

Home Office Police Research Group Briefing Note



PREVENTING SCHOOL BULLYING:

things you can do
Schools Edition

Summary

In December 1995, the Home Office Police Research Group published *Preventing School Bullying** which describes an initiative to tackle bullying in four schools - two secondary and two primary - in Liverpool and London.

A questionnaire survey of the students established that there was a high level of violent and anti-social behaviour both in the schools and the surrounding areas, that Bengali and black students appeared to be disproportionately victimised and that students usually lacked the confidence to report bullying incidents.

The researchers worked with the staff and students to develop and implement measures relevant to each school. Follow-up questionnaires were used to monitor the impact of the initiative. The results showed that in two years the level of bullying had decreased in three of the schools and remained about the same in the London secondary school.

This pack contains the practical materials used in that project, for use by schools to develop and implement their own anti-bullying strategies.

* *This pack replaces the earlier report which is no longer available.*

The anti-bullying initiative

Working with the staff and students, the researchers produced an anti-bullying code of practice and implementation strategy which had the support of those at all levels in the schools. Measures were introduced at three levels; the school, the class and the individual. Examples from each level include:

- a questionnaire survey; improved supervision/surveillance of play areas during breaks; confidential contact for victims and others concerning bullying; meetings about bullying between staff and parents;
- class rules against bullying; role-playing and using literature which highlights the plight of scapegoated groups and individuals;
- formal confrontations of students who bully; encouragement of 'neutral' students to help; organising discussion groups for parents of students who bully or are bullied.

The effects of the initiative

A follow-up questionnaire showed that in two years the levels of bullying had decreased in three of the four schools.

- the percentage of students who said they had been bullied at all in the preceding three months fell from 62% to 47% in the London primary school, from 72% to 48% in the Liverpool primary school, and from 34% to 21% in the Liverpool secondary school;
- all types of bullying decreased, including being given dirty looks, racist name calling, being hit or kicked and theft from pupils. Theft from pupils also reduced;
- the boys' attitudes and behaviour had changed so that more thought bullying was wrong and fewer admitted to bullying.

Some important factors in reducing bullying were:

- an increased confidence of students to report bullying;
- an increased willingness of teaching and ancillary staff to intervene in bullying incidents;
- the development of a shared perception by adults and students of those behaviours which can be tolerated, and those which cannot.

In the London secondary school, where the questionnaire did not indicate a reduction in bullying, a number of counteracting forces were identified.

These were:

- racial tensions in the locality which spilt over into the school environment and which 'demanded' allegiances to one's own racial group;
- a group of ex-students who hung around the school gates and perimeter fences and undermined staff and students' feelings that the school was a safe place.

Points for action

The link between bullying in the schools and the violence and anti-social behaviour, including racial tensions, in the immediate location of the schools suggests that effective prevention work in difficult areas should include work within the local schools.

Schools should, through a process of consultation involving staff and students, develop anti-bullying strategies. These should aim to develop a shared perception of what behaviours can be tolerated, and what cannot, and increase the confidence of students to report bullying. Schools will need to determine individually what interventions best suit their own pupils and circumstances.

The materials contained in this pack will assist schools in developing their own local action. It includes guidance on consultation exercises, bully box forms and victimisation monitoring sheets. For ease of use, the pack is in a form suitable for photocopying.

One copy of the pack per school is available free of charge from:

*Home Office, Police Research Group Publications, Room 456, 50 Queen Anne's Gate, London SW1H 9AT.
Facsimile no. 0171 273 4001 or by written request.*