

All Together Case study: Using peer defenders to reduce bullying at school

How Crookhill Primary, Gateshead has introduced peer defenders to encourage pupils to support one another

This case studies main focuses have been to:

- Encourage pupils to support their fellow peers through the peer defender programme
- To encourage pupils to think about their own friendships with others
- Consider how giving pupils responsibility can lead to positive change surrounding bullying

Background on the School

As part of our ABA audit, one of the objectives we needed to meet was to introduce 'peer defenders' into our school. We already had a 'buddy' system but felt we needed another layer which involved all of the children in school rather than just the Year 6 children.

Lots of our younger children have little disagreements with their friends which can often escalate and be brought back into the classroom. This can often result in the children feeling as if they are being bullied rather than just actually having a fallout with a friend.

Desired outcome

The role of peer defenders is to help the children to solve some of these problems with their peers rather than always with a teacher. The peer defenders will support, particularly the younger children, with their friendships with their peers. The hope is that the children will be able to play together more happily during play and lunchtime and realise that some of their disagreements with their friends are just disagreements and not bullying.

If the children are having more positive playtimes, then this will impact in the classroom as there will be fewer problems to solve before we can start teaching our next lesson.

What is the action we took?

The concept of peer defenders was discussed as a staff after the ABA action plan was created. It was then introduced in a whole school assembly to the children. We discussed what makes a happy, positive playtime and what things can spoil our playtimes. The children had brilliant ideas about how to create a more positive playtime. The children created a list of qualities a peer defender would need to have. This resulted in a job advert being created which the children then had to apply for. As part of this process, they had to write a supporting letter to say how they felt they had the right qualities for this job. They then had to find a reference who could support their letter. Some of the references were completed by parents, friends or staff in school.

These were handed in and discussed at a Senior Leadership Meeting. It was felt that some of the girls who had applied for the jobs might struggle to support the younger pupils with their friendships when they struggled with their own friendships. We felt that it might be a good idea to let the girls try this role as it may encourage them to think more carefully about how they behave in their own friendship group.

The children who had applied were invited to a training session which focused on empathy and respecting others feelings. On the back of this, the children then completed a sheet around how they would deal with certain situations that may arise at playtime or lunchtimes. The children were told they would be peer defenders on a trial basis and staff would be watching to see how they handled different situations.

2 weeks later, children were selected to be peer defenders based on their applications, references, involvement in training and observations during break times. They were presented with their peer defender badges in a whole school assembly. The whole school are now aware of who the peer defenders are who they can go to during break times if they have a problem.

The peer defenders meet regularly with the lead teacher for Anti-bullying and their photographs are up in school to ensure everyone is aware of who they are.

On May 25th Sam Hawkins met with the peer defenders to support them further in their role.

Outcome

The peer defender programme has had a really positive impact on the children in school. We have much calmer playtimes as children are working together more cooperatively and there are more children on the yard ready to help any children who are having any disagreements or issues with their peers.

Staff have noticed that there are less issues filtering into the classroom which has meant children can start their work more readily. As the year 6 peer defenders leave this term, we

will begin the process again to allow the current year 3 children the opportunity to apply for the job but also any other children in Key Stage 2 who did not apply first time round.