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ANTI-BULLYING GUIDANCE FOR LEARNING ESTABLISHMENTS 2015

The Youth Commission #Bullying was convened following approval by the Aberdeenshire Education, Learning and Leisure Committee in March 2013. A group of 20 young people have worked to meet the following self-defined aims:

- To raise awareness and understanding of the impact(s) of bullying behaviour.

- To reinforce that bullying is not acceptable and will not be tolerated.

- To ensure that everyone is treated equally.

- To respond to incidents of bullying in a consistent and effective way.

- To create comfortable and safe learning environments for pupils.

The Youth Commission #Bullying has taken account of the compliance required by Aberdeenshire Council in providing services and creating policy. Research has been undertaken which has captured the experience and opinions of our diverse local population. Youth Commissioners have benefitted from the support provided by the Corporate Equalities team throughout their work

Aberdeenshire Council is obliged to meet the requirements of the Equalities Act 2010. Responsibilities extend to tackling unlawful discrimination and includes promoting and encouraging equal opportunities.

Aberdeenshire Council is under a legal duty to consider equalities as an employer, a policy maker, a service provider, a procurer of services and as a decision maker.

The Equality Act 2010 protects us all. Every person has one or more of the 9 defined protected characteristics. These are:

1. Age
2. Disability
3. Gender reassignment
4. Pregnancy and maternity
5. Race
6. Religion or belief
7. Sex (gender)
8. Sexual orientation
9. Marriage and civil partnership

The Youth Commissioner's research identified that bullying can be linked to some of the protected characteristics above.

The Youth Commission #Bullying recommends that all establishments have and publish an anti-bullying policy which includes the following 6 key areas. This will ensure that schools have an up to date and fit for purpose approach to bullying which is in accordance with national guidance. These six areas are:

1. Stance

2. Definition

3. Prevention

4. Communication

5. Response

6. Reporting and Monitoring

1. Stance

Establishments must adopt the following stance in their anti-bullying policy:

Bullying in any form is intolerable and unacceptable.

Parents/carers, pupils and teachers have a responsibility to work in partnership to maintain a high standard of behaviour and an environment free from bullying behaviour. Aberdeenshire Council believes that everyone should be treated equally and with respect.

2. Definition

All establishments must include the following definition of bullying in their anti-bullying policy:

Bullying takes place when the actions of an individual or group of people cause harm to someone by taking advantage of an imbalance of power within a relationship (whether perceived or real). Bullying behaviour is abusive.

Bullying behaviour is often displayed as a result of past experiences which affect and impact on current actions.

Bullying can be verbal, physical, mental/emotional or cyber. It can be intentional or unintentional, direct or indirect, persistent, or a one off incident. People who experience bullying behaviour feel vulnerable and/or socially isolated.

3. Prevention

Aberdeenshire Council Education and Children's Services establishments must implement the following steps in working to **prevent** bullying behaviour:

3.1 Work to **raise awareness** amongst pupils, staff and parents/carers.

- Implement programmes of education about bullying from an early stage. Revisit this topic at all stages of education.

- Ensure that establishments have visual displays relating to bullying and key aspects of anti-bullying policies. These may feature national campaigns and sources of support.

- Anti-bullying work should be high profile and should include assemblies, class sessions and homework. It may be appropriate to highlight work done during National Anti-Bullying week which takes place in November.

- Regular opportunities should be available for parents/carers to obtain information on school systems and strategies relating to bullying and how to respond in a supportive and appropriate manner.

3.2 Work to **educate** pupils, staff and parents/carers about what to do when bullying behaviour is displayed, and how to support those involved.

- Use relevant, up to date resources which promote engagement by the target audience.

- Encourage pupils to teach and share key messages about bullying with other pupils and with parents/carers including the short and long term impact of bullying.

- Ensure that pupils, parents/carers and teachers are aware of support available beyond school (e.g. Childline, Samaritans, Police Scotland, Parentline).

- Participate in planned Aberdeenshire Education and Children's Services events in order to deliver key messages relating to bullying and to support ongoing curricular work.

- Within the curriculum include work designed to boost the resilience of children and young people. This may include positive mental attitude training.

3.3 Establishments should provide access to **training** and key information for staff.

- Work in partnership with other agencies to enable all teaching staff to attend a training course on preventing and responding to incidents of bullying within their first year of employment.

- Provide update training annually to all staff.

- Provide all members of staff with access to a copy of the relevant school policy(ies).

- Outline the key roles and responsibilities that each member of the school community has regarding preventing and responding to bullying behaviour within the policy.

- Ensure key staff are trained in the use of restorative approaches.

4. Communication

4.1 Establishments should ensure that **communication** is at the heart of prevention strategies and responses to incidents of bullying behaviour.

- Anti-bullying policies should be shared with and accessible to pupils and parents/carers.

- Anti-bullying policies should be highlighted regularly. This may be done through the school newsletter, and/or the school website.

- Key aspects of Anti-bullying policies should be included in homework diaries/planners where these are in use.

- Targeted lessons should be used to increase knowledge and understanding of Anti-bullying policies and processes.

- The profile of Anti-bullying work should be raised through focussed assemblies at key points in the year (e.g. National Anti-Bullying Week).

- Timescales and methods for ongoing communication should be negotiated on a case by case basis to ensure that the needs of pupils are met. Communication should be used to build relationships and in the early identification of further or ongoing difficulties.

4.2 **Pupils and Parents/carers** should be included in communication relating to prevention of bullying and incidents of bullying.

- Pupils and Parents/carers should be supported through involving them in information sessions relating to bullying and anti-bullying.

- Pupils and parents/carers should be involved in reviewing anti-bullying policies and procedures.

- Establishments should ensure regular contact with parents/carers of pupils affected by bullying behaviour in the initial weeks after issues have been identified and worked through.

- Establishments should communicate with parents/carers of all pupils who have demonstrated bullying behaviour after issues have been identified and worked through.

- Establishments should arrange for regular contact between key staff and pupils involved in the immediate days and weeks following an incident.

- Establishments must ensure that progress is maintained and that effective communication is used to build relationships and identify further ongoing difficulties.

5. Response

Establishments should promote consistency of **response** to instances of bullying behaviour using the 6 step approach:

1. Record the Incident
2. Speak to the individuals involved having frank and honest dialogue
3. Speak to parents
4. Utilise Restorative approaches
5. Monitor the situation
6. Review and increase response accordingly

5.1 **Restorative Practice** or a similar mediation based approach should be used where possible in order to repair relationships.

- Restorative practice lets pupils speak to each other, and encourages the development of self awareness.

- Restorative practice teaches pupils to understand and share their emotions in a safe environment.

- Restorative meetings or mediation must be facilitated by a suitably trained individual, with whom both parties are comfortable.

5.2 Taking Action

- The language 'victim' and 'bully' should be avoided as this labels those involved in bullying incidents and this can be unhelpful.

- Taking action to resolve a bullying situation must be given **high priority**. In some circumstances, immediate action may be required.

- Pupils and parents/carers should be aware of and included in communication strategies used by establishments.

- Visual 'step by step' guides are available for parents/carers, pupils and teachers, and should be available within all schools.

- Each situation may require a different response. A risk assessment can be done through speaking to pupils involved, and their parents/carers as is appropriate.

- Communication with the person who has displayed the bullying behaviour should be frank and honest.

- Ongoing support to parents/carers and pupils involved in bullying behaviour will come from good and regular communication, and a shared understanding of the steps that are being and have been taken to address identified issues.

- Education and Children's Services staff must monitor how relationships develop over the weeks and months that follow an incident of bullying behaviour.

- Repeat displays of bullying behaviour must be followed up with an increasing response. Appropriate responses will be decided on a case by case basis, taking account of factors relevant to each person involved, and the mental/emotional wellbeing of pupils involved.

6 Reporting and Monitoring

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6.1 Roles and responsibilities

- All staff must be aware of Education and Children's Services Anti-Bullying Policy including roles and responsibilities to ensure effective implementation.

- Anti-bullying should be incorporated within the strategic remit of one member of each establishment's leadership team.

- Staff holding any strategic responsibility for anti-bullying must have a strong professional interest in this area.

- Establishments will be asked to report the number of bullying incidents centrally using a secure electronic system.

6.2 Pupil Voice

- Establishments should gather pupil feedback relating to bullying behaviour.

- Focus groups, surveys or other means could be used and should consist of a mixture of ages

- **Student Councils** should raise the issue of bullying on their agendas at least once per academic session.

- Focussed discussion through student councils should be used to identify themes, trends and locations of bullying issues on school campus. Discussion should not centre on identifying pupils perceived to be displaying bullying behaviour.

- Information gathered through student council bodies should be shared to Leadership Teams through existing school channels.

- A discussion **forum** for use by Aberdeenshire Education and Children's Services establishments and staff will be established.

- This forum should be used as a means for the sharing of effective, successful strategies which help in resolving incidents where bullying behaviour has been displayed.

- This forum may also be used to highlight good practice regarding lesson/assembly ideas and resources, and will feature links to the good practice section of the respect*me* website.

6.3 Statistical data should form part of the monitoring of bullying behaviour.

- Incidents should be recorded in a pupil's chronology.

- Establishments will be asked to report the number of bullying incidents centrally using a secure electronic system.

- Statistics will not routinely be published, but will be used by Aberdeenshire Council Education and Children's Services as part of ongoing monitoring and improvement.

- Establishments reporting a statistical spike in the frequency of bullying incidents in subsequent years will receive targeted support in order to reduce this. Support may include training in prevention and response methods, and additional/refreshed pupil and class resources.

6.4 Anti-Bullying policies should be evaluated

- Evaluation should focus on the impact of policies at establishment and local authority level. Impact can be measured in part using statistical data, but must also take account of pupil experience, and the opinions of parents/carers and Education and Children's Services staff.

- Anti-bullying policies should be revised every three years.