

United Against Bullying School Case Study: Improving playground behaviour

How Hillside Avenue Primary & Nursery School improved playground behaviour

Context of our anti-bullying work

At the end of Autumn 1, we did some analysis of our CPOMS data and found that the number of behaviour incidents had increased three-fold when compared with pre-lockdown data. When digging into this, we saw a pattern of playground behaviour being an issue. This was then confirmed with the UAB survey in February when over half of all children reported being 'hit, pushed or kicked by other pupils'. When compared to behaviour online, which was much more positive, it was clear that behaviour in school was a big issue for pupils.

At the time we had just implemented a new behaviour policy which focussed on restorative justice as a key principle so we knew we were tackling this from a policy angle but recognised there was work to do in the playground to make children feel safer.

What we hoped to achieve

We wanted to ensure children were active at playtime and had a range of activities to choose from so that they weren't bored, a key trigger for some children misbehaving. We also wanted to provide children with role models in the playground who could model good play and relationships. Finally, we wanted to ensure staff were effective in their role at playtimes.

The action we took

First, we created a plan in the playground to have zones of different play, including: skipping zone, football zone, climbing zone, bat/ball zone etc. We then bought play equipment to ensure the zones were clearly defined and well-equipped e.g. new football goals to demarcate these areas clearly so that football wasn't dominating the space as it had been.

Next, we trained up some Year 6 play leaders to model play and lead each zone. They wore a special hat so were clearly identifiable and we had an assembly to introduce the role to the other children so they would know what their responsibilities were.

After a few weeks, we made further tweaks by running KS2 play at the same time (as opposed to separate play times for Y3/4 and Y5/6 which had been in place during the pandemic) and

opened up the other playground (KS1) to extend the area of play: this section gave greater opportunity for quieter play.

The plan was led by our KS2 phase leader who used a key stage meeting to explain the rationale behind the plan. It was made clear that staff were expected to be in different zones to be proactive in facilitating the play.

We held an assembly to celebrate the role of the Y6 play leaders and to share our excitement and vision for the playtime zones at the launch of these changes.

After a few months of success with the zones, we invested Sports Premium money in 8 small portable football goals which further helped define the space and raise the profile of the expected modes of play. The children saw these as a reward for them having used the zones so well!

Impact and outcomes of the work

The impact on behaviour at playtime has been huge. There are far fewer incidents of poor behaviour at playtime and we've even tried to incorporate some of these elements into the lunchtime play to improve behaviour here which we are starting to see the impact of but this is ongoing..

Most noticeable has been the impact on SEND children. Child D had struggled with playtimes and was very possessive over areas of the playground that he would claim as his own. This often led to him lashing out at other children. Now this is rarely an issue for him as he's so involved and occupied in the football zone which is his favourite zone.

Y3/4 children in particular reported being happy with the change back to whole-KS2 playtime as they enjoyed having the play leaders around to play with.

Observing the play leaders has been a particular highlight for staff and was recently observed by a parent governor. For example, disagreements over football decisions are minimised as the play leaders act as a referee and the other children respect them.

What we have learned

Key steps to success:

- Using data and evidence - eg CPOMS records and surveys - as a start point to identify areas or times in school which need addressing to reduce behaviour and/or bullying issues - through this we identified playtimes as a difficult time
- Watching how children play and talking with them about how they wanted to spend playtimes and what they were interested in doing
- Investing time and resources in setting up a playtime structure

- Observing how effective this is in terms of pupil engagement, active play and number of behaviour incidents
- Refining and further developing playtime as an ongoing process, because children's interests and issues will change over time

After a few months, we had seen a significant reduction in behaviour incidents at playtime, but we noticed another time children struggled with was the routine of lining up.

Disagreements and minor upsets arose when waiting in line. We then spent some time with staff and pupils practising what we expected. We changed the end-of-playtime routine to tidy up equipment but continue socialising before a final whistle to line up and go straight in. This has worked much better. A next step for us as a team will be to upskill MSAs to lead this effectively when there isn't a teacher present.

We also have some exciting additions we will be making to the zones over the summer holiday which has been led by the children's interest in hide-and-seek, 'adventure' play and digging. We will be converting an underused space into a digging and adventure zone complete with tunnels!