

THE ALTERNATIVE SCHOOL LTD

Cyber Bullying Policy



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Policy Statement

The Alternative School has a duty to protect pupils and staff from online activities that are harmful and damaging and which can, in some circumstances, constitute a criminal act. Cyberbullying - the use of new and emerging technologies to cause harm or distress to another person – poses a growing challenge and the school possesses a clear framework of policies giving guidance in this area.

The Alternative School also ensures that pupils and staff understand the school's expectations in regard to the acceptable use of ICT and e-safety. In addition, we are committed to providing an effective, age-appropriate and ongoing program of E-Safety and related education throughout a pupil's time at the school. There is a clear system of sanctions in place for those who fall short of expectations. This policy outlines in greater detail how pupils, parents/carers and staff can work together to foster an environment in which cyberbullying is not tolerated and where there is effective detection of and sanction for those involved in it (See Anti-Bullying Policy).

In line with DfE Advice (Cyberbullying: Advice for Headteachers and School Staff, DfE November 2014) all forms of bullying (including cyberbullying) should be handled as a community issue for the whole school. While the school will take measures to prevent and tackle bullying among pupils, it is equally important that school makes it clear that bullying of staff, whether by pupils, parents/carers or colleagues, is unacceptable.

School leaders, teachers, school staff, parents/carers and pupils all have rights and responsibilities in relation to cyberbullying and should work together to create an environment in which pupils can learn and develop and staff can have fulfilling careers free from harassment and bullying. At The Alternative School we encourage all members of the school community, including parents/carers, to use social media responsibly including offering support to parents/carers on how to help their children engage safely and responsibly with social media via sign-posting advice in the school newsletter and parent/teacher meetings.

The school is committed to developing a positive home-school relationship in which parents/carers are aware and understand how to communicate with the school and how to raise concerns in an appropriate manner. It is not acceptable for pupils, parents/carers or colleagues to denigrate and bully school staff via social media in the same way that it is unacceptable to do so face to face.

All members of the school community are expected to understand and follow the policies and procedures regarding acceptable use of technologies including rules about the use of school equipment, software and access routes, acceptable behaviour of pupils and staff and the support and advice provided for staff and pupils when incidents of cyberbullying are reported.

This policy should be read in conjunction with the following:

- Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy
- Anti-Bullying Policy
- Behaviour Policy
- E-Safety Policy
- ICT Acceptable Use Policy
- PSD programme
- Staff Code of Conduct

Cyberbullying definition

Mr Bill Belsey, the creator of the web site: www.cyberbullying.org defined this unpleasant and particularly intrusive phenomenon in the following terms:
"Cyberbullying involves the use of information and communication technologies to support deliberate, repeated, and hostile behaviour by an individual or group that is intended to harm others."

Cyberbullying can involve Social Networking Sites, mobile phone apps, games consoles, emails and mobile phones used for SMS messages and as cameras.

Identifying types of Cyber Bullying.

We must be aware of the different ways that ICT can be abused so that we can effectively investigate and respond to instances of online and mobile bullying.

Technology can be misused in myriad ways, as highlighted by the following examples: Computers, Consoles, iPads, Android and Windows, Tablets & Mobile phones. Bullies may make malicious - or silent - calls or send nasty, threatening, intimidating or harassing text messages. Devices can be used to take and share humiliating images of children and young people (and staff). Video clips of children and young people being harassed can be recorded on a device and sent to other devices or uploaded onto internet sites.

Instant messenger (IM): -

Nasty messages or attachments can be sent by IM. Bullies sometimes use someone else's IM account to forward rude or mean messages to the victim's list of friends.

Chatrooms and message boards: -

Bullying can happen through nasty or threatening anonymous messages. Groups of people can use these to pick on an individual or deliberately ignore them. Sometimes people pretend to be someone else in order to become a 'friend' and gain personal information that they then use against the victim e.g., for spreading secrets or blackmail.

Email: -

Email can be misused to send nasty or threatening messages. Unsuitable images or video clips or viruses may be sent as an email attachment. Bullies sometimes hack into a victim's account to forward personal emails or delete emails and personal contacts.

Webcams: -

Inappropriate content can be sent and received via webcam. Victims may also be persuaded – or threatened – into acting in inappropriate ways that are captured on webcam.

Social networking sites: -

Bullies may use social networking sites to post nasty comments and humiliating images or videos. Groups of people may pick on an individual by deliberately excluding them from a network or a friends list. Bullies can also create distasteful fake profiles of their victim to upset or harass them or to get them into trouble.

Video hosting sites: -

Incidents of misuse include the posting of embarrassing or humiliating film of someone.

Virtual learning environments (VLEs): -

These may be misused to post inappropriate messages or images.

Gaming sites, consoles and virtual worlds: -

Players may pick on weaker or less experienced users, repeatedly killing their characters. They may also call the victim names and make abusive or derogatory remarks.

The equipment may be used to forward unwanted messages to other devices in the immediate vicinity via Bluetooth™ technology.

Generative artificial intelligence (AI)

Artificial intelligence (AI) tools are now widespread and easy to access. Staff, pupils and parents/carers may be familiar with generative chatbots such as ChatGPT and Google Bard.

TAS recognises that AI has many uses to help pupils learn but may also have the potential to be used to bully others. For example, in the form of 'deepfakes', where AI is used to create images, audio or video hoaxes that look real.

TAS will treat any use of AI to bully pupils in line with our anti-bullying/cyber bullying policy.

Signs of bullying

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

- Unwillingness to be in school.
- Displays of excessive anxiety, becoming withdrawn or unusually quiet.
- Failure to produce work, or producing unusually bad work, or work that appears to have been copied, interfered with or spoilt by others.
- Books, bags and other belongings suddenly go missing or are damaged.
- Change to established habits and behaviors (e.g. giving up music lessons, change to accent or vocabulary).
- Diminished levels of self-confidence.
- Unexplained cuts and bruises.
- Frequent absence, erratic attendance, late arrival to class.

- Choosing the company of adults.
- Displaying repressed body language and poor eye contact.
- Difficulty in sleeping, experiencing nightmares etc.
- Talking of suicide or running away.

Although there may be other causes for some of the above symptoms, a repetition of, or a combination of these possible signs of bullying should be investigated by parents/carers and teachers.

Key advice to pupils on how to deal with cyberbullying: Do not be enticed into sending compromising messages/posts.

- Always respect others: think about what you say online and what images you send/post.
- Remember that anything you publish online can be made public very quickly and you will never be sure who may have seen it. Once something is posted, assume it is permanently public.
- Treat your password carefully – never share it with anyone and only give personal information like a mobile phone number or email address to trusted friends.
- Learn how to block or report online bullies or anyone behaving badly.
- Don't retaliate or reply to nasty messages.
- Save the evidence – text messages, online conversation, pictures etc.
- If you see cyberbullying going on, then support the victim and report it.
- Avoid using anonymous websites.

Remember: If you have any concerns relating to cyberbullying, please speak to your Class Teacher or another member of staff immediately and to your parents/carers, if you feel you can.

Key advice for parents/carers on how to deal with cyberbullying:

- Model positive online behaviour - it's important that children and young people know how to act safely and responsibly online and are aware of what content is acceptable and unacceptable to post or share.
- Talk to your child and understand how they are using the internet and their phone.
- Use safety tools and parental controls:
<http://www.saferinternet.org.uk/advice-and-resources/parents-and-carers/parental-controls> outlines how you can turn on 'parental filtering' in the home. Some providers can offer more sophisticated services than others, but all internet providers are obliged to offer a parental filtering option.
- Remind your child not to retaliate to any cyberbullying.
- Work with the school to resolve the issue and to obtain help and advice.
- Keep any evidence of cyberbullying – emails, online conversations, texts, screenshots of sites/chat messages – and try and include time/date where possible.
- Report the cyberbullying: contact the service provider (e.g. the website, gaming site or mobile phone company) to report the user and if possible, to remove the content. Contact the School so it can take action if it involves other pupils.
- If the cyberbullying is serious and a potential criminal offense has been committed, then contact the police.

Key advice to protect staff:

All school staff are in a position of trust, and there are expectations that they will act in a professional manner at all times.

- Ensure you understand the school's policies on the use of social media. Childnet's ['Using Technology' guide](#) has more information on what to be aware of.
- Do not leave a computer or any other device logged in when you are away from your desk.
- Enabling a PIN or passcode is an important step to protect you from losing personal data and images (or having them copied and shared) from your mobile phone or device if it is lost, stolen, or accessed by pupils.
- Keep all passwords and login details secret and ensure you lock your computer or office if away from your desk.
- Make sure you understand how to secure any websites or social networking services you use.
- Familiarise yourself with the privacy and security settings of the social media and apps you use and ensure they are kept up to date. Advice can be found on the ['Safer internet advice and resources for parents and carers'](#).
- Keep a check on your online presence – for example by typing your name into a search engine. If there is negative content online it is much easier to deal with this as soon as it appears. 'The UK Safer Internet Center's Reputation' mini site has more information on this.
- Be aware that your reputation could be harmed by what others share about you online, such as friends tagging you in inappropriate posts, photographs, or videos.
- Always think carefully before you post and don't post any information (photos, videos, comments) publicly online that you wouldn't want employers, colleagues, pupils or parents/carers to see. Just because a profile might be set to 'private' it doesn't mean that someone else can't copy or share it without your knowledge.
- Consider your own conduct online; certain behaviour could breach your employment code of conduct.
- Also consider if it could bring you, the school's or someone else's reputation into disrepute: posting something inappropriate, obscene or threatening online could lead to criminal, civil and/or disciplinary action.
- Discuss these same issues with close family, friends and colleagues, as you could become a target if they do not have security and privacy settings in place.
- Do not add or accept friend requests from pupils (past or present) or their parents/carers on any personal social networking accounts. Discuss any issues with this (for example any pre-existing relationships) with the school.
- Be aware that your social media friends may also be friends with pupils and their family members and therefore could read your post if you do not have appropriate privacy settings.
- Do not use your own personal devices or personal social networking profiles to contact pupils or parents/carers.
- Do not give out personal contact details – if pupils need to contact you with regard to homework or exams, always use your school contact details.
- On school trips, staff should use a school mobile phone and never their own.
- Use your school email address for school business and personal email

address for your private life; do not mix the two. This includes file sharing sites, for example Dropbox and YouTube.

- Ensure that the school's rules and policies regarding the use of technologies by pupils and staff are enforced. Make sure you read and understand the school's E-Safety and related Appropriate Use Policies.

If you are bullied online:

- You should never respond or retaliate to cyberbullying incidents. You should report incidents appropriately and seek support from your line manager; Headteacher; DSL/DDSL or a senior member of staff.
- Always report any incidents of cyberbullying in a timely manner.
- Make sure you save and keep any evidence of cyberbullying, e.g., screenshots and, where possible, record times, dates and usernames
- Where the perpetrator is known to be a current pupil or colleague, the majority of cases can be dealt with most effectively through the school's own mediation and disciplinary procedures.
- Where the perpetrator is known to be an adult, in nearly all cases, the first action should be for a Headteacher/senior staff member to invite the person to a meeting to address their concerns, and if they have a reasonable complaint, to make sure they know how to raise this appropriately. They can request that the person removes the offending comments.
- If they refuse, it should be an organisational decision what to do next – either the school or you could report the matter to the social networking site if it breaches their terms, or seek guidance from the local authority, legal advisers or support from other agencies for example, [The UK Safer Internet Centre](#)
- If the comments are threatening or abusive, sexist, of a sexual nature or constitute a hate crime, you or a representative from the school may consider contacting the local police. Online harassment is a crime.

Employers have a duty to support staff, and no-one should feel victimised in the workplace. Staff should seek support from the senior management team, and their union representative if they are a member.

The Professional Online Safety Helpline is a free service for professionals and volunteers working with children and young people, delivered by the UK Safer Internet Centre. The helpline provides signposting, advice and mediation to resolve the e-safety issues which staff face, such as protecting professional identity, online harassment, or problems affecting young people, for example, cyberbullying or sexting issues.

The Safer Internet Centre has developed strategic partnerships with the key players in the internet industry. When appropriate, this enables the Professional helpline to seek resolution directly with the policy and safety teams at relevant social media sites.

- ❖ (See: Cyberbullying: Advice for Headteachers and school staff, DfE, November 2014 for further information, useful links and service provider contact details)

Review, Scrutiny and Training

Who is responsible for implementing the policy?

The Headteacher, School Management Team and all staff.

Monitoring and Success Criteria

Number of reported incidents, response to parent/carer and pupil questionnaires and lessons learned from incidents are fed back into the PSD programme, as appropriate.

Headteachers and senior leaders meet every month during which time any incidents of bullying, including cyberbullying, are reviewed together with discussion to assess and respond to any emerging patterns or trends. There is a regular review of the actions taken by the school in response to any incident of bullying/cyberbullying and an assessment of the effectiveness of any actions taken. There are formal biannual reviews of the Anti- Bullying and Cyberbullying Policies and reports to the TAS Advisory Board.

The school will raise staff awareness, knowledge and understanding through training and take action to reduce the risk of cyberbullying at the times and places where it is most likely to occur.

Opportunities will also be sought to allow parents/carers to contribute to the school's actions to prevent bullying/cyberbullying. Parents/carers and pupil surveys obtained at each review will be used to facilitate an understanding of the level and type of bullying that pupils might have experienced.

- TAS will provide ongoing training for staff regarding cyberbullying, and it is recommended that staff do further reading around current cyber bullying issues as part of their ongoing CPD.

Further References:

- Preventing and tackling bullying, Advice for Headteachers, staff and governing bodies, DfE, October 2014
- Cyberbullying: Advice for Headteachers and school staff, DfE, November 2014
- <http://www.bullying.co.uk/cyberbullying/>
- <http://www.childnet.com/>
- <http://www.childline.org.uk/Explore/Bullying/>
- https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/444865/Advice_for_parents_on_cyberbullying.pdf
- <http://www.anti-bullyingalliance.org.uk/media/5926/abw2013-parents-10-top-tips.pdf>
- <http://www.saferinternet.org.uk/advice-and-resources/parents-and-carers/parental-controls>
- <http://www.saferinternet.org.uk/advice-and-resources/teachers-and-professionals>