



Anti-Bullying Policy

September 2025

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Introduction

The Oaks Specialist College is committed to providing a supportive, friendly, safe and positive environment, free from offensive behaviour, to help each learner achieve their learning goals and get the most out of their college life. Every learner should feel safe to learn and socialise and be safe from victimisation and discrimination at College. The College values all learners equally, regardless of age, ability, race, gender, gender reassignment, religion, or sexual orientation. This policy forms part of our commitment to the safeguarding of adults with additional needs and the protection of all our young people.

Bullying of any kind is not tolerated at The Oaks. If it does occur, learners are encouraged to tell staff about it in the secure knowledge that incidents will be dealt with promptly and effectively. We encourage learners who are being bullied and those who are aware of bullying, to inform a member of staff. We will communicate with learners at a level they can understand and may call upon our Therapy Team if necessary.

The purpose of this policy is:

- to prevent bullying from happening between our learners
- to make sure bullying is stopped as soon as possible if it does happen and that those involved receive the support they need
- to provide information to all staff, volunteers, learners and their families about what we should all do to prevent and deal with bullying.

This policy applies to anyone working on behalf of The Oaks, including the Leadership Team, the Board of Trustees, staff, volunteers, and it also applies to learners.

Context

This policy should be read in conjunction with The Oaks' Safeguarding, Behaviour and Equality and Diversity Policies.

We believe that:

- young people should never experience abuse of any kind.
- we have a responsibility to promote the welfare of all young people, to keep them safe and operate in a way that protects them.

We recognise that:

- bullying causes real distress and affects a person's health and development
- in some instances, bullying can cause significant harm
- all young people, regardless of age, disability, gender reassignment, race, religion or belief, sex or sexual orientation, have the right to equal protection from all types of harm or abuse

- everyone has a role to play in preventing all forms of bullying (including online) and putting a stop to bullying.

What is bullying?

Bullying is the abuse of power and the use of aggression with the intention of hurting another person. Bullying can occur due to a lack of empathy i.e. when verbal banter or physical antagonism by one learner is unreciprocated by another learner. Bullying results in pain and distress to the person being bullied and is unacceptable.

Due to our learners' additional needs and their level of understanding they are often more vulnerable to being victims of abuse and are at increased risk of being victim to hate crimes. There is no legal definition of bullying, but it is usually defined as repeated behaviour which is intended to hurt someone either emotionally or physically, and is often aimed at certain people because of their race, religion, gender, gender reassignment or sexual orientation, or any other aspect such as appearance or disability.

<http://www.bullying.co.uk/general-advice/what-is-bullying/>

Bullying can be:

- **Physical** pushing, kicking, hitting, pinching, etc.
- **Psychological** tormenting, ridiculing, humiliating
- **Verbal** name-calling, sarcasm, spreading rumours
- **Racist** racial taunts, graffiti, gestures
- **Sexual** unwanted physical contact, abusive or unwelcome remarks
- **Homophobic** comments about another learner's sexuality
- **Gender specific or Transphobic** comments about someone's gender choice or transgender
- **Electronic** via text/ email/ social networking sites also known as **cyberbullying**

Cyberbullying is defined as *"the use of Information and Communications Technology (ICT), particularly mobile phones and the internet, deliberately to upset someone else"*. It can be an extension of face-to-face bullying, but it differs from other forms of bullying in significant ways:

- It can be at any time of day or night - invading the home and personal space
- It may be perceived as anonymous, the actual identity of the perpetrator can be hidden
- Participants can be unconscious perpetrators without understanding the consequences
- The circulation of electronic messages is difficult to control
- The size of the potential audience can be huge.
- Cyberbullying can be traced and tracked to establish proof

All bullying is unacceptable, regardless of its form or reasons given to justify it.

What should a learner do if they feel they are being bullied?

A learner who feels they are being bullied or has reason to believe that someone else is being bullied should tell someone. This may be any member of staff they feel they can talk to.

Once a member of staff has been alerted, the next step will be to discuss the problem by talking with all parties, in order to decide upon the next course of action. This will be led by a Pathway Lead and the learners will be supported to communicate their concerns at a pace appropriate to them. If additional support is needed the staff will seek involvement of the Therapy Team and ensure that consideration is given to the learners and their preferred communication.

As bullying may form part of a wider safeguarding issue, details of the incident and follow up will be logged on Databridge. Staff will be supportive and promote a positive outcome so that the individuals involved are able to move forward in a more positive and confident way.

Bullying Prevention

At The Oaks we do not tolerate bullying amongst any of our learners. Everyone has a right to be treated with respect. In order to prevent any learner experiencing bullying in our provision we implement the following:

- A curriculum in which friendships and ways of dealing with challenges are addressed through PSHE. At The Oaks, PSHE is delivered as both a standalone subject as well as embedded right across the curriculum, including during unstructured times.
- Discussions with staff, young people and the wider College, where appropriate, about bullying and how to prevent it.
- Support and training for staff and volunteers, when appropriate, on dealing with all forms of bullying, including racist, sexist, homophobic, transphobic and sexual bullying. This forms part of The Oaks' safeguarding training and is acted upon in line with our safeguarding procedures.
- An environment where learners are encouraged to speak to a staff member if they feel they are being bullied.
- All bullying allegations are treated sensitively and with great care.

Discussions with staff and learners will focus on:

- Responsibilities to look after one another and for learners to be aware of their behaviour
- Practising skills such as listening to each other
- Respecting the fact that we are all different
- Making sure that no one is without friends
- Dealing with problems in a positive way
- Checking that our anti-bullying measures are working well.

Responding to bullying

The Oaks aims to respond promptly and effectively to issues of bullying. A clear consistent response is required in any case of alleged bullying and the aim of any intervention should be:

- to make the learner safe
- to stop the bullying
- to make clear to all learners that bullying is unacceptable
- to ensure that learners are helped to build positive relationships and choose not to bully or discriminate.

If a learner has broken or damaged another learner's belongings these should be replaced by the learner responsible for the damage.

Where possible, staff will work with the learner to help them think about the impact on others, this will be done through various means and methods of communication appropriate to the learner.

All learners (both the victim and the learner displaying the bullying behaviours) involved in incidents of bullying will be asked if they would like college staff to inform their parents/ carers or other staff at college.

If information is shared externally, confidentiality will be upheld, and names of the learners involved will not be disclosed by College. Learners will have the right to privacy and may choose not to share this information with others - this will be discussed on an individual basis.

There may be times when even though the learners have stated that they do not wish others to be informed, due to concerns of safety (to either/any of the learners involved, other learners at college, or member(s) of the public), staff will need to inform other stakeholders and consideration to be given to informing external professionals. If this occurs the learner(s) will be informed about who has been notified and staff will support them in understanding the reasons why. Staff will ensure that any information that is shared is done so in line with the sharing information policy.

We do not wish for any learners to suffer in silence, and we urge all our young people to tell a member of staff if they feel they are being bullied.