

Education and Lifelong Learning Committee

Answers to Questions posed by Members of the previous Education and Lifelong Learning Committee of the Welsh National Assembly following a Presentation on Effective Ways of Tackling Bullying in Schools

Thursday, 27th March 2003

Question 1

Is there any up-to-date information on the efficacy of anti-bullying strategies?

- 1 The Sheffield study, which led to the publication of "Don't Suffer in Silence " in 1994 is widely quoted because it is probably the most comprehensive study undertaken in the UK, involving over 4,000 pupils of both primary and secondary age. Rigby has undertaken more recent wide-ranging studies in Australia, also in Scandinavia by Pikas.
- 1.2 In essence, however, both the Sheffield study and more recent studies emphasise the same points as far as dealing effectively with bullying in schools is concerned: i.e.
 - a. It's vital to tackle bullying as a whole-school issue, involving everyone in the school community. It is important that the views and feelings of pupils are at the centre of any bullying policy, as research has shown that children can have a quite different understanding of bullying from adults
 - b. There are no quick and easy answers. It is important that the policy is developed, maintained and reviewed by the school as a whole, so providing ownership of the policy.
 - c. Whole-school ethos is vitally important if a school wishes to have an effective anti-bullying policy – i.e. it is unlikely that even the most enlightened policy will be effective if the behaviours and attitudes which the school wishes to promote are not consistently practised by all members of the school community.
 - d. An effective policy will include a broad range of preventative measures, including cross-curricular work, PSE, and extra-curricular activities, which are supported by specific strategies to ensure that people's needs are listened to, e.g. peer support, school councils, etc.
 - e. An effective policy needs to include agreed and well-publicised strategies for dealing with bullying when it occurs. This is where research / opinion varies most at the moment, with authors such as Michelle Elliott (Kidscape) advocating punitive approaches, whilst others argue the value of more humanistic approaches (e.g. Pikas, Robinson and Maines, Rigby). The research of Samivalli et al. has been accepted as highlighting the nature of bullying as a group process, in which not only victim and bully are implicated, but also hangers-on, bystanders and potential rescuers. Research has also shown that, although young people interviewed deplored bullying, a much lower percentage said that they would actually intervene in a bullying situation. This has led to looking at how the bystander can be empowered /encouraged to intervene so that the balance of power in a bullying group is tipped in favour of the victim, and group empathy is activated. The aim here is also to help the bully to change his / her behaviour and to be integrated into the group. The understanding of bullying as a group process is the basis of the Shared Concern (Pikas) and the No Blame Approaches (Robinson and Maines) - sometimes also called the 7 Steps Approach

- 1.3 As there were concerns in the Education Committee about protecting the victim if more humanistic approaches such as the No Blame approach are used, I would like to address these.
- When we talk to young people, they consistently say to us that the biggest factor that stops them from telling about bullying is the fear of how it will be handled. If the bully is labelled and punished, this can lead to recrimination and further bullying. Faced with this risk, young people too often choose to stay silent
 - In more “traditional” approaches to bullying incidents, the problem tends to be taken out of the victim’s control. This is another fear which young people talk to us about. With the No Blame / 7 Steps Approach, the teacher dealing with the incident will always check with the pupil that he / she is willing for the information shared to be divulged to a group including the bullies, but also bystanders and potential allies. The wishes of the victim are respected.
 - The first concern is always the protection of the victim. Divergence of opinion is about how this can best happen. Proponents of the No Blame approach believe that there is a better chance of a real solution being found if those engaged in the bullying behaviour are put in a situation where they realise the hurt they have caused, and are able to make retribution without being labelled and ostracised. It is however, crucial that the teacher in charge regularly monitors the situation.
 - The No Blame Approach is a problem-solving, forward-looking approach. Very often in bullying incidents staff can get bogged down in who did / said what to whom and when. This can cause problems because of conflicting accounts, and further recriminations of who is telling the truth. The whole thing can become more a preoccupation with getting to the bottom of things, rather than a search for a permanent solution. With the No Blame approach the emphasis is on problem solving and a working out how pupils can get on together / what is acceptable behaviour.
 - There is also the need to develop a ‘telling culture’, whereby telling on a person is seen as a completely normal thing to do with no recriminations.
- 1.4 It is possible that the bully does not fully realise the effect that his / her actions are having on the victim, and need to have these explained and so be given the opportunity to modify their behaviour. The position of the victim can be explained to the bully either by a teacher or, in some cases, through a peer mediator.
- 1.5 Proponents of more supportive and restorative approaches openly agree that there will be some incidents where these approaches may not work. In these cases sanctions may need to be applied, although we would say that the pupil who is displaying bullying behaviours should always have the opportunity to change their behaviour, and may need help for a counsellor or educational psychologist. This is why I suggested to the education committee ideas for a graded approach during my presentation. As stated above, during this process it is vitally important for the behaviour of the bully / bullies to be closely monitored to ensure the safety of the victim.
- 1.6 Expelling the bully is often seen as the ultimate "solution" to the problem of bullying. However, it doesn't necessarily protect the victim, because they can be at risk from the bully outside school - and the bully is likely to go on to bully others unless his / her behaviour is modified.
- 1.7 Another concern raised in Committee was **the involvement of parents:**
- Most schools seek to involve parents when there has been a bullying incident as soon as possible. This can in some case be a deterrent to the pupil / pupils displaying bullying behaviours.

- A larger problem is pupils displaying negative and anti-social behaviours in school that they see being promoted or modelled in the home, but which are contrary to the school's ethos. Teachers talk to me about this problem, and it is a difficult one to resolve. Most schools try to ensure that the ethos and behaviour code in the school is as positive as possible, and to work to influence the behaviour of individual children as necessary. Parents' evenings can help - e.g. the school's anti-bullying policy can be highlighted during a meeting for parents as the children make the transition from primary to secondary school. I have been asked to go into schools and talk to parents on the issue of bullying. It can, however, be very difficult for a school to reach and influence the parents whose behaviour most needs to change.
- 1.8 Another aspect of an effective anti-bullying policy is making the school buildings / campus a safe place to be. Good supervision is important, particularly in "hot spots" such as concealed corners and toilet areas. Pupils can identify these by doing a "photo-safari" so that the staff is aware of areas where bullying occurs, and can take steps accordingly. Many schools now use CCTV systems. One Headteacher recently told me that having a new school building had cut the incidence of bullying in his school by half. **However, the best security system of all is a positive ethos where all pupils and staff know that everyone is looking out for one another, and that certain behaviours are unacceptable.**
- 1.9 Primary schools particularly realise that some bullying can occur because of boredom at playtime, and they have taken steps to introduce new and varied activities on the yard. For example ensuring that the football players have a space of their own, and that there are brightly painted areas for imaginative play as well as for traditional games such as hopscotch. Sometimes buddies can act as game monitors on the yard, organising games and ensuring that pupils share and act co-operatively towards one another.
- 1.10 I have listed some research that is worth looking at. I can get details of articles should the committee be interested:
- **Sonia Sharp**, who was one of the researchers working on the Sheffield project, and who is now working for Birmingham LEA, has written a very good paper for the NAPCE journal called "Reducing School Bullying - What works?"
 - **A Childline survey** carried out in 1996, following the running of a "bully-line", found that bullying situations often developed from minor friendship problems and that children who bully often don't realise the hurt they are causing
 - Smith and Shu (2000) found that 30% of bullied children tell no-one and suffer in silence
 - **Salmivalli et al.** have done work around participant roles in bullying situations, and come to the conclusion that it is very much a group / social problem, which calls for group solutions.
 - **Naylor and Cowie** (1998) did research into 50 schools which had set up peer support systems, and found that pupils and staff alike saw the schools as caring, and that bullying had been reduced.
 - **An Ofsted survey** carried out in 2001 / 2002 found that although excellent anti-bullying work was carried out in schools due to specially funded short-term projects, once these projects came to an end their impact was not sustained. The survey had some interesting findings and made a number of recommendations, which the Committee may be interested to look into.

Question 2

Has any work been undertaken on building up a profile of "the bully"?

- 2 Yes. Earlier studies about bullying concentrated to a greater or lesser extent on the role of bully and victim, and tried to understand these. An example of this is Besag's "Bullies and victims in Schools" (1989).
- 2.1 Factors which have been highlighted as possibly leading children / young people to bully include:
- a poor self-image, lack of confidence and hopelessness
 - negative adult role models, reflecting violence within the home
 - immaturity as far as moral development is concerned - especially an inability to understand the views of others and to empathise
 - an inability to feel guilt / remorse
 - lack of social skills , including self-control
- 2.2 We also know that a child might be reacting to circumstances at home, and may in fact be deeply unhappy. Young people tell us that bullying can also be caused by jealousy and by friendship problems that spiral out of proportion.
- 2.3 Later studies have questioned the usefulness of having a stereotypical description of "bullies" and "victims". Victims can be provocative, although this in no way condones them being bullied. Anyone, in fact, can be a victim, because we are all "different" in some way - too tall, too short, on the plump side, wearing spectacles, from the wrong area, etc. Likewise anyone can at some time join in with behaviour which we might later see to be unkind, even victimising. This move away from stereotypes has gone hand in hand with an understanding of bullying as a group process.

Question 3

Has there been any research to identify whether bullies have been victims of bullying in the home?

- 3 I am not aware of any specific studies that have looked at correlations as far as bullies having suffered abuse are concerned. Perhaps the Anti-bullying Unit in UWIC might know of a specific study. A young person may well mirror the behaviour that they experience in the home for the following reasons:
- they may see this as "the norm"
 - being victims themselves, they may take their unhappiness out on others - perhaps someone who seems to have an "ideal" stable and loving home background
 - A child's behaviour can be a cry for help. Being in trouble may be a way of getting attention, even if that attention is negative. They may really want to tell someone what they themselves are going through.

Question 4:

Is bullying more violent at present than it has been in the past?

- 4 Again, I am not aware of any specific studies that show this.

- 4.1 As bullying is a social phenomenon, it tends to mirror the reality of society outside the school. Technological advances have been adapted as tools of bullying - e.g. texting nasty messages to the victim.
- 4.2 Although physical violence is more sensational, it should be remembered that often the worst bullying is that which has a persistent, insidious and relentless effect on the victim. The cases of suicide that we read about are often cases where the victim has been ground down and isolated to such an extent that they just can't take any more. When training young people, we usually come to the conclusion that we can measure the seriousness of a bullying incident by the extent to which the victim is being effected by it.

Question 5

Are there different ways of tackling bullying at primary and secondary school level?

- 5 Primary schools use more classroom techniques such as "circle-time" to promote positive behaviour and relationships. Circle-time also helps children to problem-solve and to use skills such as mediation.
- 5.1 A lot of bullying in primary schools happens on the playground, and primary schools address this by ensuring that the children have a variety of interesting activities to do at break-time. Playground buddies can be trained to look out for children who are lonely or sad. Another role of the buddies can be to mediate friendship problems and to organise and supervise games.
- 5.2 Both primary and secondary schools address the problem of bullying through the PSE (Personal and Social Education) curriculum. This can be effective, but very often doesn't give pupils the skills to relate in a positive way towards one another, to be assertive and to combat bullying.
- 5.3 The problem is more difficult in secondary school because peer pressure plays a more significant role, and it can be harder for pupils to break out of a group and to speak out against unacceptable behaviour. Pupils at secondary level are also less likely to tell teachers about the problem of being bullied. This is why many schools are setting up peer support schemes, where trained pupils act as active listeners and help fellow-pupils through their problems. Some schools also have suggestion boxes or card systems, so that victims can talk about being bullied without drawing attention to themselves.
- 5.4 The development of independent school counsellors to provide children and young people with an adult to turn to who is not directly connected with the school environment, but who can give advice and support, e.g. the NSPCC Schools Team in Wrexham.
- 5.5 **The NSPCC would like to see the development of a curriculum that teaches emotional literacy/comptency, which helped pupils from an early age to develop positive personal and social skills - including how to understand one's own feelings, and those of others; how to make and maintain friendships; dealing with prejudice and conflict. Giving all pupils such skills would not only reduce the problem of bullying and also help young people to learn, but also pave the way for the development of social skills that can be used throughout the rest of their lives.**

Question 6

Will Teachers need any additional skills or support to tackle bullying?

- 6 Yes - I think the Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning raised this point during the session, and she is obviously well aware of the need for training.
- 6.1 I think that amongst the skills needed are:
- awareness of the nature of bullying
 - awareness of own attitudes and values
 - listening skills
 - familiarity with a range of preventative and reactive strategies and an ability to implement them effectively
 - training around different learning and teaching styles, and which ones promote positive behaviours.
- 6.2 The NSPCC is already active in Wales in this area by providing inputs into teacher training courses and helping to develop anti-bullying training during INSET days.

Question 7

Is there a need for a school uniform policy in Wales?

- 7 As far as I am aware, most schools implement a school uniform policy. As mentioned above, if pupils are going to victimise a fellow pupil, they will always find something that is "different". This could be the fact that a particular pupil wears unfashionable clothes, but a pupil can equally well be picked on for having holes in his / her school jumper and an un-ironed school shirt. The thing that is important is to change the culture of the school, so that bullying behaviour is seen by all as unacceptable, and it becomes the norm to be caring and helpful, regardless of age, ability, race or sexual orientation.

Question 8

How are all the agencies co-ordinated in terms of implementation strategies?

- 8 Here in Wales the NSPCC works closely with ChildLine, in particular to implement peer support and 'buddying' schemes in schools. The CHIPS manager and myself are, for, instance at the moment involved in a pilot project with the PSE Adviser in Cardiff to set up peer support and mediation schemes in 6 schools in the city. We are aiming to do some joint training as part of that project. We are also working with the PSE Advisory Teacher in Swansea and Children in Wales to seek funding for and set up a Peer Support Forum in Wales, which would be able to support all schools in Wales to continue good practice and monitor the work.
- 8.1 NSPCC is also a member of the National Peer Support Forum, which is at present being co-ordinated by the NCB (National Children's Bureau).
- 8.2 NSPCC has also set up a national Bullying Awareness and Advisory Group, looking at what we feel to be effective policy and practice in this area. One of the initiatives of the Chair of this group (who is also an NSPCC Education Adviser) has been to set up an Anti-Bullying Alliance, consisting of over forty member organisations. They have recently been to talk to officials in the DfES about the issue.

I hope that these comments have been helpful and I would be happy to clarify any of the above points for the Committee.

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