

Date of Review: February 2025
Next formal Review Date: February 2027
Person Responsible: Kathleen Gallagher

1. Introduction

At Arvalee School, we are committed to fostering a safe, inclusive, and respectful environment where every pupil—regardless of their abilities, background, or needs—feels valued, protected, and supported.

This policy aligns with:

- The United Nations Convention on the **Rights of the Child** (UNCRC)
 - **Article 12** – Right to be heard and express views
 - **Article 19** – Right to be protected from harm
 - **Article 23** – Right to full and dignified participation for children with disabilities
- The **Addressing Bullying in Schools Act** (Northern Ireland) 2016
- The principle of **Rightful Presence**, ensuring all pupils have a meaningful place in the school community.
- A **trauma-informed approach**, recognising that some pupils, particularly Looked After Children (LAC) and those with Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE), may have additional emotional needs.
- An **understanding of pupils** with Moderate Learning Difficulties (MLD), Severe Learning Difficulties (SLD), and Autism, recognising their diverse ways of communicating, interacting, and experiencing social relationships.
- The **PATHS (Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies)** programme, which supports pupils in developing emotional resilience, self-regulation, and positive social skills to reduce incidents of bullying and promote wellbeing.
- The **Community Relations, Equality, and Diversity (CRED)** framework, which promotes respect, understanding, and inclusivity across different backgrounds, cultures, and abilities.
- **Restorative Practice**, which focuses on repairing harm, rebuilding relationships, and ensuring a supportive, non-punitive approach to managing conflict and bullying.

Recognising the Needs of Our Pupils

We acknowledge that bullying may manifest differently for children with additional needs, including:

- Children with Autism who may struggle with social interactions, misunderstand social cues, or experience sensory-related bullying.
- Children with MLD or SLD who may have difficulty recognising bullying behaviour, understanding emotions, or verbalising concerns.
- Looked After Children (LAC) and those with trauma histories who may be more vulnerable due to past experiences, attachment difficulties, or emotional regulation challenges.
- Children from diverse cultural or community backgrounds who may experience prejudice-based bullying due to differences in ethnicity, religion, gender identity, or ability.
- Children who benefit from restorative practices, which encourage communication, understanding, and positive relationship-building when conflict occurs.

This policy ensures that all anti-bullying strategies are **tailored to meet the individual needs of our pupils**, recognising that some children may require additional support in understanding and responding to bullying situations.

2. Definition of Bullying

In accordance with the Addressing Bullying in Schools Act (NI) 2016), bullying is defined as:

- **“The repeated use of power by one or more persons intentionally to hurt, harm or adversely affect the rights and needs of another or others.”**

Bullying can take many forms, including:

- **Physical** – hitting, pushing, interfering with personal space or comfort objects
- **Verbal** – name-calling, teasing, mimicking communication styles

Broadening horizons for all to grow, learn and achieve together.

- **Emotional** – exclusion, controlling friendships, manipulating trust
- **Cyberbullying** – targeting through online platforms or messaging
- **Prejudice-based bullying** – targeting a pupil’s disability, sensory needs, learning difficulties, looked-after status, ethnicity, culture, or personal background

For pupils with Autism, MLD, SLD, and LAC, bullying may also involve:

- Misunderstood social interactions – not recognising unfriendly behaviour.
- Sensory distress – deliberately exposing a pupil to distressing sounds, textures, or bright lights.
- Manipulation – taking advantage of a pupil’s trust or limited understanding
- Exclusion based on identity or background, as recognised in CRED principles

Note that due to the understanding of the 'perpetrator' it may be challenging to establish the 'intention to harm' and therefore in this context the word of 'bullying' may not be suitable. However, if the behaviour of a pupil impacts negatively on another pupil, the school will continue to give support as highlighted in this policy.

3. Preventative Strategies

a) Creating a Culture of Inclusion and Rightful Presence

- Embedding the UNCRC, CRED, and Rightful Presence into daily school life, ensuring that every child belongs fully within the school community.
- Providing safe, structured spaces (e.g., sensory rooms, quiet zones) for emotional regulation.
- Encouraging peer support and positive role models, particularly for LAC and pupils with communication difficulties.

b) The Role of PATHS, CRED, and Restorative Practice in Anti-Bullying Prevention

- Integrating the PATHS programme into the curriculum to develop pupils’ emotional understanding, resilience, and problem-solving skills.
- Using PATHS lessons to develop empathy, friendship skills, and strategies for responding to conflict.
- Embedding CRED principles into learning, ensuring pupils understand and respect differences in culture, ability, and identity.
- Using Restorative Practice to address conflicts, supporting pupils in expressing feelings, understanding the impact of actions, and finding positive solutions.

c) Restorative Practices for Relationship Building

- Teaching pupils to use restorative language, such as:
- “How did that make you feel?”
- “What can we do to make things better?”
- Holding restorative circles to discuss feelings, repair relationships, and encourage positive behaviour.
- Using structured dialogue to resolve conflicts, ensuring all voices are heard in a safe, supportive setting.

4. Responding to Bullying Using Restorative Practice.

Step 1: Recognising and Reporting

- Staff must be vigilant in observing distress in pupils who may struggle to verbalise concerns.
- Pupils are encouraged to communicate concerns in ways that suit them (e.g., using symbols, body language, or trusted adults).
- All concerns are taken seriously and investigated promptly, in line with Safeguarding and Child Protection Procedures.
- reporting to outside agencies will follow the protocol as under the School Safeguarding and Child Protection procedures.

Step 2: Restorative Conversations and Interventions

- Restorative questions are used to understand both the victim’s and the perpetrator’s perspectives.

- A restorative meeting may be arranged (if appropriate and agreed upon) to facilitate mutual understanding and repair harm.
- Support is provided for emotional regulation, particularly for pupils with SEN or trauma histories.

Step 3: Support and Follow-Up

For the victim:

- PATHS-based emotional support strategies
- Sensory-friendly calming strategies
- Social scripts and structured reassurance
- Access counselling or additional Therapeutic support as appropriate.

For the perpetrator (if bullying is identified):

- Using PATHS strategies to develop emotional awareness and self-control
- Restorative actions, such as apologies, peer support, or positive community involvement
- CRED-informed discussions to promote understanding of diversity
- Access counselling or additional Therapeutic support as appropriate.

5. Conclusion

Arvalee School is committed to an **inclusive, trauma-informed, and rights-based approach** to bullying prevention. By integrating PATHS, CRED, and Restorative Practice, **recognising the unique needs of pupils** with Autism, MLD, SLD, and LAC, and using individualised interventions, we ensure that every child is valued, protected, and supported.

This policy will be reviewed annually to ensure ongoing effectiveness.