

# No place for bullying

## How schools create a positive culture and prevent and tackle bullying



A wide range of research suggests that bullying is a problem for many young people. Almost half of the pupils surveyed had felt picked on or bullied at some point while at their current school. The best schools promoted strong, inclusive values and spelt out how pupils should interact with each other. Pupils developed empathy, respect for individual differences and a good understanding of the impact of their behaviour on others.

The aim of this survey was to evaluate the effectiveness of the actions that schools take to create a positive school culture and to prevent and tackle bullying. A large part of the survey focused on pupils' own experiences and understanding of bullying and its effects.

We talked to pupils about:

- what they thought they should do if they were bullied in school
- whether they had been bullied while at their current school
- how well they thought the school dealt with bullying
- what they understood about discriminatory and derogatory language.

To gather evidence for this survey we visited 37 primary schools and 19 secondary schools. We met with 1,357 pupils, of whom 1060 completed a questionnaire about their experiences; and 797 staff.

We also spoke to pupils informally around the school and looked at a range of documentation. We then visited another nine schools to gather more detailed information about how they had tackled homophobic bullying and the bullying of disabled people.

### What practice looked like in the best schools

- The culture and ethos in the school were very positive and based on a set of strong, inclusive values.
- The schools' expectations and rules clearly spelled out how pupils should interact with each other and respect for individual differences had a high profile.
- Pupils had empathy, understood the effect that bullying could have on people, and took responsibility for trying to prevent bullying.
- The curriculum in these schools helped a great deal to bring about these positive attitudes because it gave pupils a wide range of opportunities to develop their knowledge and understanding of diversity and an assortment of strategies to protect themselves from bullying.
- These schools recorded bullying incidents carefully and analysed them to look for trends and patterns. They then used this information to plan the next steps.
- The action they took was firm and often imaginative. If pupils had been bullied then they felt very confident that action was taken and it stopped promptly.

- Training for staff had a high profile and was carefully planned, regular and relevant. The staff were very knowledgeable about the different forms of bullying and were confident about how to tackle different forms of discrimination.
- Governors were well informed and questioning about bullying.

## Pupils' experiences

Almost half of the pupils surveyed had felt picked on or bullied at some point while at their current school. Incidents related to friendship issues, personal appearance, family circumstances, sexuality, race, religion, ability, being seen as clever or good at something, disability or a combination of these aspects. One secondary-aged pupil felt that she had been bullied 'basically for being me'. Seventy five percent of questionnaire respondents in primary schools and 83% in secondary schools thought that bullying would stop if it was reported to an adult in the school.

Pupils in all of the schools could give a range of examples of disparaging language that they heard in school. This was related to perceived ability, race, religion, sexuality, appearance or family circumstances. Homophobic language was frequently mentioned. In contrast, staff often said that they did not hear any of this type of language in a typical week. Few schools had a clear stance on the use of language or the boundaries between banter and behaviour that makes people feel threatened or hurt.

In the schools with the best practice, the pupils believed that behaviour was positive in their schools. They had a high level of awareness of the impact that their behaviour could have on others and empathetic attitudes towards their peers. They had been taught how to resolve issues when they occurred. Some of the pupils had experienced bullying at some point in their school careers, but they showed a high level of confidence in the

school's willingness and ability to resolve bullying issues as soon as they occurred.

The strongest schools taught pupils carefully about the difference between 'banter' and language that was derogatory or discriminatory, for example homophobic language. Pupils understood that such behaviour 'hurts people's feelings'; 'it makes them feel upset and angry'; 'everyone is different and has different talents'; 'it does not fit in with our golden rules'; 'everyone is unique'. In one school pupils spoke confidently about how they had been taught to understand when 'banter is going too far and you are crossing a line'.

## A culture of mutual respect

To achieve a culture of mutual respect and minimise bullying, the report recommends that schools:

- have a set of clear, inclusive values that are understood and lived by all members of the school community
- have a behaviour policy that is explicit about the way in which pupils should treat each other and the messages are consistently reiterated and reinforced
- ensure staff consistently model positive behaviour in their interactions with each other, with parents and carers, and with pupils
- ensure pupils and staff understand the importance of using inclusive and non-derogatory language
- help pupils to understand the difference between banter and interactions that can threaten or hurt
- provide appropriate and regular training to give all staff the knowledge, skills and confidence to teach pupils about diversity and the effects of bullying
- ensure staff consistently and firmly challenge inappropriate interactions, including prejudice-based and aggressive language.

*No place for bullying: how schools create a positive culture and prevent and tackle bullying* contains further details and case studies of effective practice.

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