

## Report summary

# No place for bullying

How schools create a positive culture and prevent and tackle bullying

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A wide body of research indicates that bullying is a problem for many young people, and that some of this takes place in schools. The aim of this survey was to evaluate the effectiveness of the actions that schools take to create a positive school culture and to prevent and tackle bullying. A large part of the survey focused on pupils' own experiences and understanding of bullying and its effects. Inspectors considered how well pupils understood the school's expectations of their behaviour. They talked with pupils about what they thought they should do if they were bullied in school, whether they had been bullied while at their current school, and how well they thought the school dealt with bullying. Inspectors also explored pupils' understanding of discriminatory and derogatory language.

Between September and December 2011, Her Majesty's Inspectors visited 37 primary schools and 19 secondary schools for the main part of the survey. The schools were located in both urban and rural areas and varied in size and type. At their previous Ofsted inspection none had been judged to be inadequate. Altogether, inspectors held formal discussions with 1,357 pupils and 797 staff.

Inspectors found that the schools visited could be broadly split into three groups. In the best schools, the culture and ethos in the school were very positive. The schools' expectations and rules clearly spelled out how pupils should interact with each other. Respect for individual differences had a high profile. In these schools pupils developed empathy, understood the effect that bullying could have on people, and took responsibility for trying to prevent bullying. The way in which these schools planned and delivered the curriculum helped a great deal to bring about these positive attitudes because it gave pupils a wide range of opportunities to develop their knowledge and understanding of diversity and an assortment of strategies to protect themselves from bullying. These schools recorded bullying incidents carefully and analysed them to look for trends and patterns. They then used this information to plan the next steps. The action they took was firm and often imaginative. If pupils had been bullied then they felt very confident that action was taken and it stopped promptly. Governors were well informed and questioning about bullying.

The second and largest group of schools shared many of the features described above and had many strengths. These schools had a positive culture and most pupils

were considerate of each other. Many of the schools had developed a range of effective strategies for pupils to learn about moral and social issues. However, their practice was not as consistent as that of the strongest schools and on occasion had areas of relative weakness. Sometimes the curriculum was not as well structured or opportunities to teach about diversity were missed. Sometimes the analysis of behaviour and bullying was not as sharp as it should be to enable the school to see exactly what the issues were or what actions needed to be taken next.

In the third small group of schools, the culture and the curriculum did not effectively develop pupils' understanding about diversity or help them to develop sufficient empathy for each other. Behaviour in these schools was more variable and interactions between pupils were not as positive. Incidents were dealt with when they happened but the preventative work was not as effective. In some of these schools pupils expressed some concerns about bullying.

Training for staff was an important aspect of the schools' work to prevent and tackle bullying. The training that the majority of schools had provided on bullying tended to be general and did not always focus on the different types of bullying that could occur and the implications of these. This led to some staff not feeling wholly confident to tackle all types of incident. At its best, training left staff very knowledgeable about the different forms of bullying that could be faced by pupils and feeling confident to deal with different forms of discrimination.

Many headteachers and staff spoke about the tensions that could exist between the culture that they were trying to instil and maintain in their schools, and aspects of the culture in the wider communities around the school. These tensions could relate to how people spoke to and treated each other generally, or to more specific attitudes towards particular groups. The schools sometimes had systematically to tackle racist, homophobic and aggressive attitudes that existed among parents and carers and in parts of their wider community that were in serious conflict with the school's values. Some schools had achieved significant success by working with parents and carers and members of the community to reach a better understanding.

Research evidence indicates that there are groups of pupils who are bullied disproportionately. These include disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs, and pupils who are, or are perceived to be, homosexual. This aspect was considered in all of the survey visits and inspectors found that some pupils had been the targets of bullying for these apparent reasons. In particular, inspectors found that language that discriminated against both of these groups of pupils, and others, was common in many of the schools visited. Many pupils were well aware that such language was not acceptable, but it was often seen as 'banter'. In contrast, staff were not always aware of the extent of its use, or they saw it as banter, so did not challenge it. Staff also indicated that they did not always feel confident to challenge or have the strategies to do so. To extend this aspect of the survey, inspectors visited an additional four primary schools and five secondary schools that had specifically and successfully tackled prejudice-based attitudes. The

case studies are presented in Part B of the main report; they do not form part of the key findings below.

## Key findings

- In setting their expectations for behaviour, the primary schools visited placed a stronger emphasis than the secondary schools on values and on how pupils should treat one another. The primary school headteachers were more likely to describe their expectations in terms of the school's core values, while more of the secondary school headteachers focused on rules. Senior leaders varied in the extent to which they saw themselves and other staff as pivotal in leading and modelling positive behaviour and interactions.
- All the schools surveyed had a written behaviour policy and an anti-bullying policy. In the majority of the schools, these policies were separate documents. Only 12 of the 56 schools had combined them into one. The combined documents represented some of the strongest policies. This was because these schools, with one exception, saw bullying as part of a continuum of behaviour, rather than as something separate.
- Pupils in the primary and secondary schools were able to explain how the school expected them to behave. However, a greater proportion of primary than secondary school pupils could articulate the school's values, such as respecting each other. In the secondary schools, pupils tended to focus more on basic school rules such as wearing the correct uniform.
- In 14 of the schools the pupils surveyed agreed with each other that the behaviour of the vast majority of pupils of all ages and from all groups was positive. In 32 schools, pupils felt that there was a small but significant minority whose behaviour did not reach the expected standards. In 10 schools, pupils spoken with said that behaviour was variable, with some negative elements.
- Pupils in all of the schools could give a range of examples of disparaging language that they heard in school. This was related to perceived ability, race, religion, sexuality, appearance or family circumstances. Homophobic language was frequently mentioned. In contrast, staff often said that they did not hear any of this type of language in a typical week. Few schools had a clear stance on the use of language or the boundaries between banter and behaviour that makes people feel threatened or hurt.
- Almost half of the pupils surveyed wrote about an incident where they had felt picked on or bullied at some point while at their current school. Incidents related to friendship issues, personal appearance, family circumstances, sexuality, race, religion, ability, being seen as clever or good at something, disability or a combination of these aspects. Seventy-five per cent of questionnaire respondents in primary schools and 83% in secondary schools thought that bullying would stop if it was reported to an adult in the school.
- Despite significant strengths in some schools, inspectors found a range of weaknesses in how the schools recorded bullying incidents, the detail included in

this recording and in its analysis. This undermined the schools' ability to use this information to shape future actions.

- Although headteachers usually reported to the governing body on general matters regarding behaviour, only 22 of the governing bodies surveyed received specific reports about bullying. The quality of the information they received was closely related to the quality of the school's recording and analysis of bullying incidents. Often reports to governors contained little analysis.
- In 24 of the primary schools and 15 of the secondary schools the curriculum placed a strong emphasis on helping pupils to develop positive values, to understand difference and diversity, to understand the effects that bullying has on people, and to protect themselves from bullying. The curriculum specifically focused on different aspects of bullying, including homophobia and racism, and cyberbullying. However, even in these schools disability was seldom covered as well as other aspects of diversity.
- In the best examples, planning clearly identified the links between personal, social and health education, citizenship, religious education and other curriculum areas, and there was a strong emphasis on ensuring that pupils were able to extend and apply their learning in other subjects.
- Fifteen of the schools with a strong curriculum extended this effective approach by carefully and continually adapting their curriculum and introducing initiatives in response to the school's changing circumstances, the analysis of behaviour and particular issues in the community.
- The schools that had thought the most carefully about preventing bullying and helping pupils to interact positively had recognised the importance of the physical organisation of the school and the organisation of breaktimes and lunchtimes, and had taken action to improve these aspects.
- The training that the schools had provided for staff on bullying tended to be general and did not always define and explain the different types of bullying that could occur or the implications of these. Some staff had not received training on bullying at their current school.
- Where staff had received training, the majority felt that this had been very effective in helping them to tackle issues around bullying. However, around a third of staff surveyed thought that they still needed more help to feel really confident. Staff felt least confident in terms of tackling prejudice-based language.

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