

# ACT Schools Anti-Bullying and Harassment Policy and Procedures

## Commitment

Bullying and harassment is an anti-social behaviour which affects everyone; it is unacceptable and it will not be tolerated. ACT Schools has an ethos of good behaviour where learners treat one another and the staff with respect because they know that this is the right way to behave. Values of respect for staff and other learners, an understanding of the value of learning and a clear understanding of how our actions affect others permeate the ACT Schools environment and are reinforced by staff and learners alike. ACT Schools staff and leaders are committed to creating an environment that prevents bullying, harassment and victimisation from being a serious problem in the first place and all learners are introduced to ACT School's stance on bullying during induction. ACT Schools has taken guidance from the Welsh Government's anti-bullying guidance (launched in 2019).

Under this guidance, we are committed to:

- take a proactive approach to prevent all forms of bullying and harassment
- have an anti-bullying policy linking to wider school policies including behaviour and safeguarding
- record and monitor incidents of bullying and harassment to help take pro-active steps to challenge bullying and harassment
- to regularly review our anti-bullying and harassment policy and strategy in collaboration with their learners
- adopting a whole-school approach for promoting positive, respectful behaviour between staff and learners as part of our whole-school approach to health and well-being
- providing a focus on positive behaviour and action, emphasising what learners should be doing, rather than concentrating on negative behaviour underpinned by a 'must not' culture
- utilising tailored intervention approaches when faced with incidents of bullying and harassment

## Purpose

The aim of this policy is to enable ACT School staff, volunteers and learners to deal with bullying and harassment when it occurs and even more importantly to prevent it, ensuring that everyone can operate in a supportive, caring and safe environment without disruption and fear of being bullied.

## Definition of Bullying

For the purpose of this policy, ACT Schools defines bullying as, deliberately hurtful behaviour, repeated over a period of time, where it is difficult for those being bullied to defend themselves. This includes all forms of bullying:

- Emotional – being unfriendly, excluding, tormenting (e.g. hiding personal possessions, threatening gestures).
- Physical – pushing, kicking, hitting, punching, pinching or any use of physical violence.
- Sexual – unwanted physical contact or sexually abusive comments.
- Racial – racist taunts, graffiti, gestures.
- Homophobic – because of, or focussing on the issue of sexuality.

- Verbal – name calling, sarcasm, spreading rumours, teasing.
- Cyber – all areas of the internet, email, online chat facilities, posting derogatory and abusive comments, footage and images on social networking sites.
- Mobile – threats via text messaging and telephone calls.
- Misuse of technology – improper use of camera and other recording devices.

Bullying is behaviour by an individual or group, repeated over time, that intentionally hurts another individual or group either physically or emotionally. Bullying can take many forms (for instance, cyber-bullying via text messages or the internet), and is often motivated by prejudice against particular groups, for example on grounds of race, religion, gender, sexual orientation, adopted children or caring responsibilities. It might be motivated by actual differences between learners, or perceived differences.

Bullying may involve complicity that falls short of direct participation by, for instance, manipulating a third party to tease or torment someone. It may be overt and intimidatory but is often hidden and subtle.

### **Cyber-bullying**

The rapid development of, and widespread access to, technology has provided a new medium for 'virtual' bullying, which can occur in or outside ACT Schools. Cyber-bullying is a different form of bullying which can happen 24/7, with a potentially bigger audience, and more accessories as people forward on content at a click.

### **Examples of unacceptable behaviour include:**

- Physical assault
- Verbal abuse, name calling, teasing or making offensive remarks
- Humiliation, either in one's own eyes or others' eyes
- Using social websites, mobile phones, text messages, photos, videos or e-mails to intentionally upset others
- Indirect emotional abuse by excluding from social groups or spreading malicious rumours

**Bullying is not** the odd occasion of falling out with friends, arguments or disagreements or when occasional 'jokes' are played. ACT Schools is committed to helping learners understand and manage their thoughts and feelings during such occurrences and help them recognise that sometimes this is a part of social development. ACT Schools believes in empowering learners to manage conflicts and develop social skills to repair friendships and relationships.

### **Definition of Harassment**

ACT Schools defines harassment as someone behaving in a way which makes another person feel distressed, humiliated or threatened.

Examples of harassment include:

- unwanted phone calls, letters, emails or visits
- sexual harassment, including verbal remarks or unwanted physical contact

- abuse and bullying online
- verbal abuse and threats
- damage to property or possessions
- information spread maliciously in a way that is calculated to cause distress or telling lies about a person.

ACT Schools staff must be alert to the potential signs of bullying and harassment and act promptly and firmly against it in accordance with the safeguarding policy and Handbook and Behaviour Policy. In cases where a criminal offence has taken place, staff should refer to the procedures set out in the Safeguarding Policy and Handbook.

## Scope

This policy document applies to all staff, learners and volunteers.

## Responsibilities

The Head of 11-16 Education and Delivery Director have overall responsibility for this policy and its implementation. The Head of 11-16 Education is:

- the 'owner' of this policy and these procedures and has overall responsibility for reviewing, updating and controlling this policy and related documents.
- Responsible for regularly reviewing all instances of bullying and harassment that have been reported within the Schools Provision.
- Responsible for regular monitoring of MyConcern to ensure that instances of bullying and harassment are being dealt with appropriately.

Centre Managers are responsible for:

- Ensuring that all their staff are aware of and adhere to this policy and procedure
- Logging all cases of bullying and harassment via MyConcern
- Reporting incidents of bullying and harassment to the Head of 11-16 Education
- Supporting members of staff in managing/dealing with incidents of bullying and harassment

Members of staff are responsible for:

- Ensuring awareness of, and adherence to this policy and procedure
- Approaching all concerns of bullying and harassment with seriousness and impartiality

## Communication and Storage

This policy and these procedures will be communicated to staff on induction.

It will be stored on ACT's online HR system, IRIS HR, where staff will be required to read and accept the document.

## Procedures

The seriousness of bullying and harassment cannot be emphasised enough. Bullying is among the top concerns that parents have about their children's safety and well-being and is also a top concern of children and young people themselves. Bullying makes the lives of its victims a misery: it undermines their confidence and self-esteem; and destroys their sense of security and can be psychologically damaging. Bullying impacts on its victims' attendance and attainment, marginalises those groups who may be particular targets for bullies and can have a life-long negative impact on some young people's lives. At worst, bullying has been a factor in suicide.

It is acknowledged that bullies may have complex reasons for their behaviour and may well need help. It should also be recognised that the consequences of being allowed to 'get away with it' can be detrimental to them as well as to their victim. All learners deserve the opportunity to be helped to understand what acceptable behaviour is and ACT's learner standards are instrumental in this.

**Stopping violence and ensuring immediate physical safety is ACT School's first priority** but emotional bullying can be more damaging than physical; staff have to make their own judgements about each specific case.

Learners experiencing bullying may display changes in their behaviour, becoming more shy or withdrawn. Some may become more nervous, feign illness, take unusual or additional absences or become more needy seeking staff contact and attention. There may be additional changes evidenced in work completed, poor concentration or engagement and increased truanting from the provision. These behaviours however, do not in themselves mean that a learner is being bullied. Likewise, bullying may occur without a learner demonstrating any of these behaviours and therefore learners must be encouraged to report incidents to the staff team.

## Preventative Approach

ACT Schools's response to bullying does not start at the point at which a learner has been bullied - it starts during learner induction where learners are expected to sign the anti-bullying and harassment policy.

Staff proactively gather intelligence about issues between learners which might provoke conflict and develop strategies to prevent bullying and harassment occurring in the first place.

This might involve talking to learners about issues of difference, through sessions and dedicated events or projects, or through individual discussions.

ACT Schools takes the opportunity to re-enforce the effects of bullying and harassment through initiatives such as anti-bullying week where the whole organisation take part in events to develop knowledge and understanding of bullying and harassment and involve learners in the development of resources.

Staff and learners will be involved in the processes to help determine what would work best.

Open communication between staff and learners regarding potential concerns are strongly encouraged.

## What to look for

Learners who are being bullied may show changes in behaviour, such as:

- Becoming shy and nervous
- Feigning illness
- Taking unusual absences
- Wanting to stay near staff
- Changes in work patterns
- Lacking concentration
- Not attending training.

Members of staff and volunteers must be alert to the signs of bullying; ensure legal responsibilities are known and act promptly and firmly against it, in accordance with ACT's policies and procedures.

Surveys have shown that in the vast majority of bullying incidents, **most** people knew that what was going on was wrong.

Sometimes people, either through lethargy, peer group pressure, or tacit support for what is going on, fail to act.

## Dealing with incidents of bullying and harassment

ACT Schools staff will deal with bullying in different ways, depending on how serious the bullying is.

Staff should also consider bullying that happens anywhere off ACT's premises, e.g. on public transport or in a town centre – depending on the nature of incidents.

All instances of bullying should be reported to the centre manager or Head of 11-16 Education and logged on My Concern.

They will then decide on the most appropriate course of action to deal with the situation.

The incident may be dealt with within ACT through the use of tailored intervention approaches, depending on the nature of the incident, and those involved. This could include, but is not limited to:

- Discussion with those involved
- Mediation session(s)
- Disciplining bullies

Where appropriate upon review of the nature of the incident, the Head of 11-16 Education (or their delegated representative) will report incidents to the police or social services in line with the Safeguarding Policy and Handbook.

Any action taken must take account of special educational needs or disabilities that the learners involved may have.

**Please note: Some forms of bullying and harassment are illegal and should be reported to the police (please refer to the Safeguarding Policy and Handbook).**

These include, but are not limited to:

- violence or assault
- theft
- repeated harassment or intimidation, e.g. name calling, threats and abusive phone calls, emails or text messages
- hate crimes
- Trolling (social media)

Staff should record their concerns following the processes identified in ACT's Safeguarding Policy and Procedure.

If there are concerns with cyberbullying, staff are required to encourage learner(s) involved to keep a record of the date and time of the calls, emails or texts and not to delete any messages they receive.

**Staff are required to call 999 if you or someone else is in immediate danger.**

## Managing concerns

1. Any learner who feels they are being bullied or harassed must tell a teacher or any other member of staff with whom they feel comfortable.

If they do not feel confident enough to speak up by themselves, learners should be encouraged to enlist the moral support of a friend. Above all, learners should be encouraged to tell someone straight away.

2. Teachers should not ignore or disregard a complaint.  
When a case is referred to them, teachers should ask for details and record the information using the MyConcern software system. The DSP will be notified of the concern and the appropriate action can be taken.
3. The Head of 11-16 Education (or their nominated representative) will then:
  - a. Interview all involved parties and update MyConcern with full details
  - b. Speak to the victim to establish what exactly has occurred and whether there are any witnesses.
  - c. Any/all witnesses will then also be interviewed.

### Please note:

- i. It may not be possible to preserve confidentiality in these discussions as the person accused of bullying and harassment will need to be told exactly what they have done and the impact it has had.
  - ii. If any evidence of cyber-bullying or harassment is present, the victim should be encouraged to preserve the evidence in the case of police involvement.
- d. Interview the person(s) being accused of bullying once the details of the complaint have been established. Again this should be recorded.
  - e. Inform the parent(s)/guardian(s) of the victim and the person(s) being accused of bullying. All parties will be made fully aware of the School's anti-bullying policy, and it will be stressed that if the bullying continues sanctions will be used.
  - f. Make all members of staff involved with the learner(s) aware of any incidences of bullying and any strategies that may be useful to reduce the risk of bullying occurring.
  - g. Arrange a follow-up meeting with all parties a week later to review progress and 'check in'.
  - h. All supporting evidence of bullying to be uploaded to the open case on MyConcern.

## Monitoring of incidents

It is the responsibility of the Head of 11-16 Education to review all instances of bullying that have been reported within the Schools Provision.

Regular monitoring of MyConcern will occur to ensure that instances are being dealt with appropriately.

The Head of 11-16 Education will also be responsible for regular reviewing of the Anti-Bullying Policy, ensuring the current legislation is being adhered to and that any national initiatives are being used.

## **Involvement of Parents**

All Parent(s)/Guardian(s) will be made fully aware of the ACT Schools Anti-Bullying and Harassment policy. In some cases, Parent(s)/Guardian(s) may be the first to alert a teacher to an incident of bullying or harassment and they may be in some distress when they contact the School.

In these instances, good practice includes:

- recognising that the parent may be angry or upset
- keeping an open mind – lack of staff awareness does not mean it is not happening
- remaining calm and understanding
- making clear that the School does care and that something will be done, explaining the school policy and seeing that procedures are followed.

## **Sanctions**

In the event that an incident of Bullying or harassment has been raised, and the findings of the investigation completed by the Head of 11-16 or their nominated representative finds evidence that one/more ACT Schools learner is involved in an incident of bullying as a 'bully', possible sanctions/action taken include, but are not limited to:

- Targets for behaviour from Senior Management (to be documented on personal behaviour plans)
- Following of a behaviour contract which will be reviewed daily/weekly by the Centre Manager depending on the severity of the incident
- Internal exclusion arrangements
- If the incident is of a serious nature, then a fixed term exclusion may be necessary. This would be in order to readdress risk assessments to ensure the protection of all parties.
- In extreme cases, a permanent exclusion may be issued. In these instances, the ACT Exclusion Policy will be implemented.

## **Complaints**

In the event that any parties involved in ACT Schools management of an incident of bullying or harassment, and they are not satisfied with one/more of the actions taken, they have the opportunity to raise these concerns formally via the ACT Complaints Policy.

## **Support for learners**

ACT Schools recognised that being a victim and a perpetrator of bullying or harassment can have an impact on the wellbeing and self-esteem of the learners. Therefore, ACT Schools are committed to:

- Ensuring appropriate after care is in place for victims of bullying and harassment. This may include counselling, frequent meetings with the Centre Managers/behaviour support or reduction/amendments to timetable to phase the learner back in to full time education.
- Ensuring the root cause of the bullying or harassment is addressed. The behaviour support team will work closely with the bully (unless they have been removed from provision) to develop self-esteem and an understanding of their actions.

## **Staff Training**

All staff will receive training in dealing with bullying via induction and regular review of policy at staff meetings.

The Anti-bullying and harassment policy dovetails with the school's Behaviour Policy and Safeguarding Policy and Handbook and staff need to be aware of these crossovers.

INSET training days may be adapted to focus on anti-bullying training and this will be dependent on current areas of concern and need identified within the schools.

During these training sessions, external agencies will provide the specialist training to ensure we are receiving the current guidance.

### **Document / Policy Change Request**

Any changes to this Policy and Procedure must be agreed with the Head of 11-16 Education.

This document will be reviewed annually by the Head of 11-16 Education.

### **Document / Policy Reviewing and Approving**

This document will be reviewed annually by the Head of 11-16 Education.

### **References**

- ACT Safeguarding Policy and Handbook
- ACT Health and Safety Policy and Procedure
- ACT Learner Health and Wellbeing Policy, Procedure, and Strategy
- ACT Behaviour Policy and Procedure
- ACT Complaints Policy and Procedure
- Welsh Government guidance - Rights, respect, equality: Statutory guidance for governing bodies in relation to Anti-bullying