



Anti-Bullying Alliance response to the revised behaviour in schools guidance and suspension and permanent exclusions guidance

This response has been collated with input from the Anti-Bullying Alliance (ABA) Advisory Group. We welcome the opportunity to respond to this consultation. You can read more about the work of the Anti-Bullying Alliance at the end of this response. We are also in support of the National Children's Bureau's wider response to this consultation.

Our Advisory Group consists of the following organisations:

- National Children's Bureau
- NSPCC
- NASUWT
- Royal Mencap Society
- Kidscape
- Childnet International / Safer Internet Centre
- Red Balloon
- Ditch the Label
- Nottingham Trent University
- London Borough of Wandsworth

1. The impact of bullying on poor behaviour and school exclusions

There exists a significant amount of available research about the impact of bullying on poor behaviour and exclusions:

- **Children who bully are more likely to be excluded:** Children who engage in bullying are more likely to be involved in crime and be excluded from school¹.
- **Children who have been bullied are more likely to be excluded:** Research on behalf of the Department for Education² finds that children who say they are bullied every day are three times as likely, as children not being bullied, to be excluded.
 - *"Not one child suffered an exclusion for a physical assault but my son did when he assaulted another child after much provocation. They said it was a two-way thing."* – Parent
 - *"I just got so angry I couldn't stand it anymore, so I just hit them"* – Young person
- **Not all children report their experiences of being bullied:** Ditch the Label research³ shows that 37% of pupils who have been bullied never tell anybody about it. Of them 23% don't tell anyone because they are worried that it will make things worse. Through our work with young people, and especially disabled young people and those with SEN, we hear time and again of children experiencing covert bullying that goes under the radar of school staff. Sometimes these children will not be confident that reporting the bullying to school will

¹ Ofsted, 2003; Monks et al., 2009

² [Sarah Lasher and Clare Baker \(2015\) Bullying: Evidence from the Longitudinal Study of Young People in England Wave 2, Department for Education](#)

³ [Ditch the Label \(2017\) Annual Anti-Bullying Survey](#)

help, they may be scared of the repercussions of reporting bullying or be worried about school or parent reactions to bullying. In these cases, we know that children can lose control of their own behaviour and retaliate, be it to those perpetrating the bullying or others in their peer group.

- **Children who experience bullying do not always display behaviours that show ‘typical’ signs of sadness or worry:** They often ‘act out’ and can display similar behaviours to that of children who bully, may go on to bully others and can display poor behaviour. Researchers often refer to these young people as ‘bully-victims’.
- **Children who bully others are just as likely to have poor wellbeing as those that experience bullying⁴.**
- **Bullying is often more nuanced than straightforward binary oppositions of ‘bully’ and ‘victim’⁵:** Bullying is multi-faceted, regularly involving groups; often impacted by the wider peer, school and social culture, and too often involving vulnerable children who both bully and are bullied.
- **There is evidence that a focus on restorative approaches rather than a punitive response can help reduce bullying:** These methods include where the focus on restoring good relationships rather than punishment. Actions of this kind have been found to be effective in some 70-80% of cases^{6 7}.

2. Proposed behaviour in schools guidance

It is important to remember that children may be labelled as having behavioural difficulties when in fact the issue lies further back in the system’s failure to meet their needs. **Emphasis should always be placed on looking at the underlying causes of behaviour**, including whether there are unmet special educational needs or social or emotional difficulties.

Previous guidance on behaviour in schools included very little on the links between bullying and poor behaviour, simply stating school’s responsibilities to outline bullying prevention methods in their policies. **We believe this has been improved in this version of the guidance and should be welcomed.**

The revised guidance acknowledges that behaviour should be a top priority of schools and recognises that when behaviour is poor, bullying can take place. It notes that behaviour policies should include measures to prevent all forms of bullying and that schools should expect the same standard of behaviour of pupils online as they do in school, which we welcome.

We welcome the outlining of Ofsted’s national minimum expectations of behaviour. This includes all members of the school and notes how a sense of community can create an environment in which bullying is not tolerated, everyone is treated respectfully and all such incidents are dealt with quickly and effectively.

We believe that the guidance should have more of a proactive and positive approach to behaviour, allowing for a stronger focus on how school staff can understand and identify the

⁴ [Interim evaluation report on bullying and wellbeing from the All Together Programme \(2020\) – Susanne Robinson, Robert Slonje, and Peter K. Smith.](#)

⁵ [Salmivalli, C., Lagerspetz, K., Björkqvist, K., Österman, K. and Kaukiainen, A. \(1996\), Bullying as a group process: Participant roles and their relations to social status within the group. *Aggr. Behav.*, 22: 1-15.](#)

⁶ Burssens, D. & Vettenburg, N. (2006). Restorative group conferencing at school: a constructive response to serious incidents. *Journal of School Violence*, 5, 5-17.

⁷ Cremin, H. (2013). *Critical perspectives on Restorative Justice / Restorative Approaches to educational settings*. In E. Sellman, H. Cremin & G. McCluskey (eds.), *Restorative approaches to conflict in schools: Interdisciplinary perspectives on whole school approaches to managing relationships*. London: Routledge.

underlying causes behind pupils' behaviour. **We would like to see the guidance be further strengthened to ensure it is clear that schools must explore and act appropriately to respond to any bullying experienced by children displaying poor behaviour.**

3. Proposed suspension and permanent exclusions guidance

We are very disappointed to see that the new proposed exclusions guidance has removed reminders to schools to explore whether children that are at risk of being excluded are experiencing bullying. Due to the evidence outlined above, we would like to see the guidance explicitly state:

- that **schools should consider whether or not a child has experienced bullying** before they are at risk of being excluded or have been excluded, and take this into consideration before exclusions are issued.
- that **bullying should never be seen in isolation** and wider factors, as well as group dynamics, should always be considered before exclusions are issued.

About the Anti-Bullying Alliance

The Anti-Bullying Alliance (ABA) is a unique coalition of organisations and individuals, working together to achieve our vision to: stop bullying and create safer environments in which children and young people can live, grow, play and learn.

We welcome membership from any organisation or individual that supports this vision and support a free network of thousands of schools and colleges.

The ABA has three main areas of work:

1. Supporting learning and sharing best practice through membership;
2. Raising awareness of bullying through Anti-Bullying Week and other coordinated, shared campaigns; and,
3. Delivering programme work at a national and local level to help stop bullying and bring lasting change to children's lives.

We provide expertise in relation to all forms of bullying between children and young people. The Anti-Bullying Alliance was established by the NSPCC and the National Children's Bureau in 2002 and is hosted by the National Children's Bureau. ABA supports the messages within the response from the National Children's Bureau.

The Anti-Bullying Alliance has an elected Advisory Group consisting of 8 core members including Kidscape, Ditch the Label, NSPCC, Childnet / UK Safer Internet Centre, Wandsworth Borough Council, NASUWT, Nottingham Trent University, Red Balloon Learner Centres and the Royal Mencap Society.

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