



ALTERNATIVE ACRES

Anti-Bullying and Peer Harm Policy

Academic Year 2026/27

Policy owner	Head of Provision
Head of Provision	Gemma Robertson
DSL	Daun Beresford
Deputy DSL	Gemma Robertson
Inclusion & Engagement Lead	Rachel Archer
Placement ratios	1:1, 1:2 and 1:4
Reviewed	01/09/2026
Next review	01/09/2027 or sooner following significant safeguarding learning or guidance change

Alternative Acres does not accept bullying, harassment, intimidation, discrimination or peer abuse as an inevitable part of growing up. Concerns are addressed early, proportionately and with the safety, dignity and individual needs of every learner at the centre.



1. Purpose

This policy explains how Alternative Acres works to prevent, identify and respond to bullying and other harmful behaviour between learners.

It reflects the farm-based, small-ratio nature of the provision and should be read alongside the Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy, Behaviour Policy, Online Safety Policy and Equality, Diversity, Inclusion and Accessibility Policy.

2. Status and national framework

Department for Education anti-bullying guidance is written primarily for schools. Alternative Acres is a non-school alternative provision and does not present school-specific statutory behaviour duties as though they apply to it in exactly the same way.

However, DfE's preventing-bullying guidance states that its principles may also be useful to community settings, and Alternative Acres adopts relevant good practice. The DfE voluntary national standards for non-school AP expect providers to demonstrate safe, high-quality arrangements through clear and accessible policies.

Keeping Children Safe in Education 2026 applies directly to schools and colleges. Alternative Acres aligns its safeguarding practice with relevant KCSIE principles and commissioner expectations without misrepresenting itself as a school.

3. Our approach

Alternative Acres aims to create a culture in which learners are treated with respect and feel able to tell an adult when something is wrong. Staff should model calm, respectful communication and challenge harmful behaviour rather than normalising it.

Prevention is particularly important for learners who may have experienced rejection, trauma, disrupted education, social misunderstanding or previous bullying.

4. What is bullying?

Bullying commonly involves behaviour by an individual or group that intentionally hurts another individual or group, is repeated over time and often involves an imbalance of power.

Not every conflict, argument, unkind comment or isolated incident is bullying. Such behaviour may still be unacceptable and require intervention. Staff should focus on what happened, impact, pattern, power, vulnerability and risk rather than relying only on labels.



5. Forms of bullying and peer harm

Bullying and harmful peer behaviour can occur face to face, indirectly or through technology. It may be obvious or subtle.

- Physical – hitting, pushing, kicking, damaging belongings or intimidating use of physical presence.
- Verbal – insults, threats, name-calling, humiliating comments or repeated teasing.
- Relational/social – deliberate exclusion, rumours, manipulation of friendships or encouraging others to isolate someone.
- Online – abusive messages/posts, impersonation, sharing content, exclusion, threats or coordinated harassment.
- Discriminatory – racism, sexism, homophobia, biphobia, transphobia, disablism, religious hatred or targeting another protected/perceived characteristic.
- Sexualised – sexual comments, rumours, unwanted sexualised behaviour, image-related abuse or sexual harassment.
- Coercive – controlling another learner, threats, forced actions, extortion, pressure or exploiting a power imbalance.
- Property-related – stealing, hiding, damaging or repeatedly interfering with another learner's possessions.

6. Protected characteristics and discriminatory bullying

Bullying or harassment may relate to disability, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation, gender reassignment, pregnancy/maternity or another protected characteristic. It may also target perceived characteristics or association with someone else.

Alternative Acres will challenge discriminatory language and behaviour. Working Together to Safeguard Children 2026 reinforces the importance of inclusive, anti-discriminatory cultures and challenging racism and discrimination.

7. SEND and vulnerability

Learners with SEND may be more vulnerable to bullying or may find it harder to recognise, explain or report harmful behaviour. Communication differences, social understanding, literal interpretation or previous experiences must be considered.

Staff should avoid assuming that distress, withdrawal or behavioural change is simply part of a learner's SEND. Reasonable adjustments should be made to reporting, investigation, support and restorative work.



8. Child-on-child abuse

Some behaviour described as bullying may actually be child-on-child abuse. This includes sexual violence, sexual harassment, harmful sexual behaviour, physical abuse, coercive/controlling behaviour, abuse within intimate relationships, initiation/hazing violence or exploitation.

Where safeguarding thresholds may be met, staff must follow the Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy rather than treating the matter only as a behaviour issue.

9. Sexual harassment and harmful sexual behaviour

Sexual comments, unwanted sexualised behaviour, pressure for sexual activity or images, sexualised touching, sexual rumours and technology-assisted sexual harm must not be dismissed as banter.

Reports should be taken seriously, recorded appropriately and referred to the DSL. Staff must not conduct an informal mediation between children where doing so would be unsafe or inappropriate.

10. Online and cyberbullying

Online bullying can include abusive messages, exclusion, impersonation, humiliation, threats, spreading rumours, sharing images, discriminatory abuse or encouraging others to target a learner.

Although learner phones are not routinely used during Alternative Acres sessions, online behaviour outside the provision may affect safety and wellbeing within the placement. Relevant concerns should be considered with the commissioning school/parent/carer and safeguarding agencies where necessary.

11. AI, manipulated images and impersonation

Technology-assisted peer harm may include AI-generated or manipulated images/audio, fake accounts, deepfakes or fabricated messages intended to humiliate, sexualise, threaten or isolate another person.

Where sexual imagery involving a child is reported, staff must follow safeguarding procedures and should not ask for the material to be forwarded or unnecessarily viewed/copied.

12. Bullying beyond the Alternative Acres site

A concern may arise during transport, an off-site activity, work placement, online interaction or elsewhere in the community. Alternative Acres will consider the impact on the learner and placement even where the behaviour did not originate on site.

Where another organisation is responsible for the setting, Alternative Acres will coordinate appropriately rather than assuming it has disciplinary authority over that organisation.



13. Prevention

Prevention is built into daily practice rather than relying only on responses after an incident.

- Clear expectations for respectful behaviour and language.
- High-quality supervision appropriate to 1:1, 1:2 and 1:4 placements.
- Early identification of emerging peer conflict and group dynamics.
- Individual risk assessment and information from commissioners.
- SEND-aware communication and social understanding support.
- Teaching about consent, relationships, equality, online safety and help-seeking.
- Staff modelling respectful disagreement and repair.
- Safe opportunities for learner voice and trusted-adult contact.
- Prompt challenge to discriminatory or degrading language.

14. Supervision and placement ratios

Alternative Acres' 1:1, 1:2 and 1:4 placement models allow close observation and early intervention. The commissioned ratio is a baseline and supervision may be increased where risk or group dynamics require it.

Staff should consider sight lines, transitions, animal areas, woodland, toilets/approach routes, off-site activities and other locations where peer interactions may be less visible.

15. Farm and outdoor environment

The outdoor environment offers positive opportunities for regulation and relationship-building but also creates distinctive risks. Staff must consider exclusion from activities, intimidating use of tools/equipment, interference with another learner's animal interaction, blocking routes, throwing objects or using isolated areas to frighten another learner.

Risk controls should remain proportionate and should not unnecessarily remove positive outdoor opportunities from the learner who has been harmed.

16. Recognising possible signs

Possible indicators include unexplained distress, reluctance to attend, withdrawal, changes in mood or behaviour, damaged belongings, fear of particular peers, sudden online anxiety, reduced engagement, unexplained injuries or repeated requests to avoid an activity/location.

These signs do not prove bullying. Staff should explore them sensitively and consider other safeguarding or wellbeing explanations.



17. How learners can report

Learners can tell any trusted member of Alternative Acres staff. They may speak to Rachel Archer, Inclusion & Engagement Lead, or any other staff member with whom they feel comfortable.

Reports can be verbal and do not need to be written formally. Staff should make communication accessible and should notice non-verbal indications that a learner may be struggling to disclose.

18. How parents/carers and professionals can report

Parents/carers and commissioning professionals should raise concerns promptly with Alternative Acres. Concerns may be shared verbally or in writing.

Where the concern involves immediate safeguarding risk, the safeguarding procedure takes priority over ordinary complaint handling.

19. Staff response to a report

Staff should listen calmly, take the learner seriously, avoid blame and avoid promising secrecy. The immediate priority is to establish whether anyone is unsafe and what protective action is needed.

Staff should not ask leading questions or require the learner to repeatedly recount distressing details to multiple adults.

20. Immediate safety measures

Depending on risk, staff may increase supervision, adjust activities/locations, separate learners, alter transitions, coordinate transport/handover arrangements or seek safeguarding/emergency support.

Measures should protect the learner without presenting them as being punished for reporting.

21. Recording

Safeguarding concerns, including child-on-child abuse and significant bullying with safeguarding implications, must be recorded on CPOMS. CPOMS is Alternative Acres' authoritative safeguarding record.

Routine behaviour/educational records may be used where appropriate, but staff should avoid unnecessary duplication of sensitive safeguarding information.



22. Assessment and investigation

Alternative Acres will establish the facts proportionately. This may include speaking separately with learners, reviewing records, consulting staff and considering information from parents/carers or commissioners.

Staff should consider frequency, intention, power imbalance, impact, vulnerability, SEND, discriminatory elements, coercion, group dynamics and whether behaviour may constitute abuse or a criminal offence.

23. Supporting the learner who has been harmed

Support will be individualised and may include a trusted adult, increased check-ins, changes to supervision, emotional regulation support, timetable/activity adjustments, safeguarding planning, work on confidence/assertiveness and liaison with family/commissioner.

The learner should be involved in safety planning where appropriate. They should not be required to confront or reconcile with another learner as a condition of receiving support.

24. Responding to the learner displaying harmful behaviour

Alternative Acres will address behaviour firmly but in a way that seeks to understand need, function, context and risk. Consequences alone may not reduce recurrence.

Support may include clear boundaries, teaching about impact, emotional regulation, social understanding, restorative work where safe, increased supervision, risk assessment and liaison with parents/carers/commissioner or specialist services.

25. Restorative approaches

Restorative work may be helpful when both learners are willing, there is sufficient safety and power imbalance does not make the process inappropriate.

Restorative meetings must not be used to pressure a harmed learner to forgive, minimise abuse or share responsibility for behaviour directed at them.

26. Behaviour consequences

Responses should be proportionate, individualised and consistent with the Behaviour Policy and safeguarding needs. Alternative Acres' focus is on safety, accountability, learning and reducing recurrence.

Serious or repeated harmful behaviour may require changes to risk management, placement arrangements or commissioner review.



27. Placement review and commissioner involvement

Where bullying or peer harm is persistent, serious or cannot be safely managed within the current placement, Alternative Acres will involve the commissioning school/local authority.

A placement should not be ended abruptly merely because a learner has reported being bullied. Any change must consider safeguarding, SEND, education continuity and the commissioner's responsibilities.

28. Parents/carers

Alternative Acres will communicate appropriately with parents/carers, subject to safeguarding and confidentiality considerations. Information about another learner will not be disclosed merely to demonstrate that action has been taken.

Where sharing information with a parent could increase risk to a child, the DSL should consider safeguarding advice before disclosure.

29. Police and external agencies

Some bullying behaviours may also be criminal, including violence, theft, repeated harassment/intimidation, threats or hate crime. Where criminality or serious risk is suspected, Alternative Acres will consider police and safeguarding referral.

Call 999 where there is immediate danger.

30. Staff as targets of bullying or harassment

Bullying or harassment directed at staff by learners, parents/carers, colleagues or others must also be taken seriously. DfE published specific non-statutory guidance in July 2026 for preventing and tackling bullying and harassment of school staff; while written for schools, it provides useful good-practice principles for Alternative Acres as an employer.

Staff concerns should be addressed through appropriate management, safeguarding, grievance/disciplinary, health-and-safety or police routes depending on the circumstances.

31. False or mistaken reports

A report that is not substantiated is not automatically malicious. Learners may misunderstand events, have incomplete information or find it difficult to describe experiences.

Where there is clear evidence that an allegation was deliberately fabricated to cause harm, Alternative Acres will respond proportionately while still considering the needs and circumstances of the learner.



32. Confidentiality

Information will be shared on a need-to-know basis for safeguarding, support, investigation and commissioner oversight. Staff should not discuss incidents casually or in front of other learners.

Learners should be told honestly that staff may need to share information to keep people safe.

33. Monitoring patterns

The Head of Provision and DSL should consider patterns across incidents, including repeated locations, learners, discriminatory themes, online behaviour, group dynamics and whether existing controls are effective.

Patterns should inform risk assessments, supervision, staff training, curriculum/support work and quality assurance.

34. Training

Staff should understand how to recognise and respond to bullying, discriminatory behaviour, child-on-child abuse, sexual harassment, harmful sexual behaviour and online harm.

Training and induction should reinforce that harmful behaviour must not be dismissed as banter or 'just what young people do'.

35. Related policies

Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy 2026/27; Behaviour Policy; Equality, Diversity, Inclusion and Accessibility Policy 2026/27; Online Safety and E-Safety Policy 2026/27; Mobile Phone and Smart Device Policy 2026/27; Relationships, Sex and Health Education Policy 2026/27; Supervision of Learners Policy 2026/27; Complaints and Concerns Policy 2026/27; Managing Allegations and Low-Level Concerns Policy 2026/27; SEND and Inclusion Policy 2026/27.

36. Review

This policy will be reviewed annually and sooner following a serious bullying/peer-harm incident, safeguarding learning, significant change to the provision or relevant national guidance.

37. Quick staff response guide

Learner reports bullying	Listen, establish immediate safety, reassure them the concern will be acted on and record appropriately.
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Behaviour may be child-on-child abuse	Refer promptly to DSL/Deputy DSL and follow safeguarding policy.
Sexual harassment/sexualised behaviour	Do not dismiss as banter; safeguard and record on CPOMS.
Online incident happened at home	Consider its impact/risk at Alternative Acres and coordinate with parent/commissioner/safeguarding as appropriate.
Learner with SEND struggles to explain	Use accessible communication, allow processing time and avoid leading questions.
Both learners are upset after an argument	Establish facts; do not automatically label it bullying, but address harmful behaviour.
Repeated pattern/power imbalance	Treat as potential bullying and review supervision/risk/support.
Harmed learner does not want mediation	Do not force restorative work.
Possible crime or immediate danger	Seek safeguarding/police support; call 999 for immediate danger.
Concern about bullying of staff	Use appropriate management, H&S, safeguarding, grievance/disciplinary or police route.