

Addressing Bullying in Schools Act (NI) 2016 – Information for Pupils

Introduction

The law about bullying in schools has changed. The Addressing Bullying in Schools Act (NI) 2016 was introduced on 1 September 2021

This new law:

1. Provides all schools with a single definition for bullying behaviour;
2. Requires all schools to have an anti-bullying policy; and
3. Requires schools to keep records of all complaints about bullying.

What is bullying?

Definition of bullying:

Bullying includes (but is not limited to) the repeated use of —

(a) Any verbal, written or electronic communication,

(b) Any other act, or

(c) Any combination of those - by a pupil or a group of pupils against another pupil or group of pupils, with the intention of causing physical or emotional harm to that pupil or group of pupils.

Bullying can take many different forms. It might involve physically hurting someone. It could involve taking someone's things, calling them names, teasing or writing hurtful comments on social media. Bullying can also involve deliberately leaving someone out. No matter how or where it happens, bullying is always wrong.

Bullying causes the most harm when the hurtful behaviour is repeated again and again. While the Act allows schools to treat a serious one-off incident as bullying, this should be very rare and each school will explain why and how it might make this decision.

Bullying is something done on purpose. It's not just playing around or something done accidentally. The most important thing is to know is that if you feel you have been bullied, or have seen friends being bullied, you should report it to someone in your school. If you do, your school will treat the matter seriously and will take action.

Anti-Bullying Policy

Schools must have an Anti-Bullying Policy. You should know what it says and pupils should have been consulted when this is being written.

It will apply at school during the school day; during school trips or at sports matches; while receiving arranged lessons outside of the school; and while you are travelling to and from school each day.

Cyber-bullying may also be covered in the Anti-Bullying Policy. The Act doesn't expect schools to turn into online investigators – that's not their job, but it does allow each school to decide what it will do to help prevent online bullying from happening and what actions it will take if cyber-bullying is reported.

Keeping Records

The Act says that schools must keep a record of complaints about bullying. Schools should already be doing this but now it will be a legal requirement.

Schools will have to record who was involved and what happened; why did it happen; and what actions were taken by the school.

Records will help your school to show that it has treated every bullying complaint seriously, taken steps to deal with each case and continued to keep an eye on things to ensure each bullying situation really has been sorted.

The records will also help your school to see if their anti-bullying policy, and the actions they are taking, really are making a difference.

Get Help!

If you are being bullied, or you are worried about someone that might be, the first step is to get help.

You can ask a parent, a teacher or another adult you trust. If you don't feel comfortable saying it out loud you could write it in a message and send it to someone you trust.

More information on bullying can be found on the Dealing with Bullying and Getting Support page on the indirect website.

[Dealing with bullying and getting support | nidirect](#)