



Anti-Bullying Policy

September 2026

1. Policy rationale and objectives

Birtley House School is committed to providing a safe, secure, inclusive and supportive environment in which every pupil is able to learn and develop free from intimidation, harassment, victimisation, discrimination and bullying. Bullying of any kind is unacceptable and will be addressed promptly, fairly and proportionately.

The school recognises that pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) may be disproportionately affected by bullying and may experience additional barriers to recognising, communicating or reporting concerns. The school will therefore make reasonable adjustments to ensure that all pupils can understand this policy, report concerns and participate meaningfully in any investigation or support process.

This policy explains how the school prevents, identifies, records and responds to bullying, including bullying that occurs online or outside the school premises where it affects pupils, staff, relationships, safety or the orderly running of the school.

2. Legislation and statutory guidance

This policy has been prepared with regard to the legal and regulatory framework applying to independent schools in England. It should be read alongside the school's Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy and Behaviour Policy.

- The Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014, including Part 3: Welfare, health and safety of pupils.
- Keeping Children Safe in Education 2026 (KCSIE), in force from 1 September 2026.
- Working Together to Safeguard Children, as updated from time to time.
- The Equality Act 2010.
- The Children Act 1989 and Children Act 2004.
- The Human Rights Act 1998.
- DfE guidance: Preventing and Tackling Bullying.
- DfE guidance: Searching, Screening and Confiscation.
- DfE statutory guidance: Mobile Phones in Schools, which schools should follow from 1 September 2026.
- DfE guidance: Preventing and Tackling the Bullying and Harassment of School Staff (2026).
- DfE Independent School Standards Guidance (April 2026).

3. Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to:

- prevent bullying through a whole-school culture of respect, inclusion, kindness and safeguarding;

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- ensure pupils, staff and parents/carers understand what bullying is and how to report it;
- ensure concerns are taken seriously and acted upon without delay;
- protect and support pupils who experience bullying;
- help pupils who display bullying behaviour to understand the impact of their actions and change their behaviour;
- identify safeguarding concerns and refer them to the Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) or Deputy DSL without delay;
- ensure reasonable adjustments are made for pupils with SEND;
- record, monitor and analyse incidents so that patterns, risks and emerging concerns are identified.

4. Responsibilities

The proprietor/governing body is responsible for ensuring that the school has an effective strategy to prevent bullying and that the requirements of the Independent School Standards and relevant statutory guidance are met.

The Headteacher is responsible for communicating and implementing this policy, ensuring that disciplinary measures are applied fairly, consistently and reasonably, and ensuring that the policy is reviewed and monitored.

The DSL and Deputy DSLs are responsible for ensuring that bullying concerns which may constitute a safeguarding concern are managed in accordance with KCSIE 2026 and the school's Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy.

All staff, including teaching and non-teaching staff, volunteers and relevant contractors, must uphold this policy, respond to concerns promptly, record concerns appropriately and report safeguarding concerns to the DSL or Deputy DSL without delay.

Parents and carers are expected to work in partnership with the school, report concerns promptly and support the school's efforts to prevent and respond to bullying.

Pupils are expected, according to their age, understanding and communication needs, to treat others with respect, follow school expectations and tell a trusted adult when they experience or witness bullying.

5. Definition of bullying

The school uses the Department for Education definition of bullying: behaviour by an individual or group, usually repeated over time, that intentionally hurts another individual or group either physically or emotionally. Bullying may involve an imbalance of power. This imbalance may be physical, psychological, social, related to popularity or status, or arise from access to information or technology.

Bullying is different from ordinary conflict, friendship difficulties or a one-off disagreement. However, a single incident of harmful, discriminatory, sexual, threatening or violent behaviour may still constitute a serious behaviour or safeguarding concern and will be addressed under the appropriate school policy.

Bullying can be direct or indirect, overt or subtle, and can take place face-to-face or online. It may include:

- Physical bullying - hitting, kicking, pushing, damaging belongings or other use of physical force.
- Verbal bullying - name-calling, threats, insulting comments, teasing, mocking, spreading rumours or repeated derogatory language.
- Emotional or relational bullying - deliberately excluding, isolating, intimidating, humiliating, tormenting or manipulating another person.
- Cyberbullying - bullying through social media, messaging apps, group chats, gaming platforms, websites, email, livestreaming, image/video sharing, fake accounts, impersonation, manipulated or AI-generated content, or other digital technology.

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- Sexual or sexist bullying - sexualised comments, jokes, name-calling, rumours, unwanted touching, coercion, harassment or the sharing of sexual content or images.
- Prejudice-related bullying - behaviour connected to a protected characteristic or perceived difference, including race, colour, nationality, ethnicity, religion or belief, disability, sex, sexual orientation, gender reassignment, or other protected characteristics.
- SEND-related bullying - bullying connected to a pupil's disability, learning needs, communication needs, sensory needs, health needs or perceived difference.
- Bullying related to appearance, family circumstances, being a young carer, being looked after or previously looked after, or other personal circumstances.

6. Bullying, child-on-child abuse and safeguarding

Bullying can be a form of child-on-child abuse. Staff must not dismiss harmful behaviour as 'banter', 'just having a laugh', 'part of growing up' or 'boys being boys'. Where bullying involves or may involve abuse, exploitation, sexual harassment, sexual violence, harmful sexual behaviour, serious threats, coercion, discrimination, significant emotional harm or other safeguarding concerns, staff must follow the Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy and report the concern to the DSL or Deputy DSL without delay.

The school will take all reports seriously. The fact that an incident may not meet the definition of repeated bullying does not prevent the school from taking behaviour, pastoral or safeguarding action.

Where a pupil is in immediate danger or at risk of significant harm, safeguarding procedures will take priority. The school may seek advice from or make referrals to Children's Social Care, the police, health services or other appropriate agencies.

7. Bullying and pupils with SEND

Birtley House School recognises that pupils with SEND may be more vulnerable to bullying and may face barriers to recognising, describing or reporting what has happened. A pupil's communication, cognition, sensory profile, social understanding or emotional regulation needs will be considered throughout prevention, reporting, investigation and support.

Reasonable adjustments may include:

- using simple, concrete and accessible language;
- visual supports, symbols, social stories, communication boards or augmentative and alternative communication (AAC);
- allowing additional processing time and opportunities to revisit a discussion;
- support from a familiar or trusted adult;
- using observations and information from staff and parents/carers to supplement a pupil's account where appropriate;
- avoiding leading questions and adapting interview approaches to the pupil's communication needs;
- considering whether behaviour that appears deliberate may be linked to a pupil's SEND, while ensuring that the impact on others is still addressed;
- providing explicit teaching about friendship, boundaries, consent, online safety, emotions and safe reporting.

Reasonable adjustments will not be used to minimise the impact of bullying. The school will balance the needs and rights of all pupils and will put appropriate support and safety measures in place.

8. Cyberbullying and online behaviour

Cyberbullying may occur during or outside the school day. The school may respond to online behaviour outside school where it affects a pupil's welfare, relationships within school, the safety of members of the school community or the orderly running of the school.

When responding to cyberbullying, the school may:

- act promptly once a concern is reported or identified;
- support the person affected and assess any immediate safeguarding risk;
- preserve relevant evidence, for example screenshots, messages or URLs, where it is safe and appropriate to do so;
- work with pupils and parents/carers to prevent further sharing or escalation;
- report harmful or unlawful content to the relevant platform or service provider;
- apply sanctions and supportive interventions in line with the Behaviour Policy;
- refer safeguarding concerns to the DSL and, where appropriate, external agencies;
- contact the police where there may have been a criminal offence.

Electronic devices may be confiscated and, where the legal requirements are met, searched only in accordance with the school's Behaviour Policy and current DfE guidance on searching, screening and confiscation. Staff must not undertake informal searches of device content outside the school's authorised procedures.

The school's approach to pupils' use of mobile phones and other smart technology is set out in the Behaviour Policy and/or Mobile Phone Policy and reflects the statutory DfE guidance applicable from September 2026.

9. Sexual harassment, sexual bullying and harmful sexual behaviour

Sexual harassment, sexual violence and harmful sexual behaviour are not tolerated. Concerns may include sexualised comments or jokes, sexual name-calling, unwanted touching, coercion, sexual rumours, upskirting, sharing or threatening to share intimate images, or other harmful sexual behaviour.

Such concerns will be treated as potential safeguarding matters and managed in accordance with KCSIE 2026 and the school's Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy. The school will consider the needs and wishes of the child who has been harmed, the needs of the child alleged to have caused harm, the wider peer group and any risk of recurrence.

10. Signs that a pupil may be experiencing bullying

There is no single sign of bullying. Staff and parents/carers should remain alert to changes which may indicate that a pupil requires support. These may include:

- reluctance or anxiety about attending school, using school transport or taking part in particular activities;
- changes in routine, attendance, engagement, behaviour or attainment;
- becoming withdrawn, anxious, distressed, unusually quiet or lacking in confidence;
- unexplained injuries, damaged belongings or missing possessions;
- sleep difficulties, nightmares, changes in eating or physical complaints;
- increased aggression, dysregulation or challenging behaviour;
- fear of using a phone, device or online platform, or distress when messages are received;
- being frightened or reluctant to explain what is wrong;
- self-harm, suicidal thoughts or threats, or attempts to run away.

These indicators may have causes other than bullying. Staff will remain professionally curious and consider bullying alongside other possible welfare or safeguarding concerns.

11. Preventing bullying

The school takes a whole-school approach to preventing bullying. Prevention is embedded in the school's ethos, curriculum, pastoral systems, safeguarding arrangements and behaviour expectations.

The school will:

- promote mutual respect, kindness, inclusion, consideration and care for others;
- teach pupils, in an age- and developmentally appropriate way, what bullying is, how it affects others and how to seek help;
- teach social communication, interaction, emotional regulation, online safety, consent, boundaries and healthy relationships at an appropriate level;
- challenge discriminatory, prejudicial and derogatory language, including language presented as 'banter';
- recognise and address the additional vulnerability of pupils with SEND;
- provide safe and accessible ways for pupils to raise concerns;
- use assemblies, PSHE/RSE, social skills teaching, social stories, pastoral work, mentoring and other appropriate curriculum opportunities;
- review supervision, environments and routines where patterns of concern are identified;
- work in partnership with parents/carers;
- provide staff training so that staff can identify and respond appropriately to different forms of bullying.

12. Reporting bullying

Pupils can report bullying to any member of staff. Reports may be made verbally, in writing, through visual or symbol communication, communication devices, a worry box or other agreed communication system, through a trusted adult, or through a parent/carer.

A pupil will not be penalised for making a report in good faith, even if an investigation later concludes that bullying did not occur. Staff must take concerns seriously and must not require a pupil to confront another pupil as a condition of being believed or supported.

Parents/carers should report concerns to the class teacher or a member of the Senior Leadership Team. Safeguarding concerns should be passed to the DSL or Deputy DSL without delay.

13. Responding to reports of bullying

When bullying is suspected, witnessed or reported, the school will respond promptly and proportionately. The response will be adapted to the age, understanding, communication needs and SEND of the pupils involved.

The school will, as appropriate:

- ensure that the pupil who may have been harmed is safe and supported;
- listen to and record the views of the pupils involved, separately where appropriate;
- gather relevant information from witnesses, staff, parents/carers and available records;
- consider whether the concern meets a safeguarding threshold and refer to the DSL/Deputy DSL where required;
- consider immediate safety measures, supervision or risk management;
- inform parents/carers where appropriate and in accordance with safeguarding requirements;

- apply proportionate sanctions in line with the Behaviour Policy where bullying is substantiated;
- provide education, pastoral support and restorative work where appropriate and safe;
- consider referrals to Early Help, Children's Social Care, health services or the police where necessary;
- review the situation to check that the behaviour has stopped and that support remains effective.

Restorative approaches will only be used where appropriate, safe and in the interests of the pupils involved. A pupil who has experienced bullying will not be required to take part in restorative work or mediation.

14. Supporting pupils

Pupils who have experienced bullying

- reassurance that the concern has been taken seriously;
- a named or trusted adult and ongoing pastoral support;
- reasonable adjustments to communication and support arrangements;
- opportunities to discuss the experience in a way that is accessible to them;
- support to rebuild confidence, relationships and a sense of safety;
- regular review to ensure that the bullying has stopped;
- additional or external support where necessary.

Pupils who have displayed bullying behaviour

- clear explanation of what has happened, why the behaviour is unacceptable and the impact on others;
- appropriate sanctions in accordance with the Behaviour Policy;
- education and support to develop empathy, communication, emotional regulation and safer behaviour;
- involvement of parents/carers where appropriate;
- consideration of underlying needs, vulnerabilities or safeguarding concerns;
- monitoring and review to reduce the risk of recurrence;
- referral to wider services where appropriate.

15. Bullying outside school

The school may respond to bullying that occurs away from school premises, including on school transport, on journeys to and from school, during educational visits or activities, and online. The response will depend on the circumstances, the school's legal powers, the impact on the school community and any safeguarding concerns.

Where conduct outside school raises a safeguarding concern, the Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy will be followed. Where a criminal offence may have occurred, the school may seek advice from or report the matter to the police.

16. Recording, confidentiality and information sharing

All alleged and confirmed bullying incidents will be recorded on the school's designated safeguarding and/or incident recording system in accordance with school procedures. Records should include a clear summary of the concern, actions taken, decisions made, the rationale for those decisions and relevant outcomes.

Where the concern is or may be a safeguarding matter, it must be referred to the DSL or Deputy DSL and recorded in accordance with the Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy.

Information will be shared on a need-to-know basis and in accordance with safeguarding requirements and data protection law. Staff must never promise absolute confidentiality where a child's safety or welfare may be at risk. Data protection must not prevent necessary and proportionate information sharing for safeguarding purposes.

17. Monitoring and evaluation

The Headteacher and DSL will monitor the implementation of this policy. Bullying records will be reviewed periodically to identify patterns, repeat concerns, locations, times, types of bullying, online trends, pupils who may be repeatedly harmed or repeatedly display harmful behaviour, and any links to SEND or protected characteristics.

Findings will be used to inform staff training, curriculum planning, supervision, risk management, pastoral support and school improvement. Significant themes and assurance about the effectiveness of the school's anti-bullying arrangements will be reported to the proprietor/governing body as appropriate.

18. Malicious, false or unfounded allegations

The school will take all reports seriously and will distinguish carefully between an allegation that is unsubstantiated or unfounded and one that is deliberately false or malicious. A pupil will not be sanctioned simply because an allegation cannot be substantiated.

Where there is evidence that a report was deliberately false or malicious, the school will consider appropriate action under the Behaviour Policy and, where relevant, the Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy.

19. Involvement of parents and carers

The school values partnership with parents and carers. The school will make this policy available through the school website and will communicate key expectations and reporting routes in accessible formats. Parents/carers will be kept appropriately informed when their child is involved in a bullying concern, subject to safeguarding, confidentiality and information-sharing considerations.

20. Supporting adults

Bullying, intimidation and harassment of staff or other adults in the school community is unacceptable, whether it is carried out by pupils, parents/carers, staff or others and whether it occurs face-to-face or online.

Concerns involving staff will be managed through the appropriate school procedures, which may include the Staff Code of Conduct, Grievance Policy, Whistleblowing Policy, Behaviour Policy, Complaints Policy and Parent/Carer Code of Conduct. The school will have regard to the DfE's 2026 guidance on preventing and tackling bullying and harassment of school staff.

Where an adult is at risk of harm or a criminal offence may have occurred, the school will consider appropriate safeguarding, employment, civil or police action.

21. Related policies

- Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy
- Behaviour Policy
- Online Safety Policy

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- SEND Policy
- Equality Policy / Equality information and objectives
- PSHE/RSE Policy
- Mobile Phone / Acceptable Use Policy
- Complaints Policy
- Staff Code of Conduct
- Whistleblowing Policy
- Health and Safety Policy

22. Key guidance and support

- [Keeping Children Safe in Education 2026](#)
- [DfE - Preventing bullying](#)
- [DfE - Independent school standards guidance](#)
- [DfE - Mobile phones in schools](#)
- [DfE - Searching, screening and confiscation](#)
- [DfE - Preventing and tackling bullying and harassment of school staff](#)
- [Anti-Bullying Alliance](#)
- [Childline](#)
- [NSPCC](#)
- [Childnet](#)
- [UK Safer Internet Centre](#)

23. Review

This policy will be reviewed at least annually and sooner where there is a change in legislation, statutory guidance, school practice or identified need. The next scheduled review is September 2027.