

Public

Tackling bullying in schools: a governors guide

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About this guide

The Anti-bullying Alliance identified a need for specialist guidance for school governors in relation to anti-bullying work. We have had the privilege of working with a team of experienced governors from primary, secondary and special schools to make sure the guide addresses key issues and challenges that are relevant to governors today.

Responding to bullying is not always straightforward – our team of governors identified a range of particular challenges that schools and governors face in relation to bullying. These include:

- agreeing on a definition of bullying and understanding different types of bullying
- making sure the school has an anti-bullying policy that is regularly monitored to ensure its effectiveness
- consulting with pupils on anti-bullying policy and practice
- responding to emerging forms of bullying, such as the use of cyber technology and sexual bullying
- working with parents and carers to address bullying behaviour effectively and managing parental complaints
- responding to bullying incidents outside of the school day
- giving advice and guidance to senior school staff dealing with bullying incidents
- responding to serious incidents of bullying that could result in police involvement and/or exclusion – including knowing when to liaise with the police and outside partners
- managing media interest in a bullying incident
- working effectively with members of the wider community to tackle bullying, including other schools and youth providers in the area.

This guide aims to help governors work through some of these challenges by providing advice, questions to ask headteachers, top tips and details of further resources.

The Anti-bullying Alliance would like to acknowledge the work of all governors across the country who give their time and commitment to making sure children in our schools are free to learn and achieve without fear of bullying.

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The Anti-bullying Alliance

The Anti-bullying Alliance was founded in 2002 by NSPCC and NCB. It is a national coalition of over 80 members from the voluntary, statutory and private sectors that bring together a wealth of expertise and experience in tackling bullying. Members also bring specialist knowledge relating to vulnerable children and young people, and particular forms of bullying (for example, homophobic bullying, cyberbullying, sexual bullying and bullying of children with special educational needs (SEN) and disabilities). Together we work to stop bullying and create safer environments in which children and young people can live, grow and learn.

www.anti-bullyingalliance.org.uk

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Introduction

The Anti-bullying Alliance (ABA) has produced a series of guides and toolkits to assist practitioners in preventing and responding to bullying. This guide is written by the ABA, with advice and support from a team of governors, to assist the work of all governors – whether in primary, secondary or special schools.

The ABA defines bullying as:

the repetitive, intentional hurting of one person by another(s), where the relationship involves an imbalance of power. Bullying can be carried out physically, verbally, emotionally or through cyberspace.

Bullying includes any number of repetitive behaviours where the perpetrator or perpetrators intend to cause harm – these could include name calling; making offensive comments; hitting, kicking and shoving; stealing or harming belongings; graffiti; coercion; spreading harmful messages through gossip; sending or spreading harmful messages and images via mobile phones and the internet; excluding or isolating someone from the peer group.

Bullying can also be cultural and systemic. It may be linked to wider prejudicial behaviour and targeting of certain groups – for example, homophobic bullying; bullying of children with special educational needs and disabilities; bullying relating to race and religion; bullying of children in care; bullying of children who care for their parents or their siblings (young carers); and gender-based bullying.

Bullying can take place at any age and in any place. We are particularly aware of bullying that takes place in schools, but are becoming increasingly aware of bullying in the wider community. The Tell Us 4 survey (DCSF 2009) reported that almost a third of children had been bullied in school in the last year (of those, 11 per cent experienced it every day), with 21 per cent of the children and young people reporting that they were being bullied in the wider community.

Bullying has a huge range of consequences – for both the victim and the perpetrator, for those that witness the bullying, for the staff involved, for the community and for society at large.

For a number of years, governors and headteachers have had legal duties to ensure the safety of children and young people and to prevent and respond to all forms of bullying (Children's Act 2002, Education and Inspections Act 2006). Prevention and response to bullying and harassment is also an essential part of ensuring compliance with equalities legislation.

However, we know that for the majority of governors and headteachers, the motivation to prevent and respond to bullying goes beyond the law – we know that children and young people who are safe and happy make better learners. The Longitudinal Survey of Young People in England (DCSF 2004–6) showed that young people who reported being bullied had lower Key Stage 4 scores than other young people; were more likely to leave full-time education at the age of 16; and were particularly likely to be 'not in education, employment or training' (NEET) on leaving school. Having a clear and effective strategy for the prevention of, and for responding to, bullying is vital for the life and success of any school and community.

We hope this guide inspires you to lead the way in ensuring your school and the community it serves is free from all forms of bullying and harassment. If you have any comments or queries, please send an email to ABA@ncb.org.uk.

Top ten recommendations for governors tackling bullying

This guide contains information for governors on different aspects of prevention and response to bullying. Here are our top ten recommendations for governors who have an interest in tackling bullying.

1. Give someone on the governing body a lead role in addressing bullying.
2. Include bullying as a regular standing item at your meetings and ask the headteacher to provide the governing body with relevant data to support discussion.
3. Make sure that as a governing body and as a school you are meeting all your statutory duties with regard to behaviour and bullying (note: this includes compliance with equalities legislation).
4. Make sure that the governing body and the wider school community have a shared definition of bullying; an anti-bullying policy that is understood by all; and that pupils, staff and parents and carers are well informed about procedures and know how to effectively address bullying.
5. Work with the headteacher to take a whole-school approach to preventing and responding to bullying (work together to complete the ABA School Assessment Tool).
6. Create opportunities to consult with and involve pupils, parents and carers in the school's approach to bullying and behaviour.
7. Be clear about your procedures should a serious incident of bullying behaviour occur.
8. Listen to parents who complain and show them that you take behaviour and bullying seriously and will change school practice where necessary.
9. Build partnerships in the wider community and work together to address bullying behaviour inside and outside of the school.
10. Find out which agencies and voluntary organisations can offer support to your school (see Further resources).

Chapter 1: What is bullying?

Defining bullying behaviour

It is vital that each school has a clear definition of bullying that it shares with everyone in the school community. This will ensure that children and young people can recognise and report bullying behaviour and that all staff respond to bullying in a consistent way.

The best definitions are agreed collectively as a school – involving staff, children, parents and carers. We recommend the following principles in defining bullying – but you may want to adapt them or come up with your own.

- Bullying behaviour deliberately causes hurt (either physically or emotionally).
- Bullying behaviour is usually repetitive (though one-off incidents, such as the posting of an image or sending of a text that is passed around a group, can quickly spiral into bullying behaviour).
- Bullying behaviour involves an imbalance of power (the person or people on the receiving end feel like they can't defend themselves).
- Bullying behaviour is not teasing between friends without intention to cause hurt.
- Bullying behaviour is not falling out between friends after a quarrel or disagreement (though in some cases this can lead to bullying).
- Bullying behaviour does not include activities that all parties have consented to and enjoy (though watch this one as coercion can be very subtle).

Different types of bullying

There are a number of ways to bully another person, causing physical and emotional hurt. We know that some of the most common methods include verbal comments and name calling, sending or posting of messages and images online or through mobile phones, and causing social isolation. Bullying can also be physical – such as hitting, kicking and shoving, slapping and other forms of non-consensual touch. Other areas could include stealing someone's possessions and extortion.

Prevalence of bullying

The Tell Us 4 survey (DCSF 2009) reported that almost a third of children had been bullied in school in the last year (of those, 11 per cent were bullied every day). Altogether, 21 per cent of children and young people reported being bullied in the wider community. Bullying was also the biggest single reason for children and young people calling ChildLine in 2007/08.

Bullying can be motivated by wider prejudice (see below) and some children and groups are particularly vulnerable. Homophobic bullying at school had been experienced by 65 per cent of young lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people (Stonewall 2007); and in 2006, Mencap reported that 8 out of 10 children with a learning disability had been bullied in school (Mencap 2006).

Our team of governors also reported that children who move (transition) mid-term to a new school can be particularly vulnerable to bullying – whether they have come from another school in the area, from somewhere else in the country or, indeed, from outside the UK.

Bullies and the bullied

It is not always easy to identify those who bully and those who are bullied. These are not personality types – no one is born a bully or a victim of bullying – this is about behaviour and inter-relational conflict. Bullying can be overt and detectable – such as a physical assault, or it can be subtle and more difficult to spot – such as the spreading of rumours or deliberate social exclusion. There are children who both bully and are bullied by others.

Bullying behaviour can be fuelled by the activities of a wider peer group. It can be particularly difficult for school staff to determine what has happened in cases of bullying involving large numbers of children – particularly if they have previously appeared to be friends. For this reason, it is vital that the school has a clear definition of bullying and a strong anti-bullying policy that sets out how staff will respond to alleged incidents. As governors, you will need to keep an open mind when discussing incidents of bullying – and always refer to the agreed school definition of bullying.

Bullying, prejudice and discrimination

Bullying can be motivated by wider prejudice and discrimination, for example, homophobic bullying; bullying of children with special educational needs and disabilities; bullying related to race and religion; and gender-based bullying. The prejudice that drives some bullying behaviour can be found in society at large, communities, institutions and homes. This means it is important to examine the motivation behind bullying and to look at whether the school needs to challenge prejudice and discrimination on a wider basis (for example through ethos and curriculum).

Emerging types of bullying

Developments in technology have provided new opportunities for inter-relational conflict and harassment, commonly called cyberbullying. Cyberbullying, as with any form of bullying, is driven by the desire to cause hurt. Cyberbullying can include sending or posting harmful messages, comments and images online or through mobile phones; excluding others from social networking; and impersonating other people in order to cause harm.

There has also been an increase in the number of children excluded for sexual misconduct in some schools in England, and a concern that there may be a rise in sexual bullying in school. Sexual bullying is a form of gender-based bullying. It includes behaviour with a sexual element that is harmful, non-consensual and repeated. Typically this could include sexual comments and name-calling; spreading of sexual rumours; use of technology to spread sexual gossip, comments or images; and can also involve non-consensual touch (for example, touching, pinching or slapping body parts, pulling bra straps and clothes, pulling down trousers, or lifting up skirts). Girls are most likely to face sexual bullying, perpetrated by boys – but boys can also be subject to sexual bullying by girls, and there can be sexual bullying between young people of the same sex.

Bullying outside of school

Bullying behaviour can take place both inside and outside of school. Bullying outside of school can impact on the school day – this may include incidents of cyberbullying; bullying on the way to and from school; and any arguments between peers outside of school that can lead to bullying behaviour. There may also be additional problems in families and the wider community that have an impact on bullying behaviour in school, such as a climate of racism and harassment, family feuding, domestic violence and gang-related behaviour.

Bullying and crime

There are times when bullying behaviour can become a criminal offence – for example:

- threatening or actual physical assault
- threatening or actual sexual assault
- the use of technology to bully and harass
- theft
- coercing others to commit a crime
- hate crime (for example, racism).

If a headteacher thinks a crime may have been committed they should contact the police for advice (see Chapter 3: Managing bullying incidents).

Questions to ask

- ✓ Does my school have a definition of bullying that is understood by all members of the school community, including children and young people? How do we know that everyone understands and agrees with the definition?
- ✓ Do all members of my school community understand the different types of bullying – including cyberbullying, sexual bullying and bullying related to prejudice?
- ✓ Do we have a clear and robust policy that covers how we will respond to incidents of bullying both inside and outside of school?
- ✓ Do we have a clear system in place for handling incidents of bullying that may involve criminal behaviour?

Top tips

- Create opportunities to consult with staff and pupils about bullying – ask whether there are any particular types of bullying that may be causing concern and what they think could be done to improve things. Remember to be explicit about the purpose of your consultation and ensure that any actions undertaken are fed back to them so they know their views have been listened to.
- The best definitions are written and shared by the whole-school community and written in language that everyone can understand.
- Keep up to date. Young people can help you with this. Constantly review whether the school's anti-bullying policy corresponds with the latest trends in behaviour (for example, the use of cyber technology to bully). Make changes where necessary.
- Build strong relationships with partners in the community so that you can work together to respond to bullying outside of school.
- Invite the police into your school to talk to staff and pupils about links between bullying and criminal behaviour – have a clear working protocol with the police should a serious incident occur. The police can also advise young people about what constitutes a hate crime and how to report it.

Chapter 2: The role of governors

Leadership

We would recommend that within each governing body there is a lead individual or committee responsible for addressing bullying. The lead or committee should make sure that the wider governing body and the headteacher are meeting their legal duties with regard to bullying, and that the governing body has an active role in supporting the school both in prevention and response.

Legal duties

It is important that the governing body keeps up to date with the law and any government guidance relating to behaviour and bullying.

Governors and headteachers have a legal duty to ensure the safety of pupils in their care – with particular responsibilities for tackling bullying. Ofsted also inspect schools to see how they are dealing with bullying.

At the time of going to print the law requires that governing bodies must:

- write a statement of principles to promote good behaviour through consultation with the headteacher and other appropriate members of staff, parents and pupils (Education and Inspections Act 2006)
- promote the well-being of pupils in their schools (Education and Inspections Act 2006)
- safeguard and promote the welfare of pupils (Education Act 2002)
- produce an Annual Profile answering the question ‘How do we make sure our pupils are healthy, safe and well-supported?’ (Education Act 2005)
- establish procedures for dealing with complaints about bullying, and all matters relating to the school, and publicise these procedures (Education Act 2002).

Equality legislation

Governors are also responsible for ensuring that the school meets the statutory duties with regard to equality legislation. The Equality Act 2010 requires schools to protect pupils from discrimination and harassment based on disability; gender reassignment; pregnancy and maternity; race, religion or belief; and sex and sexual orientation. The Equality and Human Rights Commission (www.ehrc.gov.uk) has produced guidance for schools on their duties under the Act. Essentially, the Act requires schools to eliminate unlawful discrimination and harassment and to actively promote equality. This is vital for the prevention of prejudice-related bullying in schools.

Behaviour and anti-bullying policies

The law does not require that schools have a stand-alone anti-bullying policy (although this is generally seen as good practice) but that headteachers:

write a school behaviour policy that includes the prevention of all forms of bullying among pupils and that this is drawn to the attention of pupils, parents and staff at least once a year.

Education and Inspections Act 2006

The law also empowers headteachers to impose disciplinary measures for inappropriate behaviour such as bullying both in school and off-site (Education and Inspections Act 2006).

We would recommend that the anti-bullying policy or behaviour policy includes the following:

- a clear definition of bullying and the different types of bullying
- references to bullying outside of school
- prevention methods
- response strategies, including the recording of incidents
- detail on how incidents will be managed, including serious bullying incidents
- evidence of pupil and parent consultation and involvement
- annual or bi-annual reviews.

Encouraging a whole-school approach to tackling bullying

The Anti-bullying Alliance believes that the most effective way to tackle bullying is through taking a ‘whole-school approach’. The Anti-bullying Alliance has converted the principles of the whole-school approach into a School Assessment Tool that enables schools to measure their progress in anti-bullying work and identify areas of development (to access the resource, visit www.abatoolsforschools.org.uk).

The assessment tool includes the standards of good practice given in the table below, which we would encourage governors and senior school staff to work through systematically to ensure a whole-school approach to preventing and respond to bullying.

Leadership	<p>meaning:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - a senior staff member is designated responsible for dealing with bullying - a governor is designated responsible for dealing with bullying
Anti-bullying policy	<p>to include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - your vision of how you want your school to be, including rights of all to be safe and free from bullying and harassment - a clear definition of all methods and practices of bullying - references to bullying outside of school (off-site) - prevention methods - response strategies - inputs from pupil and parent consultation - a requirement to review it every 12 months
Data collection and analysis	<p>to involve:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - a pupil perception survey every 12 months - a system for recording bullying incidents
Prevention	<p>measures to include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - awareness-raising activities - an up-to-date equality policy that references bullying and harassment - a behaviour policy that cites bullying and related sanctions - an assessment of the school environment in the last 12 months (e.g. safety in the playground, corridors, safe places, etc.) - using the wider curriculum to raise issues relating to bullying (e.g. history, English, drama)

Responding/ intervention	involving: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - a range of interventions (for more details visit www.abatoolsforschools.org.uk) - support from outside agencies if available and/or appropriate - support from parent(s) or carer(s)
Involving pupils	through: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - the school council and general pupil consultation - peer support programmes - campaigning and awareness raising - engaging in national events (e.g. Anti-Bullying Week) - celebrating achievement (e.g. Diana Award for anti-bullying initiatives)
Engaging parents and carers	through: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - awareness-raising activities - a parent perception survey, every 12 months - a reporting system - a complaints procedure
Staff training and development	so that: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - governors are trained - senior staff are trained - all staff are trained - bullying is covered in the CPD annual programme
Partnership working	means: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - engaging in any wider local authority strategy to tackle bullying - working with feeder schools - working with other schools in the area - working with the wider community

Listening

Governors can be effective in helping the school to prevent bullying, by listening to the views and ideas of pupils, parents and carers; feeding these back to the headteacher; and making sure their ideas influence school policy and practice.

This might include meeting with the school council to hear their views on how well the school responds to bullying, and holding focus groups with small groups of pupils.

Monitoring

We would recommend that bullying is a standing item at least once a year at governors' board meetings (more regularly if there are high incident levels). In order to make this discussion evidence-based and meaningful, it is helpful if the headteacher can share relevant data with the governing body. Relevant data could include:

- data from pupil and/or parent and carer surveys
- a log of bullying incidents
- a record of any parental complaints and outcomes
- a record of exclusions for bullying or bullying-related behaviour
- attendance figures.

This can also be an opportunity for the headteacher to update governors on action that the school is taking to prevent and respond to bullying. The ABA School Assessment Tool could provide a template for recording and reporting on progress at these meetings.

If governors find that headteachers are resistant to discussing bullying and there are concerns that the school may be breaching their legal duties, we would recommend that you contact Governor Services within your local authority for advice. You can also find a list of organisations that can provide further advice and guidance under Further resources.

Building partnerships

As governors, you will be aware that pupils may be affected in school by bullying that takes place outside of school hours. This is increasingly the case with the use of cyber-technology to bully and intimidate. However, children and young people can also be bullied on the way to and from school by pupils from their own school or neighbouring and feeder schools and colleges; on public transport; in parks and play areas; in youth clubs; and in the home.

Governors provide an important link to the wider community and can use their position to build partnerships to prevent and respond to bullying. You could include, therefore, working with governors in neighbouring and feeder schools to share your anti-bullying vision and policies. You may also want to encourage partnership work with extended services in your school and any other youth providers in the area. Having a shared strategy for preventing and responding to bullying ensures congruency and may reduce bullying in the wider community.

Questions to ask

- ✓ Do we have a lead individual or committee within the governing body responsible for bullying?
- ✓ Have we met our legal duties as a governing body and as a school?
- ✓ Have we made sure that the school meets the statutory duties for equalities legislation?
- ✓ Do we create opportunities as a governing body to discuss bullying – and does the headteacher provide data to support this?
- ✓ Do we create opportunities to listen to the views of pupils and parents about bullying? Do we act on what they tell us?
- ✓ Do we work in partnership with the wider community to create a shared vision and strategy for the prevention and response to bullying?

Top tips

- Make sure there is a lead governor or committee responsible for bullying.
- Keep up to date with your legal duties and the duties of the school.
- Make sure you include bullying on the governors' board meeting at least on an annual basis.
- Take a whole-school approach to tackling bullying – and make use of the ABA School Assessment Tool to identify your strengths and areas for development.
- Gather data that will help you to know whether you are making a difference or not.

- Listen to the views of pupils in your school and take action where needed.
- Don't reinvent the wheel. Learn from what already exists and is working. Local schools will share ideas with you; and websites such as the Anti-bullying Alliance one can give you ideas for prevention and response.
- Ensure that staff who do attend anti-bullying training cascade the information to all staff.
- Training staff can be costly and it can be difficult to find the time. Consider shorter, focused slots in staff meetings – a regular ten-minute information share could be an effective way of keeping staff up to date with the latest anti-bullying developments, followed up with more in-depth information fact sheets where necessary. Identify one or two members of staff who can take on the role of organising this.
- Work with members of the wider community to create a shared vision and strategy for preventing and responding to bullying.

Chapter 3: Managing bullying incidents

All bullying incidents need to be taken seriously. The school's anti-bullying policy should make the definition of bullying clear to pupils, staff, parents and carers; should provide detail on how to report bullying; should detail recording procedures; and should make it clear how incidents of bullying will be handled.

Serious bullying incidents

Schools may face a situation where one or more pupils are involved in a serious bullying incident. All incidents of bullying are painful and have consequences – but occasionally there are incidents that may result in exclusion, a criminal investigation and/or a referral to a specialist agency such as social care teams in the local authority.

In Chapter 1, we looked at the types of bullying that could constitute a crime. These are also the types of bullying incidents that may result in exclusion or a referral to specialist support:

- threatening or actual physical assault
- threatening or actual sexual assault
- the use of technology to bully and harass
- theft
- coercing others to commit a crime
- hate crime (for example, a racist attack).

Clear policies

It is essential that the school behaviour policy (and the anti-bullying policy, if this is a separate document) includes clear guidance for staff, pupils, parents and carers on how serious bullying incidents will be managed. This could include:

- what constitutes a serious incident
- action that the school will take following a serious incident (which may include contact with the police and specialist agencies)
- how parents/carers will be informed
- how information will be handled and recorded, including issues of confidentiality
- possible sanctions for serious incidents
- occasions and procedures for searching pupils or confiscating belongings
- occasions when the school may sanction incidents that have taken place off-site.

Record keeping

We would recommend that schools have a system to record all bullying incidents, however minor. The system should include a record of action taken following an incident and the outcome of this action. Such a system has a number of advantages, including tracking whether incidents are recurring, and if certain pupils have repeated involvement. It also provides schools with a historical account of incidents including previous action the school has taken – this is crucial should there be formal meetings with parents, outside agencies or a formal investigation.

Involving the police and other outside agencies

If the headteacher is concerned that a crime may have been committed, they should contact the police as soon as possible and consult with them to determine the next steps. The police can advise the school on whether this is a criminal matter or a case for the school to investigate and resolve. If the school is concerned that there may be child protection concerns in relation to the incident they should follow their child protection policy, and contact the relevant agencies as soon as possible.

Support for pupils and staff

In the case of any serious incident occurring, we would recommend that the school seek additional support for staff and pupils involved. This could involve short- and long-term support for pupils and staff involved in the incident – for example, creating time to talk through what has happened, and providing counselling for those involved where necessary. Local services that may be able to help include social care in Children's Services if it is a child protection issue; health services if there are ongoing mental health concerns; an anti-bullying coordinator or staff with responsibility for supporting schools with behaviour (if they exist in your local authority); educational psychologists (contact your local authority for the name of the appropriate one in your area); and other agencies that provide specialist support and advice (e.g. Victim Support).

Sanctions

Exclusion should always be a last resort, but there may be serious incidents of bullying where the headteacher decides to permanently exclude the pupil. It is important that the governing body keeps up to date with law and guidance from the Department of Education relating to behaviour management and discipline, and ensures that appropriate and lawful action has been taken. It is unlawful to exclude a pupil because they are the victim of bullying or harassment – this includes unofficial exclusions or suggestions that the child may be happier elsewhere. It is also important with incidents of bullying that the school considers whether the behaviour of a child is a result of provocation, bullying or harassment. For example, a child may have been systematically bullied for a period of time without the knowledge of the school and may then act out in retaliation.

Confidentiality

It is important that the headteacher and the governing body carefully and sensitively manage information. Details of incidents should only be shared on a need-to-know basis. This can be difficult to manage in a school environment – particularly if children have witnessed a particular incident. Headteachers will need to think carefully about information that is shared with the wider staff body, pupils, parents and carers and should seek advice from the governing body, the police and specialist agencies where appropriate. You will need to adhere to your data protection policy – this may be pertinent in terms of what information you can legally share with other parties.

Responding to the media

There may be occasions where the media show an interest in an incident of bullying – they may have been alerted to a criminal case or have been contacted by a member of the community. If it is likely that an incident may lead to media interest, the headteacher needs to take swift action to inform staff of the agreed protocol for a response. We would recommend that schools contact their local authority and seek legal advice (where appropriate) before making any comment.

Follow-up work

If a serious bullying incident has occurred, or there have been recurrent incidents of bullying, it is vital that the governing body works with the headteacher to consider whether there is anything that the school could have done differently; whether there is a need for a change to policy or practice; and whether the school should seek further advice or support. For example, does the school need to review the school behaviour or anti-bullying policy? Is there a need for work to be done with pupils and staff around a specific type of behaviour? Would the school benefit from outside support for a particular issue and is there a need for further staff training? This is particularly important if the bullying incident was driven by prejudice, such as racism or homophobia. There are a number of agencies and voluntary organisations that can support schools with particular forms of bullying (see Further resources).

Questions to ask

- ✓ How prepared are we as a school to respond to a serious bullying incident?
- ✓ Do we include details of how we would manage a serious incident in the school behaviour and/or anti-bullying policy?
- ✓ Do we have a recording system for all types of bullying incident?
- ✓ Do we know who can advise us if we need specific advice on what to do?
- ✓ Are we aware of agencies and voluntary organisations in our area that can provide support for specific bullying issues (for example, homophobic bullying, sexual bullying)?

Top tips

- Plan for how you would respond to a serious incident of bullying before it happens.
- Provide information on how the school would respond to a serious incident of bullying in your behaviour policy and/or anti-bullying policy and ensure everyone in school is clear about the procedure.
- Make a list of who you would contact if you needed advice and ensure it is updated annually.
- Build partnerships and contacts with agencies and voluntary organisations that could offer additional support to the school.

Chapter 4: Working with parents and carers

Communication

Working with parents and carers is an essential part of the whole-school approach to preventing and responding to bullying (described in Chapter 2). Parents and carers need to be involved in all stages of the approach – from working with staff and pupils to define and understand bullying; to agreeing the best ways to report concerns about bullying; to working with the school if there needs to be sanctions for bullying behaviour.

The Parent Governor may want to take the lead in making sure that parents and carers feel involved in the school approach to tackling bullying. Some ways to make this happen could include:

- making sure that the school brochure outlines for parents and carers:
 - who to contact if they have concerns about bullying
 - an agreed protocol for reporting incidents of bullying
 - an agreed protocol on responses to reported incidents, including the complaints procedure
- having a parent-friendly leaflet that explains the complaints procedure in simple and easy-to-understand terms
- ensuring that parents have access to the behaviour and/or anti-bullying policy and are kept informed of relevant information about the school's approach to anti-bullying work via newsletters, email, coffee mornings, open days and evenings, and that these events offer opportunities for consultation and feedback
- providing training sessions for parents on specific forms of bullying (for example, cyberbullying)
- involving parents and carers in focus groups to look at the school's anti-bullying policy
- surveying parents and carers to see how well the school manages bullying, for example using the ABA parent questionnaire (available through www.abatoolsforschools.org.uk); the information from the survey can then be fed back to parents and used to determine clear action
- creating working groups involving parents and carers – this is particularly useful if bullying in the wider community is having an impact on the school.

Handling complaints

The Chair of governors may find they receive complaints from parents and carers about bullying in the school, or how incidents of bullying have been managed. By this point it is likely that the parent or carer is angry and upset and so it is important that these complaints are resolved as quickly as possible before they escalate. Governors need to be conscious that any previous involvement in the complaint (even at an informal level) should preclude them from being involved in any formal process.

We would recommend the following principles for handling complaints:

1. Respond as soon as you are able – if you need more time to consider your response, make sure you acknowledge that you have received the letter or email and give a timeframe for getting back in touch.

2. Gather all the relevant information and records – the headteacher and staff may also be feeling quite upset and so it is important to listen carefully, keep an open and objective mind, and ask the right questions. Consider whether there are any gaps in the evidence before you, and ask why this is the case. Has something that should have happened not occurred, is there a recording issue, or is there a particular piece of evidence that has not been considered as yet?
3. Your anti-bullying policy and parent complaints procedure should guide your response – this highlights how vital it is to get these right and to ensure they are shared with all members of the school community.
4. Keep the child or children involved at the centre of all your thoughts and actions – consider the impact of the incident and the complaint on them and whether there is a need for specialist support (see Chapter 3: Managing bullying incidents). Check that their views have been sought.
5. Seek advice from outside agencies and voluntary organisations (see Further resources).
6. Remedy any fault that you identify as quickly as possible.
7. Finally, ensure the complainant receives a written response that fully outlines the complaint made, how it has been investigated, what findings have been made, any actions the school has committed to take and what the decision relating to the complaint is. If you have established that a fault has occurred, acknowledge it and be clear and specific about what action the school will take to prevent further recurrence.

Effective meetings

If you are meeting with the parents and carers in person, we would recommend the following:

Before the meeting

- Find out whether they will need an interpreter or any other kind of additional support for the meeting.
- Suggest that they bring a friend or family member for support.
- Make sure they are not left waiting in a corridor but guide them to a quiet space or room as soon as possible.
- Keep the number of people involved in the meeting to a minimum – make sure the parents know in advance who is coming and who they are.
- Consider carefully whether the child or children concerned should be involved in the meeting. This is likely to be dependent on their age.
- Think carefully about the room you use – and the way it is set out – it can be helpful to sit in a circle rather than behind tables.
- Explain carefully the structure and purpose of the meeting to both the parent or carer and the members of staff.
- Make sure you will have refreshments available and a box of tissues handy.
- Consider whether there will be any safety risks – for example, if you know the parent has a history of anger or violence and is particularly upset with a member of staff, you need to consider whether the staff member should be present. You should also plan for what you will do if the situation suddenly escalates and you need to draw the meeting to a close.

During the meeting

- Make sure you offer the parent or carer a drink and keep a box of tissues handy.
- Introduce everyone at the start of the meeting – use formal names unless you are on first name terms. Whatever you choose, stick to them throughout the meeting.
- Reiterate the purpose and structure of the meeting.
- Explain who will take notes and make sure the parent knows they will receive a record of the meeting.
- Ask the parent or carer to begin with their concerns – listen without interrupting and repeat back what they have said. Accept that there is a problem that needs to be resolved – without accepting the blame for it (unless appropriate).
- If the child is there, give them space and time to talk and make sure they only stay in the meeting for as long as they feel comfortable.
- School staff can give their view of the situation using relevant documentation and evidence – they should refer to the school's anti-bullying policy and behaviour policy where relevant. They need to avoid being defensive but stick to the facts. If you sense that either party is getting upset you need to take control of the meeting.
- Ask the parent or carer, child and then school staff for possible solutions.
- Tell the parent or carer what steps you will take, but do not make any promises. Make clear any actions that the parent/carer or child will need to take.
- Think about whether you need to involve other members of staff or outside agencies and agree this with the parent or carer and the child.
- Agree when you will next make contact with the parent or carer. Close the meeting.

After the meeting

- Make sure that the staff involved are satisfied with the outcome, reiterate any agreed actions and set timescales.
- Make sure that the parent or carer is provided with notes of the meeting and provide a letter outlining agreed actions and timescales.
- Follow up any agreed actions.
- Agree a day by which to contact the parent or carer and members of staff to check that the situation has been resolved.
- Consider whether there needs to be any follow-up work to prevent the incident happening again (see Chapter 3: Managing bullying incidents).

Questions to ask

- ✓ How are we engaging parents and carers in the anti-bullying work in our school? List the possible options available.
- ✓ Do we have a policy for handling parent and carer complaints that is up to date and fit for purpose?
- ✓ Are there any particular complaints about bullying that keep coming up – is there a need for follow-up work in the school (for example, a change to the anti-bullying policy or to the training for staff)?

Top tips

- Make sure your anti-bullying policy and behaviour policy are agreed and shared with all members of the school community – the more that parents and carers feel they are involved and informed about anti-bullying work in the school, the less likely you are to receive complaints.
- Respond quickly to complaints from parents and carers.
- Remember that your role is to be objective – even if this presents a challenge in your relationship with the headteacher.
- Make sure your parents and carers complaints process is fit for purpose.
- Consider whether there is a serious complaint or recurrent complaints that require follow-up work in the school (for example, changes to the anti-bullying or behaviour policies, training for staff, work with pupils). Decide how you will address these.

References and further resources

References

Department for Children, Schools and Families (2010) *Tellus 4 National Report*. London: DCSF.

Department for Children, Schools and Families (2007) *Youth Cohort Study and Longitudinal Study of Young People in England*. London: DCSF.

Stonewall (2007) *The School Report*. London: Stonewall.

Mencap (2006) *Don't Stick it STOP IT!*. London: Mencap.

NSPCC (2008) *Childline casenotes*. NSPCC: London.

ABA websites

The ABA website includes up-to-date information, advice and resources. Visit www.anti-bullyingalliance.org.uk

The ABA Tools for Schools micro-site provides advice and resources for teachers and all education providers working with children and young people to combat bullying. The website has a number of bespoke tools including the ABA School Assessment Tool and ABA questionnaires for children and young people, parents and carers. Visit www.abatoolsforschools.org.uk

The ABA Local Authority Toolkit provides information, guidance and case studies for all local authority practitioners working to prevent bullying. Visit www.anti-bullyingalliancetoolkit.org.uk

If you have any other questions then you can contact the ABA at any time for advice, guidance and signposting. Contact info@aba.org.uk

ABA member organisations

The ABA has over 80 member organisations. The full list of organisations can be found on the ABA website. All members are involved in preventing and responding to bullying – many with specialist knowledge in particular areas.

ABA School and College Network

The ABA invites all schools and colleges to join the School and College Network. Membership of the network provides schools and colleges with termly e-bulletins packed full of information and advice, posters and merchandise, the School and College logo, anti-bullying week materials and discounts on ABA services. To find out more about membership visit www.anti-bullyingalliance.org.uk

Specialist support

There are organisations that can provide advice, support and resources for dealing with specific forms of bullying. Some of these organisations are listed here. For up-to-date information, visit the ABA website.

General advice for schools and governors

Anti-bullying Alliance	www.anti-bullyingalliance.org.uk
Advisory Centre for Education	www.ace-ed.org.uk
Governornet	www.governornet.co.uk
NGA (National Governors' Association)	www.nga.org.uk
NSPCC	www.nspcc.org.uk

Support for children and young people

Childline	www.childline.org.uk
Cybermentors	www.cybermentors.org.uk
Kidscape	www.kidscape.org.uk

Support for parents and carers

Advisory Centre for Education	www.ace-ed.org.uk
Parentline Plus	www.parentlineplus.org.uk

Cyberbullying

Childnet	www.childnet-int.org
Thinkyouknow (CEOP)	www.thinkyouknow.co.uk
StopTextbully	www.stoptextbully.com
Cyberbullying.org	www.cyberbullying.org

Sexual or gender-related bullying

Aim project	www.aimproject.org.uk
NSPCC	www.nspcc.org.uk
Brook	www.brook.org.uk
Teen Boundaries	www.teenboundaries.co.uk
Women's Aid	www.womensaid.org.uk

Bullying related to special educational needs and disabilities

Mencap	www.mencap.org.uk
National Autistic Society	www.autism.org.uk
Young Minds	www.youngminds.org.uk
Every Disabled Child Matters	www.edcm.org.uk

Bullying related to race and religion

Equality and Human Rights Commission	www.ehrc.gov.uk
Save the Children	www.savethechildren.org.uk
Race on the Agenda (ROTA)	www.rota.org.uk

Homophobic bullying

Stonewall	www.stonewall.org.uk
Schools Out	www.schools-out.org.uk
Each <i>(Educational action challenging homophobia)</i>	www.eachaction.org.uk

Other specialist agencies

Combating Obesity	www.combatingobesity.org.uk
Changing Faces <i>(supports people with disfigurements to the face or body from any cause)</i>	www.changingfaces.org.uk