

Dear Parents

Strong protecting the weak

I spoke to the boys in chapel about the need for the strong to protect the weak. I focused on two areas; firstly, that as men they are to protect women and children (and that is why it is such a terrible thing when men abuse women and children) and, secondly, that in our school the stronger boys should use their strength to protect those who are perceived to be weaker. Seniors should be protecting juniors and, even within grades, the strong boys (physically or mentally) should protect the weaker ones. When I was at school we had an interesting “parable” of this because at night time many of the senior boys would draw rifles (.303) and ammunition from their housemasters and sleep with the rifles next to their beds. The plan was that if we were attacked the senior boys would go upstairs with their rifles and protect the Houses from windows while the little boys would take cover in “safe rooms”. The strong were to protect the weak. (Fortunately no senior ever had to fire a shot in anger at school.)

It is hard to stop bullying in schools. Young people are jostling for position, recognition etc and in the process people can get hurt – usually emotionally. However, we are trying to lessen this at Bishops and it is not acceptable to us that boys should be abused in any way and certainly not on any on-going basis. I hope your son is happy at Bishops but, if your son is struggling and you think that bullying has anything to do with it, it is important that you engage with him and then with us and that, together, we do our best to ensure that your son is safe. Sometimes this will mean tackling other boys. Sometimes it will mean teaching your son the skills he needs to cope with difficult or unkind people. Often it is a combination of both. You may like to talk to your son about how he treats others and what you expect of him.

Most of the bullying we have known has happened between boys in the younger grades. We need to encourage our sons to be gentle. They need to see that men can be very strong (even tough) but gentle at the same time – aware of the feelings of others.

Bullying has certainly decreased significantly at Bishops over the last 10 years or so as shown by two almost identically structured polls done in 2002 and 2011. However, we cannot ever be content with any level of bullying and so we all need to work together to make the College a community of gentlemen, in the best sense of the title.

One of the keys to reducing bullying in a school is to convince good boys to be strong enough to stand up for what is right and so oppose bullying when they see it. I hope you would want your son to be this sort of young man. Teachers cannot be everywhere. We rely on boys with good values to make a difference.

Yours sincerely

Peter Westwood
(Deputy Headmaster Pastoral)