

United Against Bullying School Case Study: 'THINK before you speak' programme

How Coundon Court School, Coventry, designed and implemented a programme to tackle discriminatory and unkind language

Context of our anti-bullying work

We designed a THINK before you speak programme. This was initially brought in post-lockdown as we felt that students' expectations of what was acceptable language and interaction had changed. They had lived simultaneously in isolation, whilst also on online platforms and this, at least to some extent, appeared to have an impact on verbal interactions.

What we hoped to achieve

We wanted to re-set the expectations to all students about our school values and our expectations of respecting one another, not only through physical space, but also through the words we chose to use and the way in which we used them.

We wanted to:

- (1) Have a clear process for how students can ascertain if they are using respectful language,
- (2) Be transparent with the specific language we deemed unacceptable and
- (3) Encourage students to reflect on the wider implications and impact on individuals when such terms/ language is used.

The action we took

Stage 1

We introduced THINK before you speak posters into all classrooms. This encouraged students to reflect whether their words could pass through 'five gates': Are their words:

- (1) True (2) Helpful (3) Inspiring (4) Necessary (5) Kind?

The posters were launched alongside a sequence of 'THINK before you speak' assemblies. Our initial assemblies focused on homophobic language, misogynistic language and racist language. The assemblies drew attention to the slippery slope from stereotypes and prejudice to discrimination and genocide. These assemblies were initially launched to all years.

Stage 2

The THINK programme was built into the Key Stage 3 Personal Development tutor programme. Additional lessons returned to the three foci to allow students an opportunity to

reflect again on the way we should speak to others and the potential impact. The sessions were developed further for example, the racism session focused on the issue of micro aggressions.

Stage 3

This year we have brought in additional sessions to focus on disablist language and anti-Semitic language (as a focus of discriminatory language towards people of faith).

Impact and outcomes of the work

With every student receiving these sessions, there was further clarity about the way in which we can ask ourselves if the words we use are appropriate.

It can help with restorative conversations – allowing mediators to work through THINK in a step-by-step process to help pinpoint to the students where exchanges had become disrespectful/ unnecessary.

The follow-up tutor activities have provided a safe space for students to explore and ask questions about why some of the use of specific terms may be prejudicial/ discriminatory and had the chance for this to be explained without worry of recrimination.

What we have learned

It is important that there is a return to the THINK programme as students move further up the school. This allows for a gentle reminder of expectations and opportunity to reflect on the impact that words can have on the individual/ groups it refers to. It also allows to consider the roles of the bystanders and how/ when they should be involved in challenging poor language.

Having a simple poster with the five strands available in classrooms is an easy win to support staff with challenging any exchanges that might not meet the school's values and this in turn helps prevent/ challenge potential instances that could lead to bullying/ cause someone to feel less valued.