



RELATIONSHIPS AND COMMUNICATION POLICY

(inc. statement of behaviour principles)

Responsible:	Senior Deputy Headteacher
Status:	Statutory
Date reviewed:	Spring 2026
Next review Date:	Spring 2027

The aims of this policy and our approach

Malden Oaks creates a safe and purposeful learning environment across our provisions that understands behaviour as a communication and seeks to provide students with the appropriate tools and support to reach their full potential. This policy explains how our key beliefs inform how we understand and respond to 'behaviour' and the impact this has on our day to day practice.

Our values and beliefs

Malden Oaks delivers specialist education to students with Social, Emotional & Mental Health (SEMH) needs through an attachment aware trauma informed environment. It is integral there are positive relationships between our students, their peers, and staff and understanding the way they communicate is crucial to this. Consequently, behaviour is considered a communication of need and an indication that the student's needs are not being adequately met or that the provision being offered needs to be altered to better meet the needs of the student. Across our provisions, Malden Oaks adopts The 4 As Ethos which seeks to build students' resilience through enabling them to experience Attachment, Achievement, Altruism and Autonomy.

Malden Oaks does not have a Behaviour & Anti Bullying Policy, but a Relationships & Communication Policy. The title and approach to this policy has been changed to accurately reflect the following:

- We know that we work best with our students when we take the time to invest in positive relationships with them. This also supports us to create a safe and purposeful environment.
- We believe in the importance of fresh starts; from minute to minute, lesson to lesson, and day to day.
- We believe in the power of 'not yet'. All staff adopt a growth mindset attitude, have no fixed ideas around a student's potential and have high expectations of all our students.
- We believe in choosing the language we use carefully. We focus on what students can do and do not use limiting or judgemental language. We always describe the behaviour or need and not the child.
- We encourage our students to do things for the inherent benefits they bring, not for arbitrary rewards.
- We recognise and celebrate achievements retrospectively.
- We understand that sanctions do not work for our students and so do not use them. We want students to leave us at the end of their placement able to make the right choices and to take responsibility for their actions. This means that they need to take charge of their own actions, not rely on externally imposed controls.
- We turn difficult situations into learning opportunities through our use of emotion coaching. This means every interaction can be an intervention.
- We model expected communication methods to support our students in being able to express themselves appropriately and effectively.

Malden Oaks completed Achieving for Children's Virtual School's Attachment Aware Award in 2021. Our approach is attachment aware and trauma informed and staff use emotion coaching to support our students' emotional development alongside their more traditional academic development. We have also met the [AcSEED criteria](#) for accreditation in recognition of our commitment to wellbeing and mental health which is also reflected through this policy.

A team approach

Effective support for students is underpinned by shared expectations and communication between teachers and parents/carers. Staff contact parents/carers regularly and we ask them to inform us about matters which might impact on students at school. We know from experience that students' experience at Malden Oaks is more positive if there is a healthy working relationship between home and school.

All teachers work towards creating an attachment aware and trauma informed environment. All teaching staff will:

- Build positive, effective relationships with their students
- Model appropriate ways of communicating and interacting with others
- Support students through emotion coaching
- View behaviour as a communication of need
- Describe the way a student is presenting, not label them
- Understand the needs and interests of their students
- Provide advice and support to their students in a manner accessible to them
- Have high expectations of their students
- Offer a fresh start every day/ every lesson/ every moment.

What this means for our practice

We believe that unconditional care and respect underpin everything that we do. Not only is every day a fresh start, but every lesson and every section within a lesson. Our teachers care passionately about every student, regardless of the behaviour that student displays, and always have high expectations. Our staff understand that behaviour is a form of communication and so their response will seek to understand what the student needs.

Staff have also undertaken training to understand the psychological impact of attachment difficulties; that students may sometimes project or displace their negative feelings onto them unconsciously if they feel threatened or defensive. Staff understand that the way many of our students may communicate towards them in the early stages, whilst a relationship is being built, is not personal. Staff are encouraged to ensure they look after their own wellbeing so as to be able to more effectively support our students.

Students are encouraged to aim high on a day-to-day basis and in their future aspirations. Their engagement in lessons can be uneven but they are expected to attend all their lessons even if they are unable to participate. They will often decide to join in with a discussion or a task during a lesson even if they were not able to at the outset.

Our extensive experience of students with SEMH needs means that we have a thorough understanding of what works. We consistently implement clear and understood boundaries, but these are simple and few in number so that time and energy is not expended on unnecessary conflict. Our key principles, and the reasons for them, are communicated to students upon arrival and reinforced during the induction period.

The two key 'rules' are:

- Being in the right place at the right time
- Treating all members of the school community with respect

By ensuring that all students follow these rules, we create a safe and happy environment for everyone to learn and work in.

Awards vs Rewards

We want to support our students to develop their sense of personal responsibility and to better understand why they should or should not do something. In order to achieve this, we do not operate complicated rewards and sanctions systems which can be a means of manipulating behaviour through external control. Nor do we seek to incentivise children with rewards or tokens, vouchers or money as this would undermine their personal responsibility.

This means that we do not hold detentions or isolations. Many students with SEMH needs have experienced the negative cycle of detentions and exclusions. These have not led to the desired outcome because the reasons for the behaviour, the need they were communicating, was not addressed. Complicated punishment systems communicate low expectations. In a sanction-based system, whenever a student fails to complete a sanction, there needs to be another sanction imposed, and then another. These frequently ultimately end in exclusions, which are proven to limit students' life chances and negatively impact on their outcomes.

We do not exclude students from enrichment activities and educational visits because we value every learning opportunity equally and for its own sake, whether it be maths, geography, football, cycling, cooking, or a visit to the zoo. Visits are not 'treats' they are learning experiences. All students will have access to all opportunities. This is an integral part of our commitment to the Equality Act 2010. The only reason a student might not be able to access a specific learning opportunity would be if there were serious health and

safety concerns. For example, a student might not be able to take part in catering lessons on a temporary basis if they were struggling to use knives safely. They would need to undertake an individual intervention designed to teach them how and why to use sharp implements safely, then they would be able to participate in the group lesson.

Awards are intrinsically different from *rewards*. Awards are granted after the event. They are given to recognise and celebrate success and achievement and are not what the student is working towards. We frequently use awards to recognise the efforts and achievements of our students. Examples of these are:

- Stickers for demonstrating one of the 4As (Altruism, Achievement, Autonomy and Attachment).
- Certificates for good or improved attendance, or high numbers of achievement points.
- Postcards home to report specific positive aspects of students' progress.
- Milestones to recognise specific personal achievements, progress made or difficulties overcome.
- Student of the Week certificates for students nominated by their teachers at the end of the week to praise a student for progress and achievement.
- The Jack Petchey Achievement Award for students nominated by their peers for reasons determined by their peers e.g being welcoming to new students, making good progress in a particular subject, being kind at lunch etc. Students then receive a badge and certificate and £250 to spend on equipment or a learning experience.
- The Duke of Edinburgh Award Students attending the KS4 and 6 Oaks sites are automatically enrolled on this scheme starting with the Bronze Award (KS4) or Silver Award (KS5) and progressing at their own pace. A DofE award can take a number of months or years to achieve and so knowing that our students will need more frequent recognition than this, we award certificates for each individual section that is completed. Tuition students are also able to sign up to the DofE Award.
- The AQA Unit Award Scheme enables students to receive official AQA awards, which communicate status, as the design resembles that of GCSE certificates. However, the awards can be gained by students of all ages and for very small units of work. They are therefore ideal for giving students feedback about their efforts and achievements in a timely fashion.

Detentions, Exclusions, & Suspensions

Malden Oaks does not issue detentions or exclude our students. We do not believe that there are any benefits to exclusion, particularly for our students who have often experienced feelings of rejection from previous education settings. It is part of a

punitive model that we do not subscribe to. If a student acts in a way that threatens the safety and wellbeing of others then we will adopt a two-fold approach.

(1) We will work with that student and, if appropriate, their family and other agencies, to address the underlying causes of the behaviour. This may include one or more of the following (this list is not exhaustive): EP consultation, specialist teacher input, SENCo involvement, additional PSHE lessons, support worker sessions.

(2) Whilst this work is in progress it may be necessary to adjust the student's provision so that it can be delivered in a safe way. This may involve 1:1 tuition at a separate time and/or place to others, including some online delivery if this will enable greater curriculum continuity.

Homework

Malden Oaks seeks to create a safe, purposeful and non confrontational environment for our students to learn in. In recognition of the intense nature of learning in small groups homework is only given to students who request it and consequently, any conflict arising due to missing homework is avoided, ensuring positive relationships can be maintained.

Dress Codes

Whilst students are expected to dress appropriately for their learning activity, we do not have a school uniform. There are many reasons for this:

1. We believe our students should be free to express themselves and their identities through the way they choose to dress.
2. Some of our students are with us for a very short time and so it is unfair to expect them to purchase a uniform.
3. We are preparing students for the next step of their education and/or training, when they will need to select their own appropriate clothing. The same applies to jewellery, make-up and hairstyles.
4. At Malden Oaks, learning is not only confined to a traditional classroom and so a formal uniform would be inappropriate for much of our curriculum.

We have also signed up to [The Halo Code](#) as we are proactively taking a stand to ensure that no member of their community faces barriers or judgments because of their Afro-textured hair.

Mobile phones

We are working towards creating a phone free environment for our students. Those aged between 11-16 are expected to hand them in so they are able to learn without the distraction phones can provide.

Bullying

The Anti-Bullying Alliance and its members have an agreed shared definition of bullying based on research from across the world over the last 30 years:

“The repetitive, intentional hurting of one person or group by another person or group, where the relationship involves an imbalance of power. Bullying can be physical, verbal or psychological. It can happen face-to-face or online.”

Bullying behaviour is not tolerated at our school.

Bullying can take many forms:

- **Physical** – pushing, poking, kicking, hitting, biting, pinching etc.
- **Verbal** – name calling, sarcasm, spreading rumours, threats, teasing, belittling.
- **Emotional** – isolating others, tormenting, hiding books, threatening gestures, ridicule, humiliation, intimidating, excluding, manipulation and coercion.
- **Sexual** – unwanted physical contact, inappropriate touching, abusive comments, homophobic abuse, exposure to inappropriate films etc.
- **Online /cyber** – posting on social media, sharing photos, sending nasty text messages, social exclusion
- **Indirect** – Can include the exploitation of individuals.

Anyone can be bullied but some groups are more likely to experience bullying. Some further information can be found at the links below:

- [Appearance-targeted bullying](#)
- [Looked after children and bullying](#)
- [Race](#)
- [Faith](#)
- [SexDisability](#)
- [Young carers and bullying](#)
- [Identity-based bullying](#)
- [Sexual Orientation](#)
- [Gender Identity](#)

Preventing Bullying

Through various parts of the curriculum, such as PSHE, Citizenship, Geography, and History, students are taught about British Values, diverse communities, and those with needs different to their own. Students are taught the importance of being open minded and respectful to those with differing opinions and an inclusive culture is created across all sites.

Students learn about mental health and the importance of looking after your own and being mindful of the impact you could have on someone else's.

Online safety and responsibility is taught through PSHE lessons. Students are taught about how to communicate and conduct themselves appropriately and responsibly online. Through work around the Acceptable Use Agreement document for school computers,

students learn how what they share online can be traced. This piece of work is completed during the induction period. During PSHE, students explore what healthy relationships look like, and rehearse appropriate responses by practising scenarios. Tutor time offers further opportunities to discuss concerns for students attending one of our sites, and these types of conversations may take place more organically in 1:1 sessions for those learning offsite.

These strands of the curriculum arm students with the knowledge and understanding of the importance of treating those around them in the way they would wish to be treated, and the impact for not doing this.

Staff model respect and appropriate interactions through their behaviour, use of language, and interactions with students and colleagues. Their openness and lack of prejudice for all communicate that narrow minds and bullying behaviour is not expected at Malden Oaks or anywhere else. All staff complete training on bullying and associated topics.

Our approach to bullying, as with anything, is very much in keeping with the Malden Oaks's ethos of creating an environment that allows our students to feel safe and be successful. We believe that it is better to prepare in advance and reduce any potential scenarios where this could take place, rather than try to resolve any conflict after the event.

Responding to bullying

Students are supervised at all times and relationships between staff and students encourage the disclosure of any issue that might impact on well-being.

Any disclosures relating to bullying or observations of behaviour that cause concern are investigated fully and immediately. In the first instance the form tutor will talk to students, and if necessary, follow up with the Head of School. Sometimes a referral might be made in line with our Safeguarding Policy if there are concerns about a student's safety or wellbeing.

Incidents that happen off site can impact on the attendance and wellbeing of students. We will try to ensure that students are able to pursue their education regardless of conflicts that might exist elsewhere. Sometimes this may involve staggered arrival/departure times and/or students are accompanied on and off the site. Parents/carers are involved throughout.

All bullying incidents are recorded and regularly reviewed in line with our Safeguarding Policy. Students are also able to raise their own concerns, anonymously if they wish, through the school website, [here](#).

Peer on Peer Abuse

We recognise that children are capable of abusing their peers. Abuse will never be tolerated or passed off as “banter”, “just having a laugh” or “part of growing up”, as this can lead to a culture of unacceptable behaviours and an unsafe environment for students. We also recognise the gendered nature of child-on-child abuse. All child-on-child abuse is unacceptable and will be taken seriously.

Peer on peer abuse includes all allegations that raise safeguarding concerns. This might include where the alleged behaviour:

- Could put students in the school at risk
- Is violent
- Involves students being forced to use drugs or alcohol
- Involves sexual exploitation, sexual abuse, or sexual harassment, such as indecent exposure, sexual assault, upskirting or sexually inappropriate pictures or videos (including the sharing of nudes and semi-nudes)
- Any other allegations of a serious nature, including any behaviour that is potentially criminal

Power to use reasonable force & de-escalation

Whilst members of staff have the power to use reasonable force to prevent students committing an offence, injuring themselves or others, or damaging property, we always try to de-escalate situations to avoid the use of restraint. All staff are trained in safe techniques for restraining students where this is unavoidable.

Searching

We are fully aware of the current advice in relation to searching students on site. Malden Oaks staff will always assess the situation and encourage students to cooperate with any search required. In instances where students are unable to cooperate, the police may be called if the item being searched for may be related to a criminal offence. In all instances, the need to recover the item you are searching for must be greater than the need to protect the child’s wellbeing from the impact of being searched as they can find this emotionally taxing. For example if you suspect they have a knife and therefore might harm themselves or others.

Police involvement

We work in partnership with the Police. If it is essential that the police come onto site to talk to a student, we will alert parents/carers unless we have been told not to. Students who are being spoken to by police officers will have an appropriate adult with them.

We recognise that for many students, interactions with the police are fundamentally negative, challenging, and may cause anxiety. Our staff will support students in any interaction with the police, to ensure their safety and dignity is protected.

Issues outside of school

When there are incidents outside school that have repercussions in school we will work with external agencies to resolve them. However, we are also mindful that students may present a more positive persona within school and so we will not unnecessarily allude to or discuss out of school incidents or disagreements between students.

This policy should be read alongside the following Malden Oaks policies:

- Safeguarding & Child Protection
- Relationships & Sex Education

The most up to date versions of these policies can be found here:

[Malden Oaks School & Tuition Service - Policies](#)

Legislative links

- [Education Act 1996](#)
- [School Standards and Framework Act 1998](#)
- [Education Act 2002](#)
- [Education and Inspections Act 2006](#)
- [School Information \(England\) Regulations 2008](#)
- [Equality Act 2010](#)
- [Education Act 2011 Schools \(Specification and Disposal of Articles\) Regulations 2012](#)

Associated resources

[Use of reasonable force in schools - GOV.UK](#)

[Searching, screening and confiscation at school - GOV.UK](#)

[School suspensions and permanent exclusions - GOV.UK](#)

[Keeping children safe in education - GOV.UK](#)

[SEND code of practice: 0 to 25 years - GOV.UK](#)

Statement of Behaviour Principles

At Malden Oaks we aim to create a positive atmosphere where all students feel safe, supported and able to learn. We create attachment aware, trauma informed therapeutic environments that are safe, inclusive and emotionally intelligent. Our approach is informed by our 4As ethos; that we can build resilience through ensuring our students develop a sense of attachment, enjoy achievement, are given the opportunity to be altruistic and are allowed to be autonomous. We achieve this through the following key principles and beliefs:

- Behaviour is a communication of need.
- We operate under the 4As. They are Attachment, Altruism, Achievement and Autonomy. This means that we can build resilience through ensuring our students develop a sense of attachment, enjoy achievement, are given the opportunity to be altruistic and are allowed to be autonomous.
- Rewards & sanctions are externally imposed controls which seek to manipulate behaviour. We want our students to be autonomous and so:
 - We don't use any sanctions. This includes detentions and exclusions
 - We do not operate any rewards system. We do however recognise and celebrate achievement and progress. We do this through internal certificates and external schemes such as the AQA Unit Award Scheme and the Duke of Edinburgh Award.
- We recognise and understand that everyone makes mistakes but we ensure that every day is a fresh start, with high expectations of what can be achieved on that day. We do not carry difficulties forward.
- We aim to establish and maintain positive relationships between all members of our community, so that there is a safe, purposeful atmosphere.
- Incidents will be resolved internally wherever possible. It may be that the support of parents and/or other professionals is enlisted to resolve more complex matters.
- We do not have a school uniform. This is partly because our students are with us for varying lengths of time and partly because we are preparing students for the next step of their education and/or training, when they will need to select their own appropriate clothing. The same applies to jewellery, make-up and hairstyles. We support our students being able to express themselves through how they choose to present.
- Our school belongs to our students and to this end we will encourage students to be active participants in creating a safe, calm learning environment.