



## Autism and Bullying Policy

**3 year review cycle.**

**Date for Review: March 2022**

*For internal use only:*

Policy last reviewed: March 2019  
SLT responsibility: School Business Manager  
Approval required from: Headteacher

Policy reviewed by: Mike Kemlo  
Approved by Headteacher: 4 March 2019  
Requirement: Non- Statutory

### Introduction

Autism is a lifelong, developmental disability that affects how a person communicates with and relates to other people, and how they experience the world around them.

The behaviours and challenges typically associated with autism are often as a result of differences in thinking and processing information. It is through a deep understanding of the impacts of these different thinking styles that we are able to develop approaches and strategies which allow people with autism to better understand and contribute to the world around them.

Autism impacts on a number of key areas: social communication and interaction, information and sensory processing, and the ability to adapt thinking and behaviour depending on the context.

#### Social Imagination and Flexible Thinking

Autism impacts on thinking, learning and information processing. It can affect the ability to adjust to change and to manage new and unfamiliar situations.

#### Social Interaction

Autism can affect the ability to form and sustain relationships and to understand the feelings and intentions of others.

#### Social Communication

Autism impacts on verbal and nonverbal communication. It can affect the ability to understand, process and use language.

The impact and implication of the combination of these difficulties means that the person with autism has no real understanding of the implications of the demands and obligations placed upon us all by society, the impact of their actions, or the consequences arising from them.

Individuals on the autism spectrum can and often do have other conditions. This can include but is

not restricted to learning disability, epilepsy, metabolic disorders such as Phenylketonuria, sensory impairments and genetic conditions such as Fragile X syndrome and Down's syndrome.

Conditions associated with the autism spectrum are not mental illnesses. It is, however, recognised that there can be a vulnerability to mental health and wellbeing. Pathological Demand Avoidance Syndrome (PDA) is also increasingly recognised as part of the autism spectrum.

## Bullying

### A definition:

There is no legal definition of bullying.

However, it's usually defined as behaviour that is:

- repeated
- intended to hurt someone either physically or emotionally
- often aimed at certain groups, for example because of race, religion, gender or sexual orientation

It takes many forms and can include:

- physical assault
- teasing
- making threats
- name calling
- cyberbullying - bullying via mobile phone or online (for example email, social networks and instant messenger)

In order to fully address the issue of bullying in the context of a residential special school for young people with learning disability and autism, it is necessary firstly to examine what constitutes bullying and whether this can be isolated from incidents which we would classify as incidents of challenging behaviour.

The act of bullying requires the perpetrator to have as the function of the behaviour an intentional effect on the state of mind of the targeted individual. Bullying is not therefore a simple physical act with no antecedent or consequence in the mind of the perpetrator or victim. It is an expression of intent to induce in the mind of the victim a conditioned response. Fear, compliance, distress etc.

Due to the specific disabilities experienced by the young people at Bradstow School, outlined above, they have an inability to fully think through the social implications of their physical or relational behaviour. Or they do not have the capacity to use violence, or other more subtle bullying strategies, as tools with which to induce the reactions implied by the definition.

The behaviour towards others that might seem to appear to be bullying is therefore largely due to what we would term "challenging behaviour" and would have a legitimate have function e.g. to gain attention, escape, sensory feedback or access to tangibles etc. for the individual. It cannot generally be construed as bullying due to the general absence of intent implied by the definition (although it is a fact that sometimes a young person will continually be aggressive towards another young person to gain negative attention or reinforcing reactions, to escape or avoid demands, or habitually in relation to their disability), and to the fact that such behaviours are generally consistent with the

individual special needs of the young person in question, their autism and communication difficulties.

At Bradstow School, therefore, bullying is not seen as a discrete issue that we have to explicitly plan for outside of Positive Behaviour Support. Challenging behaviour, however, is given a very high priority, and should a young person exhibit behaviours towards another, this is fully and systematically planned for, and supported within the processes related to Positive Behaviour Support. Consideration would always be given in relation to Safeguarding. This is fully examined in the various policies available at Bradstow School.

We are fully aware of the implications of cyber bullying and all incidents would be fully investigated and acted upon. Bradstow has measures in place to reduce the likelihood of this occurring which are fully explained in Bradstow School's Online Safety Policy.