is, report the matter to someone you trust. All forms of bullying are unacceptable and all reports of bullying are investigated and dealt with irrespective of who the person responsible for the bullying incident might be

If you know that someone else is being bullied

- Talk to a member of staff, or help the person being bullied to talk to a member of staff, so that the school can take steps to help
- Defend the individual and question the bullying behaviour – studies show that one of the most effective ways of stopping bullying is for fellow pupils to show their support for the person being bullied
- Try to defuse the situation: intervene as a group; walk away taking the person being bullied with you; take away the audience; distract the perpetrator or use humour to lighten up a serious situation
- Leave the chat if online
- Be sceptical about rumours concerning other pupils. Don't add to them. Put yourself in their position
- Spend time with the person being bullied and be kind to them
- Don't be a bystander. Many perpetrators will not persist in bullying unless they have an audience to play to, and by not taking action it could be argued you are condoning what is happening

What the school will do

The exact course of action will vary with each situation. The immediate objective should be that bullying incidents are brought into the open and strategies agreed to help resolve the problem, encouraging all involved to return to responsible, caring behaviour.

- All reports of bullying will be taken seriously and investigated immediately
- Bullying on the basis of protected characteristics is taken particularly seriously

- It is not possible for any person who receives a report of a bullying incident to promise that it will be kept confidential. However, the action to be taken will be discussed with the person being bullied at every stage
- Everything that happens will be carefully recorded
- The most important thing is to stop the bullying and ensure the person being bullied is safe
- We aim for a peaceful resolution: revenge is not helpful or appropriate
- The person being bullied will be supported throughout the process
- Sanctions may be imposed (see below) but guidance and help will also be available for the perpetrator(s) to help change their behaviour
- Staff will monitor the situation to ensure that the bullying does not continue. If bullying recurs, further action will be taken
- The school will record all bullying incidents, so that we can monitor the effectiveness of our anti-bullying measures and identify any patterns in order to inform preventative work and the future development of policies and procedures.

Further guidance for staff on responding to bullying can be found in the Anti-Bullying Guidance on the sGDST intranet.

Sanctions

It is important that those found responsible for bullying are held to account and accept responsibility for the harm caused. Action taken in response to bullying will be intended to communicate unambiguous disapproval of the perpetrator's activities, and this will usually include sanctions. Sanctions help reassure the person being bullied that the bullying will stop; they help those responsible recognise the harm caused by their behaviour and deter them from repeating it; they demonstrate to the school community that bullying is unacceptable and that the school has effective ways of dealing with it, so deterring others from behaving in a similar way.

If sanctions are warranted, the person(s) responsible will receive a sanction in accordance with the school's behaviour policy. Any sanctions imposed will be fair, proportionate and reasonable, take account of any special educational needs or disabilities that pupils may have, and consider the needs of vulnerable pupils.

In any serious case of bullying the Head will be informed and the school will work with the parents of both parties. The school will remain in regular contact with parents until the situation is resolved.

In the most serious cases, the sanction may be fixed term or permanent exclusion.

A bullying incident will be regarded as a child protection concern when there is 'reasonable cause to suspect that a child is suffering, or is likely to suffer, significant harm' (Children Act 1989). Where this is the case, after the Head has been involved, it may be necessary to make a report to the Social Services and in certain cases the police.

Partnership with Parents

We believe that working with parents/guardians is essential to establishing the school's anti-bullying ethos and resolving any issues that arise

- Parents are encouraged to reinforce the principles of the Anti-Bullying Policy at home
- Parents are asked to let Heads Year know directly if they have cause for concern, either on behalf of their own children or because of rumours about others
- In any serious case of bullying parents will be informed by the school and may be invited in to discuss the matter. We will keep in regular contact with parents until the issue is resolved

Links to other policies

This policy operates in conjunction with:

- Behaviour Policy
- Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy
- GDST Acceptable Use Agreements
- GDST Inclusion Policy
- GDST Exclusions Policy
- GDST Equal Opportunities Policy
- GDST Online Safety Policy
- PSR sessions and Enrichment work
- Six Stages Framework

Monitoring and evaluation

The effectiveness of this policy and the school's anti bullying strategies will be evaluated annually through a review of the bullying log and consultation with the school council.

This policy will be reviewed annually.

Further information and guidance

A list of useful websites, contacts and resources can be found in the Anti-Bullying Guidance on the GDST intranet.

Key Contacts

- Deputy Head: Pastoral: e.clark@sut.gdst.net
- Head of Prep: e.ruiz@sut.gdst.net
- School Welfare Officer: s.phillips@sut.gdst.net
- Head of Year 7: s.manser@sut.gdst.net
- Head of Year 8 m.brandon@sut.gdst.net
- Head of Year 9: l.worrall@sut.gdst.net

- Head of Year 10: h.patterson@sut.gdst.net
- Head of Year 11: l.karim@sut.gdst.net
- Head of Sixth Form: h.harvey@sut.gdst.net

- Childline: 0800 1111

Anti-Bullying Policy

Cyberbullying Annex

The school's response to cyberbullying, both preventive and reactive, is integrated into its response to its anti-bullying work as a whole, as outlined in the main Anti-Bullying Policy. However, there are some points that are specific to online abuse which are covered in this annex.

What do we mean by cyberbullying?

Cyberbullying can be defined as:
'the use of technologies by an individual or by a group of people to deliberately and repeatedly upset someone else'[1]
The use of technology as a tool for bullying has increased significantly and, inevitably, changes rapidly as technology use and trends evolve. This kind of bullying can be particularly devastating to the person being bullied, as they are unable to escape the (sometimes anonymous) perpetrator(s) as the taunts and intimidation follow them home, invade their personal space, and can extend to a wide audience. Single incidents of abuse can quickly escalate into cyberbullying by reposting, sharing and commenting, and once something is posted on the internet it is likely to leave a lasting digital trail.
Cyberbullying is not a rare occurrence. A report from Public Health England showed that 17.9% of 11-15 year olds had experienced cyberbullying in the two months prior to being surveyed[2]. It also found that cyberbullying increased with age, but that it does not create a large number of new targets – it tends to be a modern tool used to supplement traditional forms of bullying.
The school regards this type of bullying very seriously and will take action whether reported cyberbullying takes place in or out of school, during or outside school hours. The Education Act 2006 includes legal powers that allow the Head to regulate the behaviour of pupils when they are off site. Any disrespectful or inconsiderate behaviour online is both wrong and in direct contravention of the school's Acceptable Use Agreements.
Furthermore, criminal laws apply to a range of behaviours linked to cyberbullying including stalking, threats, accessing computer systems without permission, and circulating sexual images. Where cyberbullying could potentially constitute a crime, the school will report the case to the police.

AI and Deepfake Abuse

The school recognises the growing risks posed by artificial intelligence, particularly the creation and misuse of deepfake content. Deepfakes, or digitally altered images, videos or audio designed to mislead or impersonate could be used to bully, harass, or damage reputations. Such behaviour is strictly prohibited and will be treated as a serious

safeguarding or behavioural concern. Pupils are educated about the ethical use of AI and encouraged to report any incidents involving AI-generated abuse.

Forms of cyberbullying

There are many forms that cyberbullying can take, including:

- **Threats and intimidation by mobile phone, email, within online games, or via comments on websites, social networking sites or message boards**
- **Harassment or stalking, e.g., by repeatedly sending unwanted messages or making calls (including silent calls) – or using public forums to post derogatory or defamatory statements.**
- **Vilification/defamation – including posting upsetting or defamatory remarks about an individual, or name-calling and general insults**
- **Ostracising/peer rejection/exclusion – e.g., setting up a closed group to deliberately exclude an individual, excluding people from online conversations, or talking behind their back**
- **Identity theft / unauthorised access and impersonation**
- **Publicly posting, sending or forwarding personal or private information or images**
- **Artificial Intelligence-driven online abuse such as deepfake images and videos, voice-cloned calls, algorithmically generated hate speech, and bot-driven harassment campaigns**

Cyberbullying is often linked to discrimination, including on the basis of sex, race, faith, sexual orientation, gender identity or special educational needs and disabilities. Girls report experiencing a higher incidence of cyberbullying than boys, and in particular are disproportionately subject to online sexual harassment.

Protecting yourself from cyberbullying

Following good online safety precautions can, to some extent, protect you from online bullying. Privacy settings should be kept up to date and personal information such as mobile numbers and email addresses only shared with trusted friends. It is also advisable to monitor your screen time and avoid dependence on social media – which is designed to be addictive.

You should also consciously protect yourself from being drawn into bullying others online. It is far easier to post or send an unkind electronic message than to say something hurtful face to face. Initial incidents can have unintended consequences, and one upsetting post or message may escalate into cyberbullying involving many people over time. Cyberbullying also attracts virtual bystanders, i.e., those who participate in the abuse through their involvement in online surveys and discussion groups, or by passing on images or messages. This adds to the humiliation felt by the person being bullied and will be treated as collusion in bullying by the school.

What to do if you are being bullied online

Whatever form bullying takes, it is very important to report it to a member of staff, parent or other adult you trust.

Do not retaliate or return the message. However, you should keep a record of abusive incidents, particularly: the date and time, content of the message(s), and where possible

the sender's ID or the web address of the content and a screenshot. Keeping evidence will be important in identifying the perpetrator(s) and taking action to stop the bullying. You can also block abusive contacts and consider changing your user ID, nickname or profile.

What the school will do

If a cyberbullying incident does not constitute a criminal offence, the school will take steps to contain it by removing upsetting material from devices and services as quickly as possible. If the incident does constitute a criminal offence, it will be reported according to the relevant protocols and the evidence secured appropriately.

The school can confiscate, retain or dispose of a pupil's devices as a disciplinary penalty, where this is reasonable. The Head and members of staff formally authorised by the Head can search a pupil's device without consent if there are reasonable grounds that it contains items specified as prohibited. Locally held content can be deleted, if it is not to be retained as evidence.

Cyberbullying of staff
The school has a responsibility to safeguard staff as well as pupils against the threat of cyberbullying. Malicious conduct against staff online will be pursued with the same vigour as that against pupils. Staff are reminded of the importance of keeping privacy and security settings up to date, regularly checking their online presence, and observing the guidelines in the Social Media Policy. Any member of staff subject to online abuse should keep evidence of the incident and report it to their line manager or a senior member of staff as soon as possible.

Advice for parents
Protect your daughter by making sure she understands how to use technology safely and knows about the risks and consequences of misuse and be open and curious about your child's activity online, so that she feels she can talk to you if something goes wrong. There are also safety features you can install on devices to help protect the user.
If you are concerned, search your daughter's name online, look at her profiles and posting on social media and community sites, review web pages or blogs, and watch out for nervous or secretive behaviour, such as rapidly switching screens or displaying anxiety when being kept away from the internet, and for attempts to hide online behaviour, such as empty file history. Be aware that your child may as likely cyberbully as be a target of cyberbullying. If you suspect or discover that your child is cyberbullying or being cyberbullied, contact the school. Parents can also take action by reporting abusive content to service providers or social networking sites.

Further sources of advice and support
Cyberbullying: understand, prevent and respond (Childnet)
Cyberbullying: advice for headteachers and school staff (DfE)
Advice for parents and carers on cyberbullying (DfE)
Sharing nudes and semi-nudes: advice for education settings working with children and young people (UKCIS)
Anti Bullying Alliance – collates resources from member organisations in one place and includes pages for schools, parents and young people. Cyberbullying section:

https://www.anti-bullyingalliance.org.uk/tools-information/all-about-bullying/online-bullying
CEOP for making a report about online abuse
UK Safer Internet Centre for reporting and removing harmful online content

Report Remove – Childline's service to help those under 18 get a nude image of themselves removed

Take it down – a tool from the National Centre for Missing and Exploited Children for removing or stopping the online sharing of images or videos

Professional Online Safety Helpline (POSH) Tel: 0344 381 4772

Education Support Partnership Tel: 08000 562 561

Stop Online Abuse provides advice for women and LGBTQIA+ people

[1] **Cyberbullying: Understand, Prevent and Respond – Guidance for schools (Childnet International)**
[2] **Cyberbullying: An analysis of data from the Health Behaviour in School-aged Children (HBSC) survey for England, 2014**