



## **Cyberbullying of School Staff NEU guidance for members in England & Wales**

The purpose of this document is to provide advice to NEU members who are victims of cyberbullying and to set out the support that can be provided by the NEU.

### **What we say**

When you read through this document you may have questions about what happens in your particular school or workplace, and there may be collective issues that affect other members. In most circumstances, you should initially discuss the matter with your workplace rep, as they will know whether similar concerns have been raised by other members. If you do not have a rep at the moment, it would be a good idea to get members together to elect one. Further advice on this is available at:

[neu.org.uk/becoming-a-rep](http://neu.org.uk/becoming-a-rep)

Although you may sometimes feel that you are the only person affected by or concerned about a particular issue, in reality this is seldom the case. Any difficulties you may experience are likely to be linked to wider conditions at your workplace and as a member of the NEU you have the advantage of being able to act collectively with your colleagues. This should give you the confidence of knowing that you have the weight of the union behind you.

### **What is cyberbullying?**

Cyberbullying is the use of technologies by an individual or a group of people to deliberately and repeatedly upset someone else. Cyberbullying is a whole school community issue and staff may be victims of cyberbullying from pupils, parents, colleagues or other members of the school community.

A wide variety of behaviours can be considered cyberbullying, including:

- intimidation and threats
- harassment and stalking
- vilification/defamation
- exclusion or peer rejection
- impersonation
- unauthorised publication of personal information or images
- manipulation.

It can be an extension of face-to-face bullying, and NEU self-help guidance on bullying in schools is available on the NEU website at: [neu.org.uk](http://neu.org.uk)

Cyberbullying may also constitute discrimination and hate crimes, such as:

- sexist bullying
- racist and faith-targeted bullying
- homophobic or biphobic bullying
- transphobic bullying
- bullying in relation to a disability.



NEU self-help guidance on various types of harassment and discrimination is available in the self-help section of the NEU website.

There are a variety of technologies that may be used to cyberbully, including email, smartphones and a large variety of social media platforms including Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat, ASKfm, WhatsApp, Sarahah and YouTube. The [NSPCC Net Aware](#) site has guides to these and many other social media platforms. NEU self-help guidance on social media and online safety is available in the self-help section of the NEU website.

### **How common is cyberbullying in schools?**

The Department for Education (DfE) says that one in five (21 per cent) teachers have reported having derogatory comments posted about them on social media sites from both parents and children. A [survey of school leaders](#) by the Tes (formerly the Times Educational Supplement) found that 56 per cent had seen negative or offensive comments on social media about school staff, posted by parents (see article at: [tes.com/news/majority-heads-say-parents-have-abused-their-school-and-staff-social-media](https://www.tes.com/news/majority-heads-say-parents-have-abused-their-school-and-staff-social-media)). The Childnet charity reports that 12 per cent of nine- to 16-year-olds have experienced cyberbullying.

### **What must schools do to prevent and tackle cyberbullying?**

It is important that the school community is aware that cyberbullying will be dealt with as seriously as face-to-face bullying, regardless of whether the bullying is physically perpetrated on the school site. [DfE guidance on cyberbullying](#) states: "Schools should also make clear that it is not acceptable for pupils, parents or colleagues to denigrate and bully school staff via social media in the same way that it is unacceptable to do so face to face."

The school's approach to preventing and tackling cyberbullying should be presented via a whole school policy. This policy should be kept under regular review and communicated to all staff, pupils and parents. The policy should be referred to in other relevant documents, such as policies on pupil behaviour, IT acceptable usage, safeguarding and mobile phones.

The school's reporting routes and relevant responsibilities should be made clear and publicised to the whole school community. A nominated member of the senior management team should lead on, and take overall responsibility for, the co-ordination and implementation of cyberbullying prevention and response strategies. Some staff may find it difficult to report instances of cyberbullying to the nominated member of staff and, where this is the case, they should feel free to seek advice from their NEU school representative.

The school should make sure that pupils, parents, staff and governors are aware of the consequences of cyberbullying and the relevant sanctions that may be applied. The school should also provide training, both to pupils about the consequences of cyberbullying and the positive uses of technologies, and to staff so they are kept up to



date with developments in technologies used to cyberbully. It is particularly important that staff are trained on the child protection and other legal issues that may relate to cyberbullying and online safety. Schools should consider whether social networking sites with a reputation for cyberbullying should be blocked from the school's IT systems.

### **Are there any legal protections against cyberbullying?**

It is the duty of every employer under health and safety legislation to ensure, so far as reasonably practicable, the health, safety and welfare at work of all employees. The [DfE states](#) that these responsibilities include "seeking to protect staff from cyberbullying, by pupils, parents and other members of staff and supporting them if it happens".

Staff resignation as a consequence of cyberbullying, in cases where the school has failed to take adequate steps to address the situation, may qualify for claims of constructive dismissal. The timescales for employment tribunals are very short so any NEU members considering taking a claim to tribunal should [contact the NEU](#) at the earliest opportunity.

Schools also have a duty to review and develop online safety measures as part of their safeguarding responsibilities. In England, the Ofsted framework specifies that pupils should be asked about online safety, including cyberbullying, and the school's approach and response to incidents of cyberbullying will be reviewed.

While cyberbullying is not a specific criminal offence, some instances of online abuse and cyberbullying may be illegal, and the school may need to refer the incident to the police. Sharing indecent images of children (under the age of 18) is illegal – refer to the NEU self-help guidance on sexting for more advice on how to handle these incidents (available in the self-help section of the NEU website).

Other forms of illegal content include hate crimes and racist material, 'revenge pornography', stalking and harassment, and threats of violence, rape or death. Images or recordings of a crime, eg an assault on a member of the school community, are not illegal but should still be passed to the police. NEU self-help guidance on different forms of harassment is available in the self-help section of the NEU website. It is also a criminal offence to publish details of any allegation of abuse against a member of staff on social media if the details published are likely to lead to the identification of the member of staff accused.

### **I've had hurtful information posted about me online, what should I do?**

If you are victim of cyberbullying or online abuse, the NEU advice to members is:

- Never respond or retaliate to messages or things posted online, as this could lead to action being taken against you. Instead, report the incident in line with your school's reporting procedures and contact your NEU rep for support.
- Keep evidence of the abuse: take screen prints of messages or web pages, including the URL (web address) where appropriate, and record the date and time.
- If the comments may constitute a criminal offence, it is likely your school will need to contact the police.



Where the perpetrator is known to be a current pupil or colleague, it should be dealt with via the school's cyberbullying policy and disciplinary procedures. Similarly, where pupils are found to have made unfounded or malicious claims against staff members, relevant and appropriate disciplinary processes should be applied, in line with the relevant school policies. Safeguarding concerns about pupils may arise during cyberbullying investigations, and these should be referred to the school's safeguarding lead.

Where the perpetrator is known to be an adult from the school community (eg a parent or carer), the school should advise them that their behaviour will not be tolerated and remind them of the appropriate ways of raising issues with the school. If the cyberbullying takes the form of abuse and/or threats made via social media, the school should address this in line with its violence against staff policy and the school's violence risk assessment should be reviewed in light of the incident. NEU guidance on violence in schools is available in the health and safety section of the NEU website.

If the perpetrator is known to be another member of staff, it should be dealt with via the school's cyberbullying and staff disciplinary policies.

The member of senior staff who is the cyberbullying lead must take responsibility for ensuring the person being bullied is supported, for investigating and managing the incident, and for contacting the police and local authority if appropriate. NEU advice on staying safe online is available in the NEU self-help briefing on social media and online safety.

### **Can I get content taken off the internet?**

The quickest and most effective route to getting inappropriate material taken down from the web will be to have the person who originally posted it remove it:

- If the person/s responsible are known, the school should explain why the material is unacceptable and request that they remove it.
- Pupils can be asked to delete offending content from their phones and other devices.
- A pupil's refusal to delete material is likely to constitute reasonable grounds for confiscation of the device. Their parent/carer should also be informed. NEU guidance on screening and searching pupils is available in the health and safety section of the NEU website.
- Pupils can also be asked to list to whom they have forwarded information and where it is posted.
- Similarly, adults that have posted content should be asked to remove it.
- If perpetrators refuse to remove content, the school must decide what to do next. The school can report it to the social networking site/s if it breaches their terms, and/or seek further guidance from the local authority/school employer, legal advisers and agencies such as the [UK Safer Internet Centre](http://saferinternet.org.uk) (saferinternet.org.uk).

### **What happens if I don't know who the perpetrator/s are?**

If the person who posted the material is not known, the site or service hosting the material should be contacted to request that the content is taken down. Service providers should remove material that breaches their terms and conditions. The UK



Safer Internet Centre provides an up-to-date [list of social media providers](#), their terms and conditions, and how to contact them to report offensive material.

Some service providers will not accept complaints lodged by a third party, so the member of staff affected may need to make the request directly. In cases of mobile phone abuse, where the person being bullied is receiving malicious calls and messages, the account holder will need to contact the provider directly.

### **What should I do next?**

If further advice is needed, contact your NEU workplace rep in the first instance. If there is no NEU rep in your workplace, or the peripatetic nature of your employment makes contact with a workplace rep difficult, contact the NEU Adviceline in England on 0345 811 8111 or NEU Cymru in Wales on 029 2046 5000.

Further contact details may be found at: [neu.org.uk/contact-us](http://neu.org.uk/contact-us)

### **Further information**

#### **UK Safer Internet Centre**

Online safety helpline for professionals available at: [saferinternet.org.uk/professionals-online-safety-helpline](http://saferinternet.org.uk/professionals-online-safety-helpline)

#### **Childnet International**

Guidance on cyberbullying in schools at: [childnet.com/ufiles/Cyberbullying-guidance2.pdf](http://childnet.com/ufiles/Cyberbullying-guidance2.pdf)

#### **DfE**

Guidance on cyberbullying in schools at:

[assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/374850/Cyberbullying\\_Advice\\_for\\_Headteachers\\_and\\_School\\_Staff\\_121114.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/374850/Cyberbullying_Advice_for_Headteachers_and_School_Staff_121114.pdf)

#### **NSPCC Net Aware**

[net-aware.org.uk](http://net-aware.org.uk)

#### **NEU guidance**

Available in the self-help section at: [neu-org-uk](http://neu-org-uk)

Bullying

Social media and online safety

Sexting

Harassment

Safeguarding

Online safety guidance for reps and local officers – available in the health and safety section