

United Against Bullying School Case Study: Tackling homophobic language

How Devonshire Road Primary School tackled homophobic language

Context of our anti-bullying work

We have had a strong Antibullying policy in place for a number of years. In 2018, we were awarded the Anti Bullying Bronze Equality Mark. We are constantly working to tackle any incidents of prejudice in school, particularly around inappropriate language children. We find that often with our children, this language isn't necessarily being aimed at any individual, it is the language they repeat in their everyday talking that they might hear from songs and the wider community.

What we hoped to achieve

In Autumn 2021, from our half termly behaviour data monitoring, we identified that a number of our Year 5 children had been spoken to about the inappropriate use of "gay" e.g. "that earring is so gay", "I am not playing that, it's gay". After each individual had been spoken to and worked with, there were no repeat incidents. However, the incidents were still being recorded across this year group. The fact that the incidents were being recorded, showed us that a lot of our children knew that this use of language was inappropriate and felt comfortable in challenging and reporting it. When the individuals were spoken to about what they had said, they spoke of older siblings saying it, or parents/carers e.g. "my dad said it was gay to wear your earring on that side". We wanted to teach our children the harmful effects this language can have on the others around them and how they feel about themselves.

The action we took

Our two year 5 teachers agreed to teach an extra unit/series of lessons in PSHE to particularly tackle this issue. We used resources from Stonewall: "Tackling Homophobic Language" for guidance and to showcase some of the quotes from children who had described how this word had effected them ([Stonewall guide](#)). Alongside this, we found YouTube clips of people sharing their experiences and both class teachers used their own lives, or their family and friend's lives, to put it in context closer to home.

We shared the concerns in our whole staff meeting and trained staff on the importance of tackling the inappropriate use of this word.

Impact and outcomes of the work

In Autumn Term 2021, there were 6 incidents of homophobic language. See below taken from our termly report to governors:

(01.09.21 – 16.12.21)

Category	Number of incidents	Brief commentary	How was it dealt with?	Number of incidents
Homophobic	6	Y3 child (m) called another child 'gay'	Parents spoken with. Previous incident in previous year.	2
		Y3 child (m) called another child 'lesbian'	Parents spoken with. Previous incident in previous year.	
		Y5 child (m) called other children (m, m) 'girls' and 'gay' because of their reactions in football.	Parents informed – individual behaviour approach used and followed.	
		Y5 child (m) pushing others and calling them 'gay'	Parents informed and spoken to by class teacher.	
		Y5 child (m) shouting out in class 'he's a gay'	Parents informed – individual behaviour approach used and followed.	
		2 Y6 children (f, f) calling boys 'girly' and 'gay' because of their reactions.	Parents informed – isolated incidents for both of them.	

Spring Term data (2022) showed that there had been a reduction of these incidents and no repeat incidents from the Year 5 class we targeted.

(01.01.22 – 01.04.22)

Category	Number of incidents	Brief commentary	How was it dealt with?
Homophobic	2	3x Y4 children (all m) telling another Y4 child (m) that he was 'gay' because he used 'he' and 'she' wrong by accident.	Removal of privileges, spoken to about the seriousness of the incident. Parents informed. Restorative conversations taken place.
		Y6 child (m) called another child 'gay' because of the way they looked.	Parents informed, and removal of privileges. Apologised to victim and restorative work done around individual liberty and stereotypes.

What we have learned

We feel that personalising the impact that homophobia can have by listening to "real-life" people had an impact on our Year 5 children. We were very lucky to have staff who were happy to talk about their personal life and their own experiences.

We need to do more work throughout the whole school now to ensure that our incidents are reduced to zero.

We are looking for ways to engage parents and carers in their work too. The work was put in Year 5's PSHE big book and this was displayed at parent/carer evening in Spring 2022. The work was also showcased to the governors at Pupil Welfare Committee meeting in Spring Term.

We are happy to share the outcomes of this work and also for people to come and ask our children about the impact it had on them personally.