Gothic Mede Academy

ANTI-BULLYING POLICY

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Significant changes made	
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Policy status: Statutory / safeguarding-linked school policy

1. POLICY AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

Gothic Mede Academy (GMA) is a values-based lower school for children aged 3–9 years. Our learning, interactions and relationships are rooted in our four school values: Compassion, Pride, Respect and Responsibility.

GMA is committed to providing a safe, inclusive, happy and nurturing environment in which every child can learn, develop and feel that they belong. Bullying is unacceptable, whether it takes place in school, online, during school activities, on the journey to or from school, or where behaviour outside school has a clear impact on the safety or wellbeing of pupils in school.

The aims of this policy are to:

- prevent bullying and reduce the likelihood of bullying behaviour occurring;
- ensure every pupil knows how and where to seek help and feels safe to report concerns;
- respond promptly, proportionately, fairly and sensitively to all reports or concerns;
- protect and support pupils who experience bullying, recognising the impact on emotional wellbeing, attendance, learning and relationships;
- provide appropriate support, challenge and consequences for pupils who have bullied or harmed others, while considering the reasons for their behaviour and any safeguarding or additional needs;
- recognise bullying as potentially linked to child-on-child abuse, discrimination, harassment or other safeguarding concerns and ensure these are escalated appropriately;
- meet the school's duties under the Equality Act 2010 and promote an inclusive culture in which prejudice, discrimination and derogatory language are challenged;
- work in partnership with parents/carers and, where appropriate, external agencies; and
- use recording, pupil voice and data analysis to identify patterns, hotspots and groups who may be disproportionately affected.

2. POLICY DEVELOPMENT

This policy has been developed with regard to the views and experiences of the whole school community, including pupils, staff, parents/carers and governors. Pupil voice will continue to inform prevention, review and improvement.

3. LEGISLATION, STATUTORY GUIDANCE AND RELATED POLICIES

This policy should be read alongside:

- Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy
- Child-on-Child Abuse Policy
- Positive Relationships / Behaviour Policy
- Equality and Diversity / Equality Information and Objectives
- SEND Policy and Accessibility Plan
- Online Safety and Acceptable Use Policy
- Mental Health and Wellbeing Policy
- Attendance Policy
- Complaints Policy

- Whistleblowing / Confidential Reporting Policy
- Exclusions / Suspensions Policy, where applicable
- PSHE / Relationships and Health Education curriculum documentation

The policy has been reviewed against the following current legislation and guidance:

- Education and Inspections Act 2006, including the duty to promote good behaviour and prevent bullying;
- Equality Act 2010 and the Public Sector Equality Duty, including duties relating to discrimination, harassment and victimisation and the need to make reasonable adjustments for disabled pupils;
- Children Act 1989;
- Protection from Harassment Act 1997;
- Public Order Act 1986 and other relevant criminal law where behaviour may constitute an offence;
- Keeping Children Safe in Education (KCSIE) 2026, particularly the child-centred safeguarding, child-on-child abuse, information-sharing and record-keeping expectations;
- Working Together to Safeguard Children 2026, including the principles of multi-agency safeguarding, anti-discriminatory practice, information sharing and considering multiple or extra-familial sources of harm;
- DfE Preventing and Tackling Bullying guidance (current DfE guidance, originally issued as DFE-00160-2017);
- DfE guidance on preventing and tackling bullying and harassment of school staff (July 2026); and
- relevant local safeguarding partnership procedures and thresholds.

This policy will be updated when relevant legislation, statutory guidance or local safeguarding procedures change. Where a safeguarding concern arises, the school's safeguarding procedures take precedence.

4. WHAT IS BULLYING?

GMA recognises that there is no single statutory definition of bullying. For the purposes of this policy, bullying is understood as behaviour by an individual or group that is repeated over time, is intended to hurt or humiliate another individual or group, and involves an imbalance of power or influence. The behaviour may be physical, verbal, relational, emotional, sexual or online.

The school will not, however, wait for behaviour to become repeated before acting. A single serious incident may constitute harassment, discrimination, child-on-child abuse, a safeguarding concern, or potentially a criminal offence and will be addressed according to the nature and seriousness of the concern.

Bullying can include:

- Physical: hitting, kicking, pushing, biting, pinching, damaging or taking belongings, or other physical intimidation.
- Verbal: name-calling, threats, insults, mocking, racist or discriminatory language, sexualised language or persistent teasing.
- Relational / emotional: deliberate exclusion, humiliation, manipulation, coercion, intimidation, spreading rumours or encouraging others to isolate a child.
- Sexual: sexualised comments, unwanted touching, sexual harassment, sharing sexualised material or other sexualised behaviour. Such behaviour may also constitute child-on-child abuse and must be referred to the DSL where appropriate.

- Online / cyber: harmful messages, images, videos, group exclusion, impersonation, threats, humiliation or other abuse using digital technology. Online behaviour may occur outside school but still require a school response where it affects pupils or the school community.
- Prejudice-based bullying: behaviour linked to race, religion or belief, disability, sex, sexual orientation, gender reassignment or another protected characteristic, or behaviour targeting a child because they are perceived to have a protected characteristic or because of association with someone who does.
- Indirect or coercive behaviour: using others to intimidate, threaten, isolate, manipulate or exploit a child.

4.1 Bullying and child-on-child abuse

Bullying can overlap with child-on-child abuse. Staff must not assume that an incident is 'just bullying' because the children involved are pupils or because there is no history of repetition. Where behaviour may involve sexual violence or harassment, physical abuse, coercive or controlling behaviour, serious threats, hate-related behaviour, exploitation, or a significant safeguarding risk, staff must follow the Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy and inform the DSL without delay.

4.2 Behavioural context and developmental understanding

Children's behaviour must be understood in context. Staff will consider age, stage of development, communication needs, SEND, neurodiversity, trauma, previous experiences, family circumstances, power dynamics and any other relevant factors. This does not excuse harmful behaviour, but it informs a proportionate and effective response.

4.3 Children who may be particularly vulnerable

Any child may experience bullying. GMA recognises that some children may be at increased risk, including children with SEND or disabilities, children experiencing family adversity or abuse, children who are looked after or previously looked after, children experiencing mental health or wellbeing difficulties, children who may be socially isolated, and children who experience or are perceived to have protected characteristics.

5. WHOLE-SCHOOL APPROACH

GMA adopts a whole-school, preventative and child-centred approach. Safeguarding is everyone's responsibility and all staff are expected to contribute to a culture in which bullying, discrimination and harmful behaviour are identified and challenged.

- Teach respectful relationships, emotional literacy, resilience, inclusion and safe online behaviour through PSHE, relationships and health education, assemblies, stories, role play and age-appropriate discussion.
- Provide regular opportunities for pupils to understand what bullying is, how to respond as a bystander and how to seek help.
- Ensure pupils know trusted adults and appropriate reporting routes, including how to report concerns on behalf of another child.
- Use pupil voice, surveys and discussion to identify concerns, unsafe areas and emerging patterns.
- Monitor behaviour, safeguarding and attendance information for patterns or disproportionality, including by year group, protected characteristic and SEND where appropriate and lawful.
- Use supervision, environmental changes and targeted staffing to reduce identified hotspots or opportunities for bullying.
- Challenge discriminatory, racist, homophobic, biphobic, transphobic, sexist, ableist or otherwise derogatory language and behaviour in line with the Equality Act 2010 and school policies.

- Provide staff training so all adults understand signs, reporting arrangements, recording expectations and the distinction between bullying, poor behaviour and safeguarding concerns.
- Work with parents/carers and relevant external agencies where this will improve outcomes or reduce risk.
- Review the effectiveness of prevention and response measures through SLT, governors and pupil voice.

6. PROCEDURES FOR RESPONDING TO ALLEGED BULLYING

6.1 Immediate response

- Take every report seriously and listen calmly, without judgement.
- Reassure the child that they have done the right thing by speaking to an adult.
- Do not promise confidentiality. Explain that information will be shared only with people who need it to keep children safe and respond appropriately.
- Take immediate action where necessary to secure safety, including separating pupils, increasing supervision or obtaining first aid.
- Inform the DSL promptly where there is a safeguarding element, including possible child-on-child abuse, significant emotional or physical harm, sexual behaviour, discriminatory abuse, threats or exploitation.
- Record the concern as soon as possible in the school's agreed recording system, using factual, professional language and the child's own words where relevant.

6.2 Initial assessment and gathering information

The member of staff leading the response, with SLT/DSL input as appropriate, will consider:

- what is alleged to have happened, when and where;
- whether behaviour is repeated, persistent or escalating;
- the impact on the child, including emotional wellbeing, attendance, learning and sense of safety;
- any imbalance of power, influence, age, size, status or vulnerability;
- whether the behaviour relates to a protected characteristic or discriminatory belief;
- whether there are online, community or extra-familial elements;
- the developmental age and communication needs of all children involved;
- whether there are additional safeguarding concerns or evidence that any child may also be experiencing harm elsewhere;
- the views and wishes of the child who has experienced the behaviour, while recognising that the school retains responsibility for safeguarding decisions; and
- whether the concern requires referral to the DSL, police, children's social care or another agency.

Children involved should normally be spoken to separately. Staff should use open, non-leading questions, avoid repeated questioning and avoid asking children to confront one another. The school will not conduct an investigation in a way that could compromise a police or safeguarding investigation.

6.3 Recording

- Record concerns promptly and objectively.
- Distinguish clearly between what was observed, what was reported and professional analysis.
- Use the child's exact words in quotation marks where relevant.
- Record dates, times, locations, witnesses, actions taken and the outcome or next steps.

- Avoid labels such as 'bully' or 'victim' where the facts have not yet been established; use neutral language such as 'child who has reported harm' and 'child alleged to have caused harm' during the assessment stage.
- Record discriminatory or protected-characteristic elements explicitly where relevant.
- Link related records where there is a pattern, while maintaining appropriate confidentiality.

6.4 Safeguarding escalation

If there is reasonable cause to suspect that a child is suffering, or is likely to suffer, significant harm, the concern must be referred to the DSL immediately and managed under the school's safeguarding procedures. Bullying must never be used as a reason to minimise or delay a safeguarding response.

The DSL will consider whether the threshold for support or statutory intervention is met and, where appropriate, will consult or refer to children's social care, the police or other agencies in line with local procedures and Working Together to Safeguard Children 2026.

6.5 Risk assessment and safety planning

Where there is an ongoing risk, the school will complete a proportionate risk and needs assessment. This may include:

- named trusted adults and safe spaces;
- increased supervision at identified times or locations;
- planned separation or changes to seating, routines or activities where necessary;
- safe arrangements for transitions, playtimes and clubs;
- online safety measures and parent/carer support;
- consideration of risks beyond the school site or outside school hours where these affect school safety;
- support for witnesses or bystanders where required; and
- review dates and named staff responsible for monitoring.

Any safety measures will be proportionate, reviewed regularly and designed so that the child experiencing harm is not unnecessarily disadvantaged, isolated or made responsible for preventing the bullying.

6.6 Informing parents/carers

Parents/carers will normally be informed at an appropriate stage and in a sensitive and confidential manner. The school will consider the child's welfare, safeguarding risks, the wishes of the child where appropriate, and whether contacting a parent/carer could increase risk. Information will be shared on a need-to-know basis.

6.7 Outcomes and consequences

The school will decide the appropriate response after considering the facts, seriousness, impact, age and development of the children, safeguarding concerns, SEND and other relevant circumstances. Consequences will be consistent with the school's Positive Relationships / Behaviour Policy and applied fairly, reasonably and lawfully.

- Responses may include restorative or relational work where safe and appropriate, repair of harm, education, mentoring, pastoral support, targeted intervention, increased supervision, behaviour consequences, or external agency involvement.
- Restorative approaches will never be used where they would place a child at further risk or pressure a child to meet or reconcile with another child.

- A child who has displayed bullying behaviour may require support in addition to a consequence. Staff will consider whether the behaviour indicates unmet needs, previous harm, SEND, emotional difficulties or other safeguarding concerns.
- The school will monitor whether the behaviour stops and whether the child experiencing harm feels safe and supported.

6.8 Police involvement

Where behaviour may constitute a criminal offence or presents a serious risk, the DSL/Head of School will consider contacting the police in accordance with current safeguarding procedures and relevant police guidance. The school will cooperate with any investigation and will avoid taking action that could compromise evidence or an investigation.

7. SUPPORT

7.1 Support for children affected by bullying

Support will be tailored to the child's needs and may include:

- a named trusted adult and regular check-ins;
- pastoral or wellbeing support;
- support with friendships, confidence and social skills;
- support with attendance or reintegration where bullying has affected school attendance;
- a proportionate individual safety plan or risk assessment;
- support for online safety and digital resilience;
- targeted interventions or referrals to specialist services where appropriate; and
- ongoing review to ensure the child continues to feel safe.

The child’s voice, wishes and feelings will be considered throughout, while recognising that safeguarding decisions must remain focused on the child's best interests and safety.

7.2 Support for children who have displayed bullying behaviour

GMA will seek to understand why harmful behaviour has occurred and will consider whether the child may themselves be experiencing harm, neglect, exploitation, discrimination, unmet needs or other difficulties. Support may include mentoring, emotional wellbeing work, family support, early help or specialist services. Support does not remove the need for an appropriate consequence or clear expectations for behaviour.

7.3 Support for staff

Bullying, harassment and intimidation can also affect staff. GMA will promote a respectful workplace and will respond to bullying or harassment of staff in line with employment, safeguarding, equality, health and safety, complaints and behaviour procedures. Current DfE guidance on preventing and tackling bullying and harassment of school staff will be considered when responding to such concerns.

8. EQUALITY, INCLUSION AND DISCRIMINATION

GMA is committed to equality of opportunity and to eliminating unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation. Where bullying or harassment is connected to a protected characteristic, the school will treat this as a significant factor in assessing seriousness and response.

The school will make reasonable adjustments for disabled pupils where required and will consider communication, sensory, cognitive and other needs when investigating and responding to concerns.

9. ONLINE AND OFF-SITE BULLYING

The school recognises that bullying may occur through social media, messaging platforms, games, devices and other digital spaces. The school will respond where online behaviour affects the safety, wellbeing, relationships or education of pupils or the wider school community. Parents/carers will be supported to report platform abuse and to use appropriate parental controls and reporting mechanisms.

Where behaviour occurs outside school, GMA will consider its safeguarding and behaviour responsibilities where the behaviour has a clear connection to the school, affects pupils at school, creates a risk to children, or otherwise falls within the school's lawful duties.

10. MONITORING, EVALUATION AND GOVERNANCE

The effectiveness of this policy will be monitored through:

- CPOMS / safeguarding and behaviour records, including analysis of repeat concerns and hotspots;
- analysis of incidents by year group and, where appropriate and lawful, protected characteristic and SEND;
- pupil voice, surveys and discussions;
- attendance and wellbeing indicators where relevant;
- staff feedback and training needs;
- parent/carer feedback and complaints;
- review of risk assessments and safety plans;
- SLT review of preventative measures and outcomes; and
- governor monitoring of the effectiveness of the school's anti-bullying strategy.

The school will consider whether interventions have reduced harm, improved pupils' sense of safety and prevented recurrence. Data will be used to identify disproportionality and inform improvement.

11. ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Head of School / Senior Leadership Team

- Have overall responsibility for implementation and effectiveness of this policy.
- Ensure appropriate staffing, training, supervision and resources.
- Ensure serious or safeguarding-related concerns are escalated appropriately.
- Report relevant patterns and themes to governors.

Designated Safeguarding Lead

- Ensure safeguarding concerns linked to bullying or child-on-child abuse are assessed and managed in accordance with the Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy.
- Consider referrals to children's social care, police or other agencies where appropriate.
- Ensure safeguarding records are accurate, secure and appropriately shared.
- Support staff with advice, training and professional challenge.

All staff

- Be vigilant and take concerns seriously.
- Intervene promptly and safely when harmful behaviour is observed.
- Record and report concerns in accordance with this policy and safeguarding procedures.
- Challenge discriminatory or derogatory language and behaviour.
- Maintain professional curiosity and consider patterns rather than isolated incidents only.
- Avoid labelling children and maintain a child-centred, non-judgemental approach.

Governors

- Monitor the implementation and effectiveness of the policy.
- Ensure leaders provide appropriate reporting and assurance.
- Consider whether the school is meeting its equality and safeguarding duties.
- Use available information to challenge leaders where patterns, disproportionality or weaknesses in response are identified.

Parents and carers

- Contact the school promptly if they are concerned about bullying or harmful behaviour.
- Work with the school to support their child's safety, wellbeing and behaviour.
- Support safe and respectful use of digital technology.
- Avoid directly confronting another child or family where this could increase risk or conflict; concerns should be raised through the school.

Pupils

- Treat others with Compassion, Pride, Respect and Responsibility.
- Report bullying, discrimination or harmful behaviour, including concerns affecting another child.
- Seek help from a trusted adult if they feel unsafe.
- Avoid joining in, encouraging, sharing or forwarding harmful behaviour online or offline.
- Support an inclusive school community where everyone can belong.

12. COMPLAINTS AND REVIEW

Parents/carers who remain concerned about how an alleged bullying incident has been managed should use the school's Complaints Policy. The school will seek to resolve concerns promptly and fairly.

This policy will be reviewed annually, or sooner where there are significant changes to legislation, statutory guidance, local safeguarding procedures or school practice.

APPENDIX 1 – STAFF QUICK REFERENCE

- Listen → reassure → assess immediate safety.
- Record the concern promptly and factually.
- Do not promise confidentiality.
- Inform the DSL immediately if there is a safeguarding concern.
- Speak to children separately and use open, non-leading questions.
- Do not label a child as a 'bully' before facts are established.
- Remember: a single serious incident can require a safeguarding response even if it is not technically bullying.

- Consider protected characteristics, SEND, power imbalance, developmental stage and the impact on the child.
- Put proportionate safety measures in place and review them.
- Keep the child experiencing harm at the centre of the response.
- Support the child who has caused harm as well as applying an appropriate consequence.
- Monitor for recurrence and wider patterns.

APPENDIX 2 – KEY DOCUMENTS AND SOURCES

- Department for Education, Keeping Children Safe in Education 2026.
- Department for Education, Working Together to Safeguard Children 2026.
- Department for Education, Preventing and Tackling Bullying (DFE-00160-2017; current DfE publication).
- Department for Education, Preventing and Tackling the Bullying and Harassment of School Staff (2026).
- Equality Act 2010.
- Education and Inspections Act 2006.
- Children Act 1989.
- Relevant local safeguarding partnership procedures and thresholds.