ACS Anti-Bullying Policy

Please note:

In countries where ACS International Schools is operating outside of the United Kingdom the UK regulatory framework will provide the foundation for best practice as far as this policy is concerned. All ACS schools will operate in compliance with the relevant legislation of the country in which they are operating.

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1. Introduction

1.1 ACS International Schools Ltd. (henceforward referred to as ACS) aims to provide a safe, caring and friendly environment for all our students to allow them to learn effectively, improve their life chances and help them maximise their potential. ACS expects students to feel safe in school, and to understand the issues relating to safety, such as bullying. ACS also wants students to feel confident to seek support from school should they feel unsafe.

1.2 In line with the core values of the organisation, ACS aims to create a community in which every member is respected as an individual. ACS believes that every student has a right to receive his/her education in a safe and secure environment free from intimidation, threat or harm from any other student.

2. Purpose of the Policy

2.1 It is the aim of our policy to clarify to all students, parents and teachers that bullying is unacceptable, causes psychological damage and not tolerated at our schools.

2.2 This policy was formulated in consultation with the whole school community with input from members of staff, board members, parents/carers and students. Students contribute to the development of the policy through the student council, Responsive Classroom, Community Action Service activities and similar programmes and initiatives that promote positive behaviours and outlooks. Parents/carers are encouraged to contribute to the continued development of this policy by taking part in written consultations, parent meetings, parent focus groups and other activities in line with our core value commitment to engage in the community.

3. Roles and Responsibilities

3.1 The Head of School has overall responsibility for the policy and its implementation and liaising with the board of governors, parents/carers and outside agencies.

3.2 Coordination of anti-bullying in each of the schools' divisions is the responsibility of the divisional principals and, in the case of the boarding house, the Head of Boarding, who will have general responsibility for handling the implementation of this policy.

3.3 The responsibilities of these persons within this duty include policy development and review involving pupils, staff, board members, parents/carers and relevant local agencies; implementing the policy and monitoring and assessing its effectiveness in practice; ensuring evaluation takes place and that this informs policy review; managing bullying incidents; managing the reporting and recording of bullying incidents; assessing and coordinating training and support for staff and parents/carers where appropriate, and coordinating strategies for preventing bullying behaviour

4. Definition

4.1 ACS International Schools defines bullying as "behaviour by an individual or group usually repeated over time, that intentionally hurts another individual or group either physically or emotionally".

ACS recognises that bullying behaviour can occur online and in real life and that for many children there is little meaningful distinction between the two when matters of friendship and peer relations are concerned.

4.2 Bullying differs from teasing/falling out between friends or other types of aggressive behaviour in three regards: it includes a deliberate intention to hurt or humiliate; there is a power imbalance that makes it hard for the victim to defend themselves; it is usually persistent.

4.3 Occasionally an incident may be deemed to be bullying even if the behaviour has not been repeated or persistent – if it fulfils all other descriptions of bullying. This possibility should be considered, particularly in cases of sexual, sexist, racist homophobic or transphobic bullying, and when children with disabilities are involved. If the victim might be in danger, then intervention is urgently required. Bullying can include any of the following behaviours, which is not intended to constitute a comprehensive list:

• name calling
• taunting
• mocking
• making offensive comments
• physical assault
• taking or damaging belongings
• cyber bullying - inappropriate text messaging and e mailing; sending offensive or degrading images by phone or via the Internet
• producing offensive graffiti
• gossiping and spreading hurtful and untruthful rumours
• excluding people from groups.

4.4 Although bullying can occur between individuals it can often take place in the presence (virtually or physically) of others who become the 'bystanders' or 'accessories'. Specific types of bullying include:

- bullying related to race, religion or culture
- bullying related to special educational needs or disabilities
- bullying related to appearance or health
- bullying relating to sexual orientation
- bullying of young carers or looked after children or otherwise related to home circumstances
- sexist or sexual bullying

4.5 There is no hierarchy of bullying – all forms should be taken equally seriously and dealt with appropriately. Bullying can take place between:
- young people
- young people and staff
- between staff
- individuals or groups

4.6 Certain groups of pupils are known to be particularly vulnerable to bullying by others: these may include pupils with special educational needs such as learning or physical disabilities; young carers, Looked After Children, those from ethnic and racial minority groups and those young people who may be perceived as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or questioning their gender (see next section).

5. Homophobic Bullying

5.1 In homophobic bullying, a person is targeted for being perceived as a lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgendered (trans) person or those who are questioning their gender. This group of people is sometimes termed the LGBTQ community. People do not have to be lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or questioning their gender to suffer homophobic bullying. This bullying not only impacts on the individual person, but on their families and others perceived to be from that same group. It may be based on gender stereotyping.

5.2 Incidents of homophobic bullying may include:

- verbal abuse by name-calling, offensive mimicry
- physical threats or attacks
- mockery of subject and career choice
- defacing of property
- graffiti
- inciting others to behave in a homophobic way
- mockery of a person's demeanour or way of speaking
- mockery of a person's contributions to work

- refusing to co-operate in work and play (refusing to sit next to someone).

6. Peer on Peer

6.1   ACS recognises that students will on occasion behave in a way that causes concern to other students, or act in ways that cause harm to other students. Some aspects of this sort of peer-on-peer bullying behaviour are addressed in section 8 of the ACS Child Protection and safeguarding policy. Whether or not a peer-on-peer bullying incident raises a specific safeguarding concern, ACS recognises that children are capable of abusing their peers. Such abuse is regarded as unacceptable at ACS and will not be passed off as "banter" or "part of growing up".

6.2   Some examples of forms of peer on peer abuse are outlined below. This outline is not intended to represent an exhaustive list, and future behaviour trends may inform the list's expansion or modification. In particular, online bullying is further addressed in the separate ACS Online Safety policy

- Online bullying – for example through abuse of the terms and conditions of social media platforms, trolling, encouraging others to join in targeting an individual for abuse or otherwise failing to observe the expectations of the school's values and ESLRs.
- Sexting and/or sending Youth Produced Sexual Images (the act of sending explicit photographs or messages often via social media or via mobile devices).
- Verbal insults intended to intimidate others or make them feel worthless, and/or comments of a sexually explicit nature intended to insult or subjugate others.
- Distribution of sexually harmful or violent literature.
- Coercion or intimidation.
- Child Sexual Exploitation – children under the age of 18 may be sexually abused in the context of exploitative relationships, contexts and situations by peers who are also under 18. Child sexual exploitation is defined as a form of child sexual abuse that occurs where an individual or group takes advantage of an imbalance of power to coerce, manipulate or deceive a child or young person under the age of 18 into sexual activity (a) in exchange for something the victim needs or wants, and/or (b) for the financial advantage or increased status of the perpetrator or facilitator. The victim may have been sexually exploited even if the sexual activity appears consensual. Child sexual exploitation does

not always involve physical contact; it can also occur through the use of technology.

- Harmful Sexual Behaviour – children and young people presenting with sexual behaviours that are outside of developmentally 'normative' parameters and harmful to themselves and others.
- Serious Youth Violence – any offence of serious violence or weapon-enabled crime where the victim is aged 1-19 ('Youth Violence' is defined in the same way, but also includes assault with injury offence).
- Initiation ceremonies or ritual misconduct.

6.3   ACS recognises its responsibilities with regard to the thresholds of concern associated with these behaviours, and others like them, including a recognition of the legal thresholds, and will address allegations of any such concerns with the appropriate agencies.

6.4   ACS recognises that sexual violence and sexual harassment can occur between two children of any age and sex. It can also occur through a group of children sexually assaulting or sexually harassing a single child or group of children.

6.5   ACS acknowledges that children who are victims of sexual violence and sexual harassment are likely to find the experience stressful and distressing. This will, in all likelihood, adversely affect their education attainment as well as their emotional well-being. Sexual violence and sexual harassment exist on a continuum and may overlap; they can occur online and offline (both physically and verbally) and are never acceptable. It is important that all victims are taken seriously and offered appropriate support.

6.6   ACS believes that all children have a right to attend school and learn in a safe environment. Children should be free from harm by all whom they encounter in school.

6.7   ACS commits to minimising the risk of peer on peer abuse by:

Prevention

Taking a whole school approach to safeguarding & child protection

Providing training to staff

Providing a clear set of values and standards, underpinned by the school's behaviour policy and pastoral support; and by a planned programme of evidence based content delivered through the curriculum.

Engaging with specialist support and interventions.

Responding to reports of sexual violence and sexual harassment

Children making a report of sexual violence or sexual harassment will be taken seriously, kept safe and be well supported.

If the report includes an online element staff will be mindful of the Searching, Screening and Confiscation: advice for schools (DfE 2018) guidance.

Staff taking the report will inform the DSL or a Deputy DSL immediately.

Staff taking a report will never promise confidentiality.

Parents or carers should usually be informed (unless this would put the child at greater risk).

If a child is at risk of harm, is in immediate danger, or has been harmed, a referral (MARF) will be made to the MASH whose contact details are included in the appendices.

6.8 Following a report the DSL will make an immediate risk and needs assessment on a case-by-case basis. This process is described in sections 8.9 to 8.11 of the ACS Child Protection and Safeguarding policy.

6.9 ACS notes that research indicates that young people rarely disclose peer on peer abuse and that if they do, it is likely to be to their friends.

Therefore, ACS will also educate students in how to support their friends if they are concerned about them, that they should talk to a trusted adult in the school, and what services they can contact for further advice.

7. Special Educational Needs & Disability

7.1 People with Special Educational Needs or disabled people may be less able or more reluctant to articulate experiences as well as others. However, they are often at greater risk of being bullied, both directly and indirectly, and usually about their specific difficulties or disability.

7.2 Incidents of Special Education Needs & Disabilities bullying may include:

- verbal abuse by name-calling, offensive mimicry
- physical threats or attacks
- defacing of property
- graffiti
- inciting others to behave in a similar way

- mockery of specific difficulty or disability
- mockery of a person's contributions to work
- refusing to co-operate in work and play (refusing to sit next to someone).

8.   Commitment

8.1   ACS schools make the commitment to all their young people that all reported incidents regarding bullying will be taken seriously.

8.2   The schools will support this commitment by:

- Providing clear and well-established reporting procedures for students and parents (i.e. a comprehensive complaints policy featured on the school website).
- Providing guidelines that help in the identification of bullying.
- Raising teachers' awareness of bullying through training (e.g. Responsive Classroom training in the lower school).
- Teachers raising the issue in classroom instruction.
- Creating opportunities for confidential/anonymous communications by students.
- Challenging the notion that there can be innocent neutral bystanders in this issue.

9.   Implementation of Commitment

9.1   Students are encouraged to talk with a trusted teacher, counsellor, boarding staff member or principal if they feel uncomfortable in school. If any instances of bullying are reported, the teacher and principal will investigate by conducting interviews of all parties and appropriate consequences will be administered.

9.2   Faculty are expected to intervene in any observed or suspected cases of bullying to either counsel the student or report the situation to the principal for further investigation.

9.3   Respect is emphasized in classrooms and if any bullying situations arise or are suspected, the teacher/Counsellor will talk with students about appropriate behaviours.

9.4   Students who witness any bullying of others are encouraged to report their observations/concerns to a teacher/counsellor/principal or the Head of School to ensure our school is a safe learning environment for all.

10. Intervention, Reporting and Recording

10.1 When a bullying issue has been uncovered, the school will intervene by:

- Acknowledging the distress of the bullied children and re-assuring them that they are not to blame.
- Avoiding damaging labelling of "bullied" and "bully" which can lead to lowered esteem and self-fulfilling predications regarding future behaviour.
- Confronting the bullying behaviour clearly, but going beyond mere application of sanctions; punishment alone can reinforce the idea that power is what matters and can also lead to an escalation as resentment is built up: this in itself can lead to children becoming less willing to report bullying.
- When appropriate, advising the appropriate child protection agencies.
- Recording instances of bullying to enable patterns to be identified.

10.2 A range of specific responses may be appropriate to any given bullying situation. ACS International Schools commits to assessing each situation as fully as possible and applying such approaches as are believed to be most likely to be effective in allowing the situation to be resolved in a satisfactory manner.

10.3 Strategies used in response to bullying incidents may include solution-focused, restorative approach, circle of friends, individual work with victim and perpetrator, and referral to outside agencies.

10.4 The attention of all students and other community members is drawn to the schools' behaviour policy and to the descriptions of codes of conduct in the schools' handbooks for each campus and division.

10.5 School sanctions may include follow up - especially keeping in touch with the person who reported the situation, contact with parents/carers and support for the victim and the bully. Bullying is also subject to sanctions under the discipline procedures outlined in the schools' divisional handbooks.

11. Recording Bullying and Evaluating the Policy

11.1 Bullying incidents will be recorded by the member of staff who deals with the incident and this will be notified to and held by the divisional principal. The information held on the incident will be used to ensure individual incidents are followed up. It will also be used to identify

trends and inform preventative work in school and development of the policy.

11.2   This information will be presented to the board in an anonymous format as part of the annual report. The policy will be reviewed and updated annually. The policy review will be linked to the School Improvement Plan, working towards a more inclusive and harmonious ethos across the school community.

12.   Links with other policies

12.1   This policy is associated with, and should be read in conjunction with, the following ACS policies:

Behaviour Policy
Online Safety Policy
Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy
Acceptable Use Policy
Equal Opportunities Policy
Complaints Policy
Privacy Notice