

Sheringham Woodfields School



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STAFF BULLYING & HARASSMENT POLICY STATEMENT

Approved by SMT: 30 th April 2024	Approved by Staff: 7 th May 2024	Approved by Governors: 13 th May 2024
Next Review date: Summer 2026	Person(s) responsible for review: Head Teacher, HR Advisor and Business Manager	

Please note this is a policy to outline the school's commitment to preventing bullying and harassment. Where instances of bullying and harassment are reported the schools grievance policy and procedure, and in some cases the school's disciplinary procedure, should be followed.

1. Introduction

The governing body recognises that all employees have the right to work in an environment that is free from bullying and harassment. This policy aims to reinforce the school's commitment to equality and diversity and to promote positive, professional and courteous working relationships. The working environment should be safe and non-threatening, where the dignity of all is respected. This policy outlines what bullying and harassment is and the responsibilities of school leaders and employees. Any procedural action relating to bullying and harassment should be dealt with under the school's grievance or disciplinary procedures or where a separate, specific procedure is required this policy will make that clear.

The school will not tolerate harassment or bullying. Any breaches by employees will be treated as disciplinary offences and the school's disciplinary procedure will be followed. Employees, who feel they are being harassed or subjected to other inappropriate behaviour by work colleagues, have a right to raise concerns via the Grievance procedure and/or make a complaint and to be protected against victimisation for making or being involved in a complaint. Information on ways of dealing with complaints from members of the public is available at Appendix A.

With the school making the commitment outlined in this policy to address employee concerns, it is important to state that there is also a clear expectation that those employees who choose to raise concerns through the Grievance policy and procedure do so with an intention to resolve the issues and bring about a harmonious working environment. All employees are expected to adhere to this policy in line with the school's obligations under equality legislation. The school will ensure that all reasonable adjustments or supportive measures are considered to allow equality of access and opportunity regardless of age, gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, disability, religion or belief, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity or marital status.

All concerns or complaints will be treated seriously but this may not mean going directly to a formal procedure. Except in extreme cases, informal methods of dealing with unacceptable behaviour are often

the most successful. To cool emotions and defuse the situation, an immediate apology is invaluable and may avoid the need to take the matter further. Please see the school's grievance procedure for informal resolution methods. Where informal action fails to resolve a situation, employees can raise a formal grievance in accordance with the school's grievance procedure.

2. Relevant legislation

- Equality Act 2010 - protection against discrimination, harassment or victimisation for protected groups.
- Protection from Harassment Act 1997 - makes it unlawful to pursue a course of conduct amounting to harassment, where the conduct causes alarm or distress to the victim.
- Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 - employers duty of care to provide a safe place for its employees to work.

3. Application of this policy

This policy applies to the conduct of school employees in the context of their work, or which otherwise affects the working, learning or social environment of the school. This can include the way in which employees behave towards each other outside school premises on school-related social occasions. It can also cover conduct towards people who are not members of the school (such as contractors and other members of the public).

The school will bring this policy to the attention of contractors through its procurement processes.

If there are concerns about an employee's conduct online the school's E-safety and ICT user acceptance form.

4. Governing Body Responsibilities

The Governing body will:

- be alert to potential problems and act promptly without waiting for a complaint to be made to the extent that this is possible (by challenging unacceptable behaviour which is directly observed and promoting an inclusive culture)
- deal, through the Chair of Governors or other nominated governor, with any complaints raised against the Headteacher under this policy and procedure. The school will take advice from the HR Business Partner (Schools) where appropriate.
- take any complaint, being dealt with, seriously with sensitivity to the feelings and perceptions of those involved, being fair, maintaining confidentiality, safeguarding against victimisation and ensuring support is available
- ensure this policy is reviewed at least every three years (*see Monitoring of the policy section below*)

5. Headteacher and Leadership Team Responsibilities

Ultimate responsibility for this policy rests with the governing body; however they will require the Headteacher to ensure that the policy is brought to the attention of all employees.

The Headteacher and Leadership team will:

- set an example and promote a working environment where harassment, bullying and victimisation is viewed as unacceptable and employees feel free to challenge unacceptable behaviour
- ensure all employees are aware of the standards of behaviour and conduct expected of them at work and that it is covered in discussions during induction, at appraisal and supervision meetings and provide appropriate awareness and training on key issues
- treat informal and formal complaints seriously, with sensitivity to the feelings and perceptions of all those involved

- deal with any issues raised fairly and confidentially
- take steps to ensure that employees who bring complaints, or support others to do so, are not treated less favourably than others because of this
- ensure all employees are aware of the support networks available to them
- make reports to the governing body as appropriate (*see Monitoring of the policy section below*)
- take immediate action if bullying and/or harassment is suspected or identified
- be familiar with this policy and the school's grievance and discipline policies and procedures
- be aware of the possibility of malicious or frivolous complaint
- be aware that it is not only your perception of what behaviour is acceptable which defines harassment. The recipient's view of the behaviour is important and if the recipient feels that they have been harassed, the complaint must be taken seriously and actioned.

6. Employee Responsibilities

All employees must:

- report any incidents of bullying or harassment to the Headteacher or a member of the management team
- behave in accordance with this policy
- take seriously requests to cease or amend behaviour and respond courteously to them
- not participate in, encourage or condone the harassment, bullying or victimisation of others
- promote an inclusive culture in which colleagues or peers are not subjected to harassment, bullying or victimisation by challenging these forms of behaviour or reporting situations in which they occur to the manager of the person involved

7. Definitions

7.1 What is unacceptable behaviour?

Harassment, bullying, victimisation and other behaviours affecting the dignity of an individual at work are unacceptable. The term harassment is used in this document to include all forms of unacceptable behaviour. Some behaviour or actions may be acceptable to one individual but unacceptable to another. It is the deed and the impact on the recipient that is the deciding factor. This includes behaviour that creates an offensive environment in which to work.

7.2 Harassment

Harassment is any unwanted conduct affecting the dignity of men and women in the workplace. It may be related to one or more personal characteristic(s) of an individual such as age, gender, race, disability, religion, belief, nationality or sexuality. It may also be related to the membership or non-membership of a trade union. The key is that the actions or comments are viewed as demeaning and/or unacceptable to the recipient.

7.2.1 Sexual harassment

Sexual harassment has the same definition as any other forms of harassment, but the harassment is of a sexual nature. Sexual harassment claims may go back over some time for two reasons; either because when it is finally reported it is the last straw (the individual may have been subject to a number of incidents that finally culminate in the individual not being able to stand it anymore) or individuals may also delay their reporting of the incident because they fear they will be bullied, not believed, feel too distressed or have their reputation at work damaged. All reports should be dealt with, with the upmost sensitivity and confidentiality as experiencing sexual harassment is highly distressing for the individual. All employees must feel they can report the incident and it will be taken seriously immediately.

The use of the word 'banter' should be avoided as it seeks to legitimise behaviour that may be offending an individual(s) and could be classed as harassment.

It is very important that the complainant should be taken seriously, regardless of whether or not there are any witnesses. It is the job of the investigator (as part of the process outlined in the school's Grievance procedure) to present the facts of the case, incorporating information from all involved. Questions will need to be asked of the complainant to establish the facts. These questions should be asked sensitively, in a private place and plenty of time should be allowed. The situation must be as stress-free as possible so that the complainant does not feel like they are being cross-examined.

ACAS also provides advice and guidance on sexual harassment in the workplace.

7.3 Bullying

Bullying is offensive, intimidating, malicious or insulting behaviour, an abuse or misuse of power through means intended to undermine, humiliate, denigrate or injure the recipient.

7.4 Victimisation

Victimisation is treating a person less favourably because they were (or may have been) a party to a particular action.

7.5 Discrimination

Discrimination can be direct or indirect:

- direct discrimination is where a person is treated less favourably because of a 'protected characteristic'.
- indirect discrimination is an apparently neutral provision, criterion or practice which disadvantages a large proportion of the members of a particular group or community.
- associative discrimination is when employees are also able to claim harassment due to 'associative discrimination' - direct discrimination against someone because they associate with another person who possesses a protected characteristic.
- perceptive discrimination is when an employee is discriminated against because someone thinks the employee has a protected characteristic, even though they do not.

7.6 What are the forms of harassment?

Harassment may be directed at, and can be carried out by, an individual or a group.

Harassment can be unwanted conduct ranging from a series of two or more incidents or ongoing conduct. It can be physical or non-physical, deliberate or unintentional.

Employees can also complain of harassment even if it is not directed at them, if they can demonstrate that the behaviour creates an offensive environment for them in which to work. Harassment can be experienced online as well as in a physical environment. This is known as Cyberbullying. Please refer to the Schools Cyberbullying documentation for further information.

Harassment may be unlawful as well as being damaging to individuals and to the school. It causes tension, conflict and de-motivation. This is disruptive and costly in terms of time, the physical and emotional wellbeing of staff, money, public reputation and online reputation.

Where the incident is deemed to meet the schools Violence at Work policy an incident reporting form should be completed on the schools' incident reporting system. There is a Violence at Work policy on HR InfoSpace.

Employees who feel they have been a victim of a hate crime or hate incident in the workplace consider calling the police - 999 in an emergency or 101 in a non-emergency situation. Reports can also be made online to the police.

More examples of what might constitute harassment are listed at Appendix B.

7.7 What harassment is not about

The Headteachers is required to manage employee performance. This includes giving reasonable instructions, undertaking performance reviews, informal reprimands and fairly instigating capability or disciplinary procedures. It is most unlikely that reasonable action taken by the Headteachers will constitute harassment, even if the management action is unwelcome.

All school procedures will be conducted in such a manner as to respect people's dignity.

8. Malicious complaints

Whilst the school is determined in its zero tolerance approach to harassment and bullying, a responsible attitude is expected of employees.

It should be recognised that allegations of harassment are sometimes falsely made and, in all cases, the rights of alleged perpetrators need to be recognised.

Malicious or unfounded complaints of harassment can also have a devastating effect on the health, confidence, morale, and motivation of those falsely accused. It would not serve the interests of the school for any policy or procedure to be abused and for victims of malicious or unfounded allegations to have no redress. Complaints of harassment by employees, which are found to be intentionally frivolous, spiteful, or unreasonable will themselves be treated as misconduct in accordance with the disciplinary procedure. Accused workers should be offered support and sensitivity.

Appendix A deals with how to treat complaints of harassment by external parties.

9. Confidentiality

Confidentiality will be maintained during and after the grievance procedure. Please refer to the school's grievance procedure for more information.

10. How to report and deal with incidents of bullying and harassment

Claims of bullying and harassment should be reported and dealt with using the school's grievance procedure. If the grievance is against another employee and is upheld, it may be appropriate for a disciplinary investigation to be undertaken. In these cases the school's disciplinary procedure should be followed.

Appendix A - Complaints of harassment by external parties

Employees may occasionally be subject to harassment from members of the public. A member of the public is defined as anyone not acting in the capacity of an employee of the school.

The steps that may need to be taken are:

- If the employee feels able to tell the member of the public that their behaviour is unacceptable and unwelcome, without inflaming the situation they could do so. This is only advisable where the employee is sure this is the right response. In situations where they are not sure, the best course of action is to try to bring the incident to a close by politely ending the discussion and referring the matter to the Headteacher.
- It would be natural for employees to try to defend themselves aggressively in such situations, but this course of action is often likely to make the situation worse, rather than better. Employees should try to remain calm and clear-headed whilst they remain with the member of the public.
- The employee should make a record of the details of the incident, and any others of which they are aware involving the same aggressor.
- After the incident, employees must report the matter to the Headteacher. No action can be taken until the matter is reported, and if incidents go unreported they are more likely to be repeated.
- The Headteacher and the employee should agree on the course of action to be taken. This will usually mean informing the member of the public that their behaviour, in harassing a school employee, was unacceptable and try to re-build the relationship.
- Reaching a solution in meetings with the member of the public may be very difficult. In some situations, it may be advisable to use a trained mediator.

In the situation where a parent or carer has harassed a teacher, further action would normally take the form of a letter from the Headteacher to the aggressor. The letter would underline the fact that it is not acceptable behaviour to harass a school employee, and if the parent or carer wishes to discuss the matter, further arrangements for this can be made. The subsequent meeting should take place in the presence of the Headteacher and a School Governor.

Where there are repeated cases of harassment by the same aggressor the Headteacher should undertake a risk assessment.

Appendix B - Examples of harassment

Information in this appendix relates to harassment given verbally or physically, written or online e.g. social media. Please note that this list is not exhaustive:

- Unwanted physical contact
- Physical attacks or threats
- Any unwanted conduct of a sexual nature
- Intrusive remarks about a person's appearance
- Deliberately promoting negative attitudes about others
- Telling offensive jokes, using offensive language, malicious gossip
- Verbal abuse or using offensive names
- Displaying offensive posters, graffiti, emblems
- Isolation, non co-operation, exclusion from social activities
- Constantly undermining an individual's efforts without explaining how to improve
- Communicating in an intimidating and unreasonable manner (whether verbally, in writing, via email or another way)
- Causing embarrassment in front of others
- Constant criticism relating to historical events
- Persecution and intimidation through threats or inspiration of fear
- Not listening to another's point of view on a regular basis
- Victimisation or retaliation
- Removal of responsibilities, allocating menial tasks
- Deliberately impeding performance of work
- Constantly and unreasonably changing targets or deadlines (moving the goalposts)
- Over-monitoring of an employee with or without his or her knowledge
- Unreasonable refusal of applications for leave, training or promotion
- Making threats about job security without foundation
- Obvious close down or whispering when a colleague comes in

Examples of harassment on the grounds of disability:

Derogatory remarks, mimicking, invasive personal questions, staring, ostracising or patronising which is directed at any disabled individual, or group of disabled people, which results in the individual(s) feeling threatened or compromised. Stereotyping or making assumptions about individual's ability because of their disability. Holding events at non-accessible venues

Examples of harassment on the basis of age:

Ridiculing or demanding behaviour focused towards people because of their age, regarding them as "too old" or "too young"; or making assumptions about lifestyle based on perceived age. Examples of harassment on the basis of sexuality:

- Behaviour that condemns or ridicules people because of their perceived or actual sexuality.
- Derogatory remarks, jokes, graffiti that results in the individual feeling uncomfortable, excluded or threatened.
- Outing an individual as lesbian, gay or bisexual without their permission.
- Spreading rumours or gossip about an individual's sexual orientation.
- Asking a lesbian, gay or bisexual colleague intrusive questions about their sexual orientation.

Examples of harassment on the basis of working patterns:

Behaviour, which fails to acknowledge that some people do not work five days a week or "9.00 to 5.00" every day, and that organisations operate effectively using a variety of working patterns. Making comments about not "pulling their weight" or hours of work.

Examples of harassment on the grounds of ethnicity:

This can be derogatory remarks, racist statements, graffiti, jokes, or any other action of a racist nature that is directed at any individual or group from a particular ethnic background that results in the individual(s) feeling threatened or compromised.

Examples of behaviour that may be sexual harassment:

Unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favours, upskirting or other conduct of sexual nature, which result in the individual feeling threatened or compromised. This is not restricted to attempts to initiate sexual relations. Sexual harassment is any harassing conduct based on the gender, gender identity or sexuality of the recipient, which has the purpose or effect of violating the dignity of the worker, or creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment for them. Most sexual harassment is experienced by women, but men also experience harassment. Sexual harassment can also happen between women or between men. Actions can still be considered as sexual harassment even if the alleged harasser didn't mean for it to be or they didn't intentionally direct it at a specific person.

Harassment on the basis of religion or belief:

This is where a person is subjected to derogatory remarks, stereotypes, making assumptions or other inappropriate behaviour on the grounds of religion or belief. This can include statements or assumptions about religion or belief or excluding people on the basis of their religion or belief. Arranging meetings that may exclude people on religious observance grounds.

Political harassment or harassment on the grounds of membership or non-membership of a trade union

This can include:

- Offensive jokes
- Ridicule
- Display of offensive material

Singling out

Singling out people because of their sex, race, disability, gender identity, religion or belief, age, sexuality, and responsibilities for dependants or marital status can also constitute harassment even without any specific references to gender, race etc. Specific non-verbal examples can be seen above under "bullying". This can also apply to people who are perceived to not "fit in". (Expecting people to "fit in" is potentially discriminatory.)