

Using data to inform and evaluate anti-bullying strategies

Each national government has its own legislation, policy and guidance around preventing and tackling bullying, keeping children safe and promoting their wellbeing.

In addition, all schools in England and Wales, or education authorities in Scotland, must have due regard to the [Public Sector Equality Duty \(PSED\)](#). This means your school leadership team needs to actively consider this duty when developing your anti-bullying policy, and when gathering and reviewing evidence of bullying at your school. This will ensure your efforts to prevent and tackle prejudice-based bullying are effectively targeted.

The PSED covers the following protected characteristics: age, disability, sex, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief and sexual orientation.

This document sets out some of the approaches that schools have told us are helpful in addressing prejudice-based and other forms of bullying. It focuses on recording incidents to inform anti-bullying strategies rather than how to respond to individual incidents of bullying.¹

As our [series of case studies](#) shows, schools that are tackling bullying effectively are gathering data to understand what type of bullying is taking place. They are also using that data to inform their anti-bullying measures and assess the effectiveness of their initiatives.

A clear learning is that there is no single way to gather data on bullying. What works best in one school may be less appropriate or effective in another. Regardless of how schools approach this, the schools we have spoken to have emphasised the need to be proactive in seeking out bullying information, ensuring there are systematic ways for people to report it, analyse it and respond to it. To be effective,

¹ A range of government bodies and anti-bullying organisations have information on addressing bullying incidents. See for example: www.equalityhumanrights.com/sites/default/files/tips_for_tackling_discriminatory_bullying.pdf

this needs to sit within a culture that sets clear expectations about values and behaviour, and which supports children and young people to report their concerns, and teachers to respond confidently.

While the individual approaches of the schools may differ, we found some common themes.

1. Setting the tone from the top: anti-bullying policy, leadership and governance

An open culture and ethos

A key component in tackling bullying is for schools to create a strong culture and ethos that champions diversity and respect for difference, and which places pupil wellbeing at the heart of the school's mission. Data enables schools to understand what bullying is taking place, and to inform and evaluate the anti-bullying strategies they have introduced to make the school ethos a daily, lived reality. Data may highlight negative aspects of school life, but ignoring it will do a disservice to young people who may need support.

The anti-bullying policy

A strong anti-bullying policy recognises different protected characteristics and sets clear expectations about behaviour. It sets out: how to report bullying incidents; how teachers will collect and use information on bullying to prevent and tackle it, and to inform regular reviews of the policy. Ensuring widespread understanding and ownership of the policy will help promote an environment where people feel able to report bullying incidents and can be confident their concerns will be acted upon.

Leadership and governance

School leaders should give their commitment to tackling bullying and their anti-bullying policy a high profile. Everyone – all staff, pupils, parents, carers – should know what the policy says and how to put it into practice.

Governors and management bodies have a clear role to play in challenging and supporting schools to ensure that both anti-bullying policies and the actions the school takes to tackle bullying are appropriate and effective.

Staff training and support

Staff need to feel supported in making decisions about how to deal with bullying issues. They also need to know that senior colleagues will back them up when they report a problem. Regular staff training is essential to enable teachers to feel confident about handling different types of diversity and different types of bullying. For example, teachers need to be kept up-to-date on how pupils can be at risk through cyberbullying, including which apps and platforms they are using. Audits can help to identify the levels of knowledge or skills among staff about identity-based bullying.

Checklist

- Do your school's ethos and values champion diversity and respect for difference?
- Does your anti-bullying policy reflect the different protected characteristics and set clear expectations about behaviour?
- Does your anti-bullying policy set out how your school gathers and uses data to prevent and tackle bullying?
- Is your school's anti-bullying policy publicised throughout the school community and understood by pupils, parents, carers, staff and governors?
- Are there ways to promote greater understanding and ownership of the policy, for example, by encouraging pupils to develop the school's anti-bullying policy or to produce their own version of it?
- How do you support staff to tackle bullying, for example, by reviewing whether school staff have the skills, knowledge and experience to tackle prejudice-based bullying and different forms of bullying?

2. Reporting bullying incidents

Direct reports

Pupils need clear ways to report concerns and ask for help. These may include paper forms, which pupils can submit anonymously through a post box, online reporting apps and/or dedicated bullying reporting email addresses.

Indirect reports

A peer mentoring scheme provides the opportunity for pupils to report bullying concerns via fellow students, rather than directly to teachers. As well as supporting

pupils in need, mentors can also be a valuable way for schools to monitor trends, for example, by identifying particular bullying ‘hot spots’ within the school.

The school’s anti-bullying policy should set out how parents, carers and other young people can report concerns about someone who they believe is experiencing bullying.

Staff also need clear routes to report incidents that they observe or which come to their attention, for example, by having a designated bullying lead who they can speak to.

Checklist

- How can children and young people report bullying in your school? Can they report anonymously?
- Can children and young people report through peer mentors, as well as directly to teachers?
- How can teachers or other staff report incidents? Does the school have a bullying ‘lead’ who staff can raise concerns with?
- How can parents, carers or other young people report bullying concerns to the school?

3. Recording and reviewing bullying incidents

Monitoring systems

Recording bullying incidents should be quick and easy to avoid making it a burdensome administrative task for overworked staff. Monitoring systems should enable staff to record incidents efficiently and consistently, while allowing them to include as many details as necessary for the school to conduct a thorough investigation into any alleged incident. Monitoring systems should include ways of categorising incidents by mode (for example, verbal, physical, cyber) and protected characteristics of the pupils involved. These may be ‘off the shelf’ online services, in-house systems, or the school’s central management information system.

Staff need to be made aware of the value that of recording incidents. By monitoring and dealing with even low-level behavioural problems or single incidents of name-calling, schools can resolve behavioural issues before they turn into bullying, saving time in the long term.

Schools should ensure that they have systems in place to respond to bullying reports quickly and that they take all reports of bullying seriously.

Surveys and audits

Anonymous online surveys are quick and easy to set up and can provide schools with a 'snapshot' of current or emerging trends and concerns among pupils and families, as well as an understanding of how well a particular anti-bullying intervention has worked. However, surveying too frequently, or asking the same questions, risks respondents becoming disengaged.

Reviewing data

Regular sessions where staff review bullying incidents can be effective. They let staff and pupils know that their concerns will be discussed promptly and acted upon, and are more likely to create an environment where people feel able to report incidents. Some schools may hold weekly meetings between pupil support leads for each year group, allowing staff to review recent incidents, highlight emerging trends and discuss potential action.

Reviewing data from bullying reports, surveys and audits can help to inform the school's safeguarding responsibilities, as well as an understanding about other issues, such as pupil absences, mental health needs and exclusions.

Adopting a continuous cycle of gathering and analysing data on bullying incidents, and then reviewing and adapting policies, procedures and training to deal with those incidents, is key to ensuring that strategies for preventing and responding to bullying are suitably targeted. Spreading awareness is also vital: everyone in the school should know that the school records and monitors all bullying incidents.

Checklist

- Is there a simple and accessible template for staff to use to record bullying incidents or concerns with behaviour that may lead to bullying?
- Does your school currently record all incidents of bullying by protected characteristic and bullying type?
- Does your school carry out surveys of pupils, staff and parents/carers about bullying?
- Is there a specific person or team who analyses bullying data at a regular time?

- How do your senior staff monitor and evaluate bullying incidents? What mechanisms are in place for governors to regularly review bullying data in order to provide effective challenge and support?
- Are there ways to assess whether bullying incidents may link to wider concerns about a pupil, such as absences and changes in attainment, as well as safeguarding issues?
- Does the way your school analyses data enable you to spot trends or emerging areas of concern?
- How do you use your bullying data to inform your anti-bullying strategies and approaches?

4. Embedding a whole-school approach

The principles of the anti-bullying strategy can be embedded in different aspects of school life, for example, through school assemblies, personal, social, health and economic lessons and through the wider curriculum, such as in History or English lessons where there may be opportunities to promote messages about celebrating difference and diversity. For more information on a whole-school approach, see our [tips for tackling prejudice-based bullying](#).

Checklist

- Are there opportunities to improve how you communicate your anti-bullying messages through assemblies or the curriculum?
- Can you use the findings from your data analysis to tackle issues in the classroom that focus on diversity and equality, or on rights-respecting issues?