



DIGNITY AT WORK POLICY

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1. Introduction

Hope Learning Community Trust is committed to providing a safe and inclusive workplace where all forms of bullying, victimisation and harassment (including sexual harassment) are not tolerated and where all concerns will be taken seriously and addressed promptly, fairly and sensitively.

Behaviours which could be interpreted as harassment, victimisation or bullying will not be tolerated and will be investigated using the Trust grievance procedure and, where appropriate, may lead to action being taken in accordance with the disciplinary procedure (see list of related policies at the end of this document).

This policy complies with ACAS guidance and outlines the Trust's approach to preventing and addressing workplace harassment and other forms of inappropriate behaviour, ensuring compliance with relevant legislation, including:

- **Health and Safety at Work Act 1974**
- **Equality Act 2010 (s.26)** – defines harassment and victimisation; covers protected characteristics.
- **Worker Protection (Amendment of Equality Act 2010) Act 2023** – legal duty to take reasonable steps to prevent sexual harassment (in force from 26 Oct 2024)
- Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED)
- **Protection from Harassment Act 1997** – criminal and civil remedies for harassment/stalking.
- DfE **Controlling access to school premises** (for proportionate action regarding stakeholders/parents on site).
- **ACAS Code of Practice on Disciplinary and Grievance Procedures** – sets the minimum fair-process standards (investigate, right to be accompanied, appeal, etc.).
- UK GDPR and Data Protection Laws

2. Scope

This policy protects all current and former members of the school workforce, including employees, agency and casual workers, apprentices, consultants, contractors, volunteers (including local ambassadors and trustees), job applicants and job-seekers.

It applies on Trust premises and offsite (e.g., trips, training, social events) and to online interactions connected with work.

3. Definitions and Prohibited Conduct

By law (Equality Act 2010), discrimination is when someone is treated 'less favourably' than someone else because of these 'protected characteristics':

- age
- disability
- gender reassignment
- marriage and civil partnership

- pregnancy and maternity
- race
- religion or belief
- sex
- sexual orientation

3.1 Harassment

Unwanted conduct related to a protected characteristic (or of a sexual nature) that has the purpose or effect of violating a person's dignity or creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment. (*Equality Act 2010*). **Harassment** can also be defined as an unwanted pattern of behaviour that can leave an individual feeling intimidated, scared, annoyed and/or humiliated. This can take many forms such as: rude gestures, touching, following or watching.

3.2 Sexual harassment:

Unwanted conduct of a sexual nature creating the effects above, or less favourable treatment because someone rejected or submitted to such conduct.

3.3 Bullying:

Offensive, intimidating, malicious or insulting behaviour involving misuse of power that undermines or injures the recipient (may occur without a protected characteristic).

3.4 Victimisation:

Detriment because someone did a **protected act** (e.g., raised a complaint, gave evidence or alleged a breach of the Equality Act).

Harassment and bullying take on many forms and are therefore difficult to define, and the definitions above are broad. Some specific examples are given at Appendix A.

For concerns involving online or social media behaviour, please also refer to the Trust's Social Media Policy, which sets out expectations for online conduct and explains that harassment through digital platforms will be managed under this policy.

4. Our preventative duty and culture

The Trust will take **reasonable steps** to prevent sexual harassment from **anyone employees encounter in the course of employment (including third parties such as parents, clients and contractors)**. We will not wait for incidents to act. We will:

- **Assess risks** of sexual harassment relevant to our settings (e.g., lone working with visitors, events where alcohol is served, work-related travel, power imbalances, younger or vulnerable staff).
- **Plan and implement proportionate measures**, considering our size, environment, prior incidents and resources.
- **Train** all staff annually on standards of behaviour, speaking up, bystander responsibilities and managers' duties.
- **Set clear expectations for third parties** (parents/visitors/contractors), including signage and communications about acceptable conduct, and take proportionate action where issues arise.

- **Coordinate related policies** (e.g., Code of Conduct, Social Media, Safeguarding) to address on- and off-site/online behaviours.
- **Monitor and review** effectiveness (surveys, case audits, exit feedback) and adjust measures regularly.

5. Roles and responsibilities

- **Trust Board:** Approves and oversees this policy; ensures periodic review; holds leaders to account; hears appeals where appropriate.
- **CEO/Headteachers/Heads of School:** Model standards; ensure risk assessment, training, and prompt, fair handling of complaints.
- **Line managers:** Take concerns seriously; signpost options; take early, proportionate steps; escalate where necessary; protect parties from victimisation.
- **All workforce members:** Treat others with dignity; complete training; challenge/report unacceptable behaviour; cooperate with investigations.
- **Collective Responsibility:** The responsibility for preventing and dealing with harassment and bullying lies with the whole community. All members of the education community have a responsibility to challenge inappropriate behaviour
All issues of bullying, harassment and victimisation, whoever the perpetrator, must be reported. This does not prevent the matter being dealt with informally yet enables the employer to fulfil its responsibilities to eliminate inappropriate conduct.
Individuals, employers, and individual managers can all be liable for disciplinary action, and in some cases prosecution, where employees are harassed, victimised or bullied. Individual managers may be liable where they knew, or should have known, about any incident in areas under their control and took no action.

6. ACAS examples of unacceptable behaviour (non-exhaustive)

- Insulting, humiliating or demeaning behaviour; malicious rumours; overbearing supervision or deliberate undermining; exclusion.
- Unwelcome sexual advances; suggestive comments or messages; intrusive questions about private life; displaying offensive materials.
- Posting humiliating, offensive or threatening material on social media or communication platforms.

7. Bullying and harassment by pupils/students

- The employer has in place policies and procedures for dealing with pupil/student behaviour and misconduct and these will be used to their full effect where pupils/students harass or bully staff, in the same way as when they act inappropriately against other pupils/students.

8. Bullying and harassment by adults other than employees

- While employers do not have the same 'influence' over other adults, as they do over employees, managers will take all appropriate steps to protect staff from inappropriate and unacceptable conduct and behaviour by them

9. Complaint and Investigation Process

Allegations of bullying, harassment and victimisation should be dealt with using the Trust's grievance procedure

10. Confidentiality and Protection

- All complaints will be handled with strict confidentiality and in compliance with UK GDPR.
- Employees making complaints in good faith will be protected from retaliation.
- Any breach of confidentiality or victimization will result in disciplinary action.

11. Support and Wellbeing

Confidential counselling services are available through SAS Wellbeing Support.

The Trust's Mental Health and Wellbeing Lead can provide support

Employees may seek external guidance from Victim Support, Protect, or the Equality Advisory & Support Service.

12. Policy Review

This policy will be reviewed annually to ensure alignment with legal requirements and best practices.

Trends, actions taken, and training compliance will be monitored and reported to the Trust Board to ensure the policy remains effective.

13. Links to Other Policies:

- HLC Equality and Diversity Policy
- HLC Grievance Policy
- HLC Disciplinary Policy
- HLC Code of Conduct
- HLC Whistleblowing Policy
- HLC Social Media Policy

Appendix A – Harassment and Bullying

- I** Harassment and bullying are often based on prejudice and may equally arise from ignorance or intolerance. They can take many forms, from overt physical or verbal abuse to more subtle psychological ill-treatment such as ostracism. The effects of bullying and harassment on an individual's mental and physical wellbeing, and ultimately on their performance are often profound. Bullying and harassment have emerged as significant factors in workplace stress and organisational efficiency.
- II** Harassment and bullying by their very nature are 'experiential', which means that the same behaviour may be interpreted in different ways by different people. It may also be that the same behaviour, practised by different people, will be interpreted quite differently. For example what is acceptable from a close friend or colleague may not be acceptable from another person.
- III** It is also important to remember that at times we all feel harassed in its colloquial sense i.e. *hassled*, for example by pressures at work or outside or perhaps because we are unwell or unable to cope for other reasons. It is therefore appropriate to examine our feelings and perceptions carefully to distinguish between genuine and intentional harassment by others and those issues which relate to personal or professional management of time, workload, etc. In the latter case there are other procedures and processes in place to support staff and employees should discuss these concerns with their line manager.
- IV** Harassment and bullying take on many forms and are thereby relatively difficult to define. However, harassment is defined in terms of how it makes the recipient feel and common sense should be used by all to avoid situations which could lead to accusations of harassment.
- V** Bullying, harassment and victimisation is not always verbal or face to face, but can involve written communications or visual images, such as pictures of a sexual nature or embarrassing photographs sent by text, instant messaging, email or social media.
- VI** Bullying, harassment and victimisation may involve single or repeated incidents, ranging from extreme forms of intimidating behaviour, such as physical violence, to more subtle forms such as ignoring someone. It can often occur without witnesses.

Broad definitions and some examples are given below. These are not intended to be exhaustive.

- Sexual and Racial harassment are perhaps the most common, widely acknowledged and legislated against forms, but harassment and bullying occur for innumerable reasons, for example:
- Gender, sex, sexual orientation, marital or parental status;
- Race, ethnic origin, nationality, skin colour;
- Religion, political convictions etc.;
- Disability, sensory impairment, learning difficulties, intellect, education;
- Physical appearance, e.g. size/weight;
- Health, hygiene, HIV/AIDS;
- Trade union or other organisation activity/membership;
- Criminal record;

- Age (or youth);
- Addiction (drugs, smoking, alcohol);
- Political affiliation;
- Social or work position/status.

Examples of harassment and bullying

- Physical contact ranging from touching to physical assault.
- Visual displays e.g. sexually explicit posters, graffiti, emblems or obscene gestures.
- Verbal e.g. offensive language or jokes, gossip, slander, sectarian songs, ridiculing, name-calling/insults, lewd remarks, sexual innuendo, unjust or public criticism, destructive sarcasm, shouting.
- Written e.g. letters, emails, social networking sites, texting, graffiti etc.
- Isolation or non-co-operation at work, ostracism, removing responsibilities, withholding information.
- Intrusions e.g. spying, pestering, following, constant observation, staring/leering.
- Coercion e.g. pressure to participate, keep quiet, support.
- Pressure e.g. impossible deadlines, constantly changing work demands/expectations, pressure to return from sick leave, blackmail.

Sexual Harassment is a specified category of harassment and includes:

- Unwelcome sexual advances
- Requests for sexual favours
- Other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature that tends to create a hostile or offensive work environment.

Employers have a legal duty to take reasonable steps to prevent sexual harassment of employees in the course of their employment.

APPENDIX B: If Someone Reports Harassment to You, What to Do Now

(Guidance for Managers)

1. Take the concern seriously

Thank the person for coming forward. Acknowledge that what they're reporting is important and will be handled properly.

2. Make the person feel safe and listened to

Find a private space. Let them speak without interruption. Show empathy and reassure them that they will not be blamed or punished for raising a concern.

3. Record what they tell you

Make a brief, factual note of:

- what happened
- when it happened
- who was involved
- what the person wants to happen next

Explain that these notes help ensure accuracy and fairness.

4. Explain their options

Let them know they can:

- **talk informally** for support or advice
- **raise a formal complaint** using the grievance procedure

If the allegation is serious (e.g., sexual harassment, repeated behaviour, risk of ongoing harm), explain that a **formal process may be required**.

5. Assess immediate risks

Consider whether any action is needed straight away, such as:

- separating individuals involved
- adjusting duties or work locations
- offering wellbeing support

6. Contact HR for guidance

You are not expected to manage everything alone. HR will support you with next steps, documentation, and the correct process.

7. Maintain confidentiality

Share information only with HR or relevant senior leaders.

Explain to the complainant that confidentiality will be respected but cannot be absolute where safety or formal investigation is required.

8. Keep the person updated

Tell them what will happen next and roughly when they can expect an update.

If the concern moves to a formal process, explain the steps set out in the grievance procedure.

9. Take no action against the complainant or witnesses

Victimisation is strictly prohibited. Ensure no changes to duties, shifts or roles disadvantage the person who reported the concern whilst the investigation is ongoing.

10. Understand what happens if a complaint is upheld

If an investigation finds the complaint to be valid, the Trust will take appropriate action.

This may include disciplinary action, management instructions, or measures to ensure safety and prevent a recurrence.

11. If you are unsure what to do

Contact HR immediately. It is always better to ask than to delay.

For full details of your responsibilities, please read the complete [Dignity at Work Policy](#).

APPENDIX C: If you have experienced sexual harassment: what to do now

1. You are not alone.

Harassment is never acceptable. What happened is not your fault, and your concern will be taken seriously.

2. Speak to someone you trust

You can talk to **any** of the following people:

- Your line manager
- Another senior manager
- The HR/People Team
- The school's Safeguarding Lead
- Your trade union representative

3. Choose how you want to raise your concern - You can:

- **Speak informally** for advice, support or help
- **Raise a formal complaint**

Some concerns may need to be handled formally from the start, and we will explain why.

4. You will be supported - Support may include:

- Time off to attend medical or wellbeing appointments
- Adjusted duties or working arrangements
- Access to internal and external support services

5. What happens next - Once you tell someone:

- We will listen and respond sensitively
- We will explain your options
- If a complaint is **upheld**, action will be taken in line with the Disciplinary Policy

6. You will not be blamed or punished.

Victimisation or retaliation of any kind is not tolerated where a concern had been raised in good faith.

7. If you feel unsure what to do You can start by simply saying:

"Something has happened and I need to talk to someone."

For full details of how concerns are handled, please read the complete Dignity at Work Policy.