



**ANTI-BULLYING
ALLIANCE**

Anti-Bullying Alliance: Agreed policy recommendations

Last reviewed - May 2022



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Introduction

There has been little policy activity on bullying since 2010/11 however the government has invested in a series of grant programmes including a series of grants to address homophobic, biphobic and transphobic (HBT) bullying and a series of grants principally on single-theme or issue initiatives aimed at young people or teachers (e.g. Diana Award Ambassadors, United Against Bullying [SEN/disability] programme) which are valuable and welcome. In 2021, a new series of grants were established and plan to be funded until September 2024.

The following policy recommendations have been developed by the Anti-Bullying Alliance through our Advisory Group, which consists of NSPCC, Ditch the Label, NASUWT Teacher's Union, Red Balloon, the National Children's Bureau, Nottingham Trent University, Childnet, Kidscape, Mencap and Wandsworth Borough Council.

Current Government activity relevant to bullying:

- Schools Bill¹ and White Paper²: The Bill has just entered Parliament and provides the legislation required to make the Schools White Paper a reality. It includes the following elements related to bullying:
 - Home education register³: government committed to introduce legislation to require LAs to keep a register of those being electively home educated
 - Legislation to bring into force new statutory guidance on attendance, including a requirement for every school to publish a clear attendance policy to improve support

As well as the Bill, there are also elements of the White Paper that are non-legislative and relevant to bullying:

- Starting an annual behaviour survey and 'better national data system'
- 500,000 teacher training and development opportunities by 2024, giving all teachers and school leaders access to world-class, evidence-based training and professional development at every stage of their career
- Implementation of statutory relationships, health and sex education: We have written a round up on the elements pertinent to bullying⁴
- Exclusions and behaviour guidance review⁵ – we have responded to the consultation on the latest changes

¹ <https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/3156>

² <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/opportunity-for-all-strong-schools-with-great-teachers-for-your-child>

³ <https://www.cypnow.co.uk/news/article/dfc-confirms-plans-for-elective-home-education-register>

⁴ <https://anti-bullyingalliance.org.uk/tools-information/all-about-bullying/whole-school-and-setting-approach/curriculum>

⁵ <https://anti-bullyingalliance.org.uk/tools-information/all-about-bullying/whole-school-and-setting-approach/exclusions-and-bullying>

- Mental health and wellbeing plan⁶: discussion paper and call for evidence – consultation open and AG to decide if we should respond
- Online Safety Bill⁷: ABA currently sit on the Children's Charities Coalition for Internet Safety (CHIS)⁸ and are in support of NSPCC's⁹ and Childnet's work on the Bill.
- Home to School Transport guidance consultation¹⁰ – still awaiting a response to this consultation which closed in 2019
- Behaviour Hubs¹¹ DfE Programme
- Senior Mental Health Leads in School Training programme¹²: DfE grant programme training senior leads in schools to meet its ambition of a lead in every school by 2025.

Our agreed policy recommendations

Children who are especially at risk of bullying

- There are groups that are significantly more likely to experience bullying in their childhoods than other young people.
- **Recommendation 1:** We would like to see the government funding anti-bullying activity and focusing on those most at risk including those with SEN/D, looked after children, young carers, those who are or are perceived to be LGBT, those in receipt of Free School Meals, sexist and sexual bullying, appearance targeted bullying, and racist and faith targeted bullying.
- There is growing evidence that children on free school meals are more likely to experience bullying.
- **Recommendation 2:** The government should conduct research into levels of bullying of children in receipt of Free School Meals¹³.
- Our literature review showed a real lack of recent research about racist and faith targeted (R&FT) bullying. It also showed that we acknowledge that what research there is shows significant variations in experience of different ethnicities and faiths.
- **Recommendation 3:** The government should commission research relating to bullying levels by ethnicity and faith, particularly exploring bullying experiences of mixed-race

⁶ <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/mental-health-and-wellbeing-plan-discussion-paper-and-call-for-evidence>

⁷ <https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/3137>

⁸ <http://www.chis.org.uk/>

⁹ <https://www.nspcc.org.uk/support-us/campaigns/end-child-abuse-online/>

¹⁰ <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/home-to-school-travel-and-transport-statutory-guidance>

¹¹ <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/behaviour-hubs>

¹² <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/senior-mental-health-lead-training>

¹³ <https://anti-bullyingalliance.org.uk/aba-our-work/news-opinion/government-research-reports-1-5-secondary-pupils-have-been-bullied-past>

CYP, immigrant and refugee CYP, and children who have English as an additional language – who the available research show may be particularly at risk¹⁴.

Online bullying

- **Recommendation 4:** Introduction of duties for social media companies to safeguard children and young people from harmful content cyberbullying and better-quality reporting.

Mental health and wellbeing

- The government has expressed a desire to train Designated Mental Health Leads in every school in England by 2025. Evidence shows there are strong links between mental health and experiencing bullying¹⁵
- **Recommendation 5:** Designated leads for mental health in schools and mental health teams should have bullying within their remit and available training.
- GPs and Accident and Emergency Departments are often the first professionals to hear from children about bullying. GPs and Accident and Emergency Departments should have a good understanding of bullying, their safeguarding duties and school's responsibilities so they are better able to support victims of bullying.
- **Recommendation 6:** GPs and other health professionals should be provided with up-to-date and accurate information and training relating to how to deal with children and young people who disclose experiencing bullying to them.

Accountability

- **Recommendation 7:** Ensure that all parts of the school system (including independent schools, Academies and free schools) are bound by the same core legislative framework around bullying.
- Currently the legislation states:
 - Maintained schools (S89 School and Inspections Act 2006) says schools
 - Must have measures to prevent all forms of bullying set out within their behaviour policy – some schools do this in a stand-alone anti-bullying policy
 - These measures must be communicated to pupils, staff and parents at least once a year

¹⁴ <https://anti-bullyingalliance.org.uk/sites/default/files/uploads/attachments/Racist%20and%20Faith%20Targeted%20Bullying%20a%20review%20of%20the%20current%20literature%20-%202020%20FINAL%20REBRAND.pdf>

¹⁵ <https://anti-bullyingalliance.org.uk/aba-our-work/news-opinion/government-research-reports-1-5-secondary-pupils-have-been-bullied-past>

- Young people should be involved in writing this
 - Academies, free schools and independent schools (Independent School Standards (England) Regulations 2012) says proprietors are required to have an effective anti-bullying strategy drawn up and implemented.
- **Recommendation 8:** Ofsted inspectors should receive anti-bullying training and as a minimum understand what bullying is.
- It is estimated that 12,000 children are moved to different schools due to the bullying they experience¹⁶. We estimate that 16,000 children are off school at any one time due to the bullying they experienced¹⁷. Absence data collected termly by the Department for Education contains a large number of 'other unauthorised absence'. ABA believes that a number of these reasons may be for bullying¹⁸. There is very little accountability within school absence data reporting and when a child is removed from school role taking into account how the school has dealt with the bullying that has taken place.
- **Recommendation 9:** We believe that each time a child is removed from a school role due to experiencing bullying, this should trigger an investigation into what has happened.
- **Recommendation 10:** School absence records should record bullying as a reason for children being absent from school. Ofsted inspections should be triggered when these absences are high.

Whole school approach

- Teachers are not currently required to undertake any anti-bullying training as part of their Initial Teacher Training.
- **Recommendation 11:** Initial Teacher Training should include how to prevent and respond to bullying as a core element.
- Schools are not required to have lead members of staff or governors responsible for their anti-bullying strategies.
- **Recommendation 12:** There should be a senior member of school staff (perhaps through the designated mental health in schools lead) who is responsible for a whole-school approach to promoting preventing and responding to bullying, in a similar manner to a SENCo.
- **Recommendation 13:** There should be an appointed school governor who is responsible for a whole-school approach to bullying.

¹⁶ <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2485397/Bullies-force-12-000-pupils-year-to-new-schools.html>

¹⁷ <https://www.natcen.ac.uk/media/22457/estimating-prevalence-young-people.pdf>

¹⁸ 16,000 pupils aged 11-15 absent from school each day where the primary reason for them missing school is bullying – NATCEN 2011 <http://www.natcen.ac.uk/media/22457/estimating-prevalence-young-people.pdf>

Curriculum

- We welcome the new RSHE curriculum including elements of bullying, online bullying, e-safety, LGBT inclusion and support about relationships.
- **Recommendation 14:** We would like to see teachers and schools adequately supported to meet requirements of curriculum in a manner that is to a high standard and inclusive. Government should ensure implementation of RSHE remains high on their agenda.

Evidence and data

- There has not been a national data collection of levels of bullying in England in a number of years.
- **Recommendation 15:** The government should undertake a national anti-bullying survey, conducted annually, which would give an annual view of the wellbeing of pupils, including the prevalence of bullying in English schools. This national survey should give a view of bullying under the protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010 and other characteristics about pupils such as free school meals, young carers and looked after children to give us a national picture of identity targeted bullying.
- Schools do not have a duty to record levels of bullying (there are such duties being implemented in Northern Ireland)
- **Recommendation 16:** The Government should consider a duty on all schools and Academies to record, monitor and review all bullying and harassment issues including assessing the impact of the effectiveness of responses. This should be reported on annually at least at school level to governors and Ofsted should review this data.
- There is a significant lack of research relating to the most effective strategies for preventing and responding to bullying in England.
- **Recommendation 17:** The government should conduct research into the most effective strategies for preventing and responding to bullying.

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