

6<sup>th</sup> July 2022

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Dear Parents/Carers

## **Bullying**

I am writing to bring your attention to the complex issues of bullying and to give you information, advice and support so that we can all work together to reduce instances of bullying in and out of school.

Sorry for the length of this letter, I hope you share my view that this is an important subject to contact you about and is deserved of this level of detail.

As a Headteacher I believe it is always important to be honest and open with our parents and students. Whilst many schools and institutions have struggled to admit this, I feel it is important to recognise that bullying has always taken place in schools and society and that to tackle it we have to be fully transparent, open to challenge and work together as a community to do all we can to eradicate bullying and support the wellbeing of young people in our care.

### **I am writing this letter because:**

- Incidents of bullying reported to the school have increased in the last 2 years.
- 90% of bullying allegations involve girls, particularly in years 8, 9 and 10.
- Reports of conflict outside of school both online and in person have increased.
- Most bullying and conflict between students takes place online outside of school.
- I know with confidence from recent conversations with many other local Headteachers that this is an issue that all schools are currently facing and this is important to tackle.

### **Based on my own experience and observations, we are seeing this because:**

- The influence of social media, increase of digital communications and their use by young people particularly since the pandemic has created a surge in poor, aggressive behaviour towards others online.
- The important social skills lost during the pandemic during important developmental years has meant that some students have struggled with how to manage relationships and friendships. This has also been seen by parents many of whom are unsure of how to manage these changes.
- The influence of an increase of conflict in society including between adults, parents and students has filtered down into schools. Behaviours of adults as displayed on reality television

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and tabloid media is an undeniable influence on the way people treat each other. This changes boundaries of manners, respect and kindness.

- Racism, homophobia, transphobia and misogyny continue to occur in society and schools and this is often driven by online trolls, fake online accounts and deliberately divisive social media posts.
- There is often a demand or extreme responses or sanctions to situations which are best resolved through talking, reconciliation and moving on. This removes healthy spaces for relationship issues and conflict to be resolved.
- We live in unusual times and many students feel more anxious than before about a range of diverse issues and the world they live in, this manifests in out-of-character behaviours.

### **Why are bullying issues so complex?**

If you were to ask someone if they have ever been bullied or have experienced bullying the vast majority would say “**yes**”; if you were to ask someone if they have ever been a bully the vast majority would say “**no**”. This is where things are often complicated. Obviously both cannot be true but it is often a lot easier to recognise when others treat us badly but not as easy to see when we may treat others badly.

When dealing with accusations of bullying we often find that both sides feel they are the victim but rarely, if ever, do we see parents and students recognise when they/their child might be the perpetrator.

Because the bullying of a child is so emotive, especially with parents, it often makes it hard to understand what is going on and why it is happening. Parents who feel their child is being bullied often jump to conclusions and request severe or extreme punishments like exclusions for the other child. In reality this neither resolves the situation nor provides the best outcome in the long term. The school always endeavours to fully understand what has happened and to get a wide picture on what is often quite complex and rarely straightforward.

In 2022 most bullying starts or takes place online with the consequences then spilling into school and this often happens on social media in the evenings then in school at lunch and breaks. This can make it very hard for staff to unpick what has happened and why.

Recently, we have had to deal with allegations of bullying where parents have become involved, taken it into their own hands, created further conflict outside of school which has made the job of supporting in school much more difficult. It is sometimes hard to differentiate between a short, one off argument, assault or disagreement with sustained bullying and an imbalance of power. When bullying is centred on an ongoing conflict it can be hard to get both sides to walk away and move on.

## What is bullying?

### We share the beliefs of the Anti-Bullying alliance when stating that Wrotham School:

- believes bullying in any form is wrong and should not be tolerated and that any environment that encourages bullying, or shows indifference to prejudice and discrimination, is unacceptable;
- believes bullying is a behaviour choice and that anyone can be encouraged to change their behaviour;
- respects difference and welcome diversity in our children, young people and in society in general and believe our work should be inclusive of all;
- believes children and young people should have the right to feel safe, secure and valued and that creating a safe environment and dealing with bullying is our shared responsibility;
- believes children and young people should actively participate in decisions that affect them and should be supported in taking responsibility for their choices and subsequent actions;
- supports a range of positive strategies to deal with bullying and actively challenge the use of humiliation, fear, ridicule and other similar approaches in an effort to reduce bullying;
- believes that people should be treated with respect and courtesy.

### The Anti-Bullying alliance defines bullying as:

*“Bullying is the repetitive, intentional hurting of one person or group by another person or group, where the relationship involves an imbalance of power. It can happen face to face or online”.*

### There are four key elements to this definition:

- hurtful
- repetition
- power imbalance
- intentional

### From our experience at Wrotham School:

- More often than not bullying takes place repeatedly over a period of time.
- Bullying often starts and gathers momentum online on social media.
- Bullying can be both physical and emotional.
- Often bullying involves groups of students “ganging up” on others.
- Bullying is rarely, if ever, provoked; it is always unwanted and persistent.
- Bullying has a serious and sustained impact on a child’s mental health and wellbeing.
- Bullying occurs when strict boundaries put in place by the school are ignored.

### What probably isn’t bullying?

One off conflicts are rarely bullying – these include basic and simple arguments, fallings out, disagreements, changes of friendship groups that happen naturally over time and normal day to day events that are isolated and unintentional such as picking sports teams or spending time with other friends, bickering, isolated incidents of arguing. A physical altercation may not always be bullying depending on the situation, what caused it and the individual’s role in this.

A “one off” incident where the other party recognises their behaviour was wrong, apologises and corrects this and it does not happen again is not bullying. Bullying is less likely to be “one on one” unless it involves an older student or a threat of others becoming involved or repeated intimidation and threat.

This list is not definitive and does not change how a victim may feel. The individuals welfare is most important at all times.

### **What does the school do?**

The school does not tolerate bullying and is committed to supporting students that are bullied and their families. The school provides a robust and detailed education programme on bullying, cyberbullying, online harassment, healthy relationships, discrimination and personal safety. This runs throughout the year in progress time and in Life and Society lessons.

We provide a safe space where bullying can be reported, discussed and where students are confident that appropriate action will be taken (see below).

Our staff are trained and experienced at dealing with bullying and ensuring children are safe in school and their wellbeing is professionally cared for and monitored.

The school will offer professional mental health and wellbeing support to any child who has been bullied as required and tailored to that individual.

The school will not tolerate physical assault and this will be met with serious sanctions such as exclusion from school on a fixed term or permanent basis unless in self defence. The school will conduct thorough investigations to understand what has happened and to take action to try and stop/prevent the bullying from happening.

Where clear and unquestionable responsibility can be established we will issue serious sanctions to those who bully others. Where situations are not straightforward and clear we will focus on restorative work, without blame being assigned to draw a clear line in the sand and move forward with both sides satisfied with the resolution and that this will not happen again. If this agreement is then broken, the school will issue sanctions.

We will work closely with parents to support their child giving professional advice and sharing judgments and outcomes if appropriate.

### **What can students do?**

If a child feels they are being bullied they must report it immediately. The sooner it is reported the more chance we have of resolving it. A report can be made at any time to any member of staff but normally to:

- Form Tutor
- Head of Year

- Head of Upper/Lower School
- A member of the MAC team.

A student can email to report bullying or any related concern **at any time** by emailing [safeguarding@wrotham.kent.sch.uk](mailto:safeguarding@wrotham.kent.sch.uk)

All students reports will be dealt with seriously and the students will be listened to.

### **What can parents do?**

When your child lets you know they are feeling bullied it is easy to feel powerless. However, as a parent you have the most important role to play in supporting and helping your child. Listen to them carefully and be there to support them. Support your child, give them love and kindness but avoid anger seeping through. Ask them if they have spoken to anyone at school and who they have spoken to. Encourage them to speak out, remind them that the school is a safe place but that they can only help if they know what is going on.

When asking them about what has happened give them time and space to speak to you, try not to become impatient and end up leading them with questions like “did they do this to you”... “I know who the bully is... I bet it is ????” Sometimes when children feel uncomfortable they will take the easiest route out and agree with you.

Remind your child that dealing with bullying means resolving the issue. The “bully” won’t just be taken away or the behaviour necessarily stop but there is lots of things that can be done and this is more than achievable.

Sometimes dealing with bullying is about being strong, resilient and being confident in your real friendships.

Try not to jump to conclusions about what has happened, allow your child to speak and reserve judgment.

Do not get involved personally. Try to avoid knee jerk reactions in front of your child such as demonising the other child, telling them that “if I get hold of them... I will”.... Avoid calling the other parent yourself or emailing the school immediately. When emotions run high this can lead to further conflict.

Never encourage physical retribution other than in self-defence. This can cause dangerous escalations and makes it even more difficult to resolve.

Always believe your child and what they are saying but remember that children, especially when vulnerable, can confuse both emotions and facts – this is fine but remember that sometimes the full account of what has happened may take time to piece together.

Work with the school. We both have the same objective – your child’s safety and welfare. If we disagree on the best course of action this can be discussed further and challenged as appropriate but in a calm and reasonable way. We both want the same outcome.

Monitor your child in the longer term. Make sure that they are well and coping and if this changes then seek further support.

**Resources for Parents:**

<https://anti-bullyingalliance.org.uk/tools-information/advice-and-support/advice-parents-and-carers>

<https://www.kent.gov.uk/education-and-children/protecting-children/bullying>

**Reporting Bullying or Seeking Help and Support:**

If you wish to report that your child is being bullied or if you think your child is being bullied please email the school using the following email address:

[Safeguarding@wrotham.kent.sch.uk](mailto:Safeguarding@wrotham.kent.sch.uk)

If you are a parent who would like advice on bullying, social media, toxic or coercive friendships, particularly if you are the first time parent of a teenage girl and want support in managing this, our team is always happy to support you and offer advice. Please use the same address to make contact.

I hope you have found this useful. I have attached a list of further resources to support parents and students with bullying.

Yours sincerely



Mr M Cater  
Headteacher

**Anti- Bullying Resources and useful links:**

<https://anti-bullyingalliance.org.uk/>

<https://anti-bullyingalliance.org.uk/tools-information/all-about-bullying/understanding-bullying/definition>

**Online Bullying:**

<https://anti-bullyingalliance.org.uk/tools-information/all-about-bullying/online-bullying>

**E- Safety and Social Media**

**School Policy:**

<https://www.wrothamschool.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/E-safety-Policy.pdf>

**Useful links and resources for parents and students:**

<https://www.wrothamschool.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/Social Media Guidance UKCCIS Final 18122015.pdf>

<https://www.wrothamschool.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/cyberbullying-checklist-pdf wdf101282.pdf>

<https://www.nspcc.org.uk/what-is-child-abuse/types-of-abuse/online-abuse/>

<https://www.wrothamschool.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/teenagers-checklist-pdf wdf101287.pdf>