

# United Against Bullying Case Study: Understanding the link between bullying and mental health

## How [school] maintained its provision for the physical, mental and emotional health and well-being of all pupils and staff

### Context of our anti-bullying work

**Mental Health and Wellbeing.** Having noticed an increase in children having mental health and wellbeing issues, we decided that this important area would form a priority on this year's School Development Plan. Indeed, Children who have experienced bullying have shown signs of mental health and wellbeing issues, including anxiety and low self-esteem; some refusing to come into school.

### What we hoped to achieve

The desired outcome of the project was to ensure that the school maintains its good provision for the physical, mental and emotional health and well-being of all pupils and staff by:

- complying with equalities legislation to promote the well-being of pupils by improving outcomes for all pupils and eliminating all forms of discrimination, harassment and bullying as well as promoting equality of opportunity, the welfare of pupils and good relations across the whole school community;
- ensuring that any sanctions to vulnerable pupils – such as those with special educational needs, physical or mental health needs, migrant and refugee pupils and looked-after children – are applied consistently, proportionately and reasonably in accordance with their needs and that they receive behavioural support according to their need;
- taking all reasonable measures to protect the safety and well-being of staff and pupils, including preventing all forms of bullying and dealing effectively with reports and complaints about bullying;
- ensuring staff model good behaviour and never denigrate pupils or colleagues;
- keeping parents/guardians informed of their child's behaviour, good as well as bad, using appropriate methods of engaging them and, where necessary, supporting them in meeting their parental responsibilities;
- working with other agencies to promote community cohesion and safety.

## The action we took

### Pupils

- Year 6 Wellbeing Ambassadors were chosen to lead on Mental Health and Wellbeing. The children chosen for this role had experienced anxiety and low self-esteem due to bullying. By choosing these pupils, we felt that we were empowering them to take back some control, by educating themselves and their peers.
- **As part of their role, the Wellbeing Ambassadors delivered an uplifting and extremely thoughtful whole school assembly during Mental Health Week. They also created a video all about mental health. Both presentations were shared with the school and uploaded onto the school website.**
- **All Wellbeing Ambassadors received Peer Mentoring training, alongside the Anti-Bullying Ambassadors.**
- **To support children who were finding playtime difficult, the Wellbeing Ambassadors set up a lunch time club. The club gave vulnerable children somewhere to go to read, play with lego, draw or colour in.**
- **To support the children experiencing social and emotional issues, the Pastoral lead set up friendship and social groups. She regularly checks-in with those children who are experiencing challenges.**
- Through our RSHE and PSHE programme of work the children are taught about relationships. This forms an important part of our curriculum and as such every class teaches RSHE/PSHE on a Friday afternoon.
- The ethos of our school is built firmly upon our Christian values and Virtues. The children are constantly reminded about the need to be kind to each other, to respect each other and to look after their neighbour.
- Whole school worship always has a Virtue focus. Our Virtues encompass respect, resilience, patience, being kind, loving one another, etc.
- From January, the school has implemented a wellbeing afternoon whereby Friday afternoon is devoted to teaching RSHE/PSHE and a mindfulness session. The afternoon ends with Celebration Assembly, whereby the whole school comes together to celebrate children who have grown in the Virtue of the week and have excelled in their learning.
- A child website page is devoted to wellbeing, signposting lots of different resources that are available.

### Staff:

- Our Pastoral Lead offers staff a listening ear if they are not comfortable going to the Headteacher. Staff go to her all the time and feel comfortable sharing their worries.

- The school offers SAS counselling services to teaching staff. This provides an initial assessment, followed by 5 counselling sessions. If SLT are worried about anyone's mental health we will refer them to Occupational Health, who are very supportive
- The Governors are responsible for the wellbeing of the headteacher, which has a direct influence on the wellbeing of staff. By supporting the headteacher to take care of herself, the expectation should be that the headteacher is modelling the correct behaviour.
- The headteacher completed the Level 4 Designated Mental Health Lead training.
- All staff have received training in trauma perceptive practice.
- Staff have undertaken a staff wellbeing survey and results analysed by SLT and shared.

**Parents:**

- The school's weekly newsletter shares information about what the school is doing regarding mental health
- The Essex Wellbeing Services newsletter is shared with parents
- A parent website page is devoted to wellbeing, signposting lots of different resources that are available and can be accessed freely.
- I am always on the gate in the morning and the afternoon.
- I know my families. They talk to me openly about their child's issues and I always refer them to the website. I am involved in the initial referral to BCCS (trained therapists) and after discussions with a parent, will often refer children to our Pastoral Lead.

**Wider community:**

- As a school we have developed strong links with [local provider]. They have provided staff training on childhood trauma and mindfulness. They also visit the school each week to carry out therapy with at least 3 children.
- During Children's Mental Health Week, [local provider] came into school and delivered an assembly on 'Growing Together', this year's theme.

**Impact and outcomes of the work**

The impact has been incredibly powerful. Through looking at bullying through the lens of its impact on mental health and wellbeing, the trauma that the child has experienced is addressed through ongoing pastoral and peer support.

- If a bullying incident occurs, the children are more comfortable about coming and speaking to the headteacher or the pastoral lead. They are able to talk about their feelings of anxiety, isolation and low self-esteem caused by the bullying openly, and with the help of the pastoral lead, feel empowered to take back control of the situation.
- We have found that for most children, knowing that they are being listened to and supported goes a long way in the healing process.

- The children who have been feeling lonely and isolated in the playground are enjoying having somewhere to go at lunchtime, evident in the results of the second Anti-Bullying Survey.
- The Wellbeing Ambassadors have flourished under the responsibility of their new role and compliment the role of the Anti-Bullying Ambassadors.
- Incidents of bullying are dealt with quickly and parents are supportive of the process.

## What we have learned

Bullying has long lasting implications. It is important that if an incident of bullying occurs, that the whole child and the trauma that that child has been through is fully recognised. The mental health of a child can be severely damaged by the experience of being bullied and it is necessary that this is taken into account when dealing with an incident. Putting in place pastoral care, both adult and peer, and working with the parents, helps the children to feel supported and listened to.