



## **Policy Title:** **Anti-Bullying Policy**

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**Approval Authority:** AIS Board of Trustees

**Effective Date:** August 2023

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### **INTRODUCTION**

At AIS, we are committed to fostering a safe, inclusive, and respectful learning environment where every student feels valued and protected. Bullying, whether physical, verbal, social, or digital, undermines this commitment and can cause significant harm to individuals and the school community as a whole. Therefore, AIS implements comprehensive preventive measures, clear response protocols, and targeted support systems to address all forms of bullying effectively. This policy outlines the school's approach to preventing and responding to bullying, promoting a culture of respect, care, and accountability among all members of our school community.

This policy applies to bullying that occurs both on and off school premises, including online or through social media, when such behavior affects a student's wellbeing, safety, or learning within the school environment. In addition, the school recognizes that cyberbullying is an illegal and a criminal offence, according to the UAE government's civil and criminal law, and the school will take all necessary measures if needed to protect its students and is therefore considered as a child protection concern.

### **PURPOSE**

- Establish a safe and inclusive school environment where bullying is not tolerated.
- Provide clear guidelines for recognizing, preventing, and addressing bullying behavior.
- Outline procedures for reporting, investigating, and responding to bullying incidents.
- Ensure appropriate support for victims and perpetrators, with targeted interventions for vulnerable students. Ensure appropriate support for victims and perpetrators, with targeted interventions for vulnerable students, including those with additional learning needs.
- Promote a culture of respect, empathy, and positive citizenship within the school community.

## DEFINITIONS

- **Bullying:** Repeated physical, social, or verbal aggression exercised by a person who feels they are in a position of power, against another person who is perceived as different, weaker, or powerless, to achieve specific gains or draw attention, in a way that hurts this other person physically and/or emotionally. Bullying can be committed by groups or individuals, in person or online (cyberbullying). Bullies abuse less powerful individuals by intimidation and/or harassment through physical, verbal, textual, cyber, or social behavior, such as:
  - *Physical Bullying:* Any form of physical aggression such as hitting, punching, pushing, scratching, biting, spitting, or tripping.
  - *Verbal Bullying:* Use of spoken or written language to demean or harm others, including name-calling, teasing, put-downs, sarcasm, and insults based on ethnicity, religion, physical appearance, learning differences, or social status.
  - *Social Bullying:* Actions that damage a person's social relationships or reputation, such as purposeful exclusion, ignoring, mocking, spreading rumors, defamation, intimidation, extortion, and theft or destruction of personal belongings.
  - *Textual Bullying:* Inappropriate or harmful written communication in physical formats, such as passing offensive notes, or writing harmful messages on school property, including desks or planners.
  - *Cyberbullying:* The use of digital technology to harm or harass others, including via email, text messaging, social media platforms (e.g., Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, Twitter), messaging apps, online forums, chat rooms, and websites.

Bullying most often occurs as a repeated behavior and often is not a single incident. Students suffering from bullying may hesitate to report the behavior out of fear of retribution, or because they feel that they should deal with the problem on their own. The impact of bullying may be manifested by poor grades, solitude or moodiness at home, or nervous reactions such as loss of appetite or insomnia. The following are signs that could indicate that a student is being bullied:

- Loss of interest in schoolwork
  - Reluctance to attend school
  - Diminished academic performance
  - Limited social contact with peers
  - Mood swings, especially toward depression, irritability, or outbursts of anger
  - Reported headaches, stomach pains, poor appetite, and loss of sleep
  - Visible signs of injury, such as cuts, scratches, bruises
  - Loss of personal property because of theft, extortion or damage to personal property
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- **Cyberbullying** is the use of digital platforms to willfully and repeatedly inflict harm by sending or spreading text messages or audiovisuals of an insulting or threatening nature. It can take various forms, including:
    - Harassment through false, cruel, or aggressive messages
    - Defamation or vilification via altered or fabricated content meant to ridicule or humiliate
    - Unauthorized sharing or publicizing of private information, images, or recordings

Cyberbullying can occur at any time and may have an amplified impact due to the persistent and far-reaching nature of electronic communication. The possibility of anonymity increases the distress for victims, while the potential for rapid sharing can escalate the harm across a wide audience.

## **POLICY**

### **1. School and Staff Responsibilities**

The following responsibilities outline the expectations of the school leadership and all staff members in implementing the Anti-Bullying Policy effectively and consistently.

- The school will provide access to the Anti-Bullying Policy and all related policies (e.g., Student Protection, Student Behavior Policy) through the school website and official communication channels.
- The school will ensure that all staff are aware of their roles in preventing, identifying, and responding to bullying, including cyberbullying, and that they receive regular training to carry out these responsibilities confidently.
- The school will create and sustain a positive culture built on the core values of respect, tolerance, and inclusion.
- The school will raise student awareness about the impact of bullying and provide clear, age-appropriate guidance on how to respond if they experience, witness, or engage in bullying, whether in person or online.
- The school will respond to all reports of bullying—whether confirmed or suspected—in a timely, consistent, and confidential manner, in accordance with the Student Behavior Policy and Student Protection Policy. This includes bullying that takes place through digital platforms or social media.
- The school will implement intervention and support procedures for both victims and perpetrators, including counseling and monitoring, as outlined in this policy.
- The school will regularly review bullying data, survey results, and incident trends to inform policy updates and strengthen preventive measures. Patterns of cyberbullying will be specifically tracked to inform digital safety interventions.
  
- Staff members must actively model the school's core values of respect, empathy, and inclusion in their daily interactions with students and colleagues.
- Staff must demonstrate and promote anti-bullying attitudes and behaviors through their language, conduct, digital communication, and supervision.
- Staff must encourage students to report any incidents of bullying, including cyberbullying or online harassment, reinforcing that reporting is a responsible and courageous act.
- Staff must identify and refer at-risk students or bullying concerns—including those related to online behavior or social media—to the appropriate school personnel (e.g., Head of Grade, Counselor, Student Support Team).
- Staff must ensure that all bullying reports are handled sensitively and in line with the school's established procedures, regardless of whether the incident occurred on campus or online.
- Staff must support vulnerable students and promote inclusive practices in classrooms, common areas, digital learning environments, and during school activities.

- Staff are expected to participate in training related to bullying prevention, cyberbullying awareness, digital safety, behavior management, and restorative practices.

## **2. Educating Students and Staff on Identifying Bullying**

The school is committed to ensuring that all students and staff can recognize and respond to bullying in its various forms, including cyberbullying. Through regular education, training, and clear communication, the school promotes early identification, timely reporting, and effective intervention.

- Ongoing education programs will be implemented to help students understand the forms, impact, and consequences of bullying, with content adapted to meet the needs of those with additional learning needs.
- Staff will receive regular training to identify signs of bullying, including physical, verbal, social, and digital forms, and to intervene effectively.
- Clear procedures for reporting bullying will be communicated to all members of the school community, emphasizing the importance of timely and accurate reporting, including digital evidence collection (e.g., screenshots or message logs) where applicable.
- Digital safety programs will address cyberbullying, focusing on recognizing online harassment, protecting personal information, avoiding harmful digital behavior, and reporting incidents.
- Anti-bullying messages will be consistently reinforced through visible reminders, classroom discussions, and school-wide initiatives, including those that promote safe and respectful online behavior.
- The effectiveness of bullying education and training programs will be regularly assessed through surveys, feedback, and incident reports, with adjustments made as necessary to address emerging trends or issues, especially those involving digital platforms.
- Targeted support and training will be provided to staff and students to recognize and respond to bullying involving vulnerable groups, including students with additional learning needs or those at higher risk of victimization, including in online spaces.

## **3. Bullying Prevention Strategies**

The school is committed to creating a proactive and inclusive environment where bullying is actively prevented through structured programs, staff involvement, and student engagement. Prevention is viewed as a shared responsibility and a key component of maintaining a safe school culture, both on campus and online.

- A comprehensive, school-wide anti-bullying program will be implemented to promote awareness, education, and consistent preventive action across all grade levels, including education on digital citizenship and cyberbullying.
- Prevention strategies will include targeted support for students identified as more vulnerable to bullying, including those with additional learning needs, social challenges, or other risk factors, especially those who may be isolated or targeted online. The school will also implement awareness initiatives, empathy-building activities, and school-wide campaigns that explicitly encourage respect and support for students with varied learning needs.

- Staff will receive regular training to help them recognize early signs of bullying and identify students who may be at greater risk, ensuring timely intervention and support, including in digital spaces.
- School-wide awareness campaigns and activities will be conducted to promote empathy, kindness, and inclusion, while reinforcing the harmful impact of bullying, with specific components that address respectful online behavior and the dangers of cyberbullying.
- Peer support structures—such as buddy systems and student mentorship initiatives—will be developed to build a sense of belonging and reduce social isolation, both in person and in virtual learning environments.
- Data on bullying incidents will be collected and reviewed regularly to identify trends, evaluate the effectiveness of current strategies, and guide continuous improvement. Data related to cyberbullying reports will be disaggregated to better inform digital safety measures.

#### 4. Procedures for Responding to Bullying Incidents

The school is committed to responding promptly and effectively to all reported bullying incidents to ensure student safety, uphold school values, and foster a respectful learning environment. All concerns—whether confirmed or suspected—will be treated seriously, investigated thoroughly, and addressed according to the school’s behavioral and safeguarding procedures. This includes incidents of bullying that occur through digital platforms, social media, or other online environments.

- **Initial Reporting:** If a bullying incident is suspected or witnessed, the staff member must report it immediately to the Head of Grade. All reports will be treated with discretion and recorded in accordance with the school’s child protection and anti-bullying procedures. Students and parents are encouraged to report cyberbullying with supporting digital evidence, such as screenshots, messages, or links.
- **Investigation:** The Head of Grade will inform the Head of Pastoral Care, who will lead a formal investigation with the support of the Student Support Team (SST). Written statements will be collected from the students involved, including any witnesses. All details will be documented and stored confidentially. In the case of cyberbullying, the investigation may include reviewing online communication, verifying shared content, or consulting IT staff for context. Records will be shared only with relevant personnel and the parents of the involved students. In cases where nondisclosure poses a safety risk, the counselor may share minimal necessary information to prevent harm.
- **Parent Notification and Meetings:** The school will notify the parents/guardians of both the student who has been bullied and the student responsible for the bullying. Meetings will be arranged to discuss the nature and severity of the incident and to develop a clear action or intervention plan for each student. If cyberbullying is involved, parents will be guided on how to manage digital safety and reinforce responsible online behavior at home.
- **Determining Immediate Support:** The school will take immediate action to protect and support the student who was bullied, including access to counseling, changes in routine or environment if necessary, and regular follow-up. For cyberbullying cases, this may include advising the student on digital privacy, account security, and emotional regulation in

response to online harassment.

A decision will also be made about the most appropriate action for the student who engaged in bullying behavior.

- **Offense Classification and Disciplinary Measures:** Disciplinary responses will reflect the nature and severity of the bullying behavior and be aligned with the school's behavioral policy.
  - **Level 3 Offense:** Bullying, intimidation, harassment, or abuse of school community members, including defamation or harassment on social media or other digital platforms.
  - **Level 4 Offense:** Persistent or repeated bullying, intimidation, harassment, or abuse, especially when causing distress or harm, including online actions that escalate or are widely shared.

Disciplinary actions may include exclusion from school activities, suspension, or expulsion, depending on the case and whether it is a repeat offense.

- **Documentation:** A detailed report outlining the incident, investigation process, outcomes, and interventions will be filed and stored confidentially in student records. In the event that the behavior constitutes a criminal offense, the school may notify relevant authorities in accordance with UAE law. Cyberbullying that involves threats, extortion, or defamation may be subject to legal action under UAE cybercrime regulations.
- **Ongoing Monitoring and Support:** Both the student who was bullied and the student who engaged in bullying will be monitored closely by the counselor, teachers, and the Head of Pastoral Care. Follow-up interventions will be implemented as needed. Continued or repeated bullying will lead to escalated action in collaboration with parents and relevant staff. Digital interactions will also be monitored where appropriate, and students will be supported in managing their online behavior and digital wellbeing.

## 5. Procedures for Intervention and Support

AIS recognizes the importance of providing comprehensive support to all students involved in bullying incidents. Whether a student has been bullied or has engaged in bullying behavior, the school is committed to implementing individualized, compassionate, and effective intervention strategies that promote safety, reflection, and long-term growth. This includes addressing bullying that occurs both in person and through digital means, such as social media or messaging platforms.

### 5.1 Support for Students Who Have Been Bullied

The school prioritizes the emotional and psychological safety of students who have experienced bullying. The following measures will be taken:

- **Immediate Emotional Support:** The student will be offered a safe and confidential opportunity to talk about the incident with a trusted staff member or counselor, including a chance to discuss any digital harassment or harmful online behavior.

- **Individual Counseling:** Ongoing counseling will be made available to help the student process their experience, build self-confidence, and develop strategies to navigate future challenges, such as dealing with online conflict, social media boundaries, and digital self-protection.
- **Parental Involvement:** The student's parents or guardians will be informed and engaged in the support process to reinforce care and communication at home. If the bullying involves online platforms, parents will also be supported in guiding their child's digital safety practices.
- **Ongoing Monitoring:** The student's well-being will be monitored by staff, including teachers and the counselor, to ensure the bullying does not recur and that the student feels secure, both in the physical and digital learning environment.
- **Protective Measures:** Where necessary, specific actions may be taken to prevent further bullying, such as adjusting classroom seating, modifying supervision plans, or revising participation in group activities. For cyberbullying, this may include advising changes to online account settings, limiting peer access, or scheduling digital safety check-ins.

## 5.2 Support for Students Who Have Engaged in Bullying Behavior

The school views intervention for students who have bullied others as an opportunity for behavioral correction, self-awareness, and positive change. This includes students who engage in bullying through digital means such as messaging platforms, social media, or other online environments. The following measures will be implemented:

- **Root Cause Identification:** The school will work with the student to explore possible reasons for the behavior, including underlying emotional or social difficulties. If the behavior occurred online, this may include examining factors such as digital disinhibition, peer pressure in group chats, or lack of awareness about digital consequences.
- **Parental Collaboration:** The student's parents or guardians will be informed and asked to support a behavioral improvement plan at home and in coordination with school staff. Where relevant, this may include discussions around digital device use, social media conduct, and online boundaries.
- **Counseling and Reflection:** The student will be offered structured counseling sessions to reflect on the seriousness of their actions, develop empathy, and learn appropriate ways to interact with others, including respectful and responsible communication in digital spaces.
- **Monitoring and Accountability:** The student's behavior will be monitored by the counselor and teachers. Progress will be reviewed regularly to ensure improvement and compliance with the behavior plan, with continued oversight of online behavior if the bullying occurred digitally.
- **Targeted Interventions:** Based on individual needs, the student may participate in additional support such as conflict resolution training, social skills development, peer mediation, or restorative conversations. In cases of cyberbullying, digital citizenship education and reflective tasks focused on online responsibility may also be assigned.

## **6. Guidance for Students in Preventing and Responding to Bullying**

Every student plays a vital role in creating a school environment that is safe, inclusive, and respectful. Whether you are working to prevent bullying, experiencing it yourself, or witnessing it happen to someone else, your actions matter. The following guidance outlines what students should do in each situation, in line with the school's code of conduct and core values.

### **6.1 Preventing bullying:**

- Students should follow the school's code of conduct at all times, demonstrating kindness, respect, and empathy in all interactions, including those that take place online or through digital platforms.
- Students should use positive and inclusive language and treat others with fairness and dignity, both in person and in written or digital communication.
- Students should demonstrate acceptance and respect toward those with learning differences, ensuring that everyone feels included, valued, and safe.
- Students should take a stand against bullying by saying “no” to such behavior and reporting any concerns to a trusted adult or staff member, whether the behavior occurs in person or through social media, messaging apps, or online forums.
- Students should behave responsibly online by avoiding the spread of rumors, harmful content, or offensive audiovisual material. They should refrain from sharing or forwarding messages or images that could hurt, shame, or harass others.
- Students should support the school's anti-bullying policy and encourage their peers to do the same, including by promoting respectful digital behavior and discouraging cyberbullying.

### **6.2 If experiencing bullying:**

- Students should report the incident immediately to a trusted adult—such as a teacher, counselor, or parent—and seek support. If the bullying occurs online, they should also report it through appropriate school channels and digital safety reporting tools.
- Students should talk to someone they trust for reassurance, advice, and help in handling their feelings.
- Students should calmly but assertively ask the bully to stop, if it is safe to do so. In digital situations, this may involve blocking or muting the person instead of responding directly.
- Students should stay with supportive friends or classmates to avoid isolation.
- Students should remove themselves from the situation when possible and remain calm, avoiding any physical retaliation or inflammatory language. This includes avoiding angry replies to online messages, posts, or comments.
- Students should keep a record of the incident, especially in digital cases, such as saving screenshots or messages. They should avoid deleting any evidence before reporting the incident to school staff.

### **6.3 If witnessing bullying:**

- Students should report the incident to a trusted adult or school advisor, even if they only suspect bullying is taking place. This includes reporting harmful behavior seen in group chats, social media posts, or shared messages.

- Students should step in to safely defuse the situation only if it does not place them at risk. In online settings, this could involve posting a supportive comment to the victim or flagging/reporting harmful content.
- Students should never use physical force or verbal aggression to intervene in a bullying situation.
- Students should avoid siding with the bully or pretending to support them, even passively. This includes liking, commenting on, or forwarding hurtful online content.
- Students should not spread rumors, hearsay, or offensive content, and should actively help limit its circulation. They should avoid reposting or sharing screenshots of bullying behavior, even to express disapproval.
- Students should reach out to the victim with empathy and support, using language such as, “I’m sorry this happened. How can I help?”
- Students should encourage the victim to report the incident and offer to accompany them to speak with a staff member or help them document and report cyberbullying evidence if the incident occurred online.

## **7. Guidance for Parents in Addressing Bullying**

Parents play a critical role in supporting the school’s efforts to prevent and respond to bullying. Whether a child is the victim, the perpetrator, or a bystander, parental involvement is essential to ensuring the situation is addressed effectively and that both behavioral and emotional support are provided. Parents are expected to uphold the school’s values of respect and tolerance, promote open communication with their children, and actively support anti-bullying measures at home. This includes discussing responsible digital behavior, recognizing signs of cyberbullying, and guiding children in how to protect themselves online. Parents must also be aware of the school’s policy and procedures—including those related to cyberbullying—and avoid direct contact with the parents of other students, as handling incidents is the school’s responsibility.

### **7.1 If your child is being bullied:**

- Parents should contact the school directly rather than approaching the other student’s parents.
- Parents should collaborate with teachers, counselors, or administrators to support their child and ensure appropriate follow-up.
- Parents should reinforce the school’s anti-bullying policy and encourage their child to speak openly about their experiences, including any incidents that occur through messaging apps, social media, or other online platforms.
- Parents should help their child build resilience and confidence in responding calmly and assertively, both in person and online.
- Parents should report all incidents to the school, even if their child is reluctant to do so, and encourage their child to report bullying to their teachers. In cyberbullying cases, parents should help preserve evidence (e.g., screenshots, messages) before submitting a report.
- Parents should reassure their child that bullying is unacceptable and that adult intervention is necessary to stop harmful behavior, whether it takes place on campus or in digital spaces.

### **7.2 If your child is bullying others:**

- Parents should understand that students who bully may be high-achieving, socially confident, or may have experienced bullying themselves. This includes students who engage in cyberbullying, which may not always be immediately visible to adults.
- Parents should make it clear to their child that bullying is wrong and must stop immediately, including online behaviors such as spreading rumors, sharing hurtful content, or excluding others in digital spaces.
- Parents should work with the school to identify the reasons behind the behavior and apply consistent consequences, while also addressing how their child uses digital devices and social media.
- Parents should support the development of empathy and respect by helping their child reflect on the impact of their actions, especially the long-term effects of online harm and public shaming.
- Parents should reinforce the school's expectations and support the interventions being implemented, including any digital safety measures or online behavior guidelines introduced by the school.

### **7.3 If your child witnesses bullying:**

- Parents should explain to their child that ignoring bullying contributes to the harm and that speaking up is important, whether the bullying occurs in person or through digital platforms.
- Parents should encourage their child to support the student being bullied in appropriate and respectful ways, including by not engaging with or sharing harmful online content.
- Parents should instruct their child to report the incident to a trusted adult or school advisor, even if they were not directly involved. In cases of cyberbullying, parents should help their child understand how to document and report online behavior responsibly (e.g., saving screenshots or reporting through platform tools).