

United Against Bullying School Case Study: Implementing worry boxes in response to wellbeing survey

How Hillside Avenue Primary & Nursery School implemented worry boxes in response to wellbeing survey

Context of our anti-bullying work

From our initial UAB pupil survey, we found that up to 20% of pupils either worry 'a lot' or 'always' and that a further 55% of children 'sometimes' worry. Post-pandemic, we felt that more children were struggling with anxiety, demonstrated by more referrals for nurture support in school by teachers and incidents of 'emotional wellbeing' being recorded on CPOMS. This was something that staff also reported anecdotally.

What we hoped to achieve

We wanted to give all children an outlet for their worries, particularly those children who weren't being reached through our nurture work in school. We hoped that by giving children an outlet to share worries in a private and safe way, they would open up more and therefore feel less anxious.

The action we took

We provided all classes with a high-quality wooden box to create unique worry boxes. First of all, this was discussed in a staff meeting to clearly share the rationale with staff. We held a whole-school assembly to explain the purpose of these to all pupils, and each class collected a box from the assembly to keep. Each class had a further PSHE lesson to introduce the concept and they then worked as a team to decorate their boxes. Parents were informed through our RSE communication. The RSE/PSHE lead observed all classes had decorated these and had them in prominent position in class during her monitoring learning walk.

Alongside the worry box, we also had whole-school wellbeing activities planned each day (SMILE activities which focus on the NHS 5 ways to wellbeing) and anxiety/worry was a focus for some of these lessons.

Impact and outcomes of the work

During a governor visit, a parent governor saw the boxes in a classroom and shared a personal story about how his daughter had used the worry box to share with her teacher how some other children were subtly making fun of her and had been for quite some time. The teacher was then able to speak to the other children and do some restorative work together to share how this girl had felt. This was very successful and the behaviour stopped immediately with the accused children sharing that they had no idea how that had made the girl feel. The father (parent governor) reported that his daughter had never mentioned it before and it was only after the worry box was introduced that she felt she had a medium to share this information with the teacher.

The worry boxes also became multi-purpose and not specifically focussed on only bullying. When the war in Ukraine broke out, we referred to the worry boxes again in whole-school assemblies and in classes, and children used these to express concerns (some anonymously) which were then addressed through PSHE and personal support for children via our Nurture team.

In the final pupil survey for this year, we hope to see a decrease in the number of children who report on the pupil survey that they 'always' worry or worry 'a lot'.

What we have learned

After some pupil feedback early on which centred on concerns that pupil worries in the box would be read aloud to the class, we had a further whole-school PSHE lesson to debunk this misconception and to fine-tune the approach all teachers were taking to ensure it was sensitive and private.