Best Foot Forward – Anti-Bullying Policy

Author: Andrew Russell
Approved By: Bethany Russell
Review Draft: 15 October 2026
Review Cycle: Annually; proposed next review October 2027

---

1. Policy Statement

Every learner has the right to safe, respectful education, free from bullying, harassment and discrimination. BFF challenges harmful conduct, protects those affected and responds fairly; this does not mean automatic punishment or exclusion.
Prevention, early support and proportionate safeguarding action underpin our approach. Restorative work may help where voluntary and safe; it must never replace protection or a necessary referral.

---

2. Purpose

This policy ensures that:

- Students, staff, parents and carers understand what bullying is and how it will be addressed.
- Clear systems are in place for reporting, recording and responding to incidents.
- Learners receive accessible support and help to develop safe relationships; responsibility for stopping bullying remains with adults, not the person harmed.
- BFF applies the safeguarding, equality and information-sharing duties relevant to its status and supports commissioning arrangements.

---

3. Scope

This policy applies to:

- All students supported by Best Foot Forward.
- Leaders, employees, self-employed tutors and mentors, contractors and volunteers.
- Parents/carers and partner agencies involved in provision. This includes harmful contact across home, school, community and online settings and outside sessions. One-to-one provision does not remove risks involving other pupils, adults, family or online groups.

---

4. Legal and Statutory Framework

Apply relevant law and guidance to BFF's non-school status and commissioning arrangements. School-specific duties and powers do not automatically apply:

- Education Act 2002 and Education and Inspections Act 2006: relevant school safeguarding/behaviour responsibilities, supported through commissioning arrangements rather than assumed BFF school powers.
- Equality Act 2010 and applicable safeguarding law; UK GDPR and Data Protection Act 2018 as amended for secure, lawful records and sharing.

Bethany Russell 07394 950803
beth@bestfootforward.org.uk
Website: www.bestfootforward.org.uk

Andrew Russell 07538 719783
andrew@bestfootforward.org.uk
Contact: office@bestfootforward.org.uk

- Keeping children safe in education 2026 and Working Together to Safeguard Children 2026, applied alongside BFF's safeguarding procedures and non-school responsibilities.
- DfE Preventing and tackling bullying (2017); Preventing and tackling the bullying and harassment of school staff (July 2026), used as relevant practice guidance.
- UKCIS Sharing nudes and semi-nudes advice; BFF's Behaviour and Positive Relationships, Child-on-Child Abuse, Inclusion/SEND, Equality, Online Safety, Professional Boundaries, Managing Allegations, Low Level Concerns, Whistleblowing and Complaints policies.

5. Definition of Bullying

Bullying is harmful behaviour, usually repeated, involving a power imbalance and seeking to hurt physically, emotionally or socially. Power may relate to age, status, numbers, communication, disability or control of information. A single online post may cause repeated harm. Do not wait for repetition or proof of intent before protecting someone.

Ordinary disagreement or an isolated unkind act may not meet the bullying definition, but still needs a proportionate response. Sexual, discriminatory or threatening conduct must not be minimised as a joke, mutual conflict or normal development.

Bullying may be:

- **Physical** – assault, pushing, interference with belongings, theft or threats.
- **Verbal** – insults, threats, racist or faith-targeted abuse, misogyny, homophobic or transphobic language.
- **Social/relational** – deliberate exclusion, coercion, rumours, humiliation or manipulation of relationships.
- **Online** – abusive messages, impersonation, doxxing, coercive group chats, harmful image sharing or manipulated/AI-generated material.
- **Prejudice-related** – targeting actual or perceived identity, disability/SEND, background or association with another person. Sexual harassment, violence, exploitation and hate incidents may overlap with bullying and require safeguarding action in their own right.

6. Roles and Responsibilities

- **Leadership:** implement this policy, arrange training, ensure safe reporting and impartial case handling, and monitor action and outcomes.
- **DSL/deputy:** assess risk, coordinate safety plans and appropriate referrals, oversee restricted safeguarding records and follow up protection.
- **Practitioners:** model respectful conduct, respond safely, listen without blame, record and report concerns promptly. Do not investigate suspected crime or arrange mediation independently.
- **Learners:** receive accessible guidance on respectful behaviour and seeking help. They are not required to confront someone, gather evidence or intervene at risk to themselves.
- **Parents/carers:** share concerns promptly and work with agreed support. Family contact must be planned safely where disclosure could increase risk.

7. Prevention

- Teach respect, equality, boundaries and help-seeking through accessible, age- and development-appropriate curriculum and mentoring.
- Promote democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty, and mutual respect and tolerance of different faiths and beliefs, including no religious belief. Lawful disagreement is not itself bullying.
- Model kindness and safe relationships in one-to-one provision; do not assume peer groups or require restorative participation.
- Teach online privacy, safe reporting and how to seek help with harmful contact; use approved professional systems and communication boundaries.
- Train staff to notice changes in attendance, distress, withdrawal, unexplained injury or online behaviour without treating a sign as proof. Challenge discriminatory language rather than dismissing it as banter. No reports does not establish that bullying is absent.

8. Reporting and Responding

- Tell any trusted BFF practitioner, the DSL/deputy or another leader in person, by telephone or through approved written routes. Reports may be supported, delayed, anonymous or made by someone else; no form, parent's permission or proof is required to receive help. Offer communication support and a trusted adult.
- Listen calmly, reassure the person that reporting was right, and explain confidentiality limits. Stop immediate harm where safe, obtain first aid if needed and report to the DSL promptly, immediately if risk is urgent. Make a factual record as soon as practicable and on the same day, including the person's words, wishes, context, action and referrals.
- The DSL assesses safety, power imbalance, SEND/communication needs and risks to everyone involved. Call 999 for immediate danger. Use child safeguarding routes for under-18s and appropriate adult safeguarding/emergency routes for adults; seek social care/police advice or referral without waiting for an internal enquiry. Reports of child rape, assault by penetration or sexual assault should be passed to police under the safeguarding procedure.
- Restorative work requires DSL assessment of safety and freely given participation. Do not require a joint meeting, apology, admission or reconciliation, or make support conditional on it. Where abuse or coercion is suspected, seek appropriate agency advice; declining restorative work must not disadvantage the person harmed.
- Use proportionate protective action and support under the Behaviour and Positive Relationships Policy from the first incident where needed; BFF does not operate a traditional punitive sanctions system. Consider adjustments, separate delivery or contact arrangements and commissioner involvement. Any interruption or placement change requires safe handover and continuity planning; no automatic exclusion or school search/restraint powers are created.

An unimplicated case lead gathers accounts separately and fairly, coordinating with agencies to protect their enquiries. Provide interim protection. Tell learners and authorised families about action affecting their safety and when to expect updates, without disclosing others' confidential records. The DSL records any safeguarding reason to delay family contact. Concerns about a staff member or leader also follow Managing Allegations/Low Level Concerns procedures; workplace bullying follows the appropriate grievance, engagement or complaints route. If the usual recipient is implicated or unavailable, use another unimplicated leader, the independent Whistleblowing route or statutory services directly. Do not route a concern solely to the person complained about or delay protection for approval.
If dissatisfied, use BFF's Complaints Policy or ask a trusted adult to help; safeguarding referrals and urgent protection do not require completion of complaint stages. Explain next steps accessibly and protect reporting people and witnesses from retaliation.

---

9. Support for Students

Support is based on individual wishes, safety and need and may include:

- A trusted adult, accessible check-ins and a practical safety plan covering sessions, travel and online contact.
- Mentoring or wellbeing support without implying that the learner must become more resilient to stop the abuse.
- Voluntary, safe restorative work only under Section 8; alternative support remains available.
- Appropriate counselling, health or specialist agency advice/referral, subject to need, consent and safeguarding requirements; access cannot be guaranteed.

Support the learner alleged to have caused harm and witnesses separately without prejudging findings. Address needs and safer behaviour while protecting others. An unproven report is not automatically malicious; police no further action establishes neither guilt nor the absence of safeguarding concerns.

---

10. Cyberbullying

- Online bullying receives the same prompt safeguarding response. Consider contact across platforms, after sessions and through peers; BFF may coordinate with the school, family, platform or agencies while acting within its role.
- Preserve necessary non-sexual evidence safely, such as dates, usernames, URLs and messages, using approved systems. Support safe platform reporting, blocking and privacy changes, considering evidence and ongoing risk. Do not require passwords, inspect private accounts or confiscate/search a device under this policy.
- For suspected child sexual imagery, including manipulated images, do not request, view, screenshot, copy, forward or upload it, or ask a learner to send it. Report immediately to the DSL and follow current imagery guidance and police advice, including on evidence preservation/deletion. Report other suspected crimes through safeguarding routes; staff need not classify the offence first.

---

11. Equality and Inclusion

Address prejudice connected with race, religion/belief, disability/SEND, sex, sexual orientation, gender reassignment, pregnancy or other identity/background, including perceived characteristics and association. The Equality Act's legal tests and protections vary by context and characteristic; not every incident is automatically statutory harassment. Harm must still be addressed. Make reasonable adjustments to reporting and support, without assuming distress, limited speech or disability makes an account less credible.

---

12. Monitoring and Review

- Keep learner safeguarding concerns in restricted CPOMS records. DCPro holds only necessary attendance, learning and support information; ordinary weekly reports must not contain sensitive allegations or replace immediate reporting. Use appropriate restricted staff records for staff-conduct cases, with relevant child safeguarding records where needed.
- Record case ownership, safety action, referrals, decisions and reasons. Arrange an initial follow-up with those affected within five working days of action, sooner where risk requires, and further checks until safety and support are effective. Review retaliation, repeated contact and attendance barriers; do not close a case merely because an apology or meeting occurred.
- Leadership reviews patterns, prejudice-related incidents, reporting accessibility and the effectiveness of action each term, using necessary information only. Review this policy annually and after significant incidents or guidance changes. October 2027 is the proposed next review.

Bethany Russell 07394 950803
beth@bestfootforward.org.uk
Website: www.bestfootforward.org.uk

Andrew Russell 07538 719783
andrew@bestfootforward.org.uk
Contact: office@bestfootforward.org.uk