

# Anti-bullying case study: how data and good governance strengthen anti-bullying approaches

Ralph Thoresby secondary school in Leeds shares bullying data with governors every term. Scrutiny from governors in turn shapes the school's anti-bullying policy and strategies.

This case study highlights how the school:

- uses incident data to produce reports for school governors that identify bullying problems and what the school is doing to tackle them
- records every bullying incident
- uses data to improve its policies, procedures and staff training on bullying
- uses the Public Sector Equality Duty (referred to here as 'the equality duty') to promote its commitment to monitoring data to prevent and tackle prejudice-based bullying

Assistant headteacher Riain Vernon is the school's anti-bullying lead. He is responsible for monitoring and reporting bullying data to senior colleagues and governors.

"We've definitely put bullying into the spotlight. And that's quite a brave thing for any school to do."

He says the school started recording bullying incidents five years ago. At first, senior leaders were nervous about bringing attention to something that could show the school in a bad light. Riain argued that it would enhance, not hinder, the school's reputation.

"It's something I was very keen on doing. We've got to be open and honest.

"Bullying goes on in every school. It's just part of human life. You cannot have a thousand teenagers under one roof and not expect to have that natural urge for hierarchy."

## Sharing data with governors

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Riain produces and presents a termly report to governors on behaviour issues within the school. He tells governors how many incidents took place, how the school handled each one, and whether there are any emerging trends the school needs to address. Names of specific pupils involved are withheld for data protection.

For the last three years, the school has also categorised each bullying incident by type (physical, verbal, cyber) and by the bullied pupils' protected characteristics. Governors have played a key role in this change, encouraging the school to capture a wider range of equality information.

The data shows that some types of pupils may be more likely to experience bullying than others.

“When we look at our data, we see that bullying happens a lot more in Year 7 than in any other year group,” Riain explains.

“The bullying that we deal with in Years 10 and 11 seems to be more around sexuality, gender and identity,” he adds. “What has stood out in the past in terms of protected characteristics would have been transgender. We've had one transgender student every year for the last three years. We have to be ready to offer the best support package we can.”

By interrogating the bullying data that Riain gathers, governors are better able to hold the school to account. It gives governors a better chance to evaluate – by looking at the number and type of incidents over time – whether the school's anti-bullying policies and strategies are working, or need to be strengthened.

For example, data-gathering has enabled governors to support the school's leadership team in fulfilling its equality duty. The school has now developed and published an equality objective focused on preventing and tackling prejudice-based bullying. This commits the school to actively promoting its anti-bullying strategy and monitoring its effectiveness, and to acting on evidence of prejudice-based bullying.

While the school has made significant progress, Riain is not complacent.

“We're constantly trying to tighten up and make sure we're doing the best we possibly can.” For example, the school is committed to continuing to work with students to review its equality objectives.

## Regular scrutiny

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As well as the termly reports to governors, Riain also produces weekly and half-termly updates for the school's senior leadership team. Unlike the anonymised data shared with governors, Riain adds specific information about the pupils involved (captured on the school's [Class Charts](#) behaviour management system) to shed more light on the potential issues behind each incident.

"We can link information about the perpetrator and victim," he explains. "Is there an ethnicity dimension, for instance?"

The school also pays privately for inspectors to assess the school in the years between Ofsted inspections. "They came last week and deemed our anti-bullying policy and strategies as being 'outstanding'," Riain says. "We are ready and prepared, and we can learn lessons."

## Supporting specific groups

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One piece of learning over the last few years has been how to support specific groups of students – and how to deal with other students' reaction to them.

The school is working with Barnardo's to ensure it is a safe and inclusive place for all sexual and gender identities and to ensure that homophobic, biphobic and transphobic (HBT) discrimination is not tolerated.

It has committed to ensuring that school staff are trained and confident in challenging HBT bullying. This is to create an environment in which pupils feel comfortable reporting such bullying and discrimination incidents. Student ambassadors also play an important role here, providing support for their peers.

## Building credibility

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Being honest about the extent of bullying in a school, through gathering and reporting data, can only enhance a school's reputation, Riain argues.

"Claiming that you don't have a bullying issue is more damaging than saying: 'You know what? We had this many incidents of bullying last year. But here's what we did about it. And now there are no further records of bullying for those children.'

"I think that's more powerful a message to give to governors – and the community."