Bullying: effective action in secondary schools

ERRATUM

Paragraph 3 of the report refers to 'specific duties' on LEAs to combat bullying in place since September 1999. This wording is inaccurate.

Section 61 of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998 covers school policy and procedures on discipline and refers specifically to preventing all forms of bullying among pupils. Section 62 of the Act covers the powers of LEAs in relation to preventing a breakdown or continuing breakdown of discipline at a school. It does not refer specifically to bullying, although the ineffectiveness of a school's measures to combat bullying could be a concern prompting LEA action.

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Contents

Introduction

The problem

1.   Bullying is aggressive or insulting behaviour by an individual or group, often repeated over a period of time, that intentionally hurts or harms. Research confirms the destructive effects of bullying on young people's lives. Although some can shrug it off, bullying can produce feelings of powerlessness, isolation from others, undermine self-esteem and sometimes convince the victims that they are at fault. It can affect attitudes to and performance in school. For some, it can lead to serious and prolonged distress and long-term damage to social and emotional development.

2.   Tackling bullying in schools is difficult and time-consuming, but this survey of good practice shows that schools can reduce the incidence of bullying and change a culture that accepts it as a fact of life.

The survey

3.   Since September 1999, local education authorities (LEAs) have had specific duties to combat bullying. Schools must have anti-bullying policies and procedures and LEAs must ensure that their schools comply with their duties.

4.   In December 2000, the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) published an anti-bullying pack, *Bullying: Don't Suffer in Silence* (revised edition 2002), giving helpful guidance to schools. The document drew on work undertaken through DfES-sponsored anti-bullying projects. The pack was updated in September 2002.

5.   This survey, based on visits by Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) to LEAs and schools in 2001/02, focused on strategies to reduce incidents of bullying, to support victims and to deal with perpetrators.

6.   Six LEAs were visited: Norfolk, Coventry, Devon, West Sussex, Durham and Birmingham. Discussions were held with LEA officers about the support given to schools to help them tackle bullying and to find out what use LEAs had made of the DfES guidance. Two-day visits were made to 15 schools which had received training either from their LEA or from other agencies. The visits assessed the effectiveness of the training teachers had received and of the approaches used in schools to counter bullying. During the visits, discussions were held with staff, pupils, parents and governors; contact was also made with voluntary agencies that worked in the schools. Inspectors observed training sessions for staff as well as lessons and other activities.

7.   Additional evidence was taken from the Ofsted school inspection database, identifying schools that were judged to have effective anti-bullying procedures and analysing the factors that contributed to this good practice.

Main findings

❏ Without reliable local or national means of analysing the incidence of different types of bullying in schools, it is not possible to say whether bullying is on the increase, but better research and publicity are bringing more evidence to light. Surveys of children and young people suggest that bullying in schools is more common than adults sometimes think.

❏ The schools visited in this survey demonstrated how practical action founded on clear moral principles and the active involvement of pupils and parents can combat bullying and challenge a culture that accepts it as inevitable. The level of reported and confirmed bullying in the schools visited was low, and serious incidents were very rare, but the schools were not complacent about the issue.

❏ Procedures for dealing with bullying were generally very good in schools with a strong ethos, where teachers, parents and governors share consistent expectations, reinforced on a daily basis, about attitudes and behaviour. A positive approach to building a sociable atmosphere and confident relationships among pupils made a powerful contribution.

❏ Schools' policies on bullying varied in coverage and depth, although they were generally good. Their effectiveness was based on the commitment of headteachers and staff to keeping the level of attention to the issue high and making policies work on a day-to-day basis, rather than only when serious incidents come to light.

❏ DfES guidance about bullying was used well by all the LEAs in the survey to help schools to develop policies and procedures. Training provided by the LEAs and supported by other agencies brought together expertise from across the country to assist schools to review and improve their practice.

❏ Most of the schools visited made good use of the guidance and training provided to raise staff awareness, revisit their policies and strengthen their procedures. They were also helped by material from voluntary organisations and sometimes their direct involvement. Anti-bullying work in schools supported by specially funded short-term projects often had value, but sometimes not enough was done to sustain its value after the projects came to an end.

❏ Schools with the most successful approaches to bullying canvassed and took full account of pupils' views and they dedicated curriculum and tutorial time to discussing relationships and matters like bullying.

❏ Other features of good practice included the efficient checking of the school site, setting up safe play areas or quiet rooms, and close supervision at the start and finish of the school day.

❏ The schools had sound procedures for the reporting and the prompt investigation of indications or allegations of bullying and spent a considerable amount of time investigating concerns when they arose. Communication with parents was an important and sometimes difficult part of the process. Most of the schools had adequate systems to record incidents of bullying so that analysis of patterns could inform policy and practice.

❏ Follow-up action to ensure that the confidence of bullying victims was restored and bullying did not re-occur was good or very good in nearly three fifths of the schools, but was always not comprehensive enough or well enough sustained in other schools. Where used, 'circles of friends', peer counselling, learning mentors and outside agencies often proved effective in supporting victims, in modifying the behaviour of bullies and affecting the culture of the school.

Recommendations

❏ To improve the way in which bullying is tackled, schools, supported by LEAs, should:

- maintain the momentum on action against bullying through initiatives to improve attitudes and behaviour in schools generally

- regularly collect and analyse information on the incidence of bullying, taking full account of pupils' views

- arrange systematic training for staff on managing behaviour, counselling pupils and working with parents in difficult situations

- ensure that training to help teachers identify and deal with bullying tackles cases where bullying focuses on race and sexuality

- check that follow-up action on confirmed allegations of bullying is appropriate in its range and is sustained

- consider the use of positive peer pressure, the involvement of pupils in befriending and mentoring schemes, and the support of outside agencies

- use other professionals to work alongside teachers, pupils and parents in overcoming the extreme effects of bullying.

Bullying and its effects

The nature of bullying

8.   Bullying takes different forms. Good school policies and training for staff analyse the different forms of bullying that pupils may experience. Unpleasant territory though it is, understanding bullying is the starting point for effective detection and response. Defining and analysing bullying can help pupils, as well as staff, to combat it.

9.   A distinction is commonly made between physical and verbal bullying, although they can occur together and verbal abuse can carry a strong threat of violence. The common factor is the intention to undermine and degrade the individual by picking on vulnerability or making difference a fault. Those who bully aim to hurt by means of force, intimidation or ridicule in order to control others, or perhaps to inspire a reaction that escalates the situation.

10.   Physical bullying seeks to intimidate and cause fear; at serious levels (assault, actual bodily harm or wounding) it is a criminal offence. Pupils comment that a common form of physical bullying is pushing and shoving – 'bumping' or jostling with deliberate intent. It can happen too often for the victim to see it as accidental, but it can be difficult to complain about because those who do it are adamant that it was unintentional. Physical bullying can also involve theft of or damage to property – although, of course, not all instances of theft or damage are evidence of bullying. The threat of violence very often accompanies thefts from persons – for example, of mobile phones or money – and there can be clear instances of extortion focused on weaker pupils. The motive – or a large part of it – is to demonstrate power and create fear.

11.   Verbal bullying most often takes the form of name-calling. The range of name-calling and other unpleasant language is wide and there are significant differences in its gravity. Contemporary media for verbal abuse include messages by mobile phone and email, which means that bullying can even invade life at home.

12.   More difficult to define and detect are those forms of bullying that are intended to hurt by spreading rumours, making malicious accusations, manipulating social networks, and seeking to sideline or ostracise individuals.

13.   It is a sad fact that the focus of bullying can be more or less anything that distinguishes an individual and represents a deviation from a presumed 'norm' – for example size, body shape, hair colour, skin, eyesight, dress, language or mannerisms; and prowess, or the lack of it, in learning, sport or other activity. It can focus on personal backgrounds, including parents' jobs, houses and lifestyles, and can sometimes derive from deep-seated local feuding, with disagreements between adults passed to children, who then act them out in school. Bullying can focus on race, nationality, culture or religion, or a mixture of these – with distinction, for example, between racism and religious bigotry being quite lost on the perpetrator. It can also focus on sexual attractiveness, or the lack of it, and sexuality, based on homophobia, misogyny, or both.

14.   Finally, there are differences in how bullying is conducted. It can be a one-off or sustained, and damaging either way. It can be painfully obvious, but it can also be surreptitious and subtle. Direct physical bullying and threats of physical bullying, more often used by boys, are usually more evident than verbal intimidation and manipulation, which is more common among girls. Bullying can be perpetrated by an individual, one-on-one, or by a group on one individual or on a group. Bystanders sometimes show tacit acceptance to such an extent that the victims see them as part of the problem.

The extent of bullying

15.   The extent to which bullying is reported is unknown. Regardless of how often teachers and parents remind pupils that they should discuss any worries with them, some choose to remain silent. Disclosing what is happening runs counter to a culture of not telling tales and it can also risk making things worse.

16.   There are no firm national statistics of reported and proven cases of bullying in schools. In part, this is because definitions of bullying and levels of seriousness vary, for understandable reasons. As discussions with staff and pupils in this survey exemplified, distinctions between degrees of oppressive behaviour are hard to fix, as are distinctions in intent and effect. The problem of definition is illustrated by common reactions from pupils accused of bullying, such as: 'we were only having a laugh'; 'I was only teasing'; 'we didn't hurt him'.

17.   The problem of definition is reflected in the categorisation of bullying by schools. What some schools regard and record as simply aggressive or unpleasant behaviour can have characteristics that other schools would record as evidence of bullying.

18.   Surveys of children and young people suggest that they see bullying as more widespread than school staff and other adults may do. The surveys include:

- a case study of a small sample of schools in 1997, reported in the DfES guidance on bullying (see paragraph 4), which recorded that 4.3% of pupils reported being bullied two or three times per month

- international research carried out by P.K. Smith et al (*The nature of school bullying: a cross-national perspective*, Routledge, 1999), which indicated that between 10% and 20% of pupils interviewed in England had been bullied in the six months prior to the survey. Of these pupils, 65% said it lasted only for a week or a month, 13% said it continued for a term, 9% said it continued for a year, and 13% said it continued for several years

- a study of youth crime for the Home Office (*Youth Crime: Findings from 1998/1999 Youth Lifestyles* Survey, A. Flood-Page et al, 2000), in which about a third of the 12- to 16-year-olds surveyed reported being bullied at school in the previous year

- analysis by ChildLine, the support agency for young people, which indicated that over 20,000 children contacted them between April 2000 and March 2001 about bullying and that, of those who gave their age, nearly three quarters were of secondary age

- a study, reported in *Bullying in Britain: Testimonies from Teenagers* (A. Katz, Young Voice 2001), which collected views from 7,000 young people, of whom more than half said they had been bullied, one in ten severely so, with a quarter saying that bullying was the main cause of stress in their lives.[1]

19.   The number of reported cases of common assault, actual bodily harm or wounding in schools that can be described as arising from bullying is very small. In Ofsted inspections, the number of cases of serious bullying under active consideration by schools is also very small. However, where schools conduct surveys, they can be dismayed at the percentages of pupils who say they have been bullied and/or have

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[1]   For accounts of bullying, see, for example, *Bullying: an annotated bibliography and resources*, A. Skinner (Youth Work Press, second edition, 1996); *Minority Ethnic Pupils in Mainly White Schools*, T. Kline et al (DfES Research Report 365, 2002); 'If looks could kill: young women and bullying' (YMCA Briefing Issue 7, 2002) and the websites of support organisations such as: www.childline.org.uk, www.kidscape.org.uk, and www.bullying.co.uk.

participated, either actively or passively, in bullying at some level. The results often show that a significant number of incidents, such as name-calling, mocking gestures, 'dirty looks' and other intimidating behaviour, take place in lessons.

The effects of bullying

20. According to research (see paragraph 18), including studies of adolescent mental health, the most common effects of bullying are:

- anxiety and depression that can lead to intermittent and long-term absence from school, physical illness or psychosomatic complaints

- poor self-esteem which inhibits pupils from forming positive relationships, leads to feelings of worthlessness and betrayal, and causes some to lower their expectations and standards of work

- withdrawal, which may lead to low participation in school and other activities, isolation or self-harm.

21. Very few pupils experience all of these effects, but combinations of them, at various different levels of severity, can affect how they view school and themselves. Of course, not all children and young people subject to bullying experience serious effects as a result; some are able to put it behind them. But, for some, the effects of bullying in school can last well into adulthood. In the course of this survey, HMI met adults who had been bullied at school. One of them recalled incidents some 30 years previously:

'I don't know why I was bullied at school. Three boys just seemed to dislike me. They always made comments, made me look stupid in front of others. The others did not join in but they didn't stop it either. The worst lesson was games. By the time I was 13 I was always sick on games day. I was made to feel as if I was nothing: people ignored me, made snide remarks, just put me down. The worst part was when teachers joined in, knowing it would get a cheap laugh and make them feel part of the group. I hardly went to school after I was in the fourth year (Year 10). Eventually, I went to a college in another town because I couldn't face meeting people from my old school at the local college. Eventually I got A levels and a reasonable job, but even today I feel nervous about new situations and hate having to ask questions in case someone says I'm stupid.'

Combating bullying

Features of good practice

❏ *a strong ethos in the school which promotes tolerance and respect, including respect for difference and diversity*

❏ *positive leadership from senior staff and governors on how bullying is to be dealt with within the overall policy on attitudes and behaviour*

❏ *a clear policy statement about bullying which has input from staff, governors, parents and pupils and which includes examples of how instances of bullying will be handled*

❏ *a planned approach in curriculum and tutorial programmes to the issue of bullying in a context which promotes self-esteem and confident relationships*

❏ *regular training for all staff to raise and maintain awareness, to alert them to indicators which may suggest bullying, and to equip them with ways of responding to it*

❏ *periodic consultation of pupils to find out what bullying occurs, when, where and by whom*

❏ *confidential and varied means for alerting the school to current instances of bullying*

❏ *efficient patrolling by staff and prefects of the school site, especially toilets, lunch queues and secluded areas, and their presence at the school gates at the beginning and end of the day*

❏ *safe play areas or quiet rooms for younger pupils or those who feel threatened at break times*

❏ *ways of breaking down age-group stratification, for example through 'buddy' systems, mixed-age tutor groups, and out-of-school clubs run by older pupils for younger ones*

❏ *independent listeners, including older pupils and adults other than school staff, to whom victims of bullying may turn*

❏ *the involvement of pupils in procedures dealing with instances of bullying through 'circles of friends', peer mediation and other schemes*

❏ *prompt and thorough investigation of reported incidents, including contact with parents of victims and bullies in order to agree, if possible, a course of action*

❏ *provision for follow-up with victims of bullying and the bullies themselves*

❏ *a system to record incidents of bullying so that analysis of patterns, whether of pupils involved, type, location or time, can inform policy and practice.*

'As I quickly learned when I became a head, dealing with bullying is a never-ending process and one that needs to be proactive rather than simply reactive. It's about being vigilant and taking every opportunity to develop a school ethos that rejects stereotypes, values everyone for his or her own unique self, and promotes the ability to empathise. Achieving and maintaining that fundamental shift in attitudes and behaviour is hard work and it has to involve every member of staff all the time.'

22.   On the evidence of school inspections, procedures for dealing with serious cases of misbehaviour, including all forms of bullying and harassment, have improved in secondary schools in recent years. They are now good or better in three quarters of schools, though still unsatisfactory in 1 school in 25. Among the improvements have been the greater clarity and deliberateness with which expectations of behaviour are agreed, publicised and pursued, the fact that records of behaviour have become more sophisticated and give a better picture of events and patterns over time, and the introduction of specific interventions to modify behaviour.

23.   Improvements of these kinds were largely evident in the schools visited in this survey. Behaviour was usually good and, in some schools, usually very good or excellent. Reflecting this general picture, the level of recorded and confirmed bullying was low in the schools. Serious incidents were very rare, although there were a few, including physical assault and theft which had the characteristics of bullying, and the schools were not satisfied that bullying had ceased to be a significant factor.

The basis for effective action

24.   In the schools dealing most successfully with bullying, headteachers were clear that, as one of them said, 'bullying is not only hurtful but stops pupils from learning'. They understood that keeping pupils safe and helping them to manage relationships and behaviour were essential to raise standards.

25.   Strong leadership by the headteacher was crucial in establishing a shared commitment to tackling bullying, based on the moral principles of respecting others, accepting diversity and demonstrating care and courtesy. The schools worked hard to build an atmosphere of trust so that pupils feel secure about themselves and their place in the school.

26.   Action against bullying was seen as integral to the school's general approach to behaviour. Key features of that approach included:

- a code of conduct agreed by the whole school community that defines unacceptable behaviour

- pastoral staff having a key role in improving behaviour and supporting those with problems

- clear rewards and sanctions for behaviour understood and taken seriously by the pupils

- staff monitoring corridors and other areas out of lesson times

- periodic training on behaviour for all staff, including those new to the school, to ensure consistency of approach across the school

- interventions, such as the use of learning support units, used well to modify behaviour

- records of pupil behaviour used to set targets and to discuss progress with parents.

27.   Less tangible, but nevertheless powerful, contributions to positive behaviour were the steps taken by schools, sometimes not consciously, to create a sociable atmosphere and good relationships among pupils. They included steps which break down barriers between year groups in the school, such as: 'buddy' systems for new Year 7 pupils or those joining the school at other times; reading partners involving older pupils working with younger ones; house systems or, in some cases, mixed-age tutor groups; and events, activities, clubs and societies with participation drawn from across the school.

Anti-bullying policies

28.   All the schools visited had specific policies to combat bullying. Most policies had started as short statements that had been developed to cover procedures and ways of working. They were understood by staff and pupils and supported by parents and governors. Some, however, were insufficiently detailed in their coverage of all the elements of effective action in schools, though most were cross-referenced to policies on personal, social and health education (PSHE) and equal opportunities.

29.   The best anti-bullying policies emphasise that a culture of not 'telling tales' or 'grassing' fosters bullying. They make it clear that:

- the school's aims mean that any kind of harassment is not tolerated

- pupils, parents and staff need to understand what is meant by bullying and to report incidents of it

- there are systems for pupils to report bullying that minimise the risk of making things worse

- all allegations of bullying are investigated and, if confirmed, they are acted upon, with clear procedures and sanctions specified and applied consistently

- records of incidents and the outcomes of investigations are used to inform review and planning by staff and governors

- the means of supporting victims of bullying include the involvement of their peers

- there are procedures to punish the bully but also to make sure that the behaviour is not repeated

- the curriculum includes programmes that build self-esteem, self-confidence and responsible assertiveness

- the aim of in-service training is to refresh staff understanding of how to manage behaviour generally and to detect and respond to bullying, and this training covers staff new to the school.

30.   Crucially, the schools that dealt with bullying effectively kept the policy alive. They communicated it widely, referred to it regularly, for example in assemblies and tutor time; they reviewed it from time to time; and they made it clear that pursuing the policy was a matter of general practice and not of simply reacting to reported incidents.

Training

31.   In all the schools, awareness of bullying has been developed through in-service training. The most common approach was for key staff to attend LEA training and for these teachers to then work with the rest of the staff on a training day in school. In many cases, staff from LEA services were used to support school-based training.

32.   Training helped teachers to understand that bullying does not go away if a school ignores it; instead, it can become part of the culture. They were also helped to appreciate their role in setting a positive tone and in having consistent expectations about attitudes and behaviour.

33.   As a result of training, procedures and systems were reviewed. In one school, discussion led to a restructuring of the tutor system, with pupils reorganised into mixed-age groups in order to mix socially. Pupils in this school believed the change had significantly improved relationships, changed attitudes and helped younger pupils, who increasingly looked to older pupils for support rather than seeing some, at least, as threatening in their manner.

34.   In another school, where discussion of bullying prompted thought about tutors' knowledge of pupils generally, staff asked to be timetabled for a half-hour session every week to meet with individual pupils from their tutor sets. They met two pupils for 15 minutes each to discuss their progress. Pupils brought examples of work and discussed what helped or hindered them in learning. Tutors found that comments about bullying, as well as less serious matters about relationships, quickly emerged in this setting.

35.   Aspects of bullying that many staff in schools find difficult to approach are those concerned with race and sex. The training programmes did not always give enough attention to these aspects, perhaps on the assumption that they would be dealt with under training of another kind.

36.   Staff in the schools visited showed rather less certainty in dealing with name-calling and other verbal abuse about sexuality than any other matters. Pupils also find this area difficult. They were aware that, under the guise of 'having a laugh', some pupils make personal comments about others' sexuality, such as using the expression 'you're gay', of boys, in a condemnatory, homophobic tone. Girls can be victims of innuendo or outright abuse about presumed sexual activity. While many pupils dismiss such statements as simply silly, others, particularly those trying to make sense of their own sexuality, can clearly feel very uncomfortable in a climate marked by crude stereotyping and hostility to difference.

Involving pupils

37.   A common factor among the schools that tackled bullying successfully was that they consulted pupils about their experiences, through class discussions, school councils, questionnaires, or a combination of these. In many cases, schools found that active pupil involvement arising from this consultation, through peer pressure and in more specific ways, was powerful in countering bullying.

38.   The basis for this is an ethos that encourages pupils to say what they think about aspects of school life which they believe are in need of improvement. Staff engaged pupils in discussions informally as well as formally, made it clear they were never too busy to listen and that they were not complacent or defensive about the school's performance. Pupils understood through assemblies, tutor time and subject lessons the importance of talking things through and they felt that their views were being taken seriously.

39.   In half the schools visited, school councils were involved in discussion with senior staff about pupils' contributions to tackling bullying. Three quarters of the schools had undertaken a specific survey, sometimes repeated over time, of pupils' opinions about bullying, devised by the LEA educational psychology service, and staff used the findings as a basis for discussion. The schools had sometimes been surprised by the extent to which bullying, especially intimidatory pushing and shoving, low-level verbal unpleasantness and denigratory sexual comment, was reported.

40. As a result of surveys the schools also had better information than before about features and patterns of bullying – for example:

- the age of victims, with Year 7 pupils being most at risk

- the extent to which bullying was one-on-one, as compared with a group on one or a group on a group

- when and where incidents of bullying took place

- the language used by bullies

- the extent to which theft of or damage to clothing and other possessions was involved.

41. Discussions of bullying with pupils can, of course, be difficult to handle as they may bring out unpleasant aspects of behaviour and language and give rise to untested allegations. Teachers need to have strong relationships with pupils to discuss sensitive issues like these. One school introduced class, year and whole school councils. In one session observed in this school, pupils in a class council discussed what stopped them from learning. They discussed how two boys, who were present, intimidated pupils and made lessons difficult by their attitudes and behaviour. The teacher managed this difficult discussion very well, asking pupils to consider positive proposals and giving the two boys a chance to say their piece. As a result, all agreed that there should be a seating plan for all lessons so that the two boys should be separated for a period of time. Pupils then volunteered to sit with them and include them positively in lessons. A letter was sent to all teachers on behalf of the class asking them to co-operate. The intimidation ceased.

42. When discussing bullying with HMI, pupils in the schools visited were often astute about how to handle it. They repeatedly returned to the value of having self-confidence, or at least putting up the appearance of having it, as the best means of defence. They talked about: 'waving it away'; the use of humour to deflect remarks meant to be wounding; and refusing to take the bait and become riled. They also referred to other tactics: engaging privately with individual members of a bullying group so as to find out what the problem or motive was; finding a new friend or set of friends; avoiding situations or places where bullying was more prevalent; asking to move groups; and coming to school or going round the school with others rather than alone. Perhaps regrettably, they also talked about the value of such tactics as 'keeping your head down in class', taking days off to avoid trouble, broadening the conflict by involving others, or, literally, fighting back.

43. As the accounts below illustrate, making an active response of some kind, rather than letting the problem persist, was often the advice of pupils, although they recognised that this would not always work:

'It started for us – three of us – when we joined the school choir in the first year. There was a group of boys in Year 9 who simply got it into their heads to pick on us, making stupid remarks about fairy singers and things like that. It went on for a bit like that. Then when [my friend] got roughed up on the way home by two of them, we just went and told the biggest boys, the sixth formers, in the choir. I don't know what happened exactly, but something did.'

'It started with 'borrowing' my phone and 'lending' dinner money, but I think it was really for her about a weird popularity contest: who was best in this or that and who people liked more. When it got nasty I had no idea what to do and it got worse and worse when [another girl] started to join in. After they ripped my sketch up and I was in tears, Mrs. B. [art teacher] got it out of me and she sat us down after school and went over it for an hour. I couldn't believe what came out! We don't talk now, but at least I'm left alone.'

44.   For many of the pupils interviewed, resilience, assertiveness and finding new friends were the keys. It was also important to get advice – or, possibly, simply comfort – from someone else. They did not think that all school staff were necessarily good at dealing with bullying, particularly the more insidious forms of it, but they recognised that some staff could be relied on to put a stop to it.

45.   In the schools visited, staff were prepared to acknowledge that bullying takes place and most staff were well aware of the signals they might have to give which would tackle incipient or continued cases of bullying. They had talked with pupils to help them understand how they should speak and act to convey their concerns. They emphasised the importance to pupils of feeling safe in their lessons, around the school and in the vicinity of the school. They were alert to name-calling and other terms used by pupils to put down their peers. They were also prepared to learn. Following discussions in one school, a science teacher explained:

> *'I didn't realise until the class told me that I didn't comment when pupils used 'put-downs'. As a result they thought I agreed with it. I thought it best to ignore what was said. It never occurred to me that they would interpret my silence like that. I asked them what could I do to help them learn better in my science lessons and they said, 'stop people putting us down and showing us up'. There were three boys in particular that did it a great deal. It was always done with humour but I realised that made it worse. What was actually said wasn't a laugh; it hurt people.'*

Using lessons to raise awareness

46.   In the schools visited, the curriculum was planned so that pastoral sessions and subject lessons could contribute to raising pupils' awareness and understanding of the need to combat bullying. Some or all of the following features were seen in all the schools:

- sessions in tutor time and PSHE allowing pupils to explore issues of equality, discrimination and oppressive behaviour

- pupils being shown how to develop the skills, attitudes and knowledge to question behaviour that disadvantages individuals or groups

- teachers using conflict of opinion and values to further the learning of pupils, developing in pupils an understanding that not all conflicts can be resolved to everyone's satisfaction

- teachers encouraging pupils to listen and to empathise with others and to be appropriately assertive

- pupils being taught about a wide spectrum of relationships and how they need to learn to develop them, with the main emphasis on how friendships grow and are sustained.

47.   In five schools, work in English lessons contributed notably to awareness, often through the use of literature to explore feelings of isolation, intimidation and abuse. In the same way, history lessons used experience and views of bullying to help pupils appreciate historical cases of intimidation, racism and persecution. Both drama and PSHE offered pupils the chance to explore complex issues of relationships. One school in Norwich made particularly effective use of drama in Year 9 to support work in PSHE on bullying. The production was taken to other schools and used by the LEA in the training offered to teachers in an annual anti-bullying conference.

48.   The organisation of subject lessons can also make a practical difference, as observations showed. Teachers in these schools often provided good opportunities for pupils to work constructively with each other, developing team-work through

co-operative activities. Without necessarily being conscious of the effect, or explicit about it, good teachers managed lessons well in order to stress the unacceptability of personal comments and 'put-downs'. They also organised seating to break up groups and to keep the dynamics positive.

Outside lessons

49.   The schools which deal effectively with bullying reviewed the arrangements made for those parts of the day when pupils feel most at risk and, for example, made changes to break and lunchtime supervision. They checked secluded areas of the school seen by pupils as high-risk – including toilets, which are often reported by pupils as the place where bullying takes place. They also kept a particularly close eye on movement around the school gates after school, and on scuffles involving possessions.

50.   Transport to and from school is often identified as a location for bullying and schools had detailed and sometimes repeated discussions with bus and/or rail companies about practical steps to be taken to deal with it. After establishing that bullying took place on certain buses, one school arranged for prefects to travel on them for a period of time. There was sometimes useful discussion with other schools when transport was shared or to reduce the prospect of conflict after school.

51.   In one school, strategies to minimise the risk of bullying out of lessons included supervision by non-teaching staff of a room at lunchtime so that pupils who feel vulnerable – or who are simply not inclined to be outside – have a safe place to talk or play games. Teachers supervised the canteen, encouraging year groups to mix socially. Sixth-form pupils set a relaxed tone for younger pupils to follow, and they enjoyed socialising. Steps in other schools included introducing more indoor social areas, having more lunchtime clubs and activities, and zoning playgrounds to ensure that boys' games do not dominate all the available space.

Identifying and investigating bullying

52.   The best intelligence about bullying in schools comes when pupils are encouraged to let staff know if there are problems, either for themselves or for others, combined with alertness on the part of staff themselves to signs of bullying. In this respect, the evidence from the schools visited is that the role of a form tutor is central, as effective form tutors have a good grasp of the social relationships within groups and make opportunities to talk to and listen to pupils in their groups.

53.   Schools that successfully involved pupils in anti-bullying campaigns pointed to the advantage it gave in providing a wider choice of contacts to whom victims of bullying could refer. A simple device used in some schools for alerting teachers to bullying is a special letter box ('bully box') in which pupils can leave a note. Ideally, such a box is located in areas where a note can be left discreetly – for example, a post point for all mail to staff. Before the end of the school day the box is checked and a teacher contacts pupils before they go home to say the note has been received and will be followed up.

54.   Maintaining vigilance at all times through reminders to staff, pupils and parents of the consequences of bullying is essential. In the schools visited, form tutors and other staff identified signs of bullying. Among the signs mentioned were:

- previously extrovert pupils becoming withdrawn

- pupils being isolated and disengaged from the class, unwilling, for example, to participate in group work

- unusual patterns of non-attendance

- cuts, bruises and torn or dishevelled clothing, at the beginning or in the middle of the school day

- damage to books or other property

- the unaccountable and possibly repeated loss of bags, books, equipment or dinner money.

55. Tutors and heads of year noted that a simple conversation with the pupil and/or with a friend after a lesson could well be enough to establish whether there was or was not a problem – and if the problem was, in fact, bullying, rather than something else. Checking with other staff and contact with parents was usually the next step if suspicions were aroused.

56. Investigation of signs or allegations of bullying from pupils or parents can take up a great deal of time, tieing up senior staff for many hours. Staff experienced in these matters were clear about the necessity and the value of finding the time for fast investigation of all reported incidents as a means of demonstrating to all that the school means what it says about not tolerating bullying. They saw greater risks in ignoring what might be single instances of low-level bullying than in making definite enquiries when such cases were reported. On a practical note, they pointed to the efficacy of:

- identifying a member of staff with whom the victim could talk openly

- encouraging the victim to co-operate fully in identifying the bullies as the best way of securing the victim's safety and that of others in the future

- establishing with the victim, as precisely as possible, what led to the attack and, where appropriate, what steps can reasonably be taken to avoid similar situations in the future

- interviewing pupils individually where allegations of bullying are made about a group

- asking individuals to make a written record of what was done or heard

- bringing the victim and the alleged bully or bullies together at certain points in the enquiry

- making it clear that close supervision is to be maintained while the investigation continues and that any further attempt to intimidate the victim will result in immediate sanction

- involving the parents of the alleged bully or bullies in the investigation to question their children about their role, if any.

57. Establishing the truth of what has happened is, of course, only the first step. Apart from deciding what action to take against the wrongdoer, follow-up action is needed to ensure that the victim is supported and the attack does not occur again if and when, in serious cases, the bully returns to school. Although it is difficult to judge after the event, the extent to which follow-up action of this kind was undertaken appeared to vary in the schools. Follow-up was consistently good or very good in nearly three fifths of the schools, with much depending on the thoroughness of the tutor or head of year involved. Illustrations of effective action are given below.

Dealing with bullies

58.   All schools in the survey had taken clear decisions about what to do with bullies and used a range of sanctions. Staff agreed that extreme bullying called for either fixed-term or permanent exclusion. When pupils return to school after a fixed-term exclusion they need help to confront their own behaviour. If this is not provided or is not effective, it may be that fixed-term exclusion gives the victim of bullying only temporary relief.

59.   Working with bullies requires time and skill. Training programmes for teachers emphasised some key points that helped them to determine appropriate steps in relation to both victims and bullies. Staff learned, for example, that:

- bullies can be from any background or ability groups in the school

- national surveys indicate that half the pupils who bully had been bullied themselves

- male bullies are twice as likely to be in trouble with the police than their peers

- bullies can have distress in their own lives and use fighting and threatening behaviour as a way of coping

- some are heavily influenced by sub-cultures where bullying and abuse are the norm

- some carry family feuds into schools and parents encourage their bullying as normal behaviour.

60.   Schools used a range of techniques to work with bullies to reduce the likelihood of the behaviour being repeated. As the number of incidents of reported bullying was low in the schools, action and response on the part of the bullies did not necessarily fall into clear patterns. Often, the focus was on trying to get the bully to identify with the victim and to understand the distress caused, as a basis for a genuine apology. In some cases, the emphasis was on working through what lies behind the desire to exercise power over others and to re-build the approach to relationships with them. As one head of year put it:

> *'Dealing with persistent bullies makes you wonder at the curious behaviour of the unloved and the insecure. I have had big lads in here who have terrorised little ones for no reason that they can explain and who just seem to see it as something people do. The psychology beats me, but there is a lot of it. Sweet reason is usually what I try: 'does this make you popular? does this make you a great success?' Whether it works, I am not sure. In the end, I suppose, I just have to make sure that it doesn't happen again on our watch.'*

Working with parents

61.   Effective liaison with parents is vital to tackle bullying successfully. In almost all of the schools visited the matter was given a clear and high profile in information given to parents. Schools were alert to the need to involve parents early on in order to explain the situation fully and parents were generally contacted as soon as an incident was reported. Some of the schools offered to arrange meetings in the pupil's home if the parents preferred. One parent commented appreciatively:

> *'My son told me he had sent in a note about being bullied. The next morning I was phoned at work by his year head to let me know that he had received the note, interviewed my son and seen those who had been doing it. I was asked for a time convenient for myself when I could come to the school to discuss with them what to do next.'*

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62.   Parents of a victim of bullying naturally want action to be taken and, on occasion, this can seem like a desire for revenge. Working with parents who have strong feelings about those who bully their children can be very difficult, but unless parents are fully included in the process, there can be a serious breakdown of confidence between them and the school. As one parent commented:

> *'When I found out what our daughter had been through I wanted blood. That's why she was so scared of me finding out. If I had got hold of them I would have ended up in court myself. However, the headteacher discussed the matter with me. He even allowed me to shout at him and when I had calmed down suggested ways in which we could deal with this. I wasn't certain at first but agreed to give it a go. Well the boy who bullied my daughter hasn't done it again and has left others alone. So I suppose it worked.'*

63.   Parents rightly expect the school to take their concern seriously. Failure to do so can result in formal complaint to the governing body or the LEA. LEA officers interviewed indicated that significant numbers of complaints received were when communication had broken down – for example, when the school declined to say what action had been taken against the perpetrators.

64.   It is particularly important that schools have strong links with parents when an investigation of alleged bullying by their child is needed and if subsequent action has to be taken. Parents of bullies often find it hard to accept the image of their child presented by the school and deny their child is capable of such behaviour. It is, therefore, important that discussions are based on well-documented evidence. Few training courses exist for senior and pastoral staff to learn how to improve the way they deal with such difficult situations.

Specific strategies

65.   A third of the schools had well-established systems of pupil involvement in follow-up activities and systems were developing in another third. Some of the schools in the survey used one or more of the techniques described below. It was clear that all these could be effective in particular circumstances.

66.   Until recently, the use of the **circle of friends** technique was largely confined to primary schools. However, more secondary schools are adopting it as a strategy to support pupils. At the heart of the approach is training: pupils are trained to befriend victims of bullying and the bullies themselves. LEA educational psychology or behaviour support services usually provide the training for pupils and the supervising teachers.

67.   The effect of the 'circle of friends' on victims of bullying was significant. They felt less isolated and knew their peers would not remain passive if anyone intimidated or troubled them. The friendship group broke down the isolation of the victims and helped them to belong.

68.   A strength of the system is that it can support not only support victims, but also those who bully. One pupil interviewed said:

> *'I used to pick on people because I didn't really have any friends. I felt clumsy, and to make sure people didn't pick on me, I picked on them. I got into trouble and Miss talked to my mum and me. A group of people in the class got together with me. They let me join in with them in lessons and at break time. They got to know me and the silly things I used to do, and they helped me to stop what I was doing.'*

69.   The effect on 'befrienders' was impressive: they learned to understand what others could be going through. As one said:

'I befriended a girl who I thought was strong because she acted hard. She could mouth off and didn't seem to care. What we found out when we started to get to know her was it was all front. She was so scared of being shown up she would go on the attack. She thought that if she was hard she could keep everyone away. All she really did was make herself lonely and hurt a lot of other people.'

70.   The use of **peer mentoring** to give support to pupils on a range of matters, including bullying, is increasingly used in secondary schools. To be effective, it needs a clear definition of what the role involves (and does not involve) and a high level of commitment from staff.

71.   In the best practice, after initial training, usually by LEA staff or voluntary organisations, the pupils make themselves known to the rest of the school, for example by giving talks in assemblies and PSHE lessons. Peer mentors are usually on duty at break and lunchtime and can be contacted in person, via a 'bully box' or at a teacher's suggestion. A senior member of staff monitors mentors' work and deals with issues which are beyond their experience and expertise.

72.   Making use of peer mentoring is not without its problems. Where this method was effective, the agreed ways of working were clear. There was an understanding that peer mentoring is not a substitute for adult action but part of the school's response to give immediate support while staff take matters further. Particular care is needed in the way the pupils involved are presented and present themselves to others if they are not to be the butt of hostile comment. Nevertheless, the strength of character of peer mentors met in the schools visited was impressive. They came from all age groups and backgrounds. What they generally had in common was a clear understanding of their role and the techniques to use and a capacity to listen, understand and empathise. The youngest peer mentors seen were Year 8 pupils who, after training and two terms in the role, were as clear in their understanding and effective in supporting their peers as many older pupils. Older pupils discussed and advised younger mentors in regular meetings where anonymous or fictional cases were discussed.

73.   In one school, pupils enacted a counselling session that had been part of their peer mediation programme. They showed how two pupils discussed problems and were helped to resolve them. Mediators listened to all sides of a dispute, asked questions and helped those involved to find a solution. Importantly, mediators explained that not all conflicts could be easily resolved and not all issues could remain confidential. The school believed strongly that peer mentors were able to help pupils by creating a safe and supportive environment where disagreements could be examined and mutual understanding developed.

74.   Peer mentors can often understand better than adults the pressures on and the fears of their peers. As one headteacher said:

'We tell pupils over and over that as a school we do not tolerate bullying. We have poster campaigns, assemblies. We tell them they can approach any adult if they are worried. However, many don't and when we press them as to why, it's because they see us rushing around doing what we do and don't want to bother us. That's why our peer mentors and prefects are such important members of the community. Pupils feel they can approach them and through them get to us. It's not about a lack of trust; it's about being able to talk to someone of your own age not someone looking back 20, or, in my case, 40 years. Peer mentoring helps our pupils to feel they can make a difference for others in our community. The only problem is, as you increase their negotiating skills, you have to train staff to manage better because pupils are more able to articulate their views and opinions than before.'

Other sources of support

75.   Some of the schools visited had access to additional sources of support, through initiatives like Excellence in Cities, through agencies such as Connexions, the youth service and social services, and through voluntary organisations. These additional sources of support can make a valuable contribution to the work of the school when their input is carefully managed to complement what the school is already doing.

76.   Some schools that are part of the Excellence in Cities programme are able to employ **learning mentors** who come from a range of background besides teaching and operate within schools to support the existing pastoral systems. They are used, among other reasons, to support victims of bullying and some are training pupils to act as peer mentors and 'befrienders'.

77.   **Connexions** services are at an early stage of development. However, in one LEA, schools were already using the skills of personal advisers to support both victims and bullies. One headteacher said:

> *'The availability of personal advisers has assisted us in better meeting the needs of some pupils. Those who are disengaged from learning often have somewhere in the background a dislike of school because of negative things they encounter. We timetabled these pupils to see personal advisers at an early stage in Key Stage 4.*
>
> *One thing that has emerged is a level of bullying we were quite unaware of in the particular year group. Having identified the issue through Connexions, the senior management team and governors have discussed ways of dealing with it. One suggestion from pupils was to look at peer mediation. As a result we contacted the LEA who put us in touch with three schools we could visit which use it. The personal adviser, teachers and pupils have visited all three and we have now asked the LEA to help organise training for staff on bullying and training for peer mediators.'*

78.   Because someone had time to sit and hear what pupils were saying, action was taken to remedy a problem of which staff were unaware.

79.   A number of national **voluntary organisations** are very active in anti-bullying work, often in association with their other work with children and young people. There were examples of their valuable involvement in some of the LEAs and schools visited.

80.   Some arose from the work of the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) and the YWCA England & Wales (formerly known as the Young Women's Christian Association), which train youth workers to support peer mentoring and mediation programmes in schools and work with individuals or small groups. In one very good example of what can be achieved, the focus of YMCA work in one school was a small group of Year 10 girls who were intimidating others. Over time, the girls were helped to see what this behaviour meant, why they engaged in it and what they could do to change it. The girls themselves developed practical anti-bullying strategies that the school used and, partly as a result of this achievement, they were re-integrated into the mainstream life of the school. In this and other cases, the volunteer workers engaged well with teachers and pupils. They understood what support pupils needed and adopted a highly professional approach in providing it. As a result, schools were confident in referring young people to them.

81.   The children's charity Barnardo's has projects working in a similar way in schools, particularly in inner-city areas. The organisation trains youth workers for school-based projects that make a positive impact on pupils. One area of development has been the use of black workers in projects to support pupils who are particularly at risk of

disengagement. Many projects allow self-referral and this is effective where there are agreed procedures to inform the school's pastoral staff, where appropriate, of issues that arise. Pupils interviewed appreciated the value of the contact, commenting that it is sometimes easier to talk openly to someone other than a teacher.

82.   Such projects were most successful where the headteachers and voluntary organisation co-ordinators ensured that the work complemented existing pastoral support in the school and where there were well-defined arrangements to sustain the momentum in the schools when the engagement ended.

LEA support

83.   All the LEAs visited employ staff with specific responsibilities for supporting anti-bullying work in schools. In some cases there is an advisory teacher and in others a dedicated member of the behaviour support service or educational psychology service. In all cases these staff had good links with PSHE advisers. Most LEAs also work with voluntary agencies in providing in-service training for teachers and training for pupils involved in peer mentoring.

84.   The quality of the in-service training provided by the LEAs visited was good. In one LEA, anti-bullying conferences take place at which expert speakers discuss aspects of bullying and practical solutions that schools can try out. Additionally, schools already using particular strategies are invited to send pupils to discuss with the participating teachers what works and how they set about what they do. These conferences are followed up with specific work in schools by LEA services.

85.   All the LEAs provided schools with training materials – booklets, posters and videos – many of which were produced within the LEAs themselves and were of a high quality. Materials produced in Essex LEA were particularly good, offering teachers the outline and detail of activities for use in tutor time and PSHE.

86.   There is now a wealth of accessible and helpful materials from national agencies as well as LEAs to support schools in developing effective anti-bullying policies and practices. Unfortunately, some schools, often those in which serious bullying is more common, do not use the materials well. As one LEA officer noted:

> *'Most letters we receive tell us that parents don't feel listened to. What's more surprising is that over 60% of letters are from just six schools in the LEA and none of these schools have bothered to take up the training our services offer. As far as they are concerned, they don't have a problem. The evidence we have is that they do, but we cannot compel them to attend training. Our duty is to ensure that they have policies and procedures in place to tackle bullying. The problem is they do, but they just don't work.'*

87.   Some LEAs work in partnership with other organisations to tackle aspects of bullying that teachers are not confident in dealing with. For example, the Greater Manchester Police Community Affairs Branch worked with Bolton LEA, local health services, victim support services and gay and lesbian support groups to develop a project to help schools to recognise and support pupils subject to homophobic bullying. The project developed materials and ways of working to support teaching about relationships and about citizenship. Evaluation reports indicate that many teachers found it useful in giving them practical strategies to reduce negative stereotyping and its impact.

88.   Through a theatre-in-education programme in one LEA, nearly 500 pupils participated in sessions covering complex issues of relationships and how others are viewed. The evaluation indicated that over 90% of pupils valued the opportunity to explore the issues. Over three quarters felt it helped them understand what other people felt and had influenced them positively. As one pupil commented:

> *'School can't stop you calling people gay. What we did makes you think about it though and what it must feel like to be picked on. The play helped to get the message across.'*

Conclusion

89.   Research carried out by academics, voluntary organisations and by schools themselves is a reminder that bullying is a cause of anxiety and distress for significant numbers of pupils, affecting their well-being and their capacity to learn.

90.   The low level of bullying in the schools visited in this survey reflects the overall quality of their work to establish a safe, inclusive and comfortable environment in which pupils can learn and thrive. The reassuring outcome from the range of work seen – not all of which was undertaken or undertaken equally well in the schools visited – was that repeat surveys of pupils showed that the extent of bullying perceived by them reduced as a result of the positive steps taken. In other words, action by schools, including analysis, dissemination and specific anti-bullying strategies, made a difference.

91.   The fact that the schools were not complacent about the incidence of bullying was, in itself, an important contribution to keeping pupils alert to the issue and confident in the schools' and their own capacity to deal with it. Their experience demonstrates that, where schools face up to bullying and develop ways of minimising it by involving pupils, staff, parents and governors, they can help pupils to manage relationships and behaviour productively. As one pupil put it:

> *'Bullying is not an unpleasant fact of life. People can do something about it. What we've learnt in our mentoring programme is that people learn how to bully and they can unlearn it. Nobody wants to come to a school where you're frightened of who's going to say what or do something. When you have to worry about that you can't learn anything.'*

Conclusion