



# Beating the bullies

**B**ullying is a favourite issue for the tabloids. There's much being said about what we should do. **Rachel Evans** describes some of the approaches that Warwickshire is taking and reminds us in the following quote just what it's all for.

“When I got home I went to my room and thought about different ways I could die. I knew there were some tablets in the bathroom cupboard. There were knives in the kitchen. The only thing that stopped me was thinking about my mum crying. I didn't want my mum to cry.”

David, aged 10

**Many years ago, in a different time and place, a colleague and I did some workshops in schools and youth clubs about bullying.**

David (not his real name) was an amazingly brave boy in year 5. We were talking about how people who were being bullied might feel when he raised his hand and asked if he could tell the class something. He came to the front, shaking but determined, and spoke to everyone. David was being bullied on the way home from school. Verbal abuse, pushing and shoving, taking his bag and tipping everything out; every day a little bit more until finally, the day before our session, they took his bag, tipped everything out and took it in turns to urinate in it.

When he finished telling us about his experiences and feelings, most of us, adults and children, had tears in our eyes. What made David even more amazing was that the three boys who were bullying him were in the room. The other children knew who they were; *they* knew who they were and two of them admitted it, saying 'it was just meant to be a joke'. Because David was so amazing we were able to have

a very open discussion about exactly what they were doing and the impact it was having. We were also able to follow it up with the school to make sure it stopped and that David was safe.

Not all children are as amazing as David. Some are not as brave; some are not able to verbalise so effectively. However, children who are being bullied shouldn't have to be amazing, they should be able to get the help and support they need quickly and safely without standing up in front of their peers. It would be nice to think, 'well that was a long time ago, it's not like that now' – but we know that bullying is a 'significant and serious problem' in Britain today (DCSF 2007).

### Anti-bullying week

To address the problem, many local authorities now have, or are developing, anti-bullying strategies and, over the last few years, we have seen Anti-bullying week in November become a key date in school diaries. It is fantastic that schools have embraced Anti-bullying week in such a positive way. It provides a real opportunity to raise the profile of anti-bullying work, explore issues and share and promote good practice. However, we do need to make sure we don't see bullying exclusively as a 'school' problem – young people frequently tell us they are worried about bullying outside of school and we are all aware of the emergence of cyber bullying. The theme of this year's Anti-bullying week, 'Safer together, safer wherever' reflects the need for a unified community approach to bullying. Tackling bullying is everybody's responsibility; some of the key things on our community 'to do' list might be to:

- help schools look beyond their gates, as their responsibilities increase with the Education and Inspections Bill (2006)
- help the police in their work to build safer communities and tackle 'hate crime' – which includes prejudice-driven bullying
- help parents and carers understand the technology their children are so adept at using, so that they can promote safe and responsible use
- equip children and young people with the skills and understanding they need to keep themselves and each other safe from bullying

In Warwickshire we have a multi-agency partnership overseeing anti-bullying work and we are using Anti-bullying week this year as a platform to launch our new anti-bullying strategy and really get started on our own 'to do' list. For example:

- Warwickshire Police are hosting an online pledge for anyone to sign, to show their support for anti-bullying work in Warwickshire
- There are 'anti-bullying boards' in youth clubs and Connexions centres for young people to tell us about their experiences and give us their suggestions
- Chart-topping band Nizlopi are lending their support to everything we are doing to combat bullying
- Schools across the county are hosting events where children and young people can showcase drama, music and poetry about bullying
- We have the formal launch event for our strategy

All of this is great and illustrates our multi-agency approach. However we have to ensure that people don't think that doing something for Anti-bullying week is all that is needed – bullying is a year round problem. So the questions we all need to be asking are – what are we doing in February? What are we doing in June?

### Curriculum development

Primary schools are well placed to tackle bullying behaviour at its roots, all year round. Children who learn to be empathetic are less likely to hurt others and the development of good social and emotional skills is key to creating 'a social climate that does not tolerate bullying behaviour' (DfES 2007). The Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning materials (SEAL) provide an excellent resource that has been shown to be effective in reducing bullying (DCSF 2007). The Anti-bullying Alliance also suggests several ways of embedding anti-bullying work into curricular activities, not only through the more obvious routes of PSHE, drama and citizenship but also in PE – promoting teamwork and challenging pupils who tease and ridicule others – and geography – identifying 'safe' and 'unsafe' places on local maps (ABA 2007).

To engage with and stimulate children we need to be creative, use tools that appeal to them and make the most of every opportunity we have to explore issues and develop skills. In addition to the more traditional approaches, there are new resources being developed by the private sector, in association with national anti-bullying charities. For example, the new 'Bratz' movie includes bullying as a theme and has accompanying teacher's notes and activities (<http://www.bratz-toolkit.co.uk/>) and children's TV character 'Shaun the Sheep' features in a new

See the manager's briefcase for some scenarios that children can act out as a stimulus for discussing bullying



resource about bullying for 5 – 11 year olds available at <http://www.bbcllc.com/shaun/>.

### Leadership teams

Using resources effectively and creatively is the bread and butter of good teaching practice. At leadership level there are further steps that need to be taken to ensure that anti-bullying work is effective. The DCSF suggest that the role of leadership teams in addressing bullying is likely to involve:

- data evaluation to inform policy development;
- co-ordination of anti-bullying curriculum opportunities
- overview of the anti-bullying prevention and response strategies and
- managing personnel practices to ensure alignment with the school anti-bullying policy and practice

(Source: Safe to learn: embedding anti-bullying work in school (DCSF 2007)

Not quite as exciting as Shaun the Sheep perhaps, but vital to tackling bullying. The DFES found that the effectiveness of anti-bullying policies in secondary schools '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 2003). There is no reason to think it would be different in primary schools. So what are you doing in January, March, May?

### The future

As schools and other agencies continue to develop their own anti-bullying practice, we need to improve the way that we celebrate the excellent work that is taking place, locally and nationally; this in turn will help us to identify and challenge less effective work constructively. Schools and local authorities need to work together so that we can produce a coherent picture of what is really happening; only then can we be confident that future policy and practice development is appropriate and effective.

Finally, we all need to keep working together towards a future in which the 'Davids' of the world won't find themselves in a situation where the only thing that keeps them going is that they don't want their mum to cry.

### To find out more...

#### References

- DfES 2003: Bullying: effective action in secondary schools
- DfES 2007; Secondary SEAL Guidance Booklet;
- DCSF 2007; Safe to learn: embedding anti-bullying work in schools
- Anti-bullying Alliance 2007: bullying in the community: briefing for teachers

#### Further support and information

- Anti-bullying Alliance: [www.anti-bullyingalliance.org.uk](http://www.anti-bullyingalliance.org.uk)
- Beat bullying: [www.beatbullying.org](http://www.beatbullying.org)
- CHILDLINE: [www.childline.org.uk](http://www.childline.org.uk)
- DCSF guidance: [www.teachernet.gov.uk/wholeschool/behaviour/tacklingbullying/](http://www.teachernet.gov.uk/wholeschool/behaviour/tacklingbullying/)
- SEAL materials: <http://bandapilot.org.uk/>

### Profile

Rachel Evans has over 20 years experience of work with children, young people and families in a range of settings in the voluntary and statutory sectors. This includes involvement in local and national family learning activities, youth and children's work, school and community learning projects and family support work. Rachel is Warwickshire's Anti-bullying Co-ordinator.

### In nutshell...

Bullying remains a problem in our society with some children driven to suicide in order to avoid it. Anti-bullying week provides a time when the message can receive a heightened profile. However, it isn't just in schools where bullying takes place and the role of the community is a key factor identified in the theme 'safer together, safer wherever'. Warwickshire is currently launching its own anti-bullying strategy with a multi-agency approach.

The point is emphasised that bullying is a problem throughout the year and not just in November. Through tackling it within the curriculum, through school leadership and through us all working together we might begin to prevent the suffering of many children and young people.

### Comment

In this issue of PLT we are considering some of the issues linked to bullying. The complexity of the problem should not be underestimated. As a headteacher I am responsible for investigating allegations of bullying. They are never as simple as they seem at first. For some parents, bullying is used as an excuse for absence, lateness or sometimes their own child's bullying. The time spent trying to disentangle the issues for these parents and their children can mean that genuine bullying goes unnoticed. Perhaps we should also consider more carefully the extent to which the education system is host to a bullying ethos otherwise known as accountability. For your views please e-mail [pltiminds@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:pltiminds@hotmail.co.uk)