St. Mary & St. Thomas Aquinas Catholic Primary School

Cyberbullying - Supporting School Staff

This summary guidance is taken directly from the Department for Children, Schools and Families document -
Cyberbullying - Supporting School Staff, Reference DCSF-00242-2009.

What is cyberbullying?

This is the deliberate use of information and communications technology, particularly mobile phones and the internet to upset someone else. It may consist of threats, harassment, embarrassment, humiliation, defamation or impersonation.

In some cases incidents may be unintentional. The person responsible may not realise that remarks are publicly accessible or understand the effect that technologies produce. They may not be fully aware of the potential seriousness or impact of their actions. Therefore prevention activities are key to ensuring that whole school community clearly understands the serious consequences of cyberbullying including sanctions.

How can it affect staff in schools?

Staff in schools have been targets of cyberbullying. There have been cases of school employees being cyberbullied by current or ex pupils, by colleagues, parents and other adults.

Like other forms of bullying, cyberbullying can seriously impact on the health, well-being and self confidence of those targeted. It may have a significant impact not only on the person being bullied but on their home and work life too.

What should schools do?

Dealing with incidents quickly and effectively is key to minimising harm in potentially highly stressful situations.

All forms of bullying, including cyberbullying should be taken seriously. Bullying is never acceptable and should never be tolerated.

All employers have various statutory and common law duties to look after the physical and mental health of their employees. Incidents taking place outside of the normal hours or place of work may fall under the responsibility of the employer if they are related to the employment.

Protecting staff from cyberbullying is best done within a prevention framework, with whole schools policies and practices designed to combat cyberbullying.

Having policies in place that include acceptable use of technologies by pupils and staff, be it technologies provided by the school or that owned by staff or pupils but used on school premises within school hours.

Policies should be developed in consultation with staff members and recognised unions and professional association reps. Policies need to be communicated with the whole school community including parents. Schools will already have e-safety, ICT policies and behaviour/conduct policies, which can be developed to include this area. School should ensure that the agreed policies regarding the use of technologies are being adhered to consistently.

Schools should have a designated lead person, perhaps a member of the senior management team tasked with overseeing and managing the recording, investigation and resolution of bullying incidents.

What should school employees do?

Employees should protect themselves by following the guidance given by their employer regarding e-security. Employees should never personally engage or retaliate with bullying incidents instead they should report the incident.

Examples of how staff can protect themselves:

- taking care of their personal mobile phones, securing them when not in use and not issuing their personal number.
- never use personal mobile phones when making calls connected with work, for example to parents, pupils, other organisations or when away on a school trip. Staff should be issued with a school mobile phone if expected to make calls away from school.
- employees should be aware that communication via the internet is seldom private. They should ensure that their personal data is not accessible to anyone who does not have their permission access it.
- use passwords and keep them safe to prevent misuse.
- not engage in communication with pupils on personal social network site.
- employees should consider what they are publishing about themselves and through conversations with others online and ask themselves whether a current or prospective employer, colleague, parent or pupil viewing the content would take issue with it.

If an employee feels they are subjected to unfair treatment online, which is work, related they should report this to their manager as soon as possible in order that any appropriate action can be taken.

The full document is available from the Department of Education:-
Cyberbullying - Supporting School Staff, Reference DCSF-00242-2009.