Tackling bullying in schools

A survey of effective practice
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- primary schools;
- secondary schools;
- special schools;
- pupil referral units;
- independent schools;
- further education;
- adult community-based learning;
- youth support services;
- LEAs;
- teacher education and training;
- work-based learning;
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Contents</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The survey</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Main findings</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recommendations</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What is bullying?</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The effects of bullying</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preventative measures to combat bullying</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Effective practices in schools</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dealing with bullies</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working with parents</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LEA support</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
1 Bullying is aggressive or insulting behaviour by an individual or group, often repeated over a period of time, that intentionally hurts or harms. Research shows that bullying can have a destructive impact on the lives of young people. For some, it can have long term effects causing distress and damage to social and emotional development.

2 The Welsh Assembly Government has issued guidance on tackling bullying to all schools. The guidance, called ‘Respecting Others (Welsh Assembly Government 2003)’, contains a number of practical ideas for preventing and dealing with incidents of bullying and advice on developing a school anti-bullying policy. The purpose of the guidance is to help schools, local education authorities (LEAs) and parents tackle bullying effectively.

3 The Welsh Assembly Government asked Estyn to carry out inspection work to identify case studies of good practice in schools and LEAs in Wales in order to exemplify effective strategies used by schools and LEAs to address the issue of bullying.
The survey

4 Schools are required to have anti-bullying policies outlining what actions the school will take to reduce the frequency of bullying and deal with incidents.

5 This survey, based on visits by Her Majesty’s Inspectors (HMI) to LEAs and schools in 2005, focuses on strategies to reduce incidents of bullying, to support victims and to deal with bullies.

6 Inspectors visited a range of different types of schools, including infant, primary, junior schools, comprehensive and special schools. The schools selected for visits in eight LEAs represent a range of different types of areas, including large urban authorities, others of a rural nature, valley communities and those whose medium is Welsh.

7 Estyn’s school inspection database allowed the team to identify schools that have effective anti-bullying procedures in place. Closer inspection of the procedures in the selected schools led to analysis of the factors that contribute to good practice in preventing or dealing with bullying.

8 LEAs also identified schools that were pro-active in addressing the issue of bullying; had good, clear policies for combating bullying; and, more importantly, where policies were embedded in the daily practices of the school.
Main findings

9 Best practice occurs where positive leadership promotes a strong ethos of respect for all members of the school community, including respect for difference and diversity.

10 Best practice also occurs where:

- schools deploy staff to ensure that opportunities for bullying and other types of oppressive behaviours are kept to a minimum;

- all teaching and non teaching staff share the responsibility of ensuring that the school is a safe place;

- school staff themselves do not use bullying strategies, such as sarcasm or derogatory names or nicknames, in dealing with pupils;

- school staff regularly consult pupils about bullying and other issues; and

- pupils feel confident that their views and concerns are listened to by adults and will be dealt with effectively.

11 The most effective schools include voluntary and community organisations and groups to make their school safe. All adults in these schools, including the staff, parents and transport companies work and plan together to make the school a safer place. Members of local communities, police and voluntary organisations work with effective schools to ensure that pupils are safe, both whilst on school premises and also whilst travelling to and from the school.

12 In the most effective schools:

- pupils communicate their concerns through a range of well-developed strategies that become part of school life, such as ‘suggestion’ boxes where pupils can indicate their concerns anonymously on a range of issues, including bullying, if need be;

- advocacy services encourage pupils to talk about their concerns with outside providers; and

- careful records of incidents of bullying, their frequency and severity identify where and when pupils are most vulnerable and inform policy and practice.

13 The most effective Local Education Authorities (LEAs) recognise the importance of taking a wide view of the issues surrounding bullying. These authorities co-ordinate training and advice to schools, including support from voluntary agencies. A number of LEAs produce good information for pupils.

14 A number of LEAs designate officers to co-ordinate the approach to bullying issues across schools. These officers may be teachers seconded from their schools,
advisory teachers for personal and social education, or members of the educational psychology service. Having a designated officer sends a clear message that the LEA takes the issue seriously and has a strategic vision for supporting and improving school practice.
Tackling bullying in schools
A survey of effective practice

**Recommendations**

15 There are a number of ways in which schools and LEAs can improve what they do to prevent bullying and respond effectively when bullying does occur.

16 Schools should:

R1 provide a clear definition to pupils and parents of what bullying is and why it is unacceptable;

R2 consult with staff, pupils, parents and other interested groups on strategies for reducing incidents of bullying;

R3 on the basis of this consultation, draw up an anti-bullying policy that meets the needs of the school and is reviewed periodically;

R4 create an environment where pupils feel able to talk openly about a range of concerns;

R5 audit school routines on a regular basis so as to keep to a minimum the places and times where pupils may be vulnerable to bullying;

R6 use the curriculum to support the anti-bullying message;

R7 promote issues relating to diversity in a positive light;

R8 make training available to adults who supervise groups of pupils;

R9 record incidents of bullying carefully and use this data to inform policy and practice;

R10 work closely with their LEA in order to develop a range of expertise and resources; and

R11 introduce some of the ‘good practice’ strategies and tactics from the case studies in this report.

17 LEAs should:

R12 provide clear leadership and practical support for schools in developing their anti-bullying strategies;

R13 provide school staff, and other adults, with good training in promoting safe schools; and

R14 liaise with agencies from the voluntary sector and use their expertise to formulate comprehensive anti-bullying strategies.
What is bullying?

18 Bullying can take many different forms. Bullies can call their victims names or use other types of verbal bullying, such as by spreading malicious rumours. Some groups exclude victims and ‘send them to Coventry’.

19 The most common perception of bullying is one that involves some kind of physical threat or assault. At the most extreme end of physical bullying, the victim can suffer criminal assaults causing actual bodily harm. Other types of physical bullying can be more subtle, such as pushing and jostling in crowded school corridors.

20 Research shows that it is more usual for boys to become involved in acts of physical aggression than girls. Girls are more likely to bully in less physical ways, such as by spreading rumours or manipulating social networks. The most common type of bullying for all pupils is name-calling and teasing in an unpleasant way.

21 Research shows that the number of pupils who report being bullied decreases with age, as does the use of physical violence.

22 The use of modern technologies as a tool for bullying is increasing. An increasing body of evidence suggests that bullies are using text messages, email, photo clips and internet web sites. Electronic bullying makes it easier to harass others anonymously. This form of bullying can invade every area of the victims’ lives, so that they feel that nowhere is safe.

23 Pupils can become victims of bullying for a variety of reasons. Young people are victimised because they differ from the accepted norm. This sort of bullying may focus on size and body shape, dress, mannerisms and on prowess, or the lack of it, in sport, learning or other activities. Bullying can occur because of differences in nationality, culture or religion or a mixture of any of these. Sometimes, there may be no apparent reason for an individual or a group victimising a young person.

24 At other times, the bullying may focus on sexual attractiveness or a person’s sexuality. A small number of schools and LEAs recognise this and incorporate appropriate advice and information on homophobia in their anti-bullying policies and schemes of work for PSE.

25 Bullies may act alone or in groups. Sometimes, there are groups of onlookers whose tacit acceptance is part of the problem.

26 There is no common shared definition of what constitutes an act of bullying. Some agencies would not class a one-off act of physical confrontation between two young people of the same age and stature as bullying. For these agencies, bullying is behaviour that happens repeatedly over a period of time. Other agencies might treat a single act as bullying. The lack of an agreed definition makes it difficult to gather reliable data about the prevalence of bullying. In order to avoid any misunderstanding, a number of schools have developed their own working definition of bullying and have shared this with pupils and parents. The Sheffield Bullying
Project gives a useful definition of bullying in language that most children would understand:

| Someone is being bullied, or picked on, when another young person or group of young people says nasty things to him or her. It is also bullying when a young person is hit, kicked, threatened, locked inside a room, sent nasty notes, when no one ever talks to them and things like that. These things can happen frequently and it is difficult for the young person being bullied to defend him or herself. It is also bullying when a young person is teased repeatedly in a nasty way. But it is not bullying when two young people of about the same strength quarrel. Adapted from DES Sheffield Bullying Project (1991). |

Research indicates that bullying in schools is far more widespread than many adults think. Most bullying in schools takes place away from the eyes of adults. Most victims are reluctant to report bullying, fearing that doing so will make matters worse. One Welsh LEA carried out a survey of bullying in its schools in 2004 and found that 8% of year 4 pupils and 6.5% of year 8 pupils reported being bullied once a week or more often. Twenty-four per cent of year 4 pupils and 14.5% of year 8 pupils reported being bullied at some time. These figures are generally in line with research findings from various other studies throughout Britain.
Bullying can affect the victim in many ways. For some, the effects are short term and the victims continue their education with few ill effects. For many victims of bullying, however, the effects are long lasting and can impact on the life of the victim well into adulthood. On rare, but well publicised occasions, the effects can be so traumatising that they may result in extreme actions by the victim.

Research indicates that some of the common effects of bullying can be:

- anxiety and depression that can lead to intermittent and long-term absence from school because of physical illness or psychosomatic complaints;
- poor self-esteem which inhibits pupils from forming positive relationships, and causes some to lower their expectations and standards of work; and
- withdrawal, which may lead to low participation in school and other activities, and may lead to isolation or self-harm.

Bullying has also been identified as one of the main factors associated with suicidal behaviour in adolescence.
Preventative measures to combat bullying

31 The schools surveyed have taken effective measures in order to reduce the incidence of bullying. These schools ensure that, as far as possible, that they are safe places in which to learn.

32 Multi-agency teams and working parties that focus on the issue of bullying and share expertise have been effective. As well as school representatives, these groups often include a range of members from the LEA advisory service, the psychology service, behaviour support and school governor groups. Increasingly, representatives from the wider community and the voluntary sectors play a role on these bodies. These may include the police, representatives from social services departments, children’s charities and community groups.

33 Websites and telephone call helplines for victims of bullying allow children to speak about their concerns and they also publicise the support they offer. ‘Childline’ receives more calls from young people about bullying than any other subject. Organisations like ‘Childline’ provide a valuable resource for young people who feel that there is no one to whom they can talk.

34 A number of voluntary organisations have provided advice and training for schools and young people in strategies to combat bullying, such as the ‘Childline’ CHIPS programme that trains young people to become peer mentors.

35 Some pupils have been involved in drama productions performed to audiences of young people in order to raise the profile of anti-bullying initiatives, as is described in the following case study.

Good practice 1: A mid Wales high school

One school produced a drama to reinforce to pupils the message of ‘telling someone’ about bullying and to help explain the school’s anti-bullying policy. A member of staff wrote the play and the actors were year 9 pupils with experience of either perpetrating or being the victims of bullying. The play shared with the audience the experiences of pupils who were bullied and it also explored the circumstances of pupils who were themselves bullies. All high schools in the local authority and the feeder primary schools were invited to send pupils to see the drama.

36 Research evidence shows that anti-bullying strategies can reduce the incidence significantly if they are effectively implemented by schools. There is some evidence to suggest that these strategies are most effective in reducing bullying amongst boys, who are more likely to bully than girls.
Effective practices in schools

37 Whatever good practice takes place outside schools, it is what happens inside individual schools that really makes the difference.

38 One of the common factors for all schools in the survey is the recognition that bullying happens in all schools. These schools are willing to talk openly about this and other challenging issues. The case study below exemplifies good practice being open with pupils.

Good practice 2: A mid Wales high school

An insert in the pupils’ daily planners reminds pupils of what to do if they experience bullying, and offers the following advice:

Don’t ever think that telling someone will make things worse. It doesn’t. If it was to continue after the bully or bullies have been warned then there would be very serious consequences. The bully/bullies could face the prospect of explaining their actions to an anti-bullying panel consisting of the headteacher, the head of year and a representative of the governors. Their parents would also be expected to accompany them. If you find yourself caught up in bullying and you don’t know how to get out of it or you know that someone is being bullied then please see the deputy headteacher.

39 Effective schools ensure that:

- pupils are actively involved in the process of making their school safer and acknowledge that, in order for any strategies to be successful, pupils need to be involved;

- anti-bullying strategies involve pupils in both the development and implementation of the policy. Pupils take an active role in ensuring that the school is a safe environment for all;

- effective policies and practices impact in a positive way on the day to day life of the school;

- staff and pupils regularly review their policies to ensure that everybody understands them;

- policies not only concentrate on what the school can do to prevent bullying but acknowledge that it will sometimes take place;

- policies state clearly what their response will be when bullying happens;

- they have systems for regularly reviewing the areas of the buildings where bullying may occur and the times of the day when children may be most
Tackling bullying in schools
A survey of effective practice

vulnerable. These schools ensure that staff are present in these areas and at these times to ensure that opportunities for bullying are minimised;

- staff arrive on time for lessons ensuring that pupils are not left unsupervised, either in classrooms or on corridors;

- the responses of the staff to the pupils are consistent, whether through informal discussions, or through the formal route of teaching or assemblies;

- pupils are encouraged to talk openly about a range of issues that may worry them and staff make time to listen;

- the school council is active in the life of the school. The school council is viewed as a valuable way to make the voices of the pupils heard; and

- all members of the school community, including all the adults who work at the school, whatever their role may be, as well as the pupils, are aware of the procedures in place and work together in order to ensure that the procedures work.

40 The case study below shows how one high school states its policy clearly so that everyone is aware of the issues:

**Good practice 3: A mid Wales high school**

One high school has an anti-bullying policy that provides staff, pupils and parents with some useful clarification of bullying and contains the following statements to reflect the ethos of the school:

- All bullying is unacceptable as are the excuses given to justify it.

- The school cannot win the confidence of its pupils and their parents if it fails to deal with bullying.

- Providing all those involved follow the procedures bullying can always be stopped.

41 A number of schools in the survey acknowledge that pupils can be at their most vulnerable whilst travelling to and from school. These schools are making transport contractors and the local community aware of their schools’ policies and expectations of behaviour. Transport contractors and local people are encouraged to report any concerns to the school promptly.

42 In a number of schools in the survey, pupils act as mentors or ‘buddies’ and are trained to take on the role and take it seriously. Other pupils can identify mentors because they usually wear some distinctive piece of clothing or a badge. Mentors take a proactive role in supporting pupils at times when they might feel vulnerable, such as in their first term at secondary school. The case studies of good practice that follow illustrate how counselling and mentoring schemes can help.
Good practice 4: A Cardiff secondary school

The school introduced peer-counselling and student listeners 15 years ago. The idea was to help students take responsibility for their own actions. Initially, counselling was introduced into the sixth form, but this soon extended to Year 11 working with Year 7. To become a student listener or peer counsellor, students have to make a formal application and are interviewed by staff and experienced mentors. The staff do not only choose listeners from those students who are already good role models. Other pupils also have a chance, but must work to prove themselves. Counsellors wear different coloured T-shirts so that other pupils can distinguish them. The scheme currently operates with Year 11 working with Year 9, Year 10 with Year 8 and Year 9 with Year 7. Counsellors are trained in the summer term each year. ‘Childline’ used to train the counsellors, but the school now does the training itself. In 2001, the Listeners attended a ‘Childline’ conference (at the Marriott Hotel in Cardiff) and talked about their counselling role. The school has produced a video, showing peer counsellors working with students, which is used by the LEA for training in other schools. The training makes counsellors aware of the importance of confidentiality. They are familiar with child protection procedures. Once pupils have trained as counsellors in Year 9, provided they continue to do a good job, they can stay as counsellors until Year 11. Counsellors receive certificates for jobs well done and very few of them withdraw from the role.

Good practice 5: A North Wales primary school

In keeping with many others, this school, a large primary school in North West Wales has developed a system of playground ‘buddies’ or ‘ffrindau ffeind’ (‘kind friends’) to help ensure that playtimes are happy times for all pupils. The idea developed from the Welsh Assembly Government ‘Healthy Schools’ initiative. The school council liked the notion of the ‘buddy’ system, but felt the title ‘kind friends’ was more appropriate to the culture of the school.

Good practice 6: A year 9 pupil in a special school

‘You can talk to anyone here, it doesn’t matter who it is, just if you are comfortable talking to them. Staff here are great, they will always give you time and listen to you. It doesn’t matter if it’s the head or the ladies in the kitchen, they all look out for you. There are some kids who try it on and think they are big but the rest of us make it clear we don’t like bullies and we tell the staff, who deal with them’.

Some schools carry out regular surveys to seek the views of pupils on how effective the school is in addressing bullying, what the school could do to create a safer environment and how the school could improve its response to bullying.

Even in the most open and consultative of schools there may be times when some pupils find it difficult to bring some issues to the attention of adults or peers. In order to help these pupils, many schools have established systems such as ‘bully boxes’, where pupils can post their concerns anonymously.
Effective schools promote the anti-bullying message well through the curriculum, not only in PSE lessons and assemblies but wherever the opportunity arises. The following case study describes how this has been done in one junior school.

**Good practice 7: A Cardiff junior school**

The co-ordinator has prepared a lesson-ideas file for each year group together with resource boxes. The files are a compilation of ideas from PSE courses and material from publishers. Each class, during the year, studies a fiction book on the theme of bullying. PSE lessons and assemblies regularly celebrate differences in relation to disabilities, minority groups, and religions. The local police liaison officer talks to Years 3 and 6 about bullying. The focus for the current Year 6 talk is internet and text bullying because there have been instances of this outside the school. Theatre company workshops have also highlighted the problem of bullying. Each class has a ‘circle time’ session every Thursday where pupils can talk openly and safely about any issue that is causing them concern. These issues of concern are taken to the school council. The school also raises money for charities - recently the school raised £800 for the Pakistani earthquake appeal (many families in the school have relatives there). This helps to promote the importance of caring for others.

Good teachers are aware of the need to promote respect throughout the curriculum. They do not tolerate ‘put down’ comments between pupils and stress the unacceptability of negative personal comments.

Effective teachers organise class groups to ensure that possible points of conflict are kept to a minimum.

Staff in the most effective schools do not use bullying strategies such as using sarcasm, derogatory names or nicknames, in dealing with pupils.

Some schools provide a supervised recreational area at break-times and lunch-times in order to provide a ‘safe area’ for pupils who may feel vulnerable or who do not want to join the rough and tumble of the playground.

In one school, a designated pastoral care worker runs sessions with both bullies and victims in order to deal with specific incidents of bullying as well as ensuring that the school policy is constantly reinforced.
Dealing with bullies

51 Effective schools acknowledge that, despite their best efforts to combat bullying, it will still occur. When bullying does occur, effective schools have procedures to deal with the issue that the whole staff and the pupils understand.

52 These schools have a range of sanctions to deal with incidents of bullying. Staff at the school understand these sanctions and implement them consistently.

53 Bullies who carry out acts of extreme physical aggression, where those acts fit the profile of actual bodily harm are dealt with accordingly by being reported to the police.

54 It is likely that, in the most serious cases, a schools’ response to bullying will include either a permanent or fixed-term exclusion. In the case of fixed-term exclusions the most effective schools have well-defined protocols for arranging the pupil’s return to school. These protocols ensure that the school takes account of the needs of both victim and bully.

55 Many of the schools in the survey have a process for helping the bully to identify with the victim and to understand the distress they have caused. Some schools use the 'circle of friends' technique to do this where the school trains pupils to befriend the victims of bullying as well as the bullies themselves. The effect of the ‘circle of friends’ on the victims of bullying can be significant. Victims, of all ages, feel less isolated and know that, if they feel intimidated, there are others who will help them.
**Working with parents**

56 Many schools consult with parents in drawing up anti-bullying policies and practices.

57 All the schools in the survey have a role for parents in their anti-bullying strategies. This is a challenging area for schools as the issue of bullying raises strong emotions among parents. The parents of the victim demand effective action against the bully, whilst the parents of the bully may find it hard to accept that their child could be guilty of bullying.

58 Effective schools base their discussions with parents on well-documented evidence. It is vital that schools record incidents of bullying and any related investigations.

59 To reduce the likelihood of complaints, schools:

- involve parents at an early stage of an investigation;
- ensure that they keep parents up-to-date as the investigation progresses; and
- make parents aware of any possible sanctions that may follow.

60 Below is an outline of good practice in recording and dealing with incidents of bullying.

### Good practice 8: A south west Wales primary school

**Record of incidents of bullying**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of pupil</th>
<th>Warnings</th>
<th>Parent informed via diary</th>
<th>Class teacher/parent discussion</th>
<th>Warning</th>
<th>Headteacher letter. Loss of privileges</th>
<th>Warning</th>
<th>Headteacher/class teacher/parent meeting. Sanctions to be discussed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ffred Jones</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>11/03/05 V</td>
<td>12/04/05 Ph</td>
<td>14/04/05</td>
<td>19/04/05</td>
<td>12/05/05 EB</td>
<td>12/05/05 Restrictions at playtime</td>
<td>17/05/05 V</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Key: V=verbal abuse Ph=physical abuse EB=threatening behaviour/intimidation

1. When an incident of bullying occurs a teacher enters the name of the bully into the table. The teacher will give a first verbal warning. The warning is recorded on the Bullying Incident Record sheet by the teacher and dated. Specific letters identify the type of bullying. The identifying letters are explained in the key on the record sheet.

2. If or when a second bullying incident occurs, the same action is taken and the bully receives a second warning. In this instance the parents of the bullying child are informed of the incidents, via the home/school diary. They are invited to school for discussions. Any essential information is recorded on the Bullying Incident Record form, and is also logged on a school incident report form.
(3) Bullying may continue, for which a higher level warning is given, recorded and dated by the headteacher.

(4) When the bully receives this warning, a letter is sent from the headteacher to the respective parents inviting them in to discuss suitable and appropriate sanctions. These can include excluding the bully from a sports event, or removing other privileges.

(5) A further incident of bullying results in the headteacher sending out a final letter to the parents inviting them into school for further discussions. At this meeting a further set of sanctions will be imposed on the bully or bullies by the class teacher. The school anticipates that very few incidences of this severity will occur. Sanctions imposed may include exclusion at lunch time or as a last resort, a fixed term exclusion.

61 The measures outlined above are applied consistently by staff. The headteacher monitors the record of bullying incidents regularly to check for patterns in individual behaviour that may require attention.
A number of LEAs employ, or deploy, staff with overall responsibility for supporting schools in their anti-bullying work. Many of the LEAs surveyed work in partnership with voluntary agencies to ensure that staff and pupils are appropriately trained in a range of anti-bullying techniques.

There is some evidence of successful joint working between LEAs in the past. However, this is no longer happening in the LEAs we surveyed.

Some LEAs produce useful materials on bullying for schools and pupils. These resources provide valuable information about bullying and other linked issues that are important within local communities.

Outcomes are often positive when LEAs encourage other organisations, such as the police, local health services and social services, to join in planning anti-bullying measures.

Where LEAs are proactive in raising the profile of bullying as an issue within its schools and provide resources and support to those schools, this has an invaluable impact on reducing bullying. Where schools perceive that the LEA is taking the issue seriously, they are more likely to do so themselves.
67 Schools can have a major impact on both the levels and severity of bullying. Clear procedures that are understood by all, and supported by effective policies which are embedded into the life and ethos of the school, can reduce the incidence of bullying significantly.

68 Positive support for schools from the LEA can have a significant impact on how effectively those schools deal with bullying. The most effective schools have generally received training and support from their LEA.

69 Effective schools recognise that bullying is an important issue. This can have the effect of ensuring that the school addresses bullying effectively. These are usually the schools that have the best policies and practices and develop an ethos whereby bullying is not tolerated in any form.