



Merton Anti Bullying Strategy 2021-23

Approved by MSCP Protect & Promote Young People Subgroup – November 2021

1. Introduction

In Merton, children and young people have

- A right to be treated with dignity and respect
- A right to live life in an environment that is safe, secure and enjoyable so they can reach their full potential.
- A right to live in an atmosphere free from victimisation, discrimination, harassment and any other form of bullying behaviours
- A responsibility to promote care, respect and co-operation in their relationships

Working together, Merton Children Schools and Families Division, partner agencies and schools have developed this strategy, which sets out our shared commitment and action to address bullying.

We also acknowledge that there are a number of groups that are more likely to be bullied related to: gender, special needs and disability, race, religion, sexual orientation, gender identity, looked after children and young carers. This strategy includes actions to address this. Merton council, schools, colleges and other settings have a responsibility under Equalities legislation to eliminate discrimination and to foster good relationships.

2. Definition of bullying

The Anti-Bullying Alliance and its members have a shared definition of bullying based on research from across the world over the last 30 years:-

“The repetitive, intentional hurting of one person or group by another person or group, where the relationship involves an imbalance of power. It can happen face to face or online”
([Our definition of bullying \(anti-bullyingalliance.org.uk\)](https://www.anti-bullyingalliance.org.uk))

We recognise that there is a close relationship between bullying and wider child on child abuse. Child on child abuse occurs when a child or young person is exploited, bullied and /

or harmed by their peers who are the same or similar age both inside and outside of school and online. KCSIE 2021 highlights the need for all schools to be vigilant and recognise the many types of peer on peer abuse. Child on child abuse includes violence, sexual violence and online abuse.

Staff should be aware that children can abuse other children (often referred to as peer on peer abuse or child on child) and that it can happen both inside and outside of school or college and online. Some but not all instances of child on child abuse will amount to bullying.



*“Children can abuse other children (often referred to as peer on peer abuse) and it can take many forms. It **can** happen both inside and outside of school/college and online. It is important that all staff recognise the indicators and signs of peer on peer abuse and know how to identify it and respond to reports. This **can** include (but is not limited to): bullying (including cyberbullying, prejudice-based and discriminatory bullying); abuse within intimate partner relationships; physical abuse such as hitting, kicking, shaking, biting, hair pulling, or otherwise causing physical harm; sexual violence and sexual harassment; consensual and non-consensual sharing of nude and semi-nude images and/or videos; causing someone to engage in sexual activity without consent, such as forcing someone to strip, touch themselves sexually, or to engage in sexual activity with a third party; upskirting and initiation/hazing type violence and rituals”*

Research suggests that girls and young women are more at risk of abusive behaviours perpetrated by their peers; however it can also affect boys and young men, those with SEND, LGBTQ Children and young people (CYP) and other minority communities (see sections below)

3. Aim of the strategy

The aim of The Antibullying Strategy is to build on good practice locally and nationally. The strategy will support schools and other settings to improve policy and practice in preventing

bullying, dealing with incidents and encouraging children and young people to celebrate, embrace and respect difference. We also aim develop the skills to resolve conflict peacefully. Children and Young People are at the heart of these initiatives.

4. Why do we need to address bullying?

Every school must have measures in place to prevent all forms of bullying. This is a legal requirement. (2006 education Act).

“The Education and Inspections Act 2006 Section 89 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006 provides that maintained schools must have measures to encourage good behaviour and prevent all forms of bullying amongst pupils. These measures should be part of the school’s behaviour policy which must be communicated to all pupils, school staff and parents.”

Preventing and tackling bullying advice for head teachers, staff and governing bodies, 2017

Children and young people tell us it is an issue that they are concerned about. We know that bullying occurs in our schools and that it can have both short and long-term impact on pupil wellbeing and outcomes.

Under Equalities legislation, public bodies including schools have a duty to:

- Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct prohibited by the Act.
- advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and people who do not share it
- Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and people who do not share it.

This requires schools to take an active role in preventing and dealing with bullying and with special regard to those groups who may be more at risk.

The protected Characteristics under the equality Act 2010, relevant to school pupils and students are: Disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, and sexual orientation.

5. Which groups of children and young people are more vulnerable to bullying?

Young people in Merton tell us that how you look is one of the main reasons for bullying (anti-bullying survey results from primary and secondary pupils). They also have told us that children are bullied about their race, skin colour and for being gay or lesbian as well as their family situation.

It is recognised by the leading anti-bullying organisations that some identified groups are more vulnerable to bullying. This is important for those working with children and young people to consider if there are additional actions they need to take to prevent and deal with bullying. The groups identified are:

5.1 Children and young people with SEND

ABA research shows that 36% of pupils with SEND experience frequent bullying compared to 25% of those without SEND.

KCSIE 2021 has emphasised the need for schools to be aware of:

“...these children being more prone to peer group isolation or bullying (including prejudice-based bullying) than other children; the potential for children with SEND or certain medical conditions being disproportionately impacted by behaviours such as bullying, without outwardly showing any signs; and communication barriers and difficulties in managing or reporting these challenges “

5.2 Care-experienced young people

Care-experienced young people (looked after children and those who have been in care) are among the groups who are most vulnerable to bullying.

Data from the Longitudinal Study of Young People in England (LSYPE) survey found that **looked after children aged 14 years were 1.56 times more likely to be bullied than those who had not been in care, 1.72 times more likely to be bullied at age 15 and 1.75 times more likely to be bullied at age 16** (National Centre for Social Research, 2010)

5.3 Young Carers

Research has shown that young carers are a vulnerable group and are significantly more likely to be bullied. Young carers have a range of responsibilities which might include caring for a sick relative with physical or mental health difficulty. This can have a significant impact on their lives which can leave them feeling different or isolated from their peers, they may miss out on social opportunities and are more likely to be bullied or harassed (Carers Trust, 2016).

Experiences of bullying can vary greatly but young carers often report that their care responsibilities and family circumstances make them feel different and they find it more challenging to join peer groups.

5.4 Identity Based bullying

Children and young people are too often bullied in schools because of their race, faith, gender, disability, sexual orientation or trans status, irrespective of whether those differences are real or perceived.

Stonewall's Schools Out report 2019 highlighted the concerns about Homophobic, bi-phobic and transphobic bullying

“Nearly half of LGBT young people are still bullied for being LGBT at school.... LGBT young people continue to experience unacceptably high levels of poor mental health. Online, nearly all LGBT pupils are exposed to offensive content about LGBT people, and just one in three think that online companies will do something about it if reported. For trans pupils in particular, the findings are alarming: nearly two in three trans pupils are bullied for being LGBT at school, one in ten have received death threats, and more than two in five have tried to take their own lives”

5.5 Racist and faith targeted bullying

Merton is a diverse borough, in Jan 2021 the white school population totalled 48.6% of the total. A recent ABA literature review has identified that among the groups more likely to be bullied were Gypsy, Roma and Traveller, asylum seeker/refugee and mixed-race children and young people. Studies suggested that being bullied in terms of background and identity can have profound negative consequences.

6. What harm does bullying do?

There is considerable evidence to show that bullying has both short term and long term impact on outcomes of children and young people.

A child or young person who is being bullied may feel isolated, anxious and angry. Bullying can reduce self-esteem and can lead to depression, self-injury and eating problems. If the bullying is happening at school children and young people may make excuses so they don't have to go to school, or get so anxious they cannot go in. Bullying can impact therefore on school engagement and attendance which can affect their school work, friendships, and even their future prospects.

It is most important to remember that bullying can seriously affect the mental health of the person being bullied and can change the way they feel about themselves long into their adulthood.

6.1 Short-term impact

Children and young people who have experienced bullying are more likely to:

- Miss school (Natcen research [Estimating the prevalence of young people absent from school due to bullying \(natcen.ac.uk\)](https://natcen.ac.uk) found that at any one time over 16,000 young people aged 11-15 are missing education primarily due to bullying)
- Be excluded (LSYPE research below found that children that were bullied daily were 3 times more likely to be excluded from school than those that were not bullied)

[RR388 - Longitudinal study of young people in England cohort 2 wave 1.pdf \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://publishing.service.gov.uk)

- Experience a strain in relationships with families/carers
- Experience a reduction in their self-esteem and have impaired wellbeing; which may lead to anxiety, depression and self-harming behaviour.

6.2 Long-term impact

Bullying impacts on pupil engagement in school and is associated with lower achievement. There is strong evidence to link bullying to mental health issues such as anxiety and depression. The evidence points to the impact of bullying going way beyond childhood and well into adulthood.

In recent years, a large longitudinal study has shown that:-

*“Children who are **bullied** are less engaged in primary school, whereas those with **positive friendships** are more engaged in secondary school. Being bullied is associated with lower achievement for both primary and secondary school pupils”*

The Impact of Pupil Behaviour and Wellbeing on Educational Outcomes 2012.

King's College London research from 2015 shows the substantial long-term effect of being bullied (especially if they fall into a 'frequently bullied' category) where people were more likely to:

- experience a range mental health issues as an adult including suicide ideation
- earn less money
- not be in employment, education or training in adulthood
- be obese (particularly in women)
- gain qualifications

- not be in stable relationships

Other research shows people who were bullied as children are more likely to:

- perpetrate or be a victim of domestic violence
- be homeless

Research from University of Warwick and Duke Medical Centre suggests that the long term impact of bullying may even be worse than that of child abuse.

[Adult mental health consequences of peer bullying and maltreatment in childhood: two cohorts in two countries - The Lancet Psychiatry](#)

7. What do we know about the prevalence of bullying?

7.1 National Data

A DfE survey from 2019 found that around 2 in 5 school pupils (43%) and parents/carers (40%) report that they/their child has been a victim of bullying in the past year. For colleges, this was lower, with around 1 in 4 college students (28%) and parents/carers (26%) reporting the same (Omnibus survey of pupils and their parents or carers: wave 6 Research report Summer 2019)

Research from the Anti-Bullying Alliance in 2016 with over 13,000 pupils aged between 7 and 15 across 44 schools in the UK found:

- 1 in 4 children reported they were bullied a lot or always
- Disabled children and those with SEN were around twice as likely to be bullied
- The risk of being frequently bullied declined with age
- Males were more likely to be victimised than females
- Disabled children and those with SEN were three times more likely to both be bullied and bully others ('bully-victims')
- Children and young people who were involved in school bullying enjoyed going to school less, had poorer relationships with their teachers, and were less likely to feel safe or included within the school.
- Children who were eligible for free school meals were more likely to be victims of frequent bullying

7.2 Online Bullying

Online bullying is when someone bullies others using electronic means, this might involve social media and messaging services on the internet, accessed on a mobile phone, tablet or gaming platform. The behaviour is usually repeated.

A recent ABA survey 2020 found that 1 in 5 children aged 10 to 15 years in England and Wales (19%) experienced at least one type of online bullying behaviour in the year ending March 2020, equivalent to 764,000 children.

In [2017 Public Health England released research](#) from a 2014 consultation with 5,335 young people aged 11-15 years old. They found: 17.9% of 11-15 year olds reported being bullied online in the two months prior to being surveyed. They found that girls were twice as likely as boys to report being bullied online.

[Research by Warwick University released in 2017](#) shows that there is a strong link between 'traditional' face to face bullying compared to online. It found that online doesn't create large numbers of new victims. Most bullying is face-to-face – with online used as a modern tool to supplement traditional forms, 29% of UK teenagers reported being bullied – only 1% were victims of online bullying alone.

It is likely that there will be long term changes in the use of online learning platform which have been developed during the pandemic to enable access to education online. Whilst national and local data suggests that bullying decreased during lockdowns, bullying when it has occurred has happened online. More children and young people have had access to online learning and have used social media more to keep in touch and this has given opportunities for online bullying ([Bullying in the pandemic.pdf \(anti-bullyingalliance.org.uk\)](#))

The rise in use of digital platforms and social media across all ages has been well documented. The potential for online bullying has increased and will need to a focus for schools and other settings.

7.3 Local Data

There is good custom and practice around information sharing between schools, and partner agencies to ensure Children and Young People stay safe.

Schools report racist and homophobic incidents to the local authority on a termly basis. This information is analysed for trends and patterns.

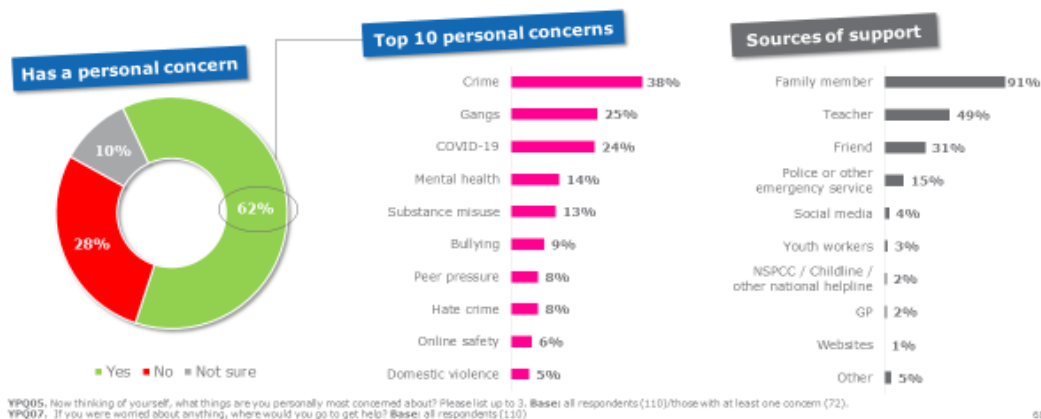
School exclusion data is also analysed. In 2020-21 there was a reduction in both primary and secondary schools in fixed term suspensions for racist comments, however this is against the backdrop of school closures due to the pandemic and lower exclusions overall.

The Merton Young Residents Survey runs regularly and provides evidence around young people perceptions of bullying.

Your Merton Survey 110 respondents aged 11-17

Personal concerns of young people

Just over three in five young residents admit to having at least one personal concern. For these young people, the primary worries are crime and gangs, following by COVID-19. Bullying has decreased as an issue compared to 2019. If faced with an issue, most young people would go to a family member for support.



Children and young people from Merton primary and secondary schools have engaged in questionnaires and focus groups to provide useful feedback on bullying. This was conducted to provide information to inform this strategy.

Over the last 12 months have you been bullied?

Primary	YES 18.7%	NO 81.3%
Secondary	YES 54%	NO 46%

Where did the bullying happen?

Primary	Break/lunchtime	Other (eg toilets)	online	Local area
Secondary	Other (e.g toilets)	Class	break or lunchtime	local area

If you were bullied did you tell someone about it?

Primary	YES	49%	NO	51%
Secondary	YES	57.5%	NO	37.5%

If you were bullied who did you tell about it?

Primary	parent	Class teacher	peer
Secondary	Parent	Peer	Senior Teacher

If you have been bullied and told an adult about it, did it stop?

Primary	YES	49%	NO	51%
Secondary	YES	53.5%	NO	36.5%

How well do you think bullying is deal with at your school?

Primary	Very well	35%	Quite well	32%	neither well /not well	20%	not well	13%
Secondary	Very well	40%	Quite well	40%	neither well /not well	5.75%	not well	14.25%

During lockdown do you think there has been more or less bullying in your school?

Primary	less	47%	more	6.2%	Not sure	46.8%
Secondary	less	28.5	more	26.5%	Not sure	45%

(Ditch the Label annual survey: Bullying has increased by 25% in the past 12 months, with 1 in 4 young people being physically attacked; and 1 in 3 having experienced bullying on online platforms.)

In your schools what are people bullied about?

Primary (in rank order)	Don't know/ none of these	How they look	Family background	Ethnic group, skin colour,	Gender	Being gay or lesbian
Secondary (in rank order)	Don't know/ none of these	How they look	Being gay or lesbian			

Ofsted judge school's provision and response to bullying, as well as how pupils work with the school to prevent bullying in all its forms, which include online and prejudice based bullying. Jan 2020:-

Personal development, pupil behaviour and welfare judgement / Behaviour and Attitudes

- 98% Merton primary schools are rated good or outstanding.
- 100% of Merton secondary schools are rated good or outstanding
- 100% of Merton special schools are rated good or outstanding.

In the Stonewall Equality Index 2017, Merton's work to challenge prejudice and homophobia in schools showed a 6% rise and ranked Merton 13 out of 39 boroughs.

Children in care have the opportunity as part of the young person's views section of the E-PEP, to share concerns and cite an appropriate adult to whom they can turn in school should they feel unhappy for any reason. Each key stage is worded appropriately for the age range. Designated Teachers, other school staff, foster carers and social workers have a close

working relationship with the Virtual School and know to highlight and discuss any concerns that might be related to bullying or any other negative situation for the child or young person. The Virtual School will bring the relevant parties together to support the resolution of issues as they arise.

Merton has commissioned the Bright Spots 'Your Life, Your Care' survey for completion by all children and young people in care between the ages of 4 and 18. Within the surveys for 8-11 and 11-16 year olds, there are specific questions relating to bullying in school. The results of the Bright Spots survey will be presented to the Local Authority in 2022.

8. Strategic Priorities

This strategy will promote the following priorities which have been identified as important by pupils and the children's workforce.

8.1 Promote a Social model of bullying

Feedback from primary school pupils have told us that bullying does not always stop when it is reported and so it is important to ensure schools and other settings are aware of best practice in dealing with bullying. Evidence about what works in dealing with bullying incidents stresses the need to go beyond protecting the target of bullying and punishing the perpetrator, and instead to learn what actions the school community needs to take to address the issues raised and prevent it happening again. Children and young people have told us that issues with bullying are often complex and not well understood by the adults.

Recent work by the Anti Bullying Alliance and funded by the DfE has emphasised the need for a social model to tackle bullying – this puts emphasis on the school community to develop tolerance and inclusive practice rather than a pupil deficit model which does not require community action or change.

8.2 Focus on Prevention with the whole community

Creating an ethos in our schools where young people embrace diversity is key to preventing all bullying but is especially important to prevent identity based bullying. Schools need to work with their pupils and their communities to enable this to happen. Prevention also includes schools knowing their schools well and knowing where pupils feel unsafe both in and outside of the school gates.

8.3 Raise awareness of bullying of vulnerable groups

Ensure all staff working with young people understand bullying. Schools need to ensure that there are effective systems in place to gather the voice and opinions of the broad school community which include vulnerable groups. Schools need to ensure that effective systems are in place so that bullying concerns can be reported and that incidents are dealt with effectively.

8.4 Promote restorative practice and problem solving

Young people tell us that bullying situations are often complex and misunderstood by the adults. We know that children and young people who bully others are just as likely to have poor wellbeing as those who are being bullied. 42% of pupils report bullying others occasionally (ABA 2021) and many pupils can bully as well as be bullied. Taking a traditional sanction led approach to bullying on the whole does not resolve the wider issues. Young people refer to a “snitching culture” in schools where “snitching” is perceived negatively by older children and young people, this can only be changed if children and young people feel that they have agency. Restorative approaches put children and young people at the heart of dealing with bullying and finding solutions by getting to the cause of the bullying behaviour and repairing relationships. This would include the use of peer mediation, whole class restorative circles and restorative meetings.

8.5 Make sure schools know what works

In order to promote effective anti-bullying practice, we need to ensure that schools are supported to prevent and deal with bullying in an effective way. A good practice toolkit will accompany this strategy and will include case studies from schools, and model policies that have been developed with children and young people.

Merton schools are encouraged to share good practice in relation to preventing and supporting anti bullying practice through our Merton PSHE network, mental health forum and wider equalities work.

9. How will this strategy be monitored and reviewed?

The Merton Anti bullying Operational Group represents a wide range of agencies including Schools, School Improvement, VBS, SMISST, Youth Parliament, Police, youth service, virtual school, young carers. The group meets termly and reports to the Merton Promote and Prevent Young People subgroup of the safeguarding Partnership.

Related documents

[**Merton Anti Bullying best practice toolkit**](#)