Westacre Middle School

Anti-Bullying Policy

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Date updated	Autumn 2026
Date of next review	Autumn 2028, or earlier if required
Date policy approved	Autumn 2026
Committee	Full Governing Body

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Introduction

Everyone at Westacre Middle School has the right to feel welcome, secure and happy. We aim to provide a safe, caring and inclusive learning environment in which all pupils can thrive, improve their life chances and maximise their potential. We openly discuss difference, celebrate diversity and make clear that bullying, prejudice and discrimination are not acceptable.

We expect pupils to act safely and to feel safe in school. Pupils should understand what bullying is, know how to report concerns and be confident that concerns will be taken seriously, recorded appropriately and responded to promptly. We also want parents and carers to feel confident that their children are safe and cared for and that concerns are handled fairly and sensitively.

Purpose and scope

This policy sets out how Westacre Middle School prevents, identifies and responds to bullying involving pupils. It should be read alongside the Behaviour Policy, Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy, Online Safety/Acceptable Use Policy, Equality Policy and relevant SEND procedures.

Bullying or harassment of staff is addressed through the school's staff conduct, grievance and dignity-at-work arrangements. Where a pupil directs bullying, harassment or abusive behaviour towards a member of staff, the Behaviour Policy and safeguarding procedures will also apply as appropriate.

Definition of bullying

Bullying is usually understood as behaviour by an individual or group that is repeated over time, intentionally hurts another person physically or emotionally and involves an imbalance of power. It can happen face to face or online.

> **Important distinction**
> A one-off conflict, disagreement or unkind act is not usually bullying, but it must still be addressed. Some single incidents - for example sexual violence, sexual harassment, discriminatory abuse, threats or serious online harm - may be safeguarding or behaviour concerns even when they do not meet the repeated-behaviour definition of bullying.

Children and young people are still learning how to manage relationships and conflict. Staff should avoid labelling a child as a "bully". The focus should be on the behaviour, its impact, accountability, support and the steps needed to prevent recurrence.

Forms of bullying

Bullying may include repeated incidents of:

- Physical behaviour - pushing, poking, kicking, hitting, biting, pinching, damaging belongings or other unwanted physical contact.
- Verbal behaviour - name-calling, sarcasm, threats, teasing, belittling, discriminatory language or persistent comments intended to humiliate or intimidate.
- Emotional or relational behaviour - excluding, isolating, tormenting, humiliating, manipulating, coercing, spreading rumours or using threatening gestures.
- Sexual bullying or harassment - sexualised comments, unwanted sexual attention or touching, sexual rumours, coercion, or the sharing or threatened sharing of sexual images. Any concern of this nature must also be considered under safeguarding procedures.
- Online/cyber bullying - harmful or intimidating messages, posts, images, videos or group-chat activity; impersonation; deliberate exclusion; repeated harassment; or using digital technology to facilitate other forms of bullying.

- Prejudice-based or discriminatory bullying - behaviour connected with a protected characteristic or perceived difference, including racist, faith-based, sexist, homophobic, biphobic, transphobic or disability-related bullying.
- Indirect bullying - encouraging others to exclude, isolate or target someone, or exploiting another pupil's vulnerability.
- Financial bullying or exploitation - threats, coercion, extortion or pressure to provide money, possessions, access to accounts or other items of value.

Equality and protected characteristics

The school will challenge prejudice-based and discriminatory language and behaviour and will meet its duties under the Equality Act 2010. The protected characteristics are age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation. The way particular provisions of the Act apply to schools and pupils varies by characteristic and context.

Staff should also be alert to bullying linked to other aspects of identity or circumstance, such as SEND, appearance, family circumstances, care experience, young-carer status, socioeconomic disadvantage, health needs or being new to the school.

Bullying prevention

Preventing bullying is part of our whole-school approach to behaviour, safeguarding, personal development and inclusion. We aim to build a culture in which pupils understand respectful relationships, recognise harmful behaviour and know how to seek help.

- Clear behaviour expectations, consistently modelled and reinforced by staff.
- Age-appropriate teaching through PSHE/RSHE, assemblies, tutor/class time and planned opportunities such as Anti-Bullying Week.
- Teaching pupils about difference, protected characteristics, respectful relationships, online safety and the impact of harmful language and behaviour.
- Active supervision and identification of locations, times or online contexts where bullying concerns are more likely to arise.
- Use of pupil voice, pastoral information and behaviour/safeguarding records to identify patterns, vulnerable groups and repeat concerns.
- Appropriate support for pupils who are bullied and for pupils whose behaviour is causing harm, including consideration of SEND, communication needs and other vulnerabilities.
- Working with parents/carers and, where necessary, external agencies.

Reporting concerns - we are a TELLING school

Pupils are explicitly taught to tell an adult if they are worried that they or someone else may be experiencing bullying. Concerns can be raised with any trusted adult. Where available, pupils who find it difficult to approach an adult directly may use the school's "Time to Talk" arrangements or another agreed pastoral route.

Parents and carers are encouraged to contact the school promptly if they have concerns. Staff should listen carefully, avoid making promises of confidentiality, reassure the pupil that the concern will be taken seriously and explain what will happen next in an age-appropriate way.

Procedures for responding to an allegation of bullying

1. Record the concern promptly, including names, dates, times, locations, the pupil's account, relevant witnesses and any available evidence. Where online content is involved, preserve evidence where it is safe and lawful to do so.

2. Assess immediate safety and safeguarding needs. If there is any safeguarding concern, staff must follow the Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy and inform the Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) or deputy without delay.
3. Inform the relevant Head of Year and, where appropriate, a member of the Senior Leadership Team. Decide who will lead the investigation and how the pupils involved will be supported while it is completed.
4. Gather information fairly and proportionately, speaking to pupils separately where appropriate. Avoid repeated questioning that could cause distress, especially where there are allegations of sexual violence, sexual harassment or other abuse.
5. Decide, on the balance of the information available, whether bullying is substantiated, not substantiated, or whether there is insufficient evidence to reach a clear conclusion. Regardless of the label, any harmful behaviour identified should be addressed.
6. Inform parents/carers as appropriate, taking account of safeguarding considerations and any advice from the DSL or external agencies.
7. Agree and record actions. These may include support, increased supervision, restorative work where suitable and voluntary, behaviour consequences, pastoral intervention, SEND support, safety planning, referrals to external agencies, or suspension/permanent exclusion in the most serious cases in line with the Behaviour Policy and statutory guidance.
8. Set a review date and monitor the situation. The school should check that the bullying has stopped, that the pupil feels safe and that there has been no retaliation or continuation online or outside school.

Restorative approach

Westacre Middle School uses restorative approaches to help pupils understand impact, repair harm and rebuild relationships where this is safe and appropriate. Restorative work is not a substitute for safeguarding action or proportionate consequences.

> **Restorative work must be suitable and voluntary**
> A pupil who has been harmed must not be pressured to meet, confront or forgive the pupil who caused the harm. Joint restorative meetings will not be used where they could increase risk or distress, including where there are concerns about sexual violence, coercion, exploitation, significant power imbalance or ongoing safeguarding risk.

Where restorative questions are appropriate, staff may ask:

1. What happened?
2. What were you thinking and feeling at the time?
3. Who has been affected and how?
4. What could be done differently next time?
5. What needs to happen now to make things as right and safe as possible?

Safeguarding and child-on-child abuse

Bullying can be a safeguarding issue. Staff must remain alert to child-on-child abuse, including sexual violence, sexual harassment, abuse in intimate personal relationships, physical abuse, harmful sexual behaviour, consensual and non-consensual sharing of nude or semi-nude images and videos, online abuse, coercion and exploitation.

Any safeguarding concern must be referred to the DSL or deputy and managed under the school's Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy and Keeping Children Safe in Education. The DSL will consider the need for early help, children's social care, police or other specialist advice. The school will not conduct an internal investigation in a way that compromises a police or statutory safeguarding process.

Victims will be taken seriously, kept safe and supported. A child should never be made to feel that they are creating a problem by reporting bullying, abuse or harassment, or be made to feel ashamed for making a report.

Incidents outside school and online

Bullying may occur outside the school premises or online. Where off-site or online behaviour has an impact on pupils' safety, wellbeing, education or the orderly running of the school, the school may respond in line with its Behaviour Policy and its legal powers. This may include behaviour while travelling to or from school, on educational visits, in the local community or online.

The school will support pupils and parents/carers, provide pastoral support where needed and signpost or refer to appropriate agencies. Serious threats, harassment, hate incidents, sexual offences or other suspected criminal behaviour may be referred to the police or other relevant services.

Supporting pupils

Support will be tailored to need and may include a trusted adult, regular check-ins, safety planning, changes to supervision, pastoral support, counselling or external support, SEND review, work on relationships and social skills, or adjustments to reduce known triggers or vulnerabilities.

Pupils whose behaviour is causing harm may also require support. Staff should consider underlying needs, safeguarding concerns, SEND, communication difficulties, peer dynamics and contextual factors while maintaining clear boundaries and accountability for behaviour.

Engaging with parents and carers

The school will work constructively with parents and carers of pupils who have experienced bullying and pupils whose behaviour is causing harm. Parents/carers will be informed of significant concerns and actions where appropriate, subject to safeguarding and confidentiality considerations. Where a parent/carer remains dissatisfied, the school's complaints procedure should be followed.

Recording, monitoring and review

- Bullying concerns and outcomes will be recorded on the school's agreed behaviour/safeguarding recording system, with safeguarding information recorded in accordance with the Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy.
- Records will identify the nature of the concern, including prejudice-based or discriminatory elements where relevant, actions taken, parent/carer contact and review outcomes.
- Leaders will monitor patterns and trends, including repeat concerns, locations, times, pupil groups and online issues, and will use this information to inform prevention and staff training.
- The Governing Body will monitor the effectiveness of the policy through appropriate reports from school leaders.
- This policy will be reviewed at least every two years and earlier where legislation, statutory guidance, local safeguarding procedures or school monitoring indicate that changes are needed.

Other relevant policies and guidance

- Behaviour Policy
- Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy
- Online Safety / Acceptable Use Policy
- Equality Policy
- SEND Policy / SEND Information Report
- Complaints Policy
- Suspension and Permanent Exclusion Policy or procedures

Appendix 1 - Bullying concern and investigation record

This form supports consistent recording. Safeguarding concerns must also be recorded and managed through the school's safeguarding system and procedures.

Date concern raised

Pupil(s) affected - name/class

Pupil(s) alleged to have caused harm - name/class

Staff member leading response

Initial concern / allegation

Include what was reported, by whom, when and where. Record the pupil's own words where important.

_____
_____

Immediate safety and safeguarding action

Record any DSL referral, safety plan, supervision change, medical support, police/social care advice or evidence preservation.

_____
_____

Investigation / information gathered

Record conversations, witness information and relevant online or documentary evidence. Note where evidence is unavailable.

_____
_____

Decision

Bullying substantiated / Not substantiated / Insufficient evidence / Other harmful behaviour identified.

_____
_____

Outcome and action plan

Record support for the pupil affected, action with the pupil who caused harm, consequences, restorative work if appropriate and voluntary, referrals and any SEND adjustments.

_____
_____

Parent/carer communication

Record who was contacted, by whom, when and the key information shared.

_____
_____

Monitoring and review

Set review dates and record whether the behaviour has stopped, whether the pupil feels safe, and any further action required.

_____
_____

Nature of concern - tick all that apply

☐ Physical

☐ Verbal / name-calling / threats

☐ Emotional / relational

☐ Online / cyber

☐ Sexual bullying / harassment

☐ Racist

☐ Faith-based

☐ Homophobic / biphobic

☐ Transphobic / gender reassignment-related

☐ Disability / SEND-related

☐ Financial exploitation / extortion

☐ Other prejudice-based / other

Signed: _____ Date: _____