

AREA TITLE: CHILDREN'S WORKFORCE

AREA TITLE BULLYING

About... **Bullying and children on the autism spectrum**

Last year over 20,000 children and young people called ChildLine about bullying, making it the most common problem the helpline dealt with. In its *Safe to Learn* guidance on dealing with the bullying of children with special educational needs and disabilities, the Department for Children Schools and Families (DCSF) recognises that, "Children with autistic spectrum disorders are particularly vulnerable as their difficulties with social interaction with peers may leave them isolated or unaware of the impact of their behaviour on others. Children with learning difficulties tend to have fewer friends than other children and a lack of friends puts children at a greater risk of being bullied." In the same report, the DCSF advises that some children with communication needs may have difficulty in reporting bullying, and that those on the autism spectrum may find it hard to understand that they are being bullied, making them an easier target for bullies hoping to escape detection.

Research from the National Autistic Society in their report *B is for Bullied* shows that 40% of children on the autism spectrum have been bullied. 56% of parents said that bullying had caused their child to miss school or even change schools.

School anti-bullying policies

The DCSF gives a broad definition of bullying as behaviour which is deliberately hurtful (or aggressive), repeated often over a period of time, and difficult for victims to defend themselves against. DCSF describes three main types of bullying: physical (hitting, kicking, taking belongings), verbal (name-calling, insulting, making offensive remarks), indirect (spreading nasty stories about someone, exclusion from social groups, being made the subject of malicious rumours, sending malicious e-mails or text messages).

The DCSF has produced an anti-bullying pack for schools entitled *Don't Suffer in Silence*. This can be downloaded from the Teachernet website. Additionally *Safe to Learn: embedding anti-bullying work in schools* is the new overarching anti-bullying guidance for schools from the DCSF, and includes specialist advice on cyber bullying and bullying involving children with SEN and disabilities. This can also be found on Teachernet, and contains a substantial list of useful organisations and resources for further information on bullying (links to these documents can be found in the links section below).

Each school is now required to have its own anti-bullying policy. *Safe to Learn* advises schools to involve pupils, parents and staff in agreeing the definition of bullying that will be used in the policy. This whole-school involvement should ensure a greater buy-in for the overall policy and the strategies decided upon to tackle bullying.

The Education and Inspections Act 2006 also places a legal requirement on the headteacher to determine measures on behaviour and discipline that form the school's behaviour policy. In this context, these include rules, rewards, sanctions and behaviour management strategies, with a view to encouraging good behaviour and preventing bullying among pupils.

The law also empowers headteachers to such an extent as is reasonable, to regulate the behaviour of pupils when they are off school site (which is particularly pertinent to regulating cyberbullying). However, a court judgement has ruled that schools are not directly responsible for bullying off school premises, a particular problem if children are being bullied on the way to and from school.

Safe to Learn contains a number of other key recommendations for schools:

- That schools use the principles in the *Bullying – A Charter for Action* document to develop their anti-bullying policies. The Charter provides a framework for self-evaluation.
- That specific responsibility for anti-bullying work is allocated by the headteacher to a member of staff within the school's leadership structure.
- That the policy be regularly reviewed (on average every two years), and that the whole school community be regularly consulted on all aspects of the policy.

Preventative strategies

Any school anti-bullying policies should contain strategies aimed at

- preventing, de-escalating and/or stopping any continuation of harmful behaviour.
- Reacting to bullying incidents in a reasonable, proportionate and consistent way.
- Safeguarding the pupil who has experienced bullying and triggering sources of support for them.
- Applying disciplinary sanctions to the pupil causing the bullying. Programmes can also be used to help pupils learn from their behaviour.

Safe to Learn sets out a number of preventative strategies that schools could employ. These include using curriculum opportunities to discuss diversity and promote anti-bullying messages, and developing social and emotional skills in areas such as empathy and management of feelings. The school environment can be improved by looking at staff supervision patterns, the physical design of buildings and joint working with partners such as transport service providers. The DCSF recommends that schools work with pupils to establish key times and locations where bullying is more prevalent.

A whole-school approach should promote positive images of disability. Alongside this, practical steps should be taken, such as setting up lunchtime clubs that offer new friendship groups and quiet spaces, trained peer supporters and well-trained staff.

Some pupils who have been subjected to bullying are provoked into violent behaviour. A pupil can be excluded for violent behaviour. However, the Department recommends that the headteacher always allows a pupil to state his or her case before exclusion, and checks whether the incident may have been a reaction to bullying.

Where a pupil has been found to be bullying others, the Department also advises that sanctions should take into account any special educational needs or disabilities pupils may have.

The Anti-Bullying Alliance (ABA) offers useful resources for teachers to help them deal with bullying in schools. Its report *Tackling Bullying in Schools* covers the most widely used approaches used in schools to deal with bullying. Kidscape also offers training in dealing with bullying for professionals, and has a training guide for teachers of children with special needs called *Dealing with Bullying*.

Get
help
from...

Kidscape 020 7730 3300 UK wide charity committed to keeping children safe from abuse. Offers a helpline for parents and guardians, online advice for children and parents and carers and training for those working with children.

Bullying: a guide for parents (also useful for professionals seeking to understand the needs of children on the autistic spectrum who are being bullied)

Author: the National Autistic Society

The Anti-Bullying Alliance

<http://www.anti-bullyingalliance.org.uk>

Teachernet (Government website for teachers) advice on dealing with bullying in school

Links

[Tackling Bullying - listening to the views of children and young people](#)

Author: Christine Oliver and Mano Candappa

Published by: The Thomas Coram Research Unit, The Institute of Education, University of London

Date: 2003

[Bullying: Don't suffer in Silence](#)

Author: The Department for Children, Schools and Families Published by Teachernet:

Online publications for schools, 2000

[Safe to Learn: Embedding anti-bullying work in schools](#)

Author: The Department for Children, Schools and Families, Published by: Teachernet:

Online publications for schools, 2007

[Bullying involving children with special educational needs and disabilities](#)

Author: The Department for Children, Schools and Families, Published by: Teachernet:

Online publications for schools, 2008

[B is for Bullied: the experiences of children with autism and their families](#)

Author: the National Autistic Society

Case Studies [Bullying - Ask Doc](#) A real life question about bullying from Keith, aged 10 on the Children First for Health website

[Bullying and self harm by Zara, age 15](#) A real life story about bullying and the consequences for 15 year old Zara

[Bullying - by Sarah](#) A real life story about bullying from Sarah

[Department for Children, Schools and Families](#) – case studies about how some schools have successfully tackled bullying

[National Autistic Society - Make School Make Sense for Me](#) – children and young people with autism speak about their experiences of school

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