

# **United Against Bullying School Case Study: Using a regular support group to involve pupils in whole-school approach**

## **How Ad Astra Infant school used a regular support group to involve pupils in their whole-school approach and equip them with skills**

### **Context of our anti-bullying work**

After completing the UAB questionnaires at the beginning of the year we noticed that many children within 'at risk' groups had not participated due to not having consent forms returned. We wanted to hear the voices of these children so a 'support group' was created for children who have anxieties around school and struggle socially - be that they've experienced unkind behaviour towards them, they are unkind to others or they find it challenging to make friends. This group were asked similar questions in a more informal group meeting. From these results a group was formed to address any areas of concern, listen to children's thoughts and feelings and make a change to aspects of school as well as equip them with way to approach and play with other children appropriately.

### **What we hoped to achieve**

The desired outcome of this project was to make changes based on these children's thoughts and feelings and around school so that a safe and inclusive environment is created for all children. We also wanted to equip these children with the skills to form positive relationships, especially if their behaviours had previously been negatively impacting other pupils.

### **The action we took**

The group meet every 2 weeks to discuss the positive and negatives of their week and their feelings towards school. This would often then draw out themes that we would discuss together such as; rough play, finding it challenging to make friends, joining and leaving other children out of games, anxieties around sharing feelings with parents and teachers and managing their emotions. The children were given strategies and advice to try and take forward over the next two weeks and how this had gone would be discussed in the following meeting. Games days also took place with these children where they would get together with an adult at playtime/lunchtime and learn new games and be given guidance on how manage any conflicts appropriately.

## Impact and outcomes of the work

The children have recently been asked the same questions to determine if the sessions had a positive impact. Their feelings towards school had become more positive and although these children still had areas which they struggled with – they were able to give a clear explanation of what to do and who to go to if they need help. It was particularly found that they were finding playtimes and lunchtimes more enjoyable and were experiencing less conflicts with other children. By listening to the needs and wants of these children, improvements were made that impacted all children. Zones were created on the playgrounds with a range of different activities for the children to carry out at play and lunch time. This helped children to build necessary social skills and reduce rough play and unkind behaviour due to the amount of resources available for children to occupy themselves with. These support sessions had a positive impact on the staff's approach to issues relating to playtime and relational conflicts along with cases where bullying behaviour may be occurring. The children highlighted areas of the playground that often felt less safe which led to careful positioning of staff in these areas. The children also discussed their anxieties around sharing their worries about school. From this, there was a big push on reminding children about worry boxes in the classrooms and making sure they are inclusive for all abilities to share their worries privately. These sessions also became a safe space for children to freely share their worries and be given dedicated time to listen to them and aim to resolve them. Over the next year or so we are hoping these sessions will continue to be a safe space for children who find socialising particularly challenging or anxiety inducing. We also hope this will be an opportunity for early intervention for children who may have started carrying out bullying behaviours without additional support. We hope over the next year, this will continue to allow our practice to be guided by children through responding regularly to requests and ideas through pupil voice.

## What we have learned

The children who are regularly behaving in an unkind manner towards peers all discussed that they were aware that they were doing the wrong thing but didn't know how to play with children appropriately discussing that they were often 'left out of games' or 'didn't have friends.' I think this is extremely important to address at an early stage because if we can equip these children with tools and resources to develop their social skills, they will be less likely to go down the path of bullying others.