

Hill West Anti-Bullying Newsletter



November 2018

Anti-bullying week is being held across the country this week and the theme this year is 'Choose Respect'. As you know the effects of bullying can have a massive impact on all individuals, whether that is at school, work, college or socially. Anti-bullying week unites us all to take a stand against bullying and raise awareness in our schools.

All children have the right to learn and work in an environment where they feel safe and which is free from harassment and any bullying. Bullying is action taken by one or more children with the deliberate intention of hurting another child, either physically or emotionally. It is usually unprovoked, persistent and can continue for a long period of time. Bullying can be difficult to identify because it is often subtle, covert and rarely witnessed by adults. We aim, as a school, to provide a safe and secure environment where all can learn without anxiety. We aim to make all those connected with the school aware of our opposition to bullying, and we make clear each person's responsibilities with regard to the eradication of bullying.

A recent article in the Times Educational Supplement however encouraged school leaders to reflect on their anti-bullying policies to ensure they were still fit for purpose. Recent studies indicate that bullying is in fact far more complex than was ever thought, that there is no "type" of pupil who bullies – it can be just about anyone.

Research by the Department for Education in 2016 found that name calling was the most common form of bullying, making up for just over a quarter of all bullying (26%), followed by exclusion from social groups (18%). Acts of violence, meanwhile, were one of



the least common forms of bullying, making up for just 10%. The trouble is that this 10% is the easiest for teachers to spot. Meanwhile, something like social exclusion can be put down to friendship troubles or social issues – not bullying. The most common forms of bullying are less likely to be reported too: children may not perceive name calling or just being "left out" as bullying, as often they too buy into the notion that bullying is a physical act.

In a talk to the American Psychological Association in 2017, Dorothy Espelage, professor of psychology at the University of Florida, who advises members of the US Congress and Senate on bullying prevention legislation, pointed out that what counts as bullying is "nebulous" and "subjective" and all children have "different levels of interpersonal sensitivity" to behaviour directed towards them. This makes it a challenge to get an accurate picture of how much bullying might be going on in schools and what may constitute bullying for each individual.

Espelage suggests that there's two types of pupils that engage in high rates of bullying. "The first group is the Hollywood depiction: the socially ineffective, bigger kids who pick on little kids". What they don't depict [so much] are those kids

Did you know?

The Anti-Bullying Alliance (ABA) is a coalition of organisations and individuals that are united against bullying. The DfE reported that up to 40% of young people have been bullied in the last 12 months.

STOP BULLYING

that have high social capital. They may be over-represented in the popular group. They are referred to as ‘Machiavellian bullies’. They know how to turn it on, turn it off; they have heightened social skills and can often go undetected because they have the support of other pupils in the class, who will collude with them or cover for them.

Schools tend to think of bullying as an individualised behaviour—committed by one or more pupils against another—which it’s not, says Espelage. The research suggests that it is a “group phenomenon”. “Kids play different roles, whether they are the assister, whether they are the defender – whether they egg things on; they keep things going,” she explains. “And the actual ring-leader bully might not have to do the work because they have their – the kids have all sorts of sayings for this – posse, entourage, bully club.”

Even those not in that “club” can be part of the problem, too. Bystanders can be key to bullying: as Jaana Juvonen, a professor of developmental psychology at UCLA, points out, bullying rarely happens without an audience. “The audience boosts [the bully’s] status and makes them feel more powerful,” Juvonen says. “Ridiculing a kid alone with no witnesses is only going to give them so much sense of reward, whereas putting someone down in front of a big group of other kids is a totally different story, so the bystanders actually play a huge role in this.”

So, theoretically, an entire class could be playing a role in maintaining a culture of bullying, even if only through bearing witness. All this raises questions about the typical approach to both prevention and reaction to bullying in schools. There is a complex web of relationships to try to

Influence and address. “I always say bullying is an equal opportunity behaviour; that given the right conditions, [all] kids can engage in bullying behaviour, and so the conditions really matter,” says Susan Swearer, professor of educational psychology and co-director of the Bullying Research Network at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

“Kids move in and out of these roles over time. I think that’s really important as we think about interventions, particularly punitive interventions. Often our strategies that are used in schools don’t take that into account and so they’re really missing the complexity of this type of social behaviour. It’s not a static problem: ‘once a bully, always a bully’. With this in mind, the best form of intervention, it is argued, is to identify and tackle the conditions that are most fertile for bullying. Unfortunately, no one has yet found a definitive answer as to what those conditions might be. But Roberts has some ideas from his recent research.

“If schools don’t have cultures that are supportive, nurturing and enabling, then young people will find ways to create their own hierarchy,” Roberts says. “They’re trying to figure out how to structure the world in a way adults have already learned, because we have job titles and organisational charts etc. Whereas, for young people, we don’t explain that. We just kind of say ‘over to you’ sometimes.”

For Roberts, it is crucial that teachers address the underlying social structures that exist within peer groups, through talking explicitly about “power” with pupils and teaching them about leadership – something he believes that schools do not

**DID YOU
KNOW?**

Research from the Anti-Bullying Alliance in 2016 with over 13,000 pupils aged between 7 and 15 across 44 schools in the UK found that 1 in 4 children reported they were bullied a lot or always.

