



Statement from the Governing Bodies and Headteachers from the Havant Federation of Schools:

We all recognise that respectful relationships result in a happier and safer society. The use of modern day technology particularly through the use of **mobile phones and social networking** means that we are more connected as a community than we have ever been before. This communication contributes to greater safety for our young people. As with all forms of technologies there are some drawbacks and disadvantages. As a group of schools there are occasions when we often find ourselves in compromising situations that have arisen when the technology is not used appropriately. In response to this, the Chairs of Governors and Headteachers from the Federation of Schools in the Havant Area have devised this joint statement to clarify their position with parents and carers and to ask for your support in this matter.

Below are just two examples of the issues faced by schools and we are asking you to support us so that our students and local community remain safe and that the Havant Area is seen as a pleasant place to live and grow up in.

Situation 1

Social Media issues which start when a child is in the care of parents/carers but which then impacts on the smooth running of the school because what has been posted causes upset and offence to other students.

Social networking has many positive attributes and uses. Social networking is a way of life for our young people and for the majority of adults. Through our education programme and e-safety briefings students are regularly reminded of the advantages and the hidden dangers of using these sites. Increasingly some students and on occasions parents use these sites to try to settle friendship issues that have arisen both in school and the local community. All schools have Anti-Bullying Policies and support mechanisms and where necessary the Police may be informed and involved about any ongoing issues. Often, when social networking is used inappropriately in 'friendship' situations the school is expected to solve the problems. As you would appreciate this is very difficult to achieve. We would ask that parents/carers support us by discouraging the use of social media for such purposes and recognise that should it be used inappropriately the school does not have the legal position to solve the issues.

Equally, we would advise any parent/carer of a child who is being bullied or on the receiving end of unkind comments NOT to post anything on social media as adult involvement rarely solves the issue and is often regarded as antagonistic or even threatening to the minor on the receiving end. Parents/carers are encouraged to seek advice from the school or the police if they are concerned about derogatory comments which have been posted about their child.

We would like to respectfully remind all parents to be aware of unseen consequences that may arise when they post pictures or information about their own or other children on social media. Parents are asked to ensure that their children are aware of this too and that activities or social network sites that students access will form part of their digital footprint and may jeopardise any future opportunities that they wish to apply for.

Situation 2

When a student uses their mobile phone to contact parents/carers during the school day about a situation that has arisen in school.

It is very upsetting for any parent to hear their child report an issue which they have perceived has occurred in school but there are always two sides to any situation and schools are best placed to establish the facts. We would ask parents/carers to respect our guidelines which are that students should not make contact via mobile phone during the school day. If a child does contact a parent it is more helpful for the parent to contact the school for further details before any conclusions are reached. A fairly minor situation which could have been resolved by the school over the course of the day can sometimes become a major issue because a parent has received a one-sided version of events and has chosen to react to what their child is telling them before being given all of the facts. We would ask parents to trust the judgement of the school and abide and support the schools in the restricted use of mobile phones during the school day.

We are grateful to all our parents/carers for supporting us with the appropriate use of mobile phones and social networking.

Relational Conflict and Bullying

The main function of schools is for students to learn and make progress. At the same time schools have a key role to play in conjunction with the students and parents to develop respectful behaviours. As young people grow up and move through adolescence they form and develop friendships with numerous other students and as they move into the latter part of schooling they settle into friendships that are more definite and even in some instances last a lifetime.

In the early years of secondary education students have the opportunity to meet children from other junior schools and they mix with many more students. At this time for some students there can be **relational conflict**, i.e times when students do not get on socially which can result in such behaviours as name calling, pushing each other, taking each other's property and ignoring someone deliberately. This kind of behaviour is common amongst younger students and as they get older it becomes less frequent and less of a problem. **Bullying** is something that happens in all schools but it is very different from **relational conflict** and it is less common. All the schools in the Federation work to prevent bullying. **Bullying is more serious than relational conflict and is defined by the Anti Bullying Alliance as the repetitive, intentional hurting of one person or group by another person or group, where the relationship involves an imbalance of power. It can happen face to face or online. Bullying can be physical, emotional or psychological.** Social media whilst it has many merits also provides an avenue for relational conflict and if it continues from the same person(s) bullying occurs, this often happens outside the parameters of the school day.

All schools in the Federation work tirelessly to develop respectful behaviours with all our students and we are grateful for the support we receive from parents/carers when trying to enforce high standards and expectations. Increasingly we have experienced some parents expecting schools to deal with and solve all relational conflicts that occur not only in school, but those that occur at weekends and in holidays and on social media. It is very difficult for schools to act as the mediators in these instances, schools will sanction behaviours according to their behaviour policies when it is right to do so.

We would be grateful if parents could assist us and consider the following points when they are faced with behavioural issues regarding their children. This would help all schools to focus the majority of their work on the learning and progress of the young people. It is important to state that at all times we will promote respectful behaviours and respond to serious incidents.

- Is the behaviour that your child is experiencing relational conflict or bullying? Is it the same person(s), has it been carrying on for a while and is your child being overly affected by it? This would be the time to contact the child's school following the recommended pathways which might include the child's Form Tutor, Head of Year/House, Anti-Bullying Co-ordinator.
- If the behaviours are more of a relational conflict then listen to your child and discuss with them how they might approach the next day when they meet the student(s). They could also be encouraged to talk to their Form Tutor or Class Teacher in the first instance. It can often be the case that students fall out with each other one day and the next day they are friends. It is advisable that Parents/Carers do not contact the school at this time and allow the child to work through it. This also allows them to build the skills to deal with the conflict and the resilience to recognise when behaviours are serious.
- All schools work closely with outside agencies that include the Police to try to resolve 'bullying'. We all work in partnership to try to resolve what can be very complex and difficult cases especially when it involves social media. On occasions the issues can have been fuelled by many parties and in some instances parents/carers. In these situations schools and outside agencies can't always resolve the situation to everyone's satisfaction and any sanctions that are used with the parties are at the discretion of the school. Parents/Carers should realise that it is not helpful for them to insist that the school takes action and under data protection they are not obliged to report on sanctions used on other students.
- At times, in the course of investigating friendship issues or bullying, it is established that the student reporting the issue has also been at fault. If this is the case, we must pursue appropriate action for all parties and need parents to accept our judgements rather than to question them. Part of the learning process for young people is to have consistent messages from home and school and that they must accept responsibility for their actions.
- We are aware that Parents/Carers can become impatient and want a specific outcome immediately. When that outcome is not what parents/carers wanted there is the tendency for parents/carers to complain further to other agencies. Parents/Carers are asked to engage with the school to resolve the issues together and to recognise that sometimes this takes longer than expected.

All the schools in the Havant Federation want our young people to develop into confident, resilient and respectful citizens of the future. It is important that we all work together to achieve this and we strongly ask parents/guardians to support us and follow the procedures that are outlined in this document. Where it is necessary parents/guardians will be referred to this document when it is clear that the support for what we are trying to achieve is not forthcoming. We are very grateful for the vast majority of parents/guardians who support the schools in what they are trying to achieve with regards to young people's behaviour and relationships.