



## DIGNITY AT WORK POLICY

*A healthy social life is found only, when in the mirror of each soul the whole community finds its reflection, and when in the whole community the virtue of each one is living.*

### Scope

This policy applies to all employees, volunteers and trustees. It is particularly important to note that this policy contains the actions people must take when they are aware that someone is being bullied or harassed. This policy relates to people's behaviour and the impact it has. If people feel aggrieved about a school policy or decision, they should use the grievance procedure, not the dignity at work policy.

### What is dignity at work?

A workplace has an environment of dignity when people are valued and treated with respect. When we fail to create such an environment, this can result in:

- poor morale
- loss of respect
- poor performance
- suffering
- damaged self esteem
- damaged relationships
- poor communication
- failure to collaborate or work as a team
- sickness absences
- pupils' education suffering
- the school losing valued staff.

**Bullying** may be characterised as behaviour which offends, intimidates, undermines, insults or injures someone. Bullying is about power, control and lack of empathy. It normally comes in the form of a pattern of verbal, physical, social or psychological aggression by a person or group, which causes harm, distress, fear or subordination. It works within and uses social dynamics, seeking to control others by various behaviours which intimidate, undermine, insult or injure the targeted person or group.

In general terms, **harassment** is unwanted behaviour that affects someone's dignity in the workplace. It may be related to age, sex, race, disability, religion, nationality, sexuality or any other personal characteristic. It may be persistent or an isolated incident.

Importantly, it is the effect of interactions on the victim that constitutes bullying and harassment, regardless of the intention of the perpetrator. The key is that the actions or comments are viewed as demeaning and unacceptable to the person being harassed or bullied. In this way, saying that something was "just a joke" or "just banter" is unlikely to be satisfactory.

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Bullying and harassment are very different from the crucial and constructive dialogue that must occur in all successful organisations, where feedback needs to be given or behaviour needs to be challenged.

### **Our commitment**

Elmfield Rudolf Steiner School, its staff and council of management, are determined to provide an environment of dignity and respect where people are motivated, productive and happy. The school recognises that when people feel bullied or harassed *and* these people do not know where they can turn to for support, this is symptomatic of a toxic and dysfunctional community, where the fundamental Waldorf values are failing to be adhered to. At our school it is required that all employees, trustees and volunteers work *proactively* to create and maintain a community where unacceptable behaviour is addressed promptly and appropriately. The aim is that this policy is more than a piece of paper – it is a set of values embodied in the behaviour of its community.

### **Dignity in a Waldorf School**

At the heart of all Waldorf Schools is a common understanding of the teachings of Rudolf Steiner. Steiner wrote a great deal about the critical importance of community, equality, the development of the self through critical reflection, and the crucial importance of an understanding of the working of sympathy and antipathy when responding to situations of conflict. All trustees, volunteers and staff working in Waldorf Schools should therefore be committed to the principles of dignity at work.

### **Working proactively to create a culture of dignity at work**

As employees, trustees and volunteers, every one of us is responsible for issues of critical importance, such as reporting child protection concerns and health and safety risks. As in any organisation, Elmfield would deem it negligent if these issues were not acted upon swiftly. Dignity at work should be no different. Any concerns about colleagues' behaviour which may constitute bullying or harassment should be reported to Coordination Group swiftly. Anyone, be they the accused, a witness or victim, should feel free to approach any chosen member of the Coordination Group and can do so with any colleague for moral support.

### **As a school community, we expect each of our members to:**

- treat colleagues fairly and equally
- value differences in others and their contribution
- treat all people politely and with respect while carrying out your work
- change your behaviour at work if it causes or is likely to cause offence to other people
- challenge inappropriate behaviour constructively
- support others where possible
- notify a relevant person on the school's Coordination Group if you are aware of anyone bullying or harassing an employee, volunteer or trustee
- attempt to engage with constructive criticism
- be willing to engage with the school's efforts at resolving the issues.

### **If someone has complained about your behaviour**

Someone may tell you that your behaviour at work is unacceptable. In these circumstances, this is the procedure to follow:

- listen carefully to the particular concerns they tell you
- respect the person's point of view – even if you don't think the criticism is fair
- if there are any issues, try to deal with them as soon as you can.

### **What you can expect from our school community**

As a valued employee, volunteer or trustee you can expect to:

- know what is expected of you
- discuss your work with your mentor or manager and raise any issues you need support with
- be consulted about significant issues that affect you

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- be encouraged to achieve your full potential
- be valued and recognised for your contribution
- be treated equally
- have a system in place for you when your fundamental dignity at work has been compromised.

There are a number of policies, procedures and guidance relating to employment at work and these are available on the School's website. However, if you feel you still need further support or you are not treated with dignity, there are procedures to take action where appropriate.

### **Dealing with difficult behaviour**

Bullying and harassment can be a problem in any organisation. As a result, this policy reinforces the concept that the school will not accept bullying or harassment, and will take action to deal with it, including disciplinary action where appropriate. Bullying and harassment can often be hard to recognise - it may not be obvious to others. Sometimes, people may feel that this is normal behaviour in this organisation or may feel that speaking up will make them appear weak or not up to the job. They may be accused of overreacting and worry that they will not be believed if they report incidents. Ultimately, this is unhelpful and does not address the issues at the root of unacceptable behaviour.

### **Examples of unacceptable behaviour**

Behaviour that is considered bullying by one person may be considered 'healthy debate' or 'just banter' by another. Most people will agree on extreme cases of bullying and harassment, but it is sometimes the 'grey' areas that cause most problems. A non-exhaustive list of examples of unacceptable behaviour is below:

- spreading malicious rumours, or insulting someone (particularly because of their sexuality, religion, belief, race or disability)
- persistently criticising someone unjustifiably, particularly within earshot of colleagues
- ridiculing or demeaning someone - picking on them or setting them up to fail
- shouting at, intimidating or threatening someone
- excluding someone or victimising them
- treating someone unfairly
- misusing power or position
- unwelcome sexual advances - touching, standing too close, or displaying offensive material
- making threats or comments about job security without good reason
- making unfounded allegations of bullying against a colleague
- disclosing confidential information about a colleague's performance or medical information to colleagues or parents.

Bullying and harassment are not necessarily face to face. They may be in writing, or via e-mail, phone or social media. The use of offensive language in written or verbal communication is not appropriate and is unacceptable. People should not send anything by e-mail that one would not say in person.

### **How to stop bullying / harassment if you witness it or believe you are the victim of it.**

Generally, it is usually best to try to resolve a situation involving bullying and/or harassment with the person concerned at an early stage. If you think a colleague, volunteer or trustee is being bullied / harassed or if you think you are being bullied / harassed, you can do the following. The school recommends that you consider these options in the order in which they are presented below.

#### **1. Try and sort out the situation yourself**

**What should I do?** If you are a witness or a victim, you should, if you can, keep a written log of the incidents of bullying or harassment and include: the date, place, time, details and names of any witnesses. (However, Co-ordination Group also recognises that it is not always possible to clearly articulate the issues or even list

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evidence in a coherent way). Consider meeting the person who you think is behaving inappropriately. Before you meet the person concerned, you should tell anyone on the school's Coordination Group, explain the situation and let them know that you are going to try to resolve it yourself. Feel free to bring a colleague with you when you notify Coordination Group. You could even ask a colleague to tell Coordination Group the issue for you. If you feel able, approach the person who is behaving inappropriately, tell them how you perceive the situation and ask them to stop the offending behaviour. You should be polite, firm and assertive. If you take this step, you may want to make a note of the meeting, including the response you received.

**Where can I go for support?** You may want to discuss the situation with a member of Coordination Group to get some guidance or moral support. Coordination Group members will want to know about an employee in this situation and will want to help you sort the situation out. They will also want to track the progress of such an issue. You should therefore feel confident and comfortable in approaching anyone from the group. There are normally six people on the group to choose from. You are also welcome to bring any colleague with you or even ask a colleague to speak on your behalf when approaching Coordination Group. The same measures of support are available to the accused.

**When is this an appropriate action to take?** This course of action is likely to be appropriate in most cases. However, there will be some instances where trying to sort out the situation yourself could be inappropriate or counter-productive. In these instances, you should use the formal procedure, below. For example, a person's behaviour may be so aggressive or intimidating that it would not be wise to address it on your own without support. Where the behaviour is severe (e.g. sexual harassment, deeply offensive behaviour, racist comments) this will need to be dealt with formally by the Coordination Group and is likely to warrant disciplinary action or may even constitute a criminal offence. You should therefore inform the Coordination Group as soon as possible and allow them to handle it (i.e. raise it formally).

## 2. Ask Coordination Group to resolve the issues informally

**What should I do?** Approach any member of Coordination Group and explain the bullying behaviour you have witnessed or experienced. You may want to bring a mentor or colleague with you or even ask a colleague to talk to the group on your behalf. The Coordination Group will decide what action is best to take in the situation. Options available to them include mediation, training, support, counselling and other interventions such as delegating the problem to an individual or dedicated group of staff. If the person behaving inappropriately is a member of Coordination Group, they will not be a part of any Coordination Group discussions about the case. It would not be appropriate to specify a timescale to resolve the issues as problems can necessitate dramatically different timescales.

**Where can I go for support?** Coordination Group will be happy to support all parties through the process and should be used as the one and only central point of contact and source of support. The same measures of support are available to the accused.

**When is this an appropriate action to take?** Informal resolution is likely to be appropriate in most cases where it has not been possible to resolve the situation yourself or where the issues are more serious. However, there will be some instances where informal resolution may be combined with formal action. Coordination Group will decide whether formal action is needed. In very severe instances (e.g. violence, racist comments) informal resolution may not be used, as formal action may result in dismissal for gross misconduct.

## 3. Raise the issue formally

**What should I do?** If you have a) tried both methods above and failed to resolve the situation, or b) witnessed or experienced serious bullying or harassment, you should make a formal complaint under the school's grievance procedure. You can look on the School's website under the policy section to read about how to raise a grievance. Alternatively, the Business Manager or a member of the admin team will be happy to provide you with a copy of the school's grievance procedure. If you make a grievance, the following will happen. Someone will be nominated to investigate the grievance and will try to deal with it in line with agreed timescales. You need to be aware that

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the investigation may result in disciplinary action for the person who you feel has bullied or harassed you. When a formal complaint is made and the matter is to be investigated, the individual you have made the complaint against will be informed of the general nature of the grievance(s) and the likely investigation process. The outcome of a grievance investigation may include measures to help the two parties work together in the future, such as mediation, training or counselling. Outcomes can include, for example: no action being taken, a package of support for one or both parties, training, a verbal or written warning or dismissal. In the case of volunteers, someone may be informed that they can no longer provide voluntary services to the school. A trustee may be removed from their position by the Chair of the Council of Management. A contractor may be banned from site.

**Where can I go for support?** Coordination Group will be happy to support all parties through the process and should be used as the one and only central point of contact and source of support. As explained above, people should all feel free to ask a colleague to raise an issue with Coordination Group. People are also welcome to bring a colleague with them when approaching Coordination Group. The same measures of support are available to the accused.

**When is this an appropriate action to take?** It is important to note that you should have tried to resolve things yourself before raising a grievance, unless the situation is severe. Formal action is therefore appropriate in situations where informal action has not worked. Formal action is also appropriate for severe instances of bullying or harassment, such as very aggressive behaviour, sexual harassment or racist behaviour.

### **What about bullying of staff by parents?**

If you are being bullied by parents or you think a colleague is being bullied by parents, the same three steps above should be followed. The support and options available are all the same. However, the sanctions are likely to differ. If a parent persists in a clear campaign of bullying against a teacher, the parent may ultimately make it impossible for the school to provide their child with an education. Ultimately, and as a last resort, this may in turn constitute a 'required withdrawal' of the child's place.

### **Confidentiality**

Everyone involved in a grievance or allegations of bullying or harassment must respect confidentiality. It is also important that investigations are dealt with as confidentially as possible for both the person making a complaint and the person accused. Those investigating the complaint need to ensure that they earn the trust of the complainant by treating disclosures confidentially. If gossip generates momentum, it is easy for someone to be unfairly characterised as a bully or another person to be unfairly branded as making false allegations. All this simply erects more barriers to resolving the issues and can lead to cliques forming around the 'victim' and 'bully'.

### **Victimisation**

Victimising someone who has made a complaint will be deemed harassment itself and may result in mediation or formal action being taken.

### **Unfounded, malicious or vexatious allegations**

Anyone found to be making unfounded, malicious or vexatious allegations may ultimately be subject to disciplinary action.

Policy last reviewed August 2016

Lesley Taberer, Bursar

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