

Appendix 1: Hertfordshire Guidance

Defining bullying

While there is no single definition of bullying, the Department for Education provides the following guidance:

‘Bullying is behaviour by an individual or group, repeated over time, that intentionally hurts another individual or group either physically or emotionally. Bullying can take many forms (for instance, cyber-bullying via text messages or the internet), and is often motivated by prejudice against particular groups, for example on grounds of race, religion, gender, sexual orientation, or because a child is adopted or has caring responsibilities. It might be motivated by actual differences between children, or perceived differences. Stopping violence and ensuring immediate physical safety is obviously a school’s first priority but emotional bullying can be more damaging than physical; teachers and schools have to make their own judgements about each specific case.’ “Preventing and Tackling Bullying” DfE 2011

Most definitions include the following dimensions:

1. The behaviour is intended to cause distress
2. The behaviour is repeated
3. There is an imbalance of power between the perpetrator of bullying and the target

However there are important issues to consider within these broad factors:

The first element, ‘the behaviour is intended to cause distress’, should not be taken to excuse behaviour which individuals or groups claim was intended in fun. It is reasonable for schools to expect that young people will develop age appropriate skills of empathy and will not be drawn into behaviour that for the perpetrators amounts to teasing but for the target becomes seriously distressing. Behaviour that impacts to damage the emotional wellbeing of others should be taken to be a matter of serious concern and individuals should be made to understand their culpability, regardless of their intention. The effect of the behaviour on the recipient – not just the intention of the perpetrator – is significant in deciding whether to treat an incident as bullying.

The second element, ‘the behaviour is repeated’, should be understood in terms of the number and degree of impacts on the target. A single posting of hurtful material on the internet has the potential to be seen by hundreds if not thousands of people and is therefore a very serious matter. A single act of physical assault, mental abuse or threat of the same can lead a child to be in a state of ongoing fear. Any incidents of deliberately hurtful behaviour that lead to fear of recurrence should be designated as bullying incidents.

The final element, ‘an imbalance of power’, can be subtle and complex. It should not be assumed that a larger child cannot be a victim, nor a smaller child a perpetrator. It is also often important to recognise the role of popularity as a factor that pertains to the balance of power. Equalities and issues of prejudice also need to be considered carefully within this dimension. A great deal of bullying is linked to difference, perceived difference or discriminatory attitudes towards certain groups regardless of whether the target is actually a member of these groups. For example, many children and young people who are not lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender (LGBT) may be targeted for homophobic bullying while others may be the targets of racist bullying based on inaccurate presumptions about their culture. These dimensions should always be recorded and monitored.

Hertfordshire County Council recommends that schools therefore reflect the following more complex aspects in defining and responding to behaviour.

Bullying is behaviour that impacts negatively on others in the following ways:

1. The behaviour is either intended to cause distress or results in significant distress
2. The behaviour is repeated or results in multiple impacts on the target
3. There is an imbalance of power between the perpetrator/s of bullying and the target/s whether as a result of the prior context or the content or the experience of the hurtful behaviour

Schools are encouraged to develop their own definitions in collaboration with children and young people, parents/carers and staff. It is very important that there is a shared understanding of the strength of the school's stance against bullying and understanding definitions is an important part of this. It is important that young people and their parents know the definition that the school is working with.

Some schools will wish to evolve child friendly definitions of bullying. For example:

People hurting or upsetting you repeatedly and on purpose by doing nasty or unkind things.

Bullying behaviour **can** include the following hurtful behaviours

- name-calling, taunting, teasing, mocking and making offensive comments
- offensive, threatening or personalised graffiti or other written material
- excluding people from groups
- gossiping and spreading hurtful or untruthful rumours
- kicking, hitting, pushing
- taking belongings
- cyberbullying – including sending inappropriate, offensive or degrading text messages, emails or instant messages, setting up websites or contributing content to social networking sites that is designed to embarrass or upset individuals or collective exclusion of individuals from social networking sites.

It should be noted that not all hurtful behaviour is bullying, but all reported hurtful behaviour should be taken seriously and resolved at the earliest opportunity.

The Equality and Human Rights Commission's report on the effectiveness of responses to 'Identity-based' (or 'Prejudice-based') bullying (Research report 64 2010) states that it

"is widespread and continues to blight the lives of many young people, affecting educational attainment and having a long term impact on their life chances."

Schools should pay particular attention to ensuring that all prejudice-based hurtful incidents are identified and prevented from escalating. Ofsted will specifically look for evidence that this is the case in all schools in relation to special educational need, sexual orientation, sex, race, religion and belief, gender identity or disability. In addition, schools should be sensitive to wider issues of prejudice. Some children and young people can be singled out because they are overweight, deprived, in care, young carers, particularly able or talented.

Schools should also be alert to challenging the development of an environment which is hurtful and threatening to particular groups or communities. For example, casual use of homophobic, transphobic, sexist or racist language should not go unchecked whether or not it is targeted at an individual.