

United Against Bullying School Case Study: Year 10 Investigation into a bullying situation

How Millais School West Sussex used Investigation Reports to investigate a bullying situation in Year 10

Context of our anti-bullying work

We began our journey with the Anti Bullying Alliance on the back of the return to school following the pandemic. Stakeholder surveys gave us an insight into how we were viewed as a school and our reputation for dealing with bullying was cited as a concern by our parents.

The Anti Bullying Policy was due to be updated and so we undertook research into making the policy as robust and useful as possible. By using the Anti Bullying Alliance resources as part of the research we came across the United Against Bullying Programme and signed up straight away. This was in February 2022, and we made the most of the remainder of the year to review and modify the policy we wanted to put in place, however we also made the decision to commit to the UAB Programme with a view to getting recognition for the work we were about to embark on. By July 2022 we had the bones of the new policy and had thoroughly completed the initial action plan baseline – this was time consuming and, at times, hard to reflect upon areas that we did not have a positive experience of. But it was an invaluable process that meant that we hit the ground running for this academic year and got to work at the start of September.

What we hoped to achieve

In November 2022 a serious level incident was reported to me that needed to be fully investigated. Having an indication that the issue was significant and based on the experience of two investigations we had carried out since working with the ABA, I required a systematic approach to collating and reviewing the details of the investigation and then being able to share that information with parents, the students involved and, in this case, a second school. I looked into Investigation Reports and used these to design the format that we now use. I have copied a redacted version to the end of this form for your convenience.

The action we took

The form meant that I would be able to explain what was reported, how the information was shared and how we as a school responded. It makes clear the students who were involved, and the simple list indicates that as one of the indicators of bullying there was an imbalance of power in the numbers of students involved on each 'side'.

Once the investigation was completed and I had a file of statements, timelines, maps and screenshots, this investigation format enabled me to pull this altogether. During the meetings with all students and their parents I was able to share the redacted investigation report and talk them through the stages I'd taken. Although I was unable to show them CCTV and screenshots the size of the file that sat with the report showed them the level to which the investigation had gone to.

The investigation report was also an important document in the delivery of consequences for some of the students involved. In this particular case, the issue involved a student who was on a managed move to our school and the investigation report was shared with their home school to explain why we had had to make the decision to terminate the move.

Equally we found out that students at a neighbouring boys' school were involved and we were able to share this information with their pastoral teams to support the work they were doing.

Finally, the investigation report meant that there was a clear line that had been drawn under what had been investigated. All students and their parents were expected to understand that their involvement in this incident and series of issues was to stop and, having received intervention from the school and our outside agency for support in understanding the breakdown of the situation, they were not to be repeated.

It helps us to explain to all parents and carers and the students themselves, that it is important that if a student is caught up in a bullying situation they must reflect on their role within it – this is the design behind the intervention. They are offered support and regular check-ins regardless of which 'side' they were on. However, it is also made very clear to those perpetrating such bullying behaviours that if they continue after the supportive interventions then they are dealt with as choice behaviours, and these come with a more serious consequence within the Behaviour Policy. The student is seen to be deliberately instigating an issue and causing further problems entirely by choice having had the report delivered to them previously.

Impact and outcomes of the work

The Investigation Report has been an invaluable document to help support parents. Those that have just been informed that their child has been involved in a bullying situation tend to feel defensive and the document helps to demonstrate that the situation has been investigated fairly and without bias. It helps me to be able to explain the process in a very clear and logical way. Feedback from parents has been overwhelmingly positive about this and it has supported the family to work together and move forward.

For the parents of students who reported the bullying in the first place, the Investigation Report has been important to demonstrate how seriously we have taken the voice of the child

and completed the investigation in detail. It helps to contextualise the consequences and the school's approach to what happens next to the students involved.

We use the same format to investigate all reports of bullying and the report is used as a marker to keep on file with the original report. This means that if further issues arise or names of individuals come up in future reports from students, we are able to refer back to their involvement, their consequences and this in turn would impact how the next investigation works. Sometimes the previous Investigation Report is enough to have a conversation with that child and implement actions quickly which is beneficial to the targeted student(s).

Copy of Investigation report:

Investigation report		Type of investigation	
Year Group involved	10, 9	Bullying	✓
Date	29 th November 22	Abusive Behaviour	
Staff	CLW, AFC, SXW	Physical Harm	

Introduction	Investigation authorised by: [Name and role] Dr Alison Lodwick Headteacher
	Investigator: [Name and role] Chantal Warwick: Assistant Headteacher in charge of Anti Bullying Policy
	Date investigation began: Thursday 24 th November 2022
	Terms of reference: [define the objectives and the scope of the evaluation and provide a clear description of the resources available] <ul style="list-style-type: none"> To investigate bullying claims made against a group of students To determine correct use of sanctions and levels of support where required Student Statements CCTV where applicable Student Interviews Screenshots relevant to the situation
	Background to the investigation: [Brief overview of the matter] 22 nd November Parent report of bullying made to the Pastoral Team, triggered by an event that took place after school (Highlands Gate)

Process of investigation	The investigation process: [Explain how the investigation was authorised]	
	Students targeted in the event asked to complete initial report and statements.	
	CCTV footage verified the involvement of a wider group of students.	
	Further reports and statements gathered from all parties involved.	
Contextual background in parent concerns about their child starting in October 2022 – emails from Mr S.		
This unearthed a wider context of conflict between two groups of students.		
Investigation grew to encompass a timeline that started in September 2022		
Evidence collected: [List all evidence collected]		
20 student statements collected, including some students wanting to add further information once the investigation was under way.		
Email content from two parents who were supporting us in our enquiries and gave us contextual background and evidence from home.		
CCTV footage of incident at Highlands Gate.		
Screenshots and video recordings of Snap Chat Groups, student conversations and TikTok recordings		
Evidence not collected: [List all evidence that could not be collected and why]		
CCTV footage of incidents reported in school but not visible on CCTV angle		
Some Snap Chat conversations were not screenshot at the time and 'disappear' after a certain period of time.		
Persons interviewed: [List all people interviewed]		
	Group 1	Group 2
	XX1	XX2
	XX1	XX2
	XX1	XX2
	XX1	XX2
	XX1	XX2
	XX1	XX2
		XX2

	XX2
	Persons not interviewed: [List any witnesses that could not be interviewed and why]
	Anonymised statements: [If any, explain why and provide details of any enquiries into witness]
The investigation findings	<p>Summary of witness evidence:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Timeline • Student Statements provided information to put together the timeline that starts in September – Email from Mr S reporting voice notes between CH and SFS. • Breakdown of friendship between XX1 and XX2 at the start of November • Breakdown of friendship between XX1 and XX2 on 18th November sees the beginning of the two new groups. (Group 1 and Group 2) • Digital evidence of social media platforms - • "OPP BLOCK" group on Snap Chat – Predominantly Group 2 but some of Group 1 as well. • Video content of XX2 verbal abuse of Group 1 students in Dance Lesson – shouting "Opp Block" at them. • TikTok evidence of Group 1 retaliating with inappropriate video aimed at Group 2. "Pennywise" clown reference. • Identified involvement of a boy from XX3 school whose phone contact was used to send a threatening voice note to XX1/group. • XX1 and XX1 added to the "Opp Block" Snapchat Group <u>by</u> XX2 and 'XX3' (XX3 School) • XX2 reports of repetitive verbal threats – shouting, swearing, voice notes • *appears to 'photo bomb' a dance video being made by Group 1 students and shouting "Opp Block". • *called XX1 on the evening of 28th Nov having been spoken to in school. • XX2 reports of threatening violence at the end of their 6-week managed move trial period. • XX2 report of threatening violence using a broken ruler. <p>Facts established: [detail what the investigation has established]</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evidence suggests a very close link between XX2 leaving XX4 School and managed move to Millais and the escalation of events within this bullying situation. • Evidence suggests that XX2 using the fall out of the friendship group – which they are aware of as previously close to a member of Group 1, as a vehicle to behave in an intimidating manner. • Siding with Group 2 gave this side the imbalance of power, confirming this to be bullying behaviour • XX2 – evidence of using social media platform to intimidate members of Group 1 • XX2 – link to XX3 Sch student – her boyfriend is friend with 'XX3' which feeds into further evidence for Cyberbullying with threatening voice note. • XX2 contacts XX1 on 25th Nov after being spoken to at school that day and asked to not contact anyone from Group 1. • XX2, XX2, XX2 involved at lower level- engaging with social media platforms and being part of the larger group and creating an imbalance of power between the two sides. Reinforcing the situation. • XX2, XX2, XX2 involved in the situation as bystanders/reinforcers – using the situation to behave negatively and meanly towards others. XX2 reported as the Millais student who added XX1 and XX1 to the Opp Block Group Chat.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • XX1 – engaging with social media platform to retaliate to the negative behaviour and intimidation received. <p>Facts that could not be established: [detail any part of the investigation that was inconclusive]</p> <p>Despite witness statement from beyond either group we have no factual evidence of the broken / sharpened ruler – just the threat</p> <p>Mitigating factors: [detail if there were any mitigating factors uncovered that are relevant to the investigation]</p> <p>Other relevant information: [detail any other information that is relevant to the matter]</p>
Conclusion	<p>Recommendation:</p> <p>XX2 – termination of managed move trial – week 4/6 due to verbal and physical threat. Intentional intimidation.</p> <p>XX2 – Cyberbullying Action Plan – 6 weeks</p> <p>XX1 – Cyberbullying Action Plan – 3 weeks</p> <p>All students identified in the two groups to attend Anti Bullying Workshop with AYP – separately.</p> <p>Key players in Group 2 to sign school-based ABC Contract to stop any further interactions – XX2, XX2, XX2, XX2</p> <p>Behaviour points – Level 3 for Group 2 involvement in bullying situation.</p> <p>Further details on recommendation:</p> <p>AYP session to be booked in as soon as possible and ideally before Christmas</p> <p>Cyberbullying Contract – signing phone into reception by 8.25am and collecting at 3 pm throughout the time period (6 weeks / 3 weeks)</p> <p>Investigator's signature : C Warwick</p> <p>Date: 29th November 22</p>

What we have learned

The Investigation Report has been really helpful in sharing our work with parents and in some cases diffusing their anxieties about how seriously we are taking the situation. In a couple of cases, it has helped us to identify cases where the targeted student who reports the bullying incident has actually been involved as a perpetrator before and the timeline aspect of the report has been a powerful way to explain to students what is going on. It has helped us to gather a much wider collection of statements and it means that the messages of the anti-bullying programme are seen to be working across the school. This in turn, hopefully, supports the community to feel that we are United Against Bullying.