

United Against Bullying School Case Study: Reducing the use of unacceptable language

How Burton Borough School reduced the use of unacceptable language

Context of our anti-bullying work

In our student voice panels, students raised concerns about the difference between profanities and slurs. They told us that slurs were common in the school and they gave us examples of them. They felt that, as a school, there were few sanctions for the use of such language.

What we hoped to achieve

To reduce the use of unacceptable language.

The action we took

1. All staff received Racist incident Training (how to deal with racist incidents) from the Multi-Cultural Development Team at Telford and Wrekin LA. This ensured that we were capturing the data around unacceptable language use correctly.
2. We completed student voice with students from a wide range of diversity to understand what unacceptable language was being used in the school and what they thought should happen when a student used this language.
3. In SLT, we had a frank conversation about how honest we wanted to be about the unacceptable words. There was a concern raised that being direct with the students about unacceptable words would encourage them to use them more. However, it was felt that, unless we were clear on the words that were unacceptable and why they were unacceptable, we would not be able to sanction and change the experiences of students within the school.
4. We presented the students with a provisional list of unacceptable words. In tutor time, we asked them to discuss the list and see if there were any missing. This was done in a sensitive and mature fashion. Form tutors noted down key concern words and we centralised the list.
5. The final list of unacceptable words was presented to students in an assembly. We were careful to show the words but not to say them. The list of unacceptable words were mainly racist words, homophobic words and disablist words. (See attached assemblies for the list of words and how we presented them.)
6. We delivered staff training on how to deal with the use of unacceptable language
7. To support International Day against Homophobic, transphobic and Biphobic Language, we again presented what words were unacceptable and what sanctions would be given were students to use these words. (See assembly evidence 3-5-22 attached).

8. We did further staff training on dealing with homophobic incidents. This included giving staff a script that they could use to challenge homophobic incidents.
9. We have introduced restorative education work for students who are involved in the use of homophobic or racist language. This has mainly been drawn from the Show Racism/ Homophobia the Red Card resources which fit our student demographic.

Impact and outcomes of the work

Whilst there was an initial increase in the use of unacceptable language, and students were talking about them, this told us that they understood that these words were unacceptable. We were clear about the sanctions for the use of these words and over the last few months we have seen a reduction in their use. When these words are used, staff know how to log it and how to respond to it so it is correctly challenged. Student voice shows that students of diversity feel better supported within school.

What we have learned

Be really clear with students about what is and isn't acceptable. You may also have to have direct conversations with parents about unacceptable language if you feel it needs challenging at home.