

United Against Bullying School Case Study: Child with autism struggling with friendships

How [school] worked with a child with autism struggling with friendships

Context of our anti-bullying work

- SEND child with autism in LKS2 who is struggling at play and lunchtimes, because she says she feels invisible due to other children leaving her out.
- She explicitly describes this as a result of her autism to staff.
- Child is working at Greater Depth across the curriculum and functions best with routine. She finds the outside time hard because she knows the routine of playing until the whistle is blown, walking to the line and being ready to go inside – however, she experiences difficulties in free play because of the lack of this routine and the free choice of other children as well as herself.
- She is on the School Council.
- She is sensible, and quiet in nature although will enter discussion with staff about this aspect of difficulty.
- Parents regularly communicate with school and are keen to work with staff and SENDCo to help their daughter.
- Attendance of 87%

What we hoped to achieve

For the child to feel happy, and have a sense of belonging at school – not just in class. To enjoy having a variety of friendships outside and to strive to recognise the reasons other children might have for not playing with her, and others.

The action we took

- Recognition of what is upsetting child by the class teacher, and recorded.
- Confirmation that the child feels safe at playtimes and not in danger. Reassurance that she was not to blame for feeling that she had been left out and talked about.
- Action requested of the SENCO to discuss this with parents and class teacher, as well as child to evaluate and respond.
- Observation of playtimes and lunchtimes by staff to fully understand the situation.
- Cascading to staff on playground duty to be aware of this issue in weekly staff briefing.

- As child was not using the friendship stop, discussion was that these peers were in a different class rather than her own. So, a buddy from her class to go out to play and chat together was introduced. This buddy also had been feeling isolated and was looking for a reliable friend.
- Child to give a non-verbal thumbs up to teacher after break and lunch who would record and evaluate progress, rather than her waiting until the end of the day or when at home to discuss.
- Identifying in review that the class' weekly turn on the play equipment was causing a misconception... the child did not understand that when the class were all playing alongside each other on the equipment, that they were playing as a whole and would not be specifically or obviously playing with one other person.
- PSHE discussion about the feelings children might experience during play and lunchtime, and how peers could help most appropriately.
- Parents evenings and SENCo meetings enabled discussion formally as well as regular phone calls to ensure school actions were communicated. Meant ongoing time related response was achieved.
- Consistent reporting on Cpoms of all actions taken, when and by whom. DSLs, SENCO and class teacher tagged to inform on each occasion.

Impact and outcomes of the work

- Child felt able to talk to staff about feeling bullied. Relief for the child clear at not being 'blamed'.
- A range of staff were able to work together to help improve her experiences at school.
- Parents regularly engaged with staff and communicated relevant information from things that had come out at home. Gave chance to work together with them positively.
- A successful reporting system enabled all actions to be recorded, reviewed and evaluated.
- Identifying areas where the child felt safest at school, and in the wider community, meant that the child felt listened to and enabled her to recognise these as good places to go to feel happy.
- Work with the child as time went on and discussion continued Identified a misconception due to autism that could be addressed, on top of the original feeling where bullying was reported and isolation observed.
- Buddy enjoyed new friendship and was able to discuss her own thoughts successfully.
- Positive outcome cascaded to staff and review of the coming year.
- Over the next year - The gap over the summer holidays may mean that the child feels isolated again, or the successful buddying may not resume in Autumn term, so needs anticipation and Pupil Profile being completed for the next teacher.

- Child becoming a library monitor during wet plays to give order and routine to what she is doing inside in the 'free time'.

What we have learned

- Pressure on the buddy to feel like they must always play. Perhaps a circle of 2 or 3 buddies from class would ease this.
- Child preferring only certain games and repetitive aspect of this – times when her buddy lost interest.
- Observation in this case needed to be more than once or twice to fully comprehend the situation, not just in isolation.
- Non-verbal thumbs up meant she felt that her feelings were still being monitored and cared about, without the class explicitly making her feel intimidated. Over time, and as she felt less isolated, the need for the signal lessened in frequency.
- Vital the child doesn't feel they are to blame.
- Opportunities for structured play at a lunchtime club gives ample time for discussion with teacher and peers.
- Early parental engagement brings the opportunity for the school and parents to be aligned on the language used to correctly define the bullying.
- Do not treat incidents as isolated, they need continued monitoring to ensure success for the child and