

## Social Safety Policy

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## 1. Preface

One of the premises of the International School Almere is that students can ‘learn and feel comfortable and safe at school’. IS Almere has a zero-tolerance attitude to bullying and clearly states its purpose to inspire students when contributing to a better and more peaceful world by striving for academic excellence, intercultural awareness and mutual respect. ISAlmere is a place where the students are seen, challenged and heard; where students can discover and develop their passion and talent; where there is room to deal with differences between people and their cultures and where difficult questions are not avoided.

Students, parents / caregivers, teachers, support staff, school mentors and the school board foster this development by creating an open and pleasant working atmosphere in the classroom and beyond. By creating an overview and making this visible, the organization of the school contributes to the feeling of safety and security. There is room for everyone to be true to themselves as long as it does not conflict with the expectations of the school or exceeds personal boundaries. Thus, it should be possible for every student to feel appreciated.

This anti-bullying protocol is written for students, parents and school staff and represents the school's policy with regard to bullying. It is part of the School Security Policy and as such is connected with other policies, such as policies on suspension and expulsion of students and the policy on unacceptable behaviour (sexual harassment and violence). The protocol describes bullying, how bullying can be prevented and how to approach the situation when bullying occurs. The main purpose of the protocol is to prevent and confront bullying, by giving all stakeholders clarity on their role. It also has a purpose of providing information and has a referral function.

## 2. Definitions

### Teasing

We talk about teasing when the effects of one's behaviour are not pleasant for others, but can still be seen as a game that is not experienced as threatening by any of the parties involved. Teasing involves verbal and non-verbal peer interactions, which may be humorous and playful on one level, but annoying or distressing on another level depending on the situation and the people involved<sup>1</sup>. Teasing could be perceived as a playful way of dealing with a “conflict” that has no adverse consequences for the person undergoing it. Therefore, teasing can be seen as a not intentional negative initiative, and not deliberate way of dealing with a “conflict”, as the main intentions from the person who runs the interactions are not to cause distress to the other participants.

### Arguments

Arguments and disagreements are not bullying, and in fact, they are part of human relationships. These disagreements and differences can also teach us valuable methods for handling emotions and settling conflicts. Arguments and disagreements differ from bullying in that they are usually

passing and momentary, and the same child is not consistently targeted. At the same time, no harm is intended.

### Bullying

Bullying is defined as an ongoing (1) and deliberate (2) misuse of power (3) in relationships through repeated

(1) physical, verbal, written, psychological and/or social behaviour that intends to cause (2) harm (4). These actions may occur online, onsite or combined, directly or indirectly.

According to the previous definition, four factors define bullying:

1. Repeated actions: The same student is subjected over and over again to mean and harmful actions by others.
2. Intentionally: The purpose or goal of the actions is to hurt, harm and cause distress.
3. Use of Inequality: There is power imbalance between the parties. One side is “powerful”.
4. Adverse consequences for the person undergoing it

At the same time, based on the definition of bullying, four types of bullying may occur:

- A. Physical: Hitting, kicking, pushing...
- B. Verbal or written: Insults, nicknames, alias...
- C. Psychological: Intimidation, blackmail, threats to do things without previous consent...
- D. Social: Making fun of, excluding, and/or spreading rumors about a person...

At ISAlmere, we apply the rule that you can act at your own will, unless that behaviour affects anyone negatively. When that happens, the students (and possible third parties involved) are obligated to find a solution to deal with that negative impact. The person who is targeted determines whether the action is seen as bullying or teasing.

What one person regards as a form of harassment, others can interpret as harmless actions. What is a joke or teasing for one person, can be experienced by others as an intentional hurtful action. Actions that may not be meant personally against one person, can actually hurt someone. When this occurs, it is necessary to sit down with each other, possibly with a third person, to work on a solution.

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1. Mooney, Creaser, & Balchford, 1991; Shapiro, Baumeister, & Kessler, 1991
  2. National Centre Against Bullying

Bullying is normally a group phenomenon, so it concerns the whole class. For perpetrators bullying seems to be motivated by the pursuit of visibility, power and a high status in the peer group. For that reason, bullies need bystanders or spectators.<sup>3</sup>

These bystanders play different roles in the bullying situation:

- They may reinforce the bully's behavior by verbal or nonverbal signals that are socially rewarding. Therefore, they are active in assisting the bully. These signals suggest that bullying is acceptable, or even funny and entertaining.
- Some peers might just silently witness what is happening, without acknowledging that the bully might interpret such behavior as an approval of his or her mean acts.
- Few students who observe bullying have the courage to intervene or take the bullied child's side.

As an educational institution, our goal is to educate the students so that instead of silently approving or encouraging the bullies, they start supporting the victim, thus showing that they do not condone bullying.

### 3. Other forms of bullying

Bullying can take the same forms as teasing. Bullying can be defined in two categories<sup>4</sup>

- Indirect bullying: stalking a student, excluding a classmate, stealing/hiding/destruction of personal property, forcing someone to give them money and cyber bullying.

Cyberbullying: cyberbullying is a part of indirect bullying, but shows clear differences compared to 'traditional' bullying. With easier access to digital platforms like Facebook, Snapchat, Instagram, Twitter and Whatsapp and less online supervision<sup>5</sup> this has grown to a more prominent problem for the youth. Cyberbullying differs from traditional bullying in the following aspects:

- A single incident can be repeated numerous times. For example: (1) a photo unwillingly taken can be spread through email or other platforms over and over again. (2) a hate comment will remain on the internet; opening the site or app will show the hate comment over and over again.
- The ability to remain anonymous. For example: (1) to create a fake account to stalk someone. (2) to use apps or websites that don't use identification methods.

- Superiority over those who are not technologically savvy. For example: (1) photoshop a picture into something offensive/inappropriate. (2) edit a video and post it online.
- Cyberbullying can happen 24/7.
- When cyberbullying, the bully does not see the response or the effect it has on the victim.

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3. KiVa antibullying Program
  4. Carbone-Lopez, Esbensen, & Brick, 2010.
  5. Waasdorp & Bradshaw, 2015.

#### 4. Parties involved in bullying

When bullying occurs, different parties are involved: the bullied student(s), the bullying student(s), the silent middle group (bystanders), the mentor, the teachers and support staff, parents / caregivers and the anti-bullying coordinator. To tackle bullying, both in terms of prevention and in curative form, it is necessary that all parties are involved in the implementation of the policy.

At ISAlmere we define the following parties:

##### The bullied student

Bullied students often find themselves bullied because (one of) the following aspects<sup>6</sup>:

- Grade level
- Involved in a fight on school grounds
- Being afraid of certain areas in the school
- Gender
- Race/ethnicity
- Academic performance
- Sexual orientation and gender identity
- Physical appearance

Many students who are bullied have a limited resilience. They are unable to actually take action against bullying and emit this. They are often anxious and insecure in this situation, which it could affect their self-esteem<sup>7</sup>. They could be afraid to say anything because they are afraid of being rejected or the frequency of the bullying increase. This fear and uncertainty are further enhanced by the experienced bullying, causing the student to enter a vicious circle, which can often be broken with external help. Bullied students often feel lonely within the bullying situation, don't have many friends to fall back on in the

environment in which they are being bullied and may sometimes get along better with adults than with their peers.

#### The bullying student

Bullying students often seem to be popular in a classroom or are a leader of a group. They can react aggressive, hyperactive or manipulative<sup>8</sup>. In comparison with bullying victims, they have strongly integrated themselves in the social networking, whereas bullying victims are on the outliers of the same social network<sup>9</sup>. Bullying students also often have a poorly developed sense of empathy, are impulsive and prefer to dominate other children. A bullying student has not learned how to express his or her aggression/anger in any other way than by bullying. They sometimes have been bullied themselves in the past or live in specific situations at home (see Parents). Because of their limited social skills, they often struggle to build and maintain friendships based on other grounds than those of power and sharing that power. Bullying students often lack social development, which has consequences for themselves and others<sup>10</sup>.

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6. Petrosino, Guckenburger, DeVoe & Hanson, 2010
  7. Campfield, 2008
  8. Estrell, Farmer, Cairns, 2007
  9. Estrell, Farmer, Cairns, 2007
  10. Campfield, 2008

#### The middle group

The middle group can be defined in two separate groups: The so-called 'silent middle' or bystanders involves the students that do not actively participate in or resist bullying. They keep some distance and ignore the situation, sometimes out of fear: stepping up for the victim could make them a target the next time. Occasionally, a student or a small group of students might dare to stand up against the bully(s). The middle group plays an important role in solving bullying problems.

The 'followers' do participate in bullying. Bullying often happens in a closely-guarded secret group: students know that others are being bullied; yet nobody dares to tell a teacher or parent.

#### The mentor

From the beginning of the school year, the mentor has a big responsibility in creating a safe class environment, starting from the introduction day in early September. There is an extensive program with a strong emphasis on developing social and collaboration skills. Learning how to properly interact, with the introductory camp in which the students get to know each other as a pivotal activity. By formulating questions about awareness, classes will get clarity on how to interact with each other. Questions like "What are the rules of engagement that we all agree to?" Students and mentors collaborate setting expectations after revising the code of conduct. These rules will which will be written down, agreed to and signed by all the students as a continuing contract for the rest of the year. In addition, the rules for interaction, as described in the school guide, will be discussed again, so these are clear for everyone.

Examples of rules on interaction:

- We listen to each other.
- We let each other speak.
- We respect each other's personal boundaries.
  
- We do not touch each other's stuff.
  
- We exclude no one.
- We solve disputes by talking to each other about what is important to us.
- We notify the teacher or mentor when someone is being bullied.
- Be yourself and give others the room to stay true to themselves.
- When something is unpleasant, we will tell someone in a correct, constructive way.

After the introduction to bullying, throughout the year more time will be devoted to the social climate during the weekly mentor lessons, by including class discussions and joint assignments. During the mentor classes, there is also room for individual conversations with the mentor, for example, if a student wants to talk about bullying or wants to express his concerns about a classmate. Apart from the introduction day and the mentor lessons, the school provides additional support for confidence- building and team-building skills through external organizations if needed.

#### Teachers and support staff

The exemplary behavior of teachers and staff is very important. Bullying is less likely to occur in a climate with clear rules about communication and interaction, where acceptance of differences is encouraged and where arguments can be settled. This exemplary behavior is founded in upholding the rules of conduct and school policies. Staff and teachers have a joint approach regarding the code of conduct. All employees are expected to intervene if they notice any untoward behavior in and around the school premises.

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11. Baldry & Farrington, 2000

12. Baldry & Farrington, 2000

#### The parents/caregivers

According to research<sup>11</sup>, bullying students often find themselves in situations where: - Parents provide low



to no support from home;

- Parents are very authoritarian;
- The child often disagrees with their parents.

To address a student that bullies, help from home is needed to change the behavior. Therefore, parents are asked in these situations to play an active role and reflect on their family dynamics to help the child<sup>12</sup>.

When students are bullied, they tend not to tell their parents. They could fear involving parents/caregivers because they think it will lead to the problem being addressed in the wrong way or making things worse. They could feel ashamed or believe that they have provoked the bullying somehow and deserve it. An open and supportive environment will help the child to share its concerns or problems.

#### The Social Safety coordinator(s)

At IS Almere, Eszter Molnár and Sanders Jackson have been appointed as Social Safety Coordinators. They can be addressed if the mentor is absent. The anti-bullying coordinator can also support the mentor and provide additional help where needed.

## 5. How to handle bullying

It is important to take the student who is being bullied seriously and to provide a listening ear. The mentor is always the first point of contact for students and parents. The anti-bullying coordinator will be informed by the mentor and – depending on the situation – becomes actively involved.

### **The mentor**

The mentor takes a clear stand against bullying and advises on how to respond. The mentor explains the involved students about the school procedures, making sure the student knows that the problem is taken seriously and will involve people from inside (and outside) the school if necessary (mentors, teachers, the caretaker and the anti-bullying coordinator). The mentor engages the student who is being bullied in the process to the extent that the bullied student actively gets involved in solving the issue with the help of the mentor.

The mentor can follow these actions after discussing them with the anti-bullying coordinator:

1. Inventory of the problem with colleagues (teachers and support staff) and anti-bullying coordinator by the mentor.
2. Talking to bullied student.
3. Talking to bullying pupil. Depending on the severity of the behavior and the outcome of the conversation, the bully agrees to apologize to the target.
4. Organize a conversation between the bullying student and the bullied student.
5. If necessary, start conversation with classmates.
6. Organize a class discussion and other activities with the aim of restoring safety in the classroom and mobilizing the silent majority. This should be a general discussion,



so that the bullied student won't get the blame. The subject of safety in the school can be discussed as a social item

7. Mentor informs parents involved about the situation.
8. An interview with the bullied student and his or her parents.
9. Draw up a plan (see possible steps below), if necessary with anti-bullying coordinator.
10. Mentor or Social Safety Coordinator informs parents involved about teachers and plan.
11. Plan implementation and evaluation moments.
12. Evaluate the plan with all the stakeholders.
13. Sanctions by programme coordinator.
14. Aftercare, close monitoring and registration of the situation.
15. Mentors, the anti-bullying coordinator and/or psychologists can refer students to a social-skills training (Oke-op-school provides these trainings for free, also to international students, e.g. rots- en watertraining).

The student who bullies should be provided with the opportunity to atone and the right to learn and make amends for his/her behavior.

Generally speaking, the school is guided by a No-Blame Approach. The No-Blame approach is a method where no one gets punished, but an appeal is made to the positive power of a group to solve the situation, making the approach to the problem a shared responsibility of the group. The group consists of a friend of the target, the bully, a follower and two or three people in the middle group.

Should the behavior be repeated, alternative penalties will be applied. The situation is recorded in the student's file and communicated to the parents either in a conversation or in writing. A follow-up conversation should provide information whether behavior has improved.

There can be a few extra conversations with the mentor and the bully, in order to:

- Find out what the possible cause of the bullying behavior is.
- To further develop the sense of empathy of the bully.

The bully can get external expertise, to further assist his or her behavioral change. The school can also set a social-skills training as a condition.

### **The Social Safety Coordinator**

If bullying occurs, the Social Safety Coordinator is always informed. Based on the request of the mentor, the anti-bullying coordinator could be present during the conversations. If the bullying escalates or is not quickly solved, the anti-bullying coordinator will take a more active role in the process, this could include one or multiple of the following actions:

- Contact parents to inform them about the situation;
- Invite parents in for a conversation;

- Informing the MYP or DP coordinator;
- Informing the Head of school;
- Establish consequences, or form a contract that will state the consequences if behavior is repeated.
- Have extended meetings with the bullied student and bullying student to get a deeper understanding of the situation.

The Social Safety Coordinator keep track of bullying events with names of the involved students, what was done to solve it and optional consequences. This document is only available for anti-bullying coordinators and mentors. It can also be used to recognize patterns of bullies or bully victims.

### **Teachers and support staff**

All employees of the school have to act as an example for the students. They must intervene when they receive signals that seem to point in the direction of bullying and inform the mentor, who subsequently goes through the described steps. Employees may be asked to pay extra attention in order to find out which students are targets of bullying.

### **The parents/caregivers**

The parents of both the bullied student and the student who is bullying should be supportive. It is important that the parents of the students that are involved are aware of their child's behavior and take it seriously. They should be involved addressing bullying as described above. Parents should be informed about the anti-bullying policy. This can be done through the school

prospectus and the website of the school. The mentor can refer to the protocol. Parents should be given information and advice about bullying and ways to tackle bullying.

### **Policy published**

The anti-bullying policy is available to all pupils, parents and staff, by referring to it in the school and publishing it on the school website. It will be regularly evaluated and adjusted, when necessary. Staff will get training opportunities regarding bullying and the anti-bullying school policy, as part of their professional development. See Appendix 1 for a detailed description of signals and advice.

## 6. Intervention and Prevention

In-class or in-school conflict resolution

- If any issue takes place in class or in school, the teacher or supporting staff talks separately with the possible victim (first) and then the possible bully (later). The talks are to address and confirm issues/actions and find possible underlying problems.
- The teacher or staff member records this interview in SOM, informing mentor and parents
- The teacher or staff member informs the mentor(s), who organizes a meeting with the involved students together. The goal of this meeting is to find agreements to solve the issues and what the impact of choices are on all people involved. This meeting should be also recorded in SOM – informing parents.
- If necessary, mentor(s) meets with the whole class/ year group to restore the group atmosphere, emphasizing the responsibility of each group member and giving students the opportunity to share information on the basis of discretion, if they would like to.
- If the problem persists, the anti-bullying coordinators and MYP- and/or DP coordinator(s) will be informed by the mentor. After talking with the involved students, the first warning letter will be given.
- If there are additional social-emotional concerns with the students involved, the Care Team and school psychologist will be informed. They set up a plan for the involved students and share this with the mentor. Parents will be invited to speak with the mentor(s), MYP/DP coordinator(s), SEN coordinators and anti-bullying coordinators.

## 7. Sanctions and consequences

School will offer support in doing so, to establish a safe climate. Students must also be aware that bullying will have consequences. Each incident or allegation will be thoroughly investigated and individually assessed. Sufficient time will be taken by the school to ensure that a thorough investigation takes place. Once a conclusion is reached, the parents or guardians of all the parties involved will be contacted for a meeting, during which the consequences, as decided by the school, will be addressed. Depending on the severity of the situation or behavior, measures will be taken towards the bullying students. These range from a letter of concern, a warning letter, an internal or external suspension and eventually, in extreme cases, expulsion from school. Factors that will have an influence on the severity of the consequence are whether the student already has a history of similar behavior or has already received previous warnings. Criminal offenses will be reported to the police.

The school may choose to implement additional consequences, if the situation calls for it, such as compulsory workshops, meetings between the students and staff members to facilitate reflection. The following steps are followed when students are involved in serious incidents:

**First offence:** see point 4 under ‘Intervention and Prevention’ Letter of concern / Warning letter (recorded in SOM)(depending on the severity of the situation and the involvement of the individual student)

**Second offence:** Second warning letter (recorded in SOM), accompanied by a one-day internal suspension

**Third offence:** Third warning letter, accompanied by a one-day external suspension (recorded in SOM)

**Fourth offence:** Expulsion from school

If a student has been actively involved in bullying another student, they will be given a red-flag for not being able to participate in an ambassadorship of the school program, such as MUN or DISS, for an agreed period of time. First of all, the student should show good will of change in behavior, before they will be allowed to these extra-curricular activities in the next school year.

## 7.Organizations

The school can call upon agencies that deal with bullying/inappropriate behavior, for assistance or educational and prevention schemes. ISAlmere has a network, which can be called upon in case of undesirable behavior (such as bullying, discrimination, aggression, sexual harassment and violence), if the student requires more guidance or support than can be offered in school, or if the students involved do not trust any of the aforementioned. Examples include coaching or counseling.

Anti- bullying coordinator :

Eszter Molnár: (e.molnar@isalmere.nl)

Sanders Jackson (s.jackson@isalmere.nl)

**Trust person:**

Arent Rummelink (a.rummelink@isalmere.nl)

Gigi Laméris (g.lameris@isalmere.nl)

**External organization:**

- Maatschappelijk Werk/ Social Work

[http://www.zorggroep-almere.nl/maatschappelijk\\_werk.php](http://www.zorggroep-almere.nl/maatschappelijk_werk.php)

(works in neighborhood teams, so the address is dependent on where the student lives)

- Samen Veilig Almere/ previously Bureau Jeugdzorg <http://www.samen-veilig-flevoland.nl/> (works in neighborhood teams, so the address is dependent on where the student lives)
- **Oke-op-school**

<http://www.oke-op-school.nl/home/vo/>

Telefoon: 036-5296032

The anti-bullying policy will be reviewed again in 2026

## 5. References

The anti-bullying protocol is based on research from published journals and books. The research is open and available for the public.

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