

United Against Bullying School Case Study: Outdoor play and learning

How Esher Church School reviewed outdoor play and learning

Context of our anti-bullying work

- Recognising the huge impact of imaginative, creative, stimulating and safe playtimes we applied for a grant a few years ago and with the money redeveloped our playground with the help of the OPAL team (Outdoor Play and Learning). This, a fully stocked Playpod with equipment from old suitcases, keyboards and dressing up clothes to skipping ropes, tyres and plastic pipping, alongside a Playzone, climbing frame and a trim Trail, enables the children to develop their creativity and co-operation skills thus having a positive effect on their physical and mental wellbeing, happy playtimes means happy children!
- However busy, interested and excited the children are there are of course always moments of disagreement so every year we ensure that playtimes and lunchtimes are reviewed and developed to ensure that all interests are catered for. The happier the children are, the less likely they are to have or to look for bullying opportunities.
- Following on from playground bubbles, now all the children are back together in a relatively small space, we wanted to ensure that our outdoor play and learning experiences are in the children's best interest
- Although we have, gratefully, had very few bullying incidents in the last year, we never want to take things for granted and find it imperative to constantly review our playtime experiences and to include the children in this process, thus giving them ownership and enabling them to take on some responsibility

What we hoped to achieve

- To have a clear review of playtimes and lunchtimes taking into consideration the views of the children and the staff and playground supervisor
- To ensure that bullying opportunities are limited with a well supervised and constructive playtimes
- To use peer mentoring at the forefront of providing positive role models and support systems for all the children
- At the beginning of the year, we introduced a Chill Out Club which takes place in the ELSA room and is led by the ELSA leader. We aim for its profile to be raised and for children in need of a calmer environment at playtimes to find this a safe and supportive space. We also hope that some of the older children will take on more mentoring roles.

The action we took

- With bubbles a thing of the past, we wanted to re-instate Year 5 Playground Friends to provide all children with a supportive and engaging peer mentoring system

- Big Friends and Little Friends were also re-instated enabling the buddy system to provide the youngest cohort with company and support and the oldest cohort with a responsibility that we know has been taken very seriously and been cherished in the past
- The School Parliament put together a Playtimes questionnaire that they took to their classes (and the staffroom) and analysed as part of their meetings with the School Parliament lead. Ideas were collated and taken to the SLT and playtime supervisor
- The School Parliament and Playground Friends were given a map of the playground with red and green dots and asked to consider bullying opportunity hot spots

Impact and outcomes of the work

- The Big Friends/ Little Friends have developed positive relationships and are always seen playing together in the playground. They offer a huge support system to the Reception children and have brought to the attention of the staff any worries or concerns. This partnership is also fostered for assembly times, some lunchtimes, shared reading and play opportunities
- The Playground Friends have been trained and have a weekly meeting to discuss any incidents and ways of dealing with situations. They also learn a new playground game every week. They wear bright yellow tabards and have just designed and are painting friendship benches. They were going to make friendship stops but following on from the UAB Questionnaire decided that the benches would be a more inclusive and friendlier way of inviting children to seek friends. The playground Friends, like the Big Friends have brought to the staff's attention any concerns eg a year 1 child always on their own. Discussions with staff and families encouraged new friendship groups and playdates.
- The playground questionnaire celebrated much about our playtimes eg the playzone, play-pod etc but it also highlighted the need for a calm area in the playground and more versatile and varied resources. The Pavillion is being turned into a calm area with books and new resources have been bought including a big chess set, scooters and cricket stumps and bats to name a few. Another area of concern was that many children didn't clear up their equipment which caused much disappointment and disagreement. The School Parliament are currently in the throws of putting together a playtime assembly which will be shared in September with the new cohort, which will include expected behaviours e.g taking responsibility for tidying up resources used
- Another area which has been of concern in the playground has been the football. Some of the children have been getting cross and possessive over rules intimidating others on what was becoming a regular occurrence. A football rota has been established, providing each year group with their own football time as well as mixing the classes in key stages. This has made a huge difference and has calmed down what we worried could potentially turn into a bullying concern
- The school Parliament and Playground Friends found a few areas in the playground which they felt could be bullying hot spots. The Playground friends have made it their responsibility to supervise these hot spot areas and to patrol those areas and keep an eye on them. They discussed how they would deal with any concerns should they come across them. Staff were shown the red/green dot maps (also displayed in the staffroom) and have been reminded to walk around their allocated area rather than standing in the same place

- Chill Out Club is inundated with children who would like the opportunity to develop friendships and spend their time in a calmer environment. Many children on the ELSA programme have appreciated the smaller and supported space and have over time even taken on mentoring responsibilities, which has been a joy to observe, a safe haven from the hustle and bustle of the busy playground
- Making playtimes a focus, has also brought to light friendship issues in year 6. The Drawing and Talking lead spent time with the girls individually and as a group and over a few weeks, relationships were nurtured and are slowly being rebuilt. One girl who is feeling a little bruised from the experience is now spending some of her playtime helping the lunchtime supervisor to set up the tables. She enjoys the responsibility and has formed a connection with a member of staff who she can confide her worries in

What we have learned

- Having the children at the heart of this process has been enlightening and very successful. It's their playtime and they should be part of the reviewing process and they have risen to the challenge of making their own playtimes safer, more exciting and more accessible and engaging for all interests and personalities.
- This has also shown the children that we believe in them and are interested in what they have to say. We had a small concern about the football but it was making the playground a focus, that encouraged some children to speak up and share their thoughts which gave us the bigger picture and enabled us to take positive action immediately
- This process will definitely be repeated again next year