Anti-bullying case study: rights of the child

Respecting the rights and responsibilities of every pupil is central to Norwood Green Junior School's approach to tackling discriminatory bullying.

This case study highlights how the school:

- adopts a rights-based approach to promote respect and inclusiveness
- analyses behaviour data to produce reports that identify bullying problems and what the school needs to do to tackle them
- records all low-level misbehaviour, including bullying incidents
- uses data to improve its policies, procedures on bullying and to support staff

The West London school's focus is on preventing bullying from happening in the first place. It promotes a culture of mutual respect that celebrates difference.

"At the beginning of the academic year we delay the curriculum and have two weeks where it's all about setting class cultures," explains deputy headteacher Jon Makepeace.

Teachers spend time with the children reviewing their rights and responsibilities, from the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. The school links the Convention directly to its own values of respect, honesty, responsibility, friendship, resilience, kindness and inclusiveness. This is shown in the school's class charter, displayed as a colourful poster in every classroom.

"The children feel comfortable, valued and they understand what's expected of them," Jon says.

During those two weeks, pupils explore the children's version of the school's anti-bullying policy. "Children are aware it's their responsibility to [report bullying]," Jon explains. "Hopefully, if you ask any child in the school 'Who's involved in dealing with bullying?' they would say: 'We all are'."

Early intervention

The school uses data to monitor, analyse and deal with any 'low-level' behavioural problems before they develop into bullying.

 "We began with a review of our behaviour policy in 2014," explains deputy headteacher Priya Sehgal. "We put systems in place to collect information consistently across the school. Through that, we've been able to track behaviour more closely."

The school created behaviour files for each class, allowing the teacher to quickly and easily note down any problems in a consistent format.

If a pupil shows any low-level misbehaviour, and does not correct it after several verbal warnings, the teacher gives the pupil a football-style 'yellow card'. After two yellow cards, they give a red card.

The teacher then records details of 'carded' pupils in the file: the child's name, date, location, who was there, a description what happened, and what action the teacher took.

Senior leaders review all the files every Friday. "It builds confidence," Jon explains. "Teachers know that the senior leadership team is going to address their concerns, and they'll get to it by the end of the week, if not before. I think our staff feel like we've got their backs."

Senior teachers also meet with any children listed in the file before the end of the week. "We remind them of our expectations of their behaviour," Priya adds. "They then understand: 'My teacher knows about it, the senior leaders know about it, so I need to do something about it.'"

Looking at trends

Priya compiles the data to show behavioural trends over time. "Every half term, I look at all that data together to shortlist those children who have been in the file several times, and think about what the issues are." If a child appears three times in the low-level folder within a half term, the school contacts the family.

Priya shares data regularly with the headteacher and governors. Teachers, meanwhile, can see how their class compares with others, or see if there are any issues about a class they've been asked to cover.

The school also keeps separate files on more serious misbehaviour (which Priya says tends to happen either in playtime or out of school). She then compares the more serious incidents with data in the low-level file to look at patterns over time.

If the school does identify an issue as bullying, it involves the parents immediately. The school also surveys parents three times a year, and organises several parents' evenings. Both of these initiatives allow parents to raise concerns or ask questions about bullying.

In addition to recording misbehaviour, each teacher also records bullying incidents in a separate exercise book on their desk. "It helps us deal with it, but it also helps the victim and the perpetrator when we're meeting with parents," says Jon.

Identifying vulnerable groups

From the data, school leaders can see whether particular types of pupils are more vulnerable to behavioural problems.

"We look for patterns," Priya explains. "Are they girls, are they boys? Are the children on a SEN register? Is their specific need also making it difficult for them? We look at the ethnic mix. Are there patterns with free school meals children?

"The data also gives us an indication of whether staff may need more interventional support to help them manage behaviours in their classroom," she says.

While, overall, the school's data shows a gradual improvement in behaviour over time, Jon says issues can flare up. "We've seen waves. You get fluctuations in racism and homophobia. When the EU referendum happened, we saw a rise in racist incidents."

"In one year, we noticed a particular ethnic group that was coming up quite a lot," Priya adds. "Some of that ethnic group also had low progress too."

The school ran a 'cultural celebration' event to promote respect and celebrate difference, involving pupils and families. This provided a great opportunity, Jon explains, to help that particular group to "feel a valued part of our school community. And I think there's been a change, so that an ethnic group who were marginalised are now integrated much more."