

4.10

CYBERBULLYING and CYBERSAFETY

Understanding cyberbullying

Cyberbullying can be defined as *the use of Information and Communications Technology (ICT), particularly mobile phones and the internet, deliberately to upset someone else*. It can be an extension of face-to-face bullying, with technology providing the bully with another route to harass their target. However, it differs in several significant ways from other kinds of bullying: the invasion of home and personal space; the difficulty in controlling electronically circulated messages; the size of the audience; perceived anonymity; and even the profile of the person doing the bullying and their target. Research into the extent of cyberbullying indicates that it is a feature of many young people's lives. It also affects members of school staff and other adults; there are examples nationwide of staff being ridiculed, threatened and otherwise abused online by pupils. Cyberbullying, like all bullying, should be taken very seriously. It is never acceptable, and a range of Education Acts and government guidance outline schools' duties and powers in relation to bullying. The Education and Inspections Act 2006 (EIA 2006) includes legal powers that relate more directly to cyberbullying; it outlines the power of head teachers to regulate the conduct of pupils when they are off-site and provides a defence in relation to the confiscation of mobile phones and other items. Independent schools cover these areas via rules, policies and the parental contract. Although cyberbullying is not a specific criminal offence, there are criminal laws that can apply in terms of harassment and threatening and menacing communications. Schools are advised to contact the police if they feel that the law has been broken.

Cyberbullying takes different forms: threats and intimidation; harassment or "cyberstalking" (e.g. repeatedly sending unwanted texts or instant messages); vilification / defamation; exclusion or peer rejection; impersonation; unauthorised publication of private information or images (including what are sometimes misleadingly referred to as 'happy slapping' images); and manipulation. Some cyberbullying is clearly deliberate and aggressive, but it is important to recognise that some incidents of cyberbullying are known to be unintentional and the result of simply not thinking about the consequences. What may be sent as a joke, may not be received as one, and indeed the distance that technology allows in communication means the sender may not see the impact of the message on the receiver. There is also less opportunity for either party to resolve any misunderstanding or to feel empathy. It is important that pupils are made aware of the effects of their actions. In cyberbullying, bystanders can easily become perpetrators – by passing on or showing to others images designed to humiliate, for example, or by taking part in online polls or discussion groups. They may not recognise themselves as participating in bullying, but their involvement compounds the misery for the person targeted. It is recommended that anti-bullying policies refer to those 'bystanders' – better termed 'accessories' in this context – who actively support cyberbullying and set out sanctions for this behaviour. It is important that pupils are aware that their actions have severe and distressing consequences and that participating in such activity will not be tolerated.

Preventing cyberbullying

ERC in his capacity as Head of Pastoral Care and Child Protection Officer will work with local safeguarding children's board, IT staff, pastoral care staff, and school council members to prevent cyber bullying and promote a culture of responsible use of technology that is consistent with the ethos of the school. Essential elements of prevention are awareness-raising and promoting understanding about cyberbullying. ERC delivers a presentation to each section of the school in morning assembly about cyber bullying and cyber safety. All pupils receive a cyber safety advice booklet. There are cyber safety presentations at parents evenings and staff INSET on the subject. It is also a topic within the PHSE programme. The school has recently updated its anti bullying policies and these, as well as the school rules include specific sections on cyber bullying. The school has acceptable ICT use policies for pupils and staff and these are reviewed annually by the ICT committee. PZ is also responsible for monitoring the school network to check whether the existing procedures are adequate.

The school records and monitors incidents of cyberbullying in the same way as all other forms of bullying and uses this information to develop policies and practices. Publicising reporting routes is an important element of prevention, raising awareness of the issue but also ensuring that any incidents can be stopped before they become too serious or upsetting. The school tries to ensure that learners, parents and staff are all aware of the different ways available to report cyberbullying incidents. In addition, schools can signpost information about external reporting routes, providing information about contacting service providers directly. Education and discussion around the responsible use of technologies and e-safety are key to preventing cyberbullying and helping children and young people deal confidently with any problems that might arise, whether in or out of school. We emphasize the fact that Technology can have a positive role in learning and teaching practice, and we try to ensure that staff are confident about ICT in order to model the responsible and positive use of technologies and to respond to incidents of cyberbullying appropriately. The school aims to stay up to date – prevention and responding strategies require continuous review and refinement as new technologies and services become popular. The school aims to publicise progress and cyberbullying prevention activities to the whole-school community.

Responding to cyberbullying

Cyberbullying is a form of bullying, and as such we are already be equipped to deal with the majority of cyberbullying cases through their existing anti-bullying and behaviour policies and procedures. However, we recognise the ways in which cyberbullying differs from other forms of bullying and reflect that in how they respond to it. In addition to considerations about the invasiveness of cyberbullying, the size of the audience, and other such factors, cyberbullying yields evidence in a way that other forms of bullying do not. The person being bullied will usually have examples of texts or emails received, and we encourage pupils to keep these to aid in any investigation.

There are also additional reporting routes available, through mobile phone companies, internet service providers and social networking sites. Some forms of cyberbullying involve the distribution of content or links to content, which can exacerbate, extend

and prolong the bullying. There are advantages in trying to contain the spread of these, and options the school might use here include contacting the service provider, confiscating phones, and contacting the police (in relation to illegal content).

Advice is given to those experiencing cyberbullying on steps they can take to avoid recurrence – for example, advise those targeted not to retaliate or reply; provide advice on ‘blocking’ or removing people from ‘buddy lists’; and ask them to think carefully about what private information they may have in the public domain.

We will take steps to identify the person responsible for the bullying. Steps can include looking at the school system and computer logs; identifying and interviewing possible witnesses; and, with police involvement, obtaining user information from the service provider.

Once the person responsible for the cyberbullying has been identified, as in other cases of bullying, sanctions will be applied. Steps will be taken to change the attitude and behaviour of the bully, as well as ensuring access to any help that they may need. The school has existing sanctions in place for bullying behaviour, and these will apply equally to cyberbullying. In addition, we will refer to any Acceptable Use Policies (AUPs) for internet and mobile use, and apply sanctions where applicable and practical. Technology-specific sanctions for pupils engaged in cyberbullying behaviour could include limiting internet access for a period of time or removing the right to use a mobile phone on the school site, for example.

Cyber Safety

Many of the policies and practices concerned with cyber bullying also deal with issues of cyber safety and indeed the programme of talks to parents and pupils, the Staff INSET and the advice booklet for pupils which are referred to above all deal with cyber safety. The filtering of material available on and the monitoring of the use of the school network which is carried out, (monitoring is referred to in the school rules and always aims to be reasonable and proportionate) serves to keep pupils safe from certain unsuitable material as well as being a tool in the anti bullying strategy.

The Role of Technology in our Pupils’ lives

Technology plays an enormously important part in the lives of all young people. Sophisticated games consoles, or PSPs (plat stations portable), like Wiis and Nintendo DS, together with Bluetooth-enabled mobile phones provide unlimited access to the internet, to SMS messages, to blogging (web logging) services (like Twitter), to skype (video calls, via web cameras built into computers, phones and PSPs), to wikis (collaborative web pages), chat rooms social networking sites (such as Bebo, Facebook and MySpace) and video sharing sites (such as YouTube).

The school wants to ensure that pupils are able to use these new technologies safely, whether they are accessing them at home or at school.

Obviously education is crucial and listed above are the various means by which the school seeks to advise pupils. We are particularly aware of the fact that although filtering and monitoring can help to prevent access to unsuitable sites via the school network, there may be limited or no filtering operating if they access the web from elsewhere. The growth of hand held technologies will make this more of an issue. It is

therefore important to ensure that pupils have a sensible and careful attitude to using the web whatever the extent of filtering or monitoring being applied.

In particular the school tries to draw attention to the dangers for pupils on line of the following:

A: Commerce

Attempts by companies to sell them items which can lead to young people getting themselves or parents into debt.

B: Content

The need for pupils to be aware that not all content on the web has been vetted for accuracy and that there are sensible approaches and procedures to follow when carrying out research.

C: Contact

Pupils can come into contact with a large number of people via the net through chat rooms, social networking sites and increasingly through virtual worlds. There are clearly dangers if contact in the real world is made with some of these people without proper precautions being taken.

Involvement with Parents and Guardians

We seek to work closely with parents and guardians in promoting a culture of e-safety. We will always contact you if we have any worries about your son or daughter's behaviour in this area, and we hope that you will feel able to share any worries with us. We recognise that not all parents and guardians may feel equipped to protect their son or daughter when they use electronic equipment at home. We therefore arrange annual discussion evenings for parents when an outside specialist advises about the potential hazards of this exploding technology, and the practical steps that parents can take to minimise the potential dangers to their sons and daughters without curbing their natural enthusiasm and curiosity