Liberty Academy Trust

Anti-Bullying Policy

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Written By	Director of Safeguarding
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1. Scope

1.1. This policy applies to all Liberty Academy Trust Schools. Some elements of the policy have been tailored to the specific school

2. Policy Summary

2.1. The purpose of this policy is to provide staff and volunteers working in Liberty Academy Trust (Liberty) Schools with an understanding of their responsibilities in preventing, addressing and intervening with incidents of bullying, including online, prejudice-based and discriminatory bullying - This includes online bullying facilitated through emerging technologies, including artificial intelligence.

2.2. The Trust recognises that some incidents of bullying may constitute child-on-child abuse. Where bullying behaviour causes significant harm, involves prejudice-based incidents, sexual harassment, sexual violence, harmful sexual behaviour, exploitation or online abuse, it will be managed in accordance with the Trust Safeguarding Policy.

2.3. Liberty has a zero-tolerance approach to bullying and expects all staff to implement the strategies laid out within this policy to ensure that bullying has no place in our schools:

- We expect all bullying concerns to be reported to the Designated Safeguarding Lead as soon as possible, for staff to be aware and not to act is a breach in our safeguarding procedures.
- We actively provide systematic opportunities to develop children's social and emotional skills, including their resilience.
- We consider all opportunities for addressing bullying including through the curriculum, displays and through peer support.
- We remain alert to and tackle any prejudicial or discriminatory views and micro-aggressions. We recognise that bullying may be influenced by discrimination, protected characteristics, perceived differences or vulnerability and will respond appropriately to such incidents
- We give support to both the child who has been harmed and the child who has allegedly caused harm (victim and the alleged perpetrator). Ensuring that the victim of bullying is satisfied that a) they can now feel safe from further incidences and b) that the incident has been appropriately dealt with.
- We reward non-aggressive behaviour in school by positively highlighting qualities such as, kindness, care for one another, understanding and generosity through our school rewards and achievement systems.
- We follow up all incidents and concerns.
- We make clear to parents/carers the unacceptability of bullying.
- We teach children, not only to accept difference but to value diversity.

2.4. This policy should be read in conjunction with the Liberty Safeguarding policy, Behaviour Policy, Exclusion Policy, Online Safety

policy (including cyberbullying, AI-enabled harms, digital images and online conduct), Restrictive intervention policy, PSHE and RSHE policies.

3. Definition of Bullying

3.1. In DfE guidance Preventing and Tackling Bullying, the following definition is used and has been adopted by Liberty: *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, social media or gaming, which can include the use of images and video) and is often motivated by prejudice against particular groups, for example on grounds of race, religion, gender, sexual orientation, special educational needs or disabilities, or because a child is adopted, in care or has caring responsibilities. It might be motivated by actual differences between children, or perceived differences.*

3.2. Liberty also recognises that the behaviour does not need to be "intentional" to be experienced as bullying and will act upon on all alleged incidents of bullying.

3.3. Bullying may occur face to face or online and may involve the misuse of technology, social media, gaming platforms, messaging services, artificial intelligence tools or the use of manipulated, altered or generated images, audio or video content.

4. Types of Bullying

4.1. Bullying can take place between children and young people, between children and staff, by individuals or groups, face-to-face, online or indirectly. Bullying can take many forms, including:

- verbal abuse, such as name calling and gossiping
- non-verbal abuse, such as hand signs or text messages
- emotional abuse, such as threatening, intimidating or humiliating someone
- exclusion, such as ignoring or isolating someone
- hectoring and provocation
- micro-aggressions
- undermining, by constant criticism or spreading rumours
- controlling or manipulating someone
- physical assaults, such as hitting and pushing
- making silent, hoax or abusive calls
- online/cyberbullying through social media, messaging services, gaming platforms or online forums
- bullying through the creation, sharing or distribution of manipulated, altered or AI-generated images, audio or video

- prejudice-based bullying linked to protected characteristics including race, religion or belief, disability, sex, sexual orientation or gender reassignment
- bullying linked to special educational needs, neurodiversity, care experience, young carers or perceived difference

5. The Impact of Bullying

5.1. A student who bullies, can have a wide-ranging impact on the students they bully, students who observe bullying, and the overall climate of the school and community.

5.2. Bullying, especially if left unaddressed, can have a devastating effect on individuals. It can be a barrier to their learning and have serious consequences for their mental health. Bullying which takes place at school does not only affect an individual during childhood but can have a lasting effect on their lives well into adulthood.

5.3. Online bullying can occur at any time of day, may rapidly reach a wide audience and can continue beyond the school environment. Incidents occurring outside school will be addressed where they impact on a pupil's welfare, education, safety or the wider school community.

5.4. Liberty schools prioritise preventing and tackling bullying to create safe, calm environments where pupils are able to learn and fulfil their potential.

5.5. **Bullying of Pupils with SEND, including those who are Autistic:** Keeping Children Safe in Education 2026 highlights the following considerations for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities:

- *assumptions that indicators of possible abuse such as behaviour, mood and injury relate to the child's condition without further exploration*
- *these children being more prone to peer group isolation or bullying (including prejudice-based bullying) than other children*
- *the potential for children with SEND or certain medical conditions being disproportionally impacted by behaviours such as bullying, without outwardly showing any signs, and*
- *communication barriers and difficulties in managing or reporting these challenges.*
- *cognitive understanding – being unable to understand the difference between fact and fiction in online content and then repeating the content/behaviours in schools or colleges or the consequences of doing so.*

5.6. Staff should recognise that some pupils with SEND may be less able to identify that they are experiencing bullying, less likely to report concerns and may require additional support to communicate their experiences.

5.7. Staff must be made aware of these additional issues and how they may apply to the specific pupils that they work with.

6. Signs that a Child is being Bullied

6.1. An individual who is being bullied may display some of the following common responses:

- increased anxiety, fear or general unhappiness
- deterioration in work standards
- Lateness/erratic attendance
- withdrawal
- aggression
- desire to remain with adults
- bed wetting

6.2. In helping children and young people with SEND, including those who are Autistic, to develop an awareness of Bullying, each school must have a relationships, sex, health and education curriculum which will support pupils to develop an understanding of healthy relationships and friendships.

6.3. Anti-bullying activities should also be embedded in the life of the school, including in:

- Assemblies
- Newsletters
- Tutor time
- Anti-bullying week
- Anti-bullying champions on the staff and student council

6.4. **Liberty Anti-bullying approach and response to concerns:** The DfE recommends that schools use the principles in the *Bullying – A Charter for Action* document to develop their anti-bullying policy. The Charter provides for a framework of self-evaluation and is reproduced in Appendix 1. Each school should publish their charter on their local website and the Local Governing committee should review this document annually.

6.5. Liberty Schools should use the following steps to ensure a robust procedure is in place aimed at ensuring on-going compliance with this policy:

- Regularly discuss, monitor and review incidents at a senior leadership level
- Support everyone in the school to identify and respond to bullying
- Ensure that children and young people are aware that all bullying concerns will be dealt with sensitively and effectively
- Ensure that parents/carers expressing bullying concerns have them taken seriously
- Learn from effective anti-bullying work across the Liberty family of schools

Details setting out procedures that underpin each of the above steps are reproduced in Appendix 2.

7. Management of the School Anti-bullying Policy

7.1. It is recommended that specific responsibility for anti-bullying work is allocated by the Principal to a member of staff within the school's management structure. (This could be the Designated Lead for Safeguarding (DSL)). However all staff are responsible for keeping children safe, including preventing and acting on any incidents or suspected incidents of bullying.

7.2. At Vanguard School, the Anti-Bullying Champion is Mr David Ritchie, Designated Safeguarding Lead.

7.3. **Anti-bullying Aims/Strategies for all staff:**

- To prevent, de-escalate and/or stop any continuation of harmful negative behaviour.
- To respond to bullying incidents in a reasonable, proportionate and consistent way.
- To safeguard the child or young person who has experienced bullying and to trigger sources of support.
- To apply supportive strategies to the child or young person responsible for the bullying.
- Schools will be pursuing strategies that draw on a range of preventative, proactive and educational practices such as:
  a) participating in anti-bullying week,

  b) making informative links between behaviour and safeguarding.

7.4. **Preventative Strategies:** Each school within Liberty will have preventative anti-bullying strategies. These should be based on the following principles:

- Effective leadership that promotes an open and honest anti-bullying ethos.
- Adopting individual positive behaviour support management as preventative measures.
- Use of curriculum/learning opportunities (Personal, Health, Social and Citizenship Education) can be used to draw out anti-bullying messages.
- Use of opportunities throughout the school/service calendar and at certain times of the day to raise awareness of the negative consequences of bullying (e.g. Anti-Bullying Week in November of each year; and school assemblies).
- Engaging children and young people, as well as parents/carers/guardians in the process of developing the anti-bullying policy and promoting open and honest reporting.

- Reviewing the school environment. In particular looking at staff supervision patterns.

7.5. **Reactive Strategies:** Where necessary, we may use disciplinary actions and learning programmes to manage founded allegations of bullying. Supportive strategies have three main purposes, namely to:

- Enable the perpetrator to become aware of what that have done
- Enable them to learn different responses and decrease the likelihood of this pattern of behaviour to be repeated and
- To highlight the supportive ethos and philosophy for both the perpetrator and victim (or alleged victim) that bullying is unacceptable

It may be necessary in some cases of alleged child-on-child bullying to make a referral to Police and social care in accordance with our Safeguarding Policy. All allegations of sexual violence will be reported to the Police and social care without delay.

8. Reporting, Recording and Acting on Incidents of Bullying

8.1. Schools are advised to encourage children and young people to report bullying in confidence. There are clear and simple reporting arrangements for all school staff and volunteers as set out below:

- A member of staff or a volunteer concerned about actual or suspected child-on-child bullying should report directly to the Designated Safeguarding lead and record within CPOMS.

- The Designated Safeguarding lead (or Deputy) will ensure key staff are alerted to investigate the matter. If deemed appropriate, by taking account of the severity of the matter, informal strategies for dealing with the alleged perpetrator and supporting the victim should be implemented and the situation closely monitored.

- If the concerns about a given situation are more serious, or strategies used to deal with a bullying incident have proven unsuccessful, the matter should be re-reported to the Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL)/ Anti-bullying lead in order to discuss and agree appropriate action(s) which may include: implementing a child on child risk assessment; meeting with the Principal for consideration of sanctions; and/or referrals to outside agencies for further support.

- It may be necessary in some cases of alleged child-on-child bullying to make a referral to Police and social care in accordance with our Safeguarding Policy. All allegations of sexual violence will be reported to the Police and social care without delay.

- Any prejudicial or discriminatory based bullying must be recorded as such, including the link to protected characteristics, such as

racist, homophobic, bi-phobic, transphobic or ableist bullying. Where bullying behaviour may constitute child-on-child abuse, sexual harassment, sexual violence, harmful sexual behaviour, hate incidents or online abuse, staff must follow the procedures outlined within the Trust Safeguarding Policy.

- Incidents involving the creation, possession or sharing of manipulated, altered, AI-generated or sexually explicit images will be managed in accordance with the Safeguarding and Online Safety Policies and may require involvement of external agencies.

- Any instances of actual or suspected bullying **perpetrated by a member of staff must be immediately reported to the Principal** in accordance with managing allegations against staff, as part of the Safeguarding Policy.

8.2. All suspected or actual child-on-child bullying instances should be recorded via the Safeguarding System CPOMS. Records of bullying will enable the school to:

- manage individual cases effectively
- monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of strategies
- celebrate the anti-bullying work of the school/service
- demonstrate defensible decision making in the event of complaints being made
- engage and inform multi-agency teams as necessary
- ensure that the executive and trustees can monitor bullying across Liberty schools, and act as necessary

8.3. Designated Safeguarding Leads and Behaviour Leads should review bullying data regularly (at least monthly) to identify patterns and trends and arrange preventative measures. Bullying should be a standing item on SLT meeting agendas. Bullying data must be reported regularly to the Trust Executive Team and Trust Board.

9. Supporting the Victim and the Perpetrator of Bullying

9.1. Following investigation to ascertain facts, if proven, the parents/carers of both the perpetrator (child who has caused harm) and the victim (child who has been harmed) will be contacted and informed of any action taken.

9.2. It is essential that all individuals who have experienced bullying are provided with timely and appropriate support. This may include one or more of the following as appropriate:

- Regular check in's with a staff member
- advice
- assertiveness training

- sessions with a counsellor
- introducing a named child/ staff member to provide appropriate support

9.3. The perpetrator will also receive support. This will be tailored to each individual with the aim of ensuring that they understand the impact of their actions and to prevent recurrence. Where pupils do not understand that their behaviour constitutes bullying the school will support them to develop their understanding of socially acceptable behaviours and empathy. Sanctions may also be applied, in line with the behaviour policy, if appropriate.

9.4. **Staff Professional Development:** Senior leaders in Liberty schools should routinely review general and specific staff induction and continuing professional development to ensure staff training reflects the anti-bullying policy and practice. Anti-bullying training is mandatory for all staff employed in Liberty schools. As a minimum bullying must be covered at least annually in In-Service Training (INSET) programmes and in regular behaviour briefings. Where specific training needs have been identified for particular members of staff, the Principal must ensure that those members of staff have access to the advice, training and development opportunities appropriate to their needs.

9.5. **Monitoring & Review:** Evaluation and review of the policy ensures that it remains responsive to changing needs while continuing to protect the children and young people who use our services. This policy will be reviewed annually by the Liberty Board and revised in consultation with schools.

9.6. **Further reading:**

- Keeping Children Safe in Education (DfE, 2026)
- Department for Education (2017) – Preventing and Tackling Bullying: Advice for Head Teachers, Staff and Governing Bodies / Charter for Action
- The Equality Act 2010
- Disability Discrimination Act 2015
- The Special Educational Needs and Disability Act 2014
- Education and Inspections Act 2006
- Children & Families Act 2014
- Olweus Bullying Prevention Program (Accessed at: http://www.violencepreventionworks.org/public/bullying.page, 2015)

Appendix 1

Bullying - a Charter for Action

Vanguard School

We are working with staff, children and young people and parents/carers to create a school/community where bullying is not tolerated.

Our school community

- Discusses, monitors and reviews our anti-bullying policy on a regular basis. Good practice suggests the policy should be reviewed, on average every two years.
- Supports staff to promote positive relationships and identify and tackle bullying appropriately.
- Ensures that children and young people are aware that all bullying concerns will be dealt with sensitively and effectively; that they feel safe; and that children and young people abide by the anti-bullying policy.
- Reports back quickly to parents/carers regarding their concerns on bullying and deals promptly with complaints. Parents/carers in turn work with the school/service to uphold the anti-bullying policy.
- Seeks to learn from anti-bullying good practice elsewhere and utilises the support of central colleagues at Liberty Academy Trust, LA and relevant organisations when appropriate.

_____ Chair of Local Governance Committee

_____ Principal

_____ Children's Representative

Appendix 2

Resources to support schools

To assist schools/services in implementing this policy, the Department for Education has issued revised guidance to schools entitled **'Preventing and Tackling Bullying' (2017)**, as well as advice and materials on prejudice-driven bullying and cyberbullying.

In addition, we recommend schools use the following prompts when devising their anti-bullying charter and reviewing the effectiveness of their anti-bullying approach.

Discuss, monitor and review:

- Do we hold discussions on bullying and its definition, involving staff, children and young people, and parents/carers?
- Do we keep a record of the incidence of bullying, according to our agreed definition, and analyse it for patterns – people, places, groups?
- Do we ask ourselves what makes an anti-bullying school?
- What is our school doing to ensure that our children and young people do not feel vulnerable and are safe?
- Do we celebrate our successes and draw these to the attention of parents/carers?
- *Support everyone in the school/community to identify and respond*
- Do we work with staff and outside agencies to identify all forms of prejudice-driven bullying, as well as different methods of bullying, such as cyber-bullying.
- Do we actively provide systematic opportunities for developing children and young people's social and emotional skills to reduce bullying?
- Have we considered all the opportunities where the different sorts of bullying can be addressed – through the curriculum/activities; through displays; through the School/service Council; through peer support; and through teaching about online safety?
- Do we create 'safe spaces' targeted at vulnerable children and young people? Do we train lunchtime staff, learning mentors, volunteers and others to identify bullying and follow policy and procedures on anti-bullying?

Ensure that children and young people are aware that all bullying concerns will be dealt with sensitively and effectively

- Do we regularly canvass children and young people's views on the extent and nature of bullying? Do we ensure that young people know how to express worries and anxieties about bullying?
- Do we involve children and young people in anti-bullying campaigns?
- Do we demonstrate that we are aware of the power of peer support?

Have we created and publicised schemes of peer monitoring or counselling; buddying or mediation, for example?

- Do we include the phone numbers of helplines in the school's/services planners?
- Do we have an anti-bullying notice board?
- How else do we bring anti-bullying measures to children and young people's attention
- What role does our School/Student Council already play in our anti-bullying policy? How might that involvement be enhanced?
- Do we offer sufficient support to children and young people who have been bullied?
- Do we work with children and young people who have been bullying in order to address the problems they have?

Ensure that parents/carers expressing bullying concerns have them taken seriously

- Do parents/carers know whom to contact if they are worried about bullying?
- Do parents/carers know about our complaints procedure and how to use it effectively?
- Do we work with parents/carers and the local community to address issues beyond the school/service gates that give rise to bullying?

Learn from effective anti-bullying work elsewhere

- Have we invited colleagues from other services or schools with effective anti-bullying policies to talk to our staff?
- Have we involved local experts or the voluntary sector in any way?