
Anti-bullying Policy Guidelines for Schools

Introduction

Changing Faces has long experience of working in schools closely with teachers, pupils and families. Our case-work with children affected by disfigurement has especially highlighted the impact of teasing, name-calling, bullying and ostracism upon their experiences of school.

This direct experience, backed up by wide-ranging research findings, underpins the emphasis on inclusion and on all children's social and psychological needs and well-being, if anti-bullying policies are to be implemented effectively.

Changing Faces recognises that bullying among pupils in schools, and to and from school, is a complex challenge calling for on-going, thoughtful and constructive involvement of all staff, all pupils, parents, and governors.

The advice and recommendations offered here can help schools to foster equality in line with specific statutory guidance and requirements, for England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales. Our advice and recommendations are also geared to best practice in line with public health guidance for promoting children's social and emotional well-being in primary and secondary education, where this applies in the four jurisdictions.

Key research findings

Children with special or additional educational needs and disabilities are especially subject to bullying in school, as are children who receive 1:1 support in lessons. Children whose appearance is affected by a condition, injury or illness, are twice as bullied as children whose illness, injury or condition does not affect their appearance.

Research shows:

- teachers underestimate and underreport bullying of children with special or additional educational needs or disabilities.
- good peer relations, especially friendships, strongly protect against bullying.
- children who bully and children who are bullied are sometimes the same children.
- improving all children's confidence and social skills around their own appearance significantly reduces appearance-related bullying.
- prevalence of unwitting negative attitudes to disfigurement is a barrier to inclusive ethos - nine out of ten people find it difficult to link positive words and phrases with images of people with disfigurement, even if they declare themselves not to hold prejudices regarding appearance.

Policy outline

Changing Faces recommends that an effective anti-bullying culture in schools requires:

- significant training to equip all staff to prevent bullying and to identify, report and address all incidents involving all forms of bullying.
- specific staff training concerning appearance- and disfigurement-related issues in education, including high expectations and social inclusion which in turn will help to counter bullying. Staff need to be confident and comfortable exploring appearance and disfigurement issues with pupils.
- all bullying incidents to be consistently addressed in ways which foster respect and inclusion.
- high and equitable staff expectations of children with disfigurement (to counter prevalent unwitting negative attitudes around disfigurement).

- mechanisms to involve pupils themselves in developing and maintaining their school's anti-bullying culture.
- a clear appeals procedure in case a bullying complaint is difficult to resolve to everyone's satisfaction.

The support which children and young people with special or additional educational needs and disabilities receive, including those whose appearance is affected, should ideally always be provided in such a way as to foster social inclusion and the development of good peer relations and friendships, as these are known to provide the best protection against bullying.

Because of the relationship between bullying and 1:1 support for special or additional educational needs and disabilities, *Changing Faces* recommends that schools' anti-bullying policies should include clear guidance on provision of 1:1 support so as to maximise positive peer interaction at all times. (The Equality and Human Rights Commission's Triennial Review, 2010, found that children with disabilities who receive 1:1 support are especially frequently bullied.)

Changing Faces invites policy makers and school leaders to consider that moving a child who is severely bullied to a new school may seem like a solution but (a) the bullying behaviours are not then adequately addressed and (b) children are significantly disadvantaged educationally by changes of school (EHRC Triennial Review, 2010, p327).

Policy Implementation

Schools' anti-bullying policies and anti-bullying cultures will work best when:

- it is easy and safe for any pupil to report an incident of bullying.
- all teachers have regular (e.g. termly) opportunities to discuss and reflect upon how they prevent, identify and address bullying.
- there are clear mechanisms for sharing good practice among both staff and pupils e.g. brief in-house in-service training led by staff member(s) most effective at turning around bullying situations (regardless of other leadership roles).
- parents are engaged through actively seeking their views and their participation in regular (e.g. termly) information and training activities about tackling all forms of bullying and promoting positive social interactions among pupils.
- senior staff/staff with leadership responsibilities and governors are all prominently involved e.g. by chairing/running the above activities as appropriate and by creating reports on bullying and anti-bullying and sharing these with staff and pupils.

The crucial social and well-being dimension of each school's anti-bullying policy in action, should engage and support:

a) *all pupils* – through a structured programme of social skills, citizenship, emotional literacy, and the United Nations Charter for the Rights of Children (of which the UK is a signatory). Appearance and disfigurement should be specifically addressed among all aspects of diversity. As well as being delivered in age-appropriate ways through circle-time, through lessons which cover social, emotional, health and economic topics, and through Citizenship education where appropriate, these important areas of learning and development should be taught through curriculum subjects wherever possible, with teachers appropriately trained and resourced.

b) *all pupils and staff* – to enquire, identify and report or address, as appropriate, *all* incidents of bullying, including types of bullying such as cyber-bullying and bullying disguised as humour etc, and bullying in the form of ostracism, which are less easily seen by those not directly involved.

c) *pupils who bully* - these children and young people should receive appropriate support including careful evaluation of their own psycho-social needs, exploring what's going on for them, and help with self-esteem and social skills.

d) *pupils who are bullied* - these children and young people should also receive appropriate support including evaluation of social skills and psycho-social needs and help with self-esteem and social skills.

All pupils/students should be involved in the development and monitoring and review of their school's anti-bullying policy, whether through classroom discussions, school council meetings or other participative mechanisms.

Anti-bullying policy and interventions should be monitored at least annually through the collection of relevant data. Statistics for bullying of children and young people with special or additional educational needs and disabilities should include a specific category of children with disfigurements or who have a condition, injury or illness that affects their appearance. Types of bullying should be monitored to ensure staff and pupils are aware of the prevalence of appearance-related bullying and bullying which targets a pupil's disfigurement, so that specific concerns can be explored and effectively addressed and progress monitored. (This will also help schools with the monitoring component of the Public Equality Duty in the Equality Act 2010, where this applies.)

Changing Faces recommends that if a pupil withdraws from a school because of bullying, this should be recorded as a serious failure by the school to tackle the problem of bullying. A substantial review of anti-bullying policy and practice, to be carried out by senior staff.

All school staff and all pupils have much to gain from preventing and tackling bullying effectively, as it is so lovely to work and learn together in socially positive, inclusively friendly pre-schools, schools, academies and colleges.