ALMOND COLLEGE

STUDENT ANTI-BULLYING POLICY

Aims

1.   The aims of this policy are:

- to state the school's position on all types of bullying of students by students;
- to explain the school's procedures for dealing with unkindness and bullying;
- to explain what actions the school takes to prevent bullying; and
- to explain how the school records and monitors incidents of bullying.

Introduction

2.   Almond College's community values, chosen by the students, are **kindness, inclusion, responsibility, perseverance and individuality.** Students must do their best to adhere to these values throughout their time at the school.

3.   Almond College promotes a culture of inclusion, kindness and consideration for others. We are committed to providing a safe and caring environment that is free from violence, intimidation or any form of harassment so that every student can develop their full potential. We expect our students to treat one another with courtesy and mutual respect and to care for and support one another.

4.   Bullying, harassment, victimisation or discrimination of any kind is unacceptable.

5.   Parents/guardians have an important role in supporting the school's commitment to inclusion and kindness. Acceptance of this policy forms part of our standard terms and conditions.

6.   This policy has been drafted with reference to the DfE's guidance documents, *Keeping Children Safe in Education*, *Preventing and Tackling Bullying* and *Cyberbullying: Advice for Head Teachers and School Staff,* and to the Equality Act 2010.

7.   This policy concerns bullying by students. If a student believes that they or a friend are being bullied by a member of staff, they should report their concern to member of the Designated Safeguarding.

Definition of bullying

8.   Bullying is behaviour by an individual or group, in person or online, that intentionally hurts another individual or group either physically or emotionally. Bullying can take many forms. It can involve violence, intimidation, humiliation, manipulation, interference with a person's property or personal space, unkind, discriminatory or belittling language, spreading rumours or lies or deliberate exclusion from a group. It can be motivated by prejudice against particular groups, for example on the grounds of protected characteristics such as race, religion or belief, gender, sexual orientation, special educational needs or disabilities or because a child is adopted, in care or has caring responsibilities. It may occur directly or involve cyber technology (social media, mobile phones, text messages, photographs and email).

9.   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 not only affects an individual during

childhood but can have a lasting effect on their lives well into adulthood. Serious bullying of students by other students is a form of child-on-child abuse.

10. Even a single, isolated act of unkind behaviour, physical, verbal or online, including discriminatory language or behaviour, will be taken seriously. Single acts of physical harm, unkindness, or racist, sexist or homophobic verbal abuse, either in person or online, will be dealt with on a case-by-case basis. Depending on their severity, single, isolated incidents will often be managed with a restorative approach in the first instance, but serious individual incidents may result in formal school sanctions, including Saturday Morning Director's detention, which includes a letter to parents/guardians, or suspension from school.

11. Bullying on the basis of protected characteristics, as defined by the Equality Act 2010, is taken particularly seriously. All reported incidents are recorded by the Vice Principal in a bullying log and reported to the Inclusion Working Group, with follow-up and outcome details, for monitoring purposes.

Specific types of bullying

12. **Racist bullying**
Racist, 'colourist' or xenophobic language or behaviour used by any Christ's Hospital student and directed towards, or used about, any individual or group of people, including online, is unacceptable. Deliberate use of racist language or behaviour directed towards an individual or group constitutes racist bullying. Students who engage in deliberate racist bullying will be suspended from school. Students who engage in a serious, deliberate, individual instance of racist language or behaviour, even if not directed towards an individual or group, are also liable to be suspended. Students must take care not to use racist language and refrain from using words if uncertain of their meaning or connotation, seeking guidance from their houseparent or tutor, or from the EDI Lead if necessary. Students must take particular care not to engage in so-called 'banter' involving racist, colourist or xenophobic language, such as enticing others into using such language as a 'joke'. Such behaviour is unhelpful, unkind and liable to cause misunderstanding and hurt.

13. **Sexism**
Sexism has no place in our society or in our school. Deliberate use of sexist language or behaviour directed towards an individual or group constitutes sexist bullying and is liable to result in suspension. Deliberate use of misogynistic or misandrist language, even if not directed towards an individual student or group of students, is also unacceptable and students who engage in such language are liable to be sanctioned.

14. **Physical bullying**
Any deliberate act of violence resulting in injury is unacceptable and will incur a serious sanction such as suspension or, in the case of a very serious incident, expulsion. Physical bullying involves acts of violence or other forms of physicality, including pushing, grabbing, slapping, kicking, tripping or deliberately blocking another person's way. Such behaviours can be experienced as intimidating, even if not intended as such. Students should think carefully before behaving in a physical way with their

peers, especially with those who are smaller or younger than themselves, or who are new to the school. Physical interactions in which one student is outnumbered by others are highly likely to feel intimidating. Students must not seek to excuse such behaviours by claiming that they were 'joking', 'playing a game' or participating in a 'trend'.

15. **Sexual assault, sexual harassment or child-on-child abuse**
Almond College takes a zero-tolerance approach to sexual harassment, recognising that if low-level sexual harassment goes unchallenged, it can become normalized. Any instance of sexual harassment, however minor, is unacceptable and will be acted upon. Acts of inappropriate touch, sexual assault, verbal harassment (including cat-calling or sexualized name-calling), 'down-blousing', 'upskirting' (which is a criminal offence) and online sexual bullying or sharing of sexualized images will always be dealt with, on a case-by-case basis, as a form of bullying and also, in serious instances, as safeguarding concerns (see paragraph 25 below) and as potential criminal offences (child-on-child abuse

16. **'Hazing', 'initiation ceremonies', 'rites of passage'**
Practices that involve frightening or harming others or interfering with or damaging others' personal property or space, under the guise of being 'initiation ceremonies' ('hazing') or 'rites of passage', are unacceptable. As deliberate, planned, organized acts, carried out by groups against others who are less powerful, they are a form of bullying and will be treated as such. Students who plan, organize or participate in such practices are liable to be suspended or, in very serious instances, expelled. So called-'jokes' or 'games' such as 'dorm-raiding' or 'birthday beats' can cause fear, distress and harm and will not be tolerated.

17. **'Banter'**
The word 'banter' is sometimes used to disguise or downplay unkind, inappropriate or bullying behaviours as something light-hearted or inconsequential. Describing something as 'banter' does not excuse unkind behaviour. Almond College encourages students to take responsibility for their words and actions.

18. **Online bullying**
Online bullying is a complex issue. It can be overt or subtle, takes many forms and constantly evolves, owing to the creation of new technology and functionality and the emergence of new social media platforms. It can involve, but is not limited to, the following:

- sending unkind messages to a person, including anonymously;
- posting or sharing unkind comments or messages about a person, including anonymously;
- taking, posting or sharing images of a person without their permission;
- threatening to embarrass or expose someone online;
- repeatedly adding or trying to add a person into an online group, particularly when you know that they do not want to join;
- shaming people on social media;
- intentionally isolating people online;
- using emojis, slang or code words to be unkind to or humiliate a person; or
- using another person's phone, email or social media account without their permission, or to hurt others or embarrass and/or incriminate the owner of the phone or account.

This list is not exhaustive. Any type of unkind behaviour online constitutes bullying. The school's strategy for tackling online bullying is detailed below, in paragraphs 27 - 39.

19. **Vigilantism**
Vigilantism (physical or verbal attacks, or unpleasantness towards or about another student, in person or online, on the grounds that they have done something wrong), is a form of bullying, and will be sanctioned accordingly. Students should report concerns about the behaviour of other students to staff, or to their parent or guardian if preferred, and must have respect for due process, including school-based investigations and sanctions and referrals to outside agencies, whilst also respecting the confidentiality requirements of such processes.

What a student should do if they suspect that they or other students are being bullied

20. Any student who suspects that they are being bullied, or that another student is being bullied, whether in person or online and either within school or outside school, should share their concerns by speaking with, or emailing, their houseparent, matron, tutor, a member of the Designated Safeguarding Team. Students who feel unable to speak up for themselves should ask a parent or guardian to do so on their behalf or use the online 'student feedback' facility which is available to them on the website. All reports of possible bullying will be taken seriously and dealt with immediately and robustly.

21. **Being a bystander**
It is acknowledged that students who find themselves witnessing acts of bullying may be in a difficult position. They may feel powerless to intervene or stop the bullying, or fear being targeted themselves if they speak out. Students are encouraged not to be 'bystanders' and to report bullying that they have seen or heard about to the Designated Safeguarding team. Students who are discovered to have been present during an incident of bullying will be spoken with as witnesses as part of the investigation into the incident. Students who have actively assisted in or encouraged the bullying will be deemed to have been complicit and to have a degree of culpability, for which they may be sanctioned.

Procedures for dealing with unkindness or bullying

22. It is regrettable but inevitable that some unkindness will occur between young people at school, especially in a boarding environment, where students live, work and socialise in close quarters. Minor instances of unkindness, when observed by staff or reported to them, will be dealt with informally and restoratively, on the spot. Where staff are concerned that an incident may be serious, form part of a pattern or where it is based on or involves reference to any protected characteristic, they will share their concern using email and website for follow-up .

23. More serious individual acts of unkindness, or suspected bullying, will be dealt with as follows:

- members of staff who have witnessed or been told about instances of serious unkindness or bullying will log their concern on school website and communicate with the relevant designated safeguarding team.
- the lead designated safeguarding team will co-ordinate an investigation. Depending on circumstances, this may be conducted by one of the team member in the first instance, who will report their findings to the lead
- students believed to have been involved will be interviewed individually and may be asked to write an account of events.
- students believed to have witnessed events will also be interviewed and may be asked to write an account of events.
- where initial enquiries suggest that a serious incident of bullying has occurred, the Deputy Head will interview students and/or may require additional written statements to be provided.
- where a serious incident of unkindness or bullying is deemed to have taken place, the lead will decide on the appropriate sanction, up to the level of suspension.
- the parents/guardians of all parties with direct involvement will be informed and, where appropriate, invited to the school to discuss the matter. This is usually after the investigation and often after any disciplinary action has been taken, for example, on a student's return from suspension.
- in cases of bullying, the feelings of the student who has been bullied will be of paramount importance. Opportunities for restorative conversations will be created, in consultation with the student who has been bullied.
- should bullying behaviour persist after all strategies have been employed and failed, the perpetrator(s) will be asked to leave the school.

Safeguarding responsibilities – risk of significant harm – threshold for referral

24.   Where there is reasonable cause to believe that a child is suffering or likely to suffer significant harm as a consequence of an incident or bullying, the matter will be treated as a child protection concern and a referral will be made to the police which is in line with the school's safeguarding protection act.

Monitoring patterns of bullying in relation to protected characteristics

25.   The Lead maintains a Bullying Log, summarising reported incidents of potential, alleged or proven incidents of bullying and including, where relevant, details of protected characteristics targeted in each incident, as well as follow-up and outcome. The lead and other safeguarding team monitor the numbers and details of entries so that any patterns can be identified and addressed.

School strategy on online bullying

26.   Parents have responsibility for deciding which online platforms their children may use when at home. At school, however, Second and Third Form students (Years 7 and 8) are not allowed to use social media, including WhatsApp, to communicate with other Almond College students, other than their own siblings.

27.   The school educates students about online bullying and online safety, including the importance of keeping personal data and passwords secure, by means of its Learning for Life and PSHE programmes, to help build students' ability to protect themselves and their peers.

28. Students are made aware of the school's policies on Anti-Bullying and Online Safety and of the Student Code of Conduct, in boarding houses and during tutorials, and are expected to comply with these and with the Student ICT Code of Conduct – Acceptable Use Policy.

29. Certain sites are blocked by the school's filtering system and the IT Department monitors students' internet use, to flag up potential safeguarding concerns including possible online bullying. All concerns raised in this way are followed up by the designated safeguarding team.

30. Incidents of online bullying are managed, in the same way as incidents of in-person bullying, by houseparents, staff, form tutors and the SLT, with the DSL having overall responsibility for the school's strategy on online bullying, and also having responsibility for making referrals to appropriate agencies where instances of online bullying constitute child protection concerns (see paragraph 25.)

31. Students who deliberately bully others online will be sanctioned in the same way as for other forms of bullying. This may include suspension. Students who engage in online bullying may also have their mobile phones and other devices confiscated for a period of time decided by a Deputy Head. The Department for Education's guidance, *Preventing and Tackling Bullying* (2017) states that 'The Education Act 2011 amended the power in the Education Act 1996 to provide that when an electronic device, such as a mobile phone, has been seized by a member of staff who has been formally authorised by the Director, that staff member can examine data or files, and delete these, where there is good reason to do so. This power applies to all schools and there is no need to have parental consent to search through a young person's mobile phone.'

32. Members of the Designated Safeguarding Team and other key pastoral staff undertake additional safeguarding training and attend workshops to keep up to date on developments in social media and its associated risks, including online bullying, and information is cascaded to staff and other key pastoral staff to assist them in being alert to signs of potential online bullying. The DSL includes information on online safety, appropriate use of online material in the classroom and online bullying in annual safeguarding training for all staff.

33. Staff are instructed, in the Staff ICT Code of Conduct, to use only official school channels, not personal email addresses or social media accounts, for all communications with students and parents.

34. The school communicates with parents by letter to inform them of updates to policies relating to all aspects of child protection, safeguarding and anti-bullying, and especially to raise awareness of new concerns or risks in relation to developments on social media, and advise them on steps to take at home to protect their children from bullying and other online risks.

35. The school hosts Parents' Pastoral Mornings with presentations on a range of issues affecting the wellbeing of young people, including online bullying and other risks associated with social media and uses the 'wellbeing' section of its Parents' Portal to share online safety guidance with parents.

36. The school manages all personal data in line with statutory requirements which helps prevent any breach which could contribute to a potential incident of online bullying.

37. **Criminal law**
    The Department for Education's guidance, *Preventing and Tackling Bullying* (2017) explains that: "Although bullying in itself is not a specific criminal offence, it is important to bear in mind that some types of harassing or threatening behaviour, or communications, including online, could be a criminal offence, for example under the Protection from Harassment Act 1997, the Malicious Communications Act 1988, the Communications Act 2003 and the Public Order Act 1986."

38. If it is believed that an offence may have been committed by a student, including online, Almond College will seek assistance from the police. For example, under the Malicious Communications Act 1988, any person who sends an electronic communication which conveys a message which is indecent or grossly offensive, a threat, or information which is false and known or believed to be false by the sender, is guilty of an offence if their purpose in sending it was to cause distress or anxiety to the recipient.

Potential signs of bullying

39. Changes in behaviour that may indicate that a student is being bullied include:

    - unwillingness to return to school;
    - displays of excessive anxiety, becoming withdrawn or unusually quiet;
    - failure to produce work, or producing unusually poor work, or work that appears to have been copied, interfered with or spoilt by others;
    - books, bags and other belongings suddenly going missing, or being damaged;
    - changes to established habits (e.g., giving up music lessons, change to accent or vocabulary);
    - diminished levels of self-confidence;
    - frequent visits to the Medical Centre with symptoms such as stomach pains and headaches;
    - unexplained cuts and bruises;
    - frequent absence, erratic attendance, late arrival to class;
    - choosing the company of adults;
    - subdued body language and poor eye contact;
    - difficulty in sleeping; nightmares; and
    - talking of suicide or running away.

40. Staff will report signs of potential bullying, using school systems to notify staff and, where there is specific cause for a serious safeguarding concern (evidence of self-harm or expression of suicidal ideation), must also notify the DSL.

Preventative measures

41. The school's commitment to anti-bullying is supported by a wide range of activities:

    - all students are made aware of the school's key policies on Anti-Bullying, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion and Student Conduct, including online, in the boarding houses and during tutorials.
    - the school uses assemblies, Chapel talks, tutorials and engagement with external partners to promote its community values of kindness, inclusion and responsibility, explain behaviour expectations and reinforce the anti-bullying message.
    - the school's Learning for Life and PSHE programmes emphasize students' social and moral responsibility to take care of one another and to seek help and support from staff. They cover equity, diversity and inclusion, with discussions of differences between people and the importance of avoiding prejudice-based

language; positive relationships; online safety and action to take if students believe someone is being bullied, including online.

- other lessons, particularly theology and philosophy, English and drama highlight the issue of bullying and reinforce this message by teaching moral and spiritual values that show bullying to be unacceptable and by developing social skills. The library is well stocked with literature aiding an understanding of equity, diversity and inclusion and creates regular displays promoting inclusion and anti-bullying.
- in boarding houses, the school's houseparents, supported by their matrons and house tutor teams, act *in loco parentis*. The informal house environment is important in reinforcing students' standards and values, providing the opportunity for friendly, informal discussion of matters of concern to the individual student outside the formal classroom. We encourage close contact between houseparents and parents/guardians. Houseparents contact parents/guardians if they are worried about a student's wellbeing and encourage parents to share any concern about potential bullying, including online bullying, immediately.
- students are encouraged to tell a member of staff at once if they know that bullying of any kind has taken place. Students receive a termly email reminding them of the ways in which they can report a concern, including the online 'student feedback' facility on the wesite.
- the names, photographs and contact details of the Designated Safeguarding Team are displayed in boarding houses and classes.
- staff are regularly trained, know their legal responsibilities and know the school's policies on dealing with bullying; whilst students cannot be constantly supervised in a large and busy boarding environment, settings such as Dining Hall.
- the school invests in specialized skills training, as appropriate, to develop its staff members' understanding of students with special educational needs or disabilities
- students who are struggling to manage their behaviour towards others may need additional support in developing tolerance, understanding and respect for others in the Almond College community. Additional support is provided beyond the boarding house by DSL, the pastoral Team, the Learning Support department, or through referral to the school's therapy service.
- the school's Medical Centre and all boarding houses display advice on where students can seek help, including details of confidential helplines and websites connecting to external.
- staff are aware of students on the Learning Support register, including those with SEND;
- all students have access to a telephone, enabling them to call for support in private;
- The school prefects promote the values of kindness and inclusion, giving assemblies on the school's core value. Leadership training is provided to the Monitor team, covering child protection and the importance of offering support and assistance to younger and to vulnerable students. The Monitors meet weekly with the Head and Deputy Heads and share any concerns;
- The student-led Anti-Bullying Ambassadors (CHABA) affinity group runs initiatives to promote anti-bullying;

- the school reserves the right to investigate incidents involving our students that take place outside school hours, on school visits and trips and in the vicinity of the school;
- we welcome feedback from parents and guardians on the effectiveness of our preventative measures.

Related policies:

- Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy
- Student Code of Conduct
- Student Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Policy
- Staff ICT Code of Conduct
- Behaviour Management, Rewards and Sanctions Policy

Date of last review: August 2025
Date of next review: August 2026