

READING BLUE COAT

Anti-Bullying Policy

I. Introduction, Policy Aims and Scope

The aim of Reading Blue Coat's *Anti-Bullying Policy* is to prevent bullying of any sort and ensure that everyone in the community can operate in a supportive, caring and safe environment in which bullying is not tolerated and in which students are safe, feel safe and everyone is treated respectfully and any incidents of bullying are dealt with quickly and effectively.

We recognise that bullying can have a serious adverse effect on physical, social and emotional well-being, and the educational achievements of individuals.

The School recognises that children with SEND or certain health conditions can face additional safeguarding challenges and may be more prone to peer-on-peer group isolation or bullying (including prejudice-based bullying) than other children. The School also recognises that certain children may face additional barriers to reporting an incident because of their vulnerability, disability, sex, ethnicity and/or sexual orientation.

This policy also covers the bullying of teaching and non-teaching staff by students or other staff.

All members of the community, including governors, volunteers, teaching and operations staff, students and parents should understand what bullying is and be familiar with the Reading Blue Coat *Anti-Bullying Policy*. Parents and guardians have an important role in supporting the School in maintaining high standards of behaviour. It is essential there are consistent expectations of behaviour both at school, online and at home and that the School and parents co-operate closely together.

The policy is available to parents of students and prospective students on the School's website and on request from the PA to the Second Master. It is also communicated to all students and staff.

Certain basic expectations apply to all members of the Reading Blue Coat community: to understand what bullying is, to refrain from engaging in bullying (including cyberbullying, harassment, victimisation and discrimination) of students or staff), to report suspected bullying, and to take all reasonable measures to prevent and respond to cases of bullying. Members of staff have a duty of care towards students and are expected to act swiftly and professionally to support them in cases of suspected bullying. Reported concerns will always be taken seriously. These responsibilities also apply to cyberbullying and concerns about bullying which develop away from the School site and outside school hours.

The Reading Blue Coat *Anti-Bullying Policy* further aims to support the School's core values:

- **Aspiration** – aiming to build a community free from unkindness and intimidation
- **Courage** – to stand up against bullying and report suspected cases
- **Compassion** – for those who suffer from bullying and determination to support them

- **Service** – to build a community free from bullying for current and future Blue Coat students
- **Integrity** – to do what is right, not what is easy, when we learn about bullying among our peer groups, friends, or colleagues

2. What is Bullying?

Bullying may be defined as: “behaviour by an individual or group, repeated over time, that intentionally hurts another individual or group either physically or emotionally.” (*Preventing and Tackling Bullying*, DfE 2017).

Bullying may manifest itself in various forms of abuse: emotional, physical, sexual. It may affect adults and vulnerable adults, as well as children.

Recognising the significant harm which may result from bullying, bullying between children may also be termed ‘child-on-child abuse’. It can be standalone or as part of wider abuse and can happen both inside and outside of school, and online. Further information about child-on-child abuse, including the procedures to follow when an incident of child-on-child abuse is reported can be found the Reading Blue Coat *Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy*.

Bullying can happen anywhere and at any time and can involve anyone - students, other young people, staff, and parents.

The seriousness of bullying cannot be emphasised enough. Bullying is among the top concerns that parents have about their children’s safety and well-being at and on the way to and from school. Bullying 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. Bullying impacts on its victims’ attendance and attainment at school, marginalises those groups who may be particular targets for bullies and can have a life-long negative impact on some young people’s lives.

What if bullying or abuse is merely suspected? In such cases, all information should still be reported as for cases of clear-cut bullying, as per the provisions set out below. Information sharing is crucial, as an understanding of circumstances is necessary for effective anti-bullying actions and, where necessary, working with external agencies. In cases of suspected bullying, all children involved (whether ‘perpetrator’ or ‘victim’) will be treated as being ‘at risk’ and in need of support.

At times, those involved in bullying or child-on-child abuse may seek to blur the boundaries or normalise behaviours. There is a risk that certain actions may be passed off as ‘banter’ or a ‘joke’ among friends, or explained as a part of child development and socialisation. It is crucial for all staff and those managing cases of suspected bullying to understand the risk of normalising behaviours, as allowing such a culture to develop could seriously undermine the School’s capacity to prevent and tackle bullying. It is important in all cases to return to the experiences of those negatively affected and to the definition of bullying. All interactions with students in these cases must set the tone for adherence to the School’s values.

However, the School also recognises that there are different forms of bullying with gradations of impact. This requires a spectrum of responses from staff; for example, some issues may be resolved by a Head of Year with sanction and education, whereas serious cases of child-on-child abuse may rise up to the level of police engagement. Nevertheless, the School has an unambiguous commitment to challenge *all* cases of bullying and practices a ‘zero-tolerance’ approach.

Bullying and child-on-child abuse must also be understood in light of the OFSTED *Review of Sexual Abuse in Schools and Colleges* (2021), which found child-on-child sexual abuse to be prevalent across society and educational institutions. This abuse take place across a blend of in-person and online interactions. All staff are expected to understand that this is a particularly widespread and pernicious

form of abuse or bullying among young people. Sexual abuse may also be enmeshed in other forms of social and emotional abuse. It may be related to patterns of discrimination, such as misogyny or homophobia. Reading Blue Coat staff are expected to be knowledgeable, vigilant, and decisive in facing such issues. The means for reporting and responding to such abuse are outlined in the Reading Blue Coat *Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy*.

3. Characteristics, Patterns, and Forms of Bullying

Bullying is threatening, humiliating, or frightening someone, or causing them hurt or distress. It is intentional, but it may not necessarily be understood in that way by the person carrying it out, as they may not accept or recognise the impact of their actions. Its seriousness is determined by the distress suffered by the victim rather than by the intention of the bully. Bullying may consist of incidents over a shorter or a long period of time. It often involves an imbalance of power, which makes it difficult for those being bullied to defend themselves or even to seek help. This imbalance of power or sense of fear may make it more difficult for bystanders to intervene or to report bullying. However, willing spectators or supporters of a bully place themselves in a position of being complicit in their actions. The understanding of this situation, therefore, requires some nuance and careful investigation by staff.

Bullying can take many forms, such as (this is a non-exhaustive list):

- It may be repeated over time as a 'drip-drip' effect of emotional harm
- It may be motivated by prejudice against groups, students with protected characteristics, or because a child is adopted or is a carer, etc.
- It may occur directly or increasingly through online interaction (mobile phones, social media, etc.). This policy should be read in conjunction with the Reading Blue Coat *E-Safety, Digital Communication and Student Device Policy*.
- It may be physical, such as hitting or punching
- It may be intimidating, threatening or include practising extortion
- It may be sexual (including the sharing of nudes/semi-nudes)
- It may be verbal (including cyberbullying via text messages, email, social media, gaming, or other instant messages, and can include the use of images and video)
- It may be psychological, such as social exclusion, being sarcastic, name-calling, tormenting or spreading malicious rumours
- It may involve manipulating a third party to tease or torment someone, or actions that fall short of direct participation, where someone encourages others to bully, or joins in with laughing at a victim
- It may include moving or damaging the property of another
- It may involve taking or sharing photos or videos, without permission
- It may include forcing or coercing someone do something that they do not want to without proper authority

The School does not tolerate peer-group "initiation ceremonies" or hazing type violence or rituals designed to cause pain, anxiety or humiliation to pupils, and all staff remain alert to such actions.

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 students deserve the opportunity to be helped to understand what acceptable behaviour is.

4. Indicators of Bullying

Students who are being bullied may show changes in behaviour, such as (this is a non-exhaustive list):

- Unwillingness to return to school
- Displays of excessive anxiety, becoming withdrawn or unusually quiet
- Failure to produce work, or producing unusually poor work, or work that appears to have been copied, interfered with, or spoiled by others

- Books, bags, money, and other belongings suddenly go "missing", or are damaged
- Change to established habits (e.g. giving up music lessons, change to accent or vocabulary)
- Diminished levels of self-confidence
- Frequent visits to the Wellbeing Centre with symptoms which may relate to stress or anxiety, such as stomach pains or headaches
- Unexplained cuts and bruises
- Frequent absence, erratic attendance, or late arrival to class
- Choosing the company of adults rather than peers
- Displaying repressed body language and poor eye contact
- Difficulty in sleeping or experiencing nightmares
- Talking of suicide or running away from home or school

Although there may be other causes of some of the above symptoms, a repetition or combination of these possible signs of bullying should be investigated, reported and recorded, as appropriate, in accordance with this policy.

Parents may also notice a change in their child and, for this reason, good communication between home and the School is essential.

The most important indicator for bullying is the nurturing of a culture of openness and support in the School community, in which there is confidence in staff and their ability to help students. Tutors will play a key role in their routine conversations with students, to ascertain whether there is anything worrying them.

All members of the School community must be alert to the signs of bullying and act promptly and firmly against it, in accordance with policy. Sometimes people, either through lethargy, peer pressure, or tacit support for what is going on, fail to act. The School aims, through its pastoral programme, to educate students as to the impacts and indicators of bullying, and to respect others at all times. This supports the wider anti-bullying aim of Reading Blue Coat, to build a community which does not tolerate and prevents as far as possible any form of bullying.

5. Reporting and Responding to Bullying

The most important part of any anti-bullying strategy is the gathering of appropriate information; the School can only intervene to support if it knows what is going on. The following mechanisms for reporting are shared with students:

- Making a verbal report, in person, to the student's Tutor or Head of Year
 - Other suitable staff: Director of Section, Chaplain, Deputy Head (Pastoral), Second Master or any trusted teacher or staff member
- Paper-based report (which may be anonymous) in the 'Worries Box' beside the Wellbeing Centre or the Girls' Changing Rooms
- Completion of an anonymous online form by clicking the "Worried" tile on RM Unify (the default homepage for all students when they open a web browser)
- Asking parents to contact the School on the student's behalf

Responsible adults, such as teachers or parents, may receive information about bullying from a child with the understanding that they do not want anybody to 'tell' about what has happened. Although the child's wishes are important, it should be recognised that bullying may not stop and may even get worse if it is not confronted. The best approach is to encourage and secure the child's agreement for tackling bullying. If circumstances reveal that the child is being harmed by bullying, it may be necessary to set aside the child's wishes to prevent further harm – an open conversation among responsible adults is important in these circumstances, to agree a strategy.

Students are asked to respond to bullying as positively and effectively as possible, while recognising that it is the responsibility of the School to develop a strategy to prevent it.

The following advice is given to students who experience bullying:

- Tell yourself that you do not deserve to be bullied and that it is wrong
- Stay with a group of friends with whom you feel safe
- Inform your Tutor or any other member of staff immediately, who will take you seriously and support you in dealing with the person or group of people
- If you are being bullied online – do not reply. Instead, you should block, report, and save evidence with screen shots.

The following advice is given to students who witness another student being bullied:

- Tell an adult immediately; all reports of bullying will be dealt with sensitively
- Share information anonymously, if necessary, but provide enough information for it to be useful
- Do not encourage or support the bully, or what they are doing
- Support the victim by offering your friendship; check that they are ok after an incident
- If you witness bullying online / in social media, 'call out' a hurtful comment and save evidence with screen shots if able

When a member of staff learns of suspected bullying, they will respond in the following way:

- They will reassure and support those involved.
- Where necessary, they will secure the immediate physical and emotional safety of the child harmed.
- It may be necessary to bring the child to a space where they feel comfortable, such as the Wellbeing Centre, the Chaplaincy, Learning Support, or a Section office.
- They will advise them that they are required to pass details on to the relevant member of the pastoral team, to protect and support that student. (Tutor, Head of Year, Director of Section, Deputy Head [Pastoral], Second Master). This will lead to an investigation and the prevention of further bullying.
- Any case of suspected bullying should be entered as a 'child-on-child point' on iSAMS. This is a log entry and not a sanction, and enables the School to track the number of reported incidents (whatever the outcome) over time.
- Any case of suspected bullying involving discrimination should also be entered as a 'discrimination point' on iSAMS. This is a log entry and not a sanction, and enables the School to track the number of reported incidents (whatever the outcome) over time.

6. Actions Following a Report of Bullying

Following this report, the following actions will occur:

- The student(s) will be spoken with further, and a careful investigation will take place.
- The victim will be interviewed by the Head of Year, Director of Section, or a member of SLT, on their own, and asked to write an account of events. The process for dealing with bullying will be explained clearly to them. All interviews will be sensitive, supportive and unpressured, without leading questions.
- The School manages all personal data obtained during such investigations in line with statutory guidance about the use of personal data.
- The victim is given the opportunity to discuss their own reactions and behaviour towards the bully. The victim is given support and advice, and counselling may be suggested if deemed appropriate.
- Once initial information has been gathered, the individual(s) identified as the bully and any others involved in or present during the incident(s) will be interviewed individually and asked to write an account of events. The process for dealing with bullying will be explained clearly to them.

- Details of the incident will be recorded on the files of those students involved, on the School's MIS. If the incident is deemed to reach a significant level of harm, the DSL will be informed and information will be stored on the School's safeguarding database.
- The pastoral team will decide on an appropriate course of action, which will be communicated to all parties concerned. It will be made clear that any further incident (or discussion about the current incident) would be considered an act of bullying in its own right. It will be made clear why the behaviour was inappropriate and unacceptable. Support will be offered to all parties, including perpetrators. Suitable sanctions will also be given (see the Reading Blue Coat *Behaviour, Rewards, and Sanctions Policy* for details).
- If the Head of Year or Director of Section decides it is appropriate, the Second Master (or, if unavailable or delegating, Deputy Head [Pastoral]) will become involved and the parents of the perpetrator/s will be informed by letter or telephone.
- Sanctions will be issued in accordance with policy and will reflect proportionately the seriousness of the incident and convey a deterrent effect, with Temporary or Permanent Exclusion being the ultimate sanctions in cases of severe and persistent bullying.
- All incidents of bullying will be recorded at weekly Section meetings attended by the relevant Heads of Year, Directors of Section, and the Deputy Head Pastoral. Any sanctions associated with a bullying incident will be logged on the School's MIS.
- A record of bullying incidents will be kept on the School's behaviour log and categorized as 'bullying' and/or 'child-on-child abuse' and/or 'discrimination.' The Deputy Head (Pastoral) will produce a log and termly analysis of child-on-child incidents, to spot trends and develop strategy. Similarly, the Director of Equality, Diversity & Inclusion will produce a log and termly analysis of discrimination incidents. The Second Master and Headmaster will be informed of all complaints or incidences of bullying, and how they were dealt with. This is done through Section notes for Lower School, Middle School and Sixth Form, or verbally directly to the Second Master. The Second Master will have the final say as to whether an incident is deemed to be bullying or not (or this may be delegated to the Deputy Head [Pastoral]).
- Whilst it is the policy of the School to attempt to resolve cases of bullying internally, there may be occasions when consideration will be given to making a report to the police or relevant Children's Services. This would be in consultation with the student, their parent(s)/guardian(s), unless, in the case of a safeguarding or child protection concerns, contacting a parent/guardian may place the student at greater risk.

7. Training, Education, and Raising Awareness

The School will raise awareness among the staff through training and take action to reduce the risk of bullying at the times and places where it is most likely to occur. The key points from this policy will be prominently displayed on School notice boards. Additional information about school or national initiatives will be communicated through whole school or year group assemblies. Further discussion with students will take place during tutor time.

Anti-bullying will feature as a discussion point for Section councils and where appropriate feedback will be taken to School Council. It will also be revisited as necessary during Wellbeing (PSHE) sessions to all years and reinforced in other areas of the curriculum as the opportunities present themselves e.g., Drama, Physical Education and Religious Studies.

The School will conduct anti-bullying surveys to facilitate an understanding of the level and type of bullying which students might have experienced, the context, and the groups involved. The aim of surveys will always be to inform our approach, enabling the School to combat bullying more effectively and improve overall student well-being.

Recent events and initiatives:

- Online safety refresher training (Educare), for staff (Sep 2022)
- Launch of the new Reading Blue Coat 'Worries Box', readvertising of worried@ email (Sep 2022) & launch of "Worried" tile on RM Unify and anonymous online form (Feb 2025)


- Training of a group of Year 8 and Year 9 students for the Diana Award, anti-bullying ambassadors (Nov 2022 & 2024)
- Talk on unconscious bias (including racial bullying) from Floyd Stedman for staff (Sep 2022) and all students (Feb 2023)
- Safeguarding update training for staff (Sep 2023)
- Talk on working with girls (including friendship issues and bullying) from Girls on Board, for staff (Sep 2023)
- Introduction of annual safeguarding training for all Year 12 students provided by the School's DSL (Sep 2023)
- Year 9 & 12 Voicebox Assemblies & Workshops on healthy masculinity and gender stereotypes (Sep & Oct 2023 & 2024)
- Talk on gender equality (including gender-based bullying) from Laura Bates for students and staff (Jan 2024)
- Anti-racism day featuring talks and workshops by African-Caribbean Education Network (Feb 2024)
- Online preventing bullying training (Educare), for staff (June 2024)
- Mentoring scheme introduced to provide all Year 7 students with a Year 13 mentor (Nov 2024)
- Talk on embracing neurodiversity from Professor Jason Arday for students and staff (Jan 2025)

8. Cyber Bullying

The widespread use of smartphones and social media apps by students means that the threat of cyber bullying is ever-present, and that bullying will often take place through a blend of remote and in-person interactions. It will often take place outside of school hours, through technology. Bullying may be conducted purely online. It should be noted that the Government advises that schools should respond to online behaviours according to exactly the same principles as online behaviours (*Behaviour in Schools 2024*).

Staff are asked to understand this point, to be vigilant for evidence of cyber-bullying, and to follow the School's *E-Safety, Digital Communication and Student Device Policy*, which gives extensive guidance on this issue.

9. Policy Update Schedule

Author(s):	Guy Williams (Deputy Head [Pastoral]) & Ed Trelinski (Second Master)
Date:	September 2025
Review Frequency:	Annually
Next Review Date:	June 2026
References and External Resources:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Preventing and Tackling Bullying</i> (DfE 2017) • <i>Cyber Bullying: Advice for Headteachers and Schools</i> (DfE 2014) • <i>Review of Sexual Abuse in Schools and Colleges</i> (OFSTED 2021) • <i>Teaching Online Safety in Schools</i> (DfE 2023) • <i>Behaviour in Schools: Advice for Headteachers and School Staff</i> (DfE 2024)
Related Policies:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Artificial Intelligence • Child Protection and Safeguarding • Behaviour, Rewards, and Sanctions • E-safety, Digital Communications, and Student Device
Agreed by:	 Clare Freeman (Safeguarding Governor) on behalf of the Full Governing Board
Date of Agreement:	September 2025