

Anti-Bullying Policy

The Virtual School believes that everyone has the right to feel welcome, secure and happy at school. Children Looked After can be particularly vulnerable to bullying, and will often not have a stable support network to help them deal with the problem. Schools have a vital role to play in ensuring that Children Looked After are healthy, happy, safe and successful.

Bullying is deliberately hurtful behaviour that is repeated over a period of time, making it difficult for the person concerned to defend themselves. This can include:

- Physical pushing, kicking, hitting, pinching etc.
- Name calling, sarcasm, spreading rumours, persistent teasing and emotional torment through ridicule, humiliation and the continual ignoring of individuals
- Sectarian/racial taunts, graffiti, gestures
- Sexual comments and/or suggestions
- Unwanted physical contact.
- Cyber bullying, e.g. using social media to alienate or spread rumours about someone

The emotional harm caused by bullying can be extreme, but when the target is a Child Looked After, it may exacerbate existing feelings of insecurity and anxiety caused by their experiences and family situation. Attachment difficulties resulting from disruptions in their family lives may also make it hard for this group of young people to trust adults enough to tell them about experiences of bullying, or even to believe that adults will care enough about them to take action. Children Looked After will often have had a change of school or placement which means they sometimes have problems in making and keeping close friendships – something which can be a protective factor against the impact of bullying.

Somerset Virtual School expects all schools to have robust anti-bullying policies which make specific reference to Children Looked After and ensure that the child's voice is heard. Children should be familiar with the systems in place and know who to go to for support. Schools' anti-bullying policies should:

- Establish systems that seek to open the door to children/young people wishing to talk about bullying or any other issue that affects them.
- Ensure that anyone who reports an incident of bullying will be listened to carefully and be supported, whether it's the child/young person being bullied or the child/young person who is bullying
- Require any reported incident of bullying to be investigated objectively and involve listening carefully to all those involved
- Be clear that young people being bullied will be supported and given assistance to uphold their right to play and live in a safe environment
- Make explicit that those who bully will be supported and encouraged to stop bullying
- Ensure that sanctions involving long periods of isolation, or those which diminish and make individuals look or feel foolish in front of others, are avoided.
- Recognise that Children Looked After can also engage in bullying behaviour, sometimes as a way of seeking revenge on other children for past hurts or as a way of expressing the

emotional turmoil they are suffering because of their family situation and that this must be considered as part of the work to address bullying issues.

All incidents of bullying involving Children Looked After should be reported to the child's Social Worker and Somerset Virtual School, with an explanation of the actions that have been taken and the plan to minimise the likelihood of any recurrence and ensure children remain safe.

If a Social Worker or Foster Carer is concerned about bullying, they should contact the child's school in the first instance. Somerset Virtual School should be contacted if there are concerns for a Child Looked After regarding the school's response. Any concerns about bullying should be fully discussed and documented at the next PEP meeting.

Somerset Virtual School holds a register of children who are Looked After and records all reported bullying incidents. To report a bullying incident the Somerset Virtual School, please contact thevirtualschool@somerset.gov.uk

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