

**Bullying - School and Council Policy to  
Support Vulnerable Children and to  
Reduce Poor and Abusive Peer Relations**

Report of the Education, Children's Services & Leisure Scrutiny  
Sub-Committee

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## Introduction

1. The Education, Children's Services & Leisure Scrutiny Sub-Committee resolved at its meeting on 10 July 2012 to conduct a review into bullying, considering both school and council policy to support vulnerable children and to reduce poor and abusive peer relations.
2. The sub-committee continued its recent focus on the role of parents and families in supporting young people and resolved to look particularly at young people who are more likely to experience bullying because of social exclusion or disadvantage: lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) pupils, children in care and girls at risk of gang involvement.
3. Two themes emerged as the review progressed: cyber-bullying and young people at risk of involvement in gangs/serious offending.

## Evidence

4. Council officers provided overview reports on:
  - the local authority context and work to combat bullying in schools, which included an update on a previous scrutiny report on bullying produced in 2006/07
  - local authority work undertaken with gangs and parents by the Specialist Family Focus Team (SFFT)
5. The sub-committee received evidence from:
  - Southwark Youth Council, which gave verbal evidence on the theme and a presentation on Quality Youth standards
  - Sue Sanders from Schools OUT, a national organisation based in Southwark, working towards equality, safety and visibility in education for the LGBT community
  - Elena Noel from Empowering People for Excellence, a local organisation focused on cohesion and community engagement, working predominantly with young people and families where there is a risk of exclusion
  - Jennifer Blake from Safe 'N' Sound, a local organisation based in Peckham that provides support to young people and parents covering a wide range of issues such as challenging behaviour, anti-social behaviour, gangs, drugs, low self-esteem and housing
  - Kidscape, a national Anti-Bullying Child Protection Charity
  - the Cybersmile Foundation, a national charity committed to tackling cyber-bullying and online hate campaigns, which works with children, young people and adults
6. The sub-committee also considered the following evidence:
  - Government publication on 'Preventing and tackling bullying - Advice for head teachers, staff and governing bodies'
  - research report on 'The impact of cyber-bullying on young people's mental health' November 2010: PEAR and Anglia Ruskin University

## Background

7. The 2006/07 Children's Services & Education Scrutiny Sub-Committee decided to review the bullying of children and young people in Southwark. The sub-committee was interested in finding out the extent to which bullying was a problem and finding out what was being done to combat it.
8. At the start of the current review the Education, Children's Services & Leisure Scrutiny Sub-Committee reviewed the recommendations of the earlier review and asked officers for an update:

Recommendation	Response
<p>That a council officer be identified and tasked with the responsibility of coordinating termly meetings between police beat officers, safer neighbourhood teams, secondary schools and bus and train operators to share information and coordinate initiatives aimed at ensuring that the journey to and from school is safe.</p>	<p>The Safer Schools Steering Group meets half-termly to discuss these issues. The nucleus group consists of the following roles:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Partnership and Criminal Justice Police Superintendent</li> <li>- Safer Neighbourhood Chief Inspector</li> <li>- Southwark Headteachers' Representative</li> <li>- Youth Offending Scheme Representative</li> <li>- Southwark Community Safety</li> <li>- Police Sergeant, Youth Engagement Team</li> <li>- Southwark Early Help Team</li> </ul>
<p>That the council takes active steps to facilitate the sharing of information about bullying strategies amongst schools and other key agencies. This should include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- organising a two yearly bullying conference</li> <li>- collating school anti-bullying policies and circulating good practice examples to head teachers and chairs of governors as an aid to other schools when reviewing their anti-bullying policies</li> <li>- becoming involved with the Anti-Bullying Alliance</li> </ul>	<p>An Anti-bullying toolkit was produced for schools and the youth services.</p> <p>Schools were supported to take part in national anti-bullying week each November.</p> <p>Case studies on activities were shared with schools.</p>
<p>That the council coordinates a mediation service on a trial basis to resolve any disputes between parents and schools, including disputes that relate to incidents of bullying. That schools should pay for this service on a case-by-case basis, but the council should organise the provision.</p>	<p>Officers worked with the Southwark Mediation Service (SMS) to develop resources for schools.</p> <p>SMS have provided training for peer mentors in many of our schools.</p>
<p>We have also identified two specific areas we think officers need to research further and report back to executive on:</p> <p>That officers look into whether schools want more training around bullying. If so, the LEA should support this either by actively promoting</p>	<p>The Personal, Social, Health &amp; Economic education team arranged regular training events for all schools and bespoke training to individual schools - plus multi agency training for our partner organisations.</p>

Recommendation	Response
the council and Southwark-wide services available, or by directly organising training days.	
That the Executive tasks an officer to look into what extent gambling is a problem amongst children and young people in Southwark.	<p>Officers found no evidence that gambling was a particular problem in Southwark schools.</p> <p>As a precautionary measure all secondary schools were provided with a nationally developed resource to help schools recognise and deal with any issues related to gambling.</p>

## Context

9. In March 2012, the Department for Education issued revised guidance for “Preventing and tackling bullying” which shifted responsibilities to schools. The guidance made only one reference to a local authority having a role – when a bullying incident was so severe it should be addressed as a child protection issue under the Children Act 1989.
10. Officers emphasised that responsibilities had moved to schools and oversight rested primarily with OFSTED, however the council retained responsibility under the council’s safeguarding duties and a ‘moral duty’.
11. Officers and sub-committee members, particularly the education representatives, commended the council’s previous good work, particularly the Anti Bullying Toolkit and officers said that this laid a foundation for schools to build on. Officers said that there were now a variety of providers, from the voluntary and private sector, who offered services that schools could buy in.
12. Just under a third of Southwark schools have been reported on under the arrangements of the current OFSTED framework since January 2012. Inspectors judged that in those schools visited:
  - Pupils’/students’ awareness of types of bullying, including cyber-bullying and racist and homophobic abuse, was well developed and they knew how to keep themselves safe
  - In over 70% of schools bullying is very rare and pupils/students and the wider school community have confidence that incidents are resolved effectively and quickly
  - In 29% of schools pupils/students reported that they had not experienced bullying and that the community did not tolerate it in any form

## Guidance on tackling bullying in schools

13. ‘Preventing and tackling bullying - Advice for head teachers, staff and governing bodies’ made the following recommendations:
  - Involve parents to ensure that they are clear that the school does not tolerate bullying and are aware of the procedures to follow if they believe that their child is being bullied. Parents feel confident that the school will take any complaint about bullying seriously and resolve the issue in a way that protects the child, and they reinforce the value of good behaviour at home;
  - Involve pupils. All pupils understand the school’s approach and are clear about the part they

can play to prevent bullying, including when they find themselves as bystanders;

- Regularly evaluate and update their approach to take account of developments in technology, for instance updating 'acceptable use' policies for computers;
- Implement disciplinary sanctions. The consequences of bullying reflect the seriousness of the incident so that others see that bullying is unacceptable;
- Openly discuss differences between people that could motivate bullying, such as religion, ethnicity, disability, gender or sexuality. Also children with different family situations, such as looked after children or those with caring responsibilities. Schools can also teach children that using any prejudice based language are unacceptable;
- Use specific organisations or resources for help with particular problems. Schools can draw on the experience and expertise of anti-bullying organisations with a proven track record and/or specialised expertise in dealing with certain forms of bullying;
- Provide effective staff training. Anti-bullying policies are most effective when all school staff understand the principles and purpose of the school's policy, its legal responsibilities regarding bullying, how to resolve problems, and where to seek support. Schools can invest in specialised skills to help their staff understand the needs of their pupils, including those with Special Educational Needs and/or Disability (SEND) and Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGB&T) pupils;
- Work with the wider community such as the police and children's services where bullying is particularly serious or persistent and where a criminal offence may have been committed. Successful schools also work with other agencies and the wider community to tackle bullying that is happening outside school;
- Make it easy for pupils to report bullying so that they are assured that they will be listened to and incidents acted on. Pupils should feel that they can report bullying which may have occurred outside school including cyber-bullying;
- Create an inclusive environment. Schools should create a safe environment where pupils can openly discuss the cause of their bullying, without fear of further bullying or discrimination; and
- Celebrate success. Celebrating success is an important way of creating a positive school ethos around the issue.

### **Cyber - bullying**

14. Cyber-bullying was a concern raised by young people giving evidence and members were concerned about reports of its damaging effects.
15. The sub-committee took evidence from two national organisations working particularly on cyber-bullying: Kidscape and Cybersmile. A range of social media providers were contacted to give evidence, including Twitter, Facebook, Blackberry, Formspring, however none responded. A research report entitled the "The impact of cyber-bullying on young people's mental health" was also considered. The report was published in 2010 by PEAR and Anglia Ruskin University. The PEAR group is a public health reference group of young people supported by the NCB (National Children's Bureau) Research Centre. Young people took a lead role in devising the research with professional support.

16. PEAR found 18.4% of young people in the research said that they had been cyber-bullied and most of these were girls (69%). The study found that many more girls than boys said they had experienced cyber-bullying in some way and that of those who said they had been affected by cyber-bullying the most common effect was to damage their confidence, self-esteem and mental and emotional well-being. More than a quarter of those who had been cyber-bullied said that they had stayed away from school and over a third said that they had stopped socialising outside school because of it. Of those who had been cyber-bullied, over half had sought support, mainly from parents and friends. Most young people thought that cyber-bullying was as harmful as traditional bullying but some felt that it did not exist and was down to the victim's ability to cope with it. The main reason given by young people for why bullies may choose this method was that 'they think they will not get caught'.
17. The report's practical and policy recommendations were:
- Develop educational programmes around awareness for young people, parents/carers and schools
  - Deliver education that brings together young people and their families to enhance communication in relation to online media
  - Educate young people about what constitutes acceptable behaviour on-line
  - Implement the advice provided by young people in the PEAR project
  - Support young people to report incidents of cyber-bullying through other young people who could help change attitudes and provide a source of support to young people
  - Develop policies that stress the importance of developing values of care and kindness amongst young people
18. Kidscape works on all types of bullying and provided an overview of bullying and its impact on both targets and perpetrators. They said that interventions with targets can be particularly successful through behaviour work to help children become more assertive, as well as encouraging more emotional intelligence in children about the consequences of behaviour. Kidscape provides support in E Safety, bullying intervention, and teacher training.
19. Cybersmile is a service for children, young people and adults provided through a website, a helpline, counselling and workshops in schools. Cybersmile explained that when they go to schools they tackle emotional detachment, by making children aware of the emotional damage that they can cause online. They emphasised the importance of schools first recognising the problem and then having effective policies that they implement.
20. Kidscape and Cybersmile both also advised that it was very important to engage with families and parents, particularly as some parents are unfamiliar with social media and can struggle to support children effectively, for instance by helping children get privacy settings correct and supportively guiding children with on-line interactions. Cybersmile reported some difficulties recruiting parents and the sub-committee suggested developing closer relationships with schools to facilitate this. Both organisations are building their capacity to work with schools in Southwark. Kidscape announced that they had received funding to work in nine boroughs, including Southwark, to do 'Bullying Intervention Training' by providing teacher training, classroom and school support, starting in September 2013.



21. Elena Noel from Empowering People for Excellence and Jennifer Blake from Safe 'N' Sound particularly focused on young people at risk of exclusion and involvement in serious offending or gangs. Both work with young people and their families, in schools and in the community. They gave similar evidence that bullying is pervasive in schools and both raised concerns that some schools will not be aware of the extent of the problem, or will not want to label the problem. Jennifer Blake pointed out that young people who are involved in gangs are also involved in types of bullying, whether as victims or perpetrators or both.
22. The sub-committee received verbal evidence that gang members / serious offenders were using sex to intimidate and that vulnerable girls were being sexual exploited. It was reported that young people on the periphery of gangs may be hassled for money or pressurised into hiding knives.
23. The importance of knowing and looking for signs such as drug trading activity and ensuring that absences from school are explained was emphasised. The sub-committee heard that it was particularly vital to look out for more vulnerable young people, and young women who may be affiliated to gangs, and to do follow up work. Elena Noel reported that gang members often have a high status in schools and referred to a boy on an attempted murder charge who was still in school and put on a pedestal by other children. She explained that these children are often referred to as 'generals' and are often not the disruptive children. She said that frequently teachers were not aware of the children with gang affiliations.
24. The importance of working with parents was emphasised, and Elena Noel commented that many of the parents left school early and are often uncomfortable visiting schools. She recommended encouraging parents to visit schools when things are going well. When there are problems she observed that parents are often frightened and agitated and that home visits can help .
25. The sub-committee's former parental engagement review was referred to and the striking evidence that it is parents, and often fathers, whose positive role most influences their children's educational performance and behaviour. Evidence was heard that many children at risk did not have a positive male role model and often fathers were not around. Mothers are also often under pressure and unable to give sufficient time to their children. It was reported that social issues were very prevalent and increasing with austerity.
26. Elena Noel commented that often young people lack emotional intelligence and that giving time to young people can make a difference, she said that recognising the signs that something is going awry and giving young people home truths is effective. She explained that she worked with young people looking at role play and through this the young people discovered that they did not like being disruptive. Jennifer Blake explained that the project works with schoolchildren on a one to one basis, often with young people not going school.
27. It was reported that Southwark schools often have a large number of black children, but a predominantly white staff who often feel unable to tackle racist bullying.
28. The sub-committee was advised that young people should be involved in developing a Gang Prevention Policy and that it is important that the policy is enacted. Work to prevent gangs needs complementary work on developing good safeguarding policy and practice. One of the key recommendations was to encourage professionals to come together to share information. Safe 'N' Sound reported that it works closely with Southwark police, and would like to replicate this close working relationship with the council. Elena Noel advocated training with people who are credible and knowledgeable. She cautioned that some people offering training are still caught up in their social / criminal networks.

## **Best practice in Schools**

29. Young people, voluntary groups and the PEAR research report all emphasised the importance of nurturing the values of kindness and care, as well as developing emotional intelligence by raising awareness of the impact of different types of bullying: emotional, psychological, physical and sexual. One school had a 'Kindness week', which the young people praised, and there is a Cyber-bullying awareness rising day every 21 June.
30. Young people emphasised the subtle affects of peer pressure and group dynamics, and how this could make people feel. Mentoring of children by other children and the training of staff to tackle bullying was praised, as was the counselling programme offered by Place2Be.
31. Facilitating methods of reporting for all types of bullying was also commonly cited. This could be more traditional bullying as well as cyber-bullying or bullying that took place out of school, such as on the bus. Some schools had a drop box which allowed children to raise concerns, and this was viewed as very effective.
32. The positive role of School Councils in tackling bullying was cited, and the youth focus groups put young people's involvement in decision making as the second most important priority, behind safety.
33. Crown Lane Primary School, in Lambeth, was praised for their very good practice in tackling bullying.

## **Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual & Transgender (LGBT)**

34. Schools OUT gave a presentation on their work to tackle bullying and on working towards equality, safety and visibility in education for the LGBT community. The presentation highlighted children and young people's experiences:
  - Young people identifying themselves as lesbian, gay or bisexual (LGB) worry more about going to school than those who identify themselves as heterosexual
  - 36% of LGB young people reported being bullied at or near school, compared with 15% of heterosexual young people
  - A quarter of LGB young people reported experiencing cyber bullying at least once a month compared with less than 10% of heterosexual young people
35. The presentation spoke about the importance of the whole school approach and said the solutions focused on Language; Law; Role Models and Culture. The presentation highlighted the resources available for work in schools.
36. Schools OUT stressed that support for young LGBT people is vital and that social networks can help this. The best networks that exist for young people are Greenwich Metro and a network in Manchester that organises trips and arts activities. These networks create a supportive space where young people are able to come out in a safety. Sue Sanders reported that children can find it hard to access information about these networks on-line at schools as the software stopped access to the websites that used terms such as 'lesbian'. Southwark has an excellent network for adults - but no network for young people.

## **Safer Schools Steering Group**

37. The previous sub-committee recommended termly meetings between police beat officers, safer

neighbourhood teams, secondary schools and bus and train operators to share information and coordinate initiatives aimed at ensuring that the journey to and from school is safe. This group is now called the Safer Schools Steering Group. Evidence received by the sub-committee highlighted that bullying on transport is still a problem and the 381 bus route was given as an example of poor behaviour. Young people suggested that somebody went on the route to combat bullying.

38. The Safer Schools partnership could be a forum that is used to encourage professionals to come together to share best practice on Gang Prevention Policy and share information.

## **Recommendations**

1. That cabinet considers nominating the cabinet member for children and young people to take overall responsibility for implementing the council's work to address bullying
2. That cabinet considers nominating a named senior officer to lead on delivery of this work.
3. That information be cascaded to schools on the work of Kidscape and the Cybersmile Foundation on tackling bullying and cyber-bullying.
4. That training be promoted that brings together teachers, young people and their families to enhance communication and knowledge in relation to online media and cyber-bullying.
5. That initiatives such as Kindness Weeks and cyber-bullying awareness days be encouraged, which promote the values of care and kindness. Initiatives such as these can also help develop emotional intelligence and an awareness of what constitutes acceptable behaviour online.
6. That the use of role play in schools be encouraged in order to develop emotional literacy.
7. That schemes be promoted that support bullied children to build self-esteem and develop assertiveness skills.
8. That counselling services such as Place2Be be supported.
9. That school children be empowered to raise issues and the box scheme and other schemes be extended so that children, young people and the public can raise concerns easily, particularly about school bus routes.
10. That placing wardens and transport police on problematic bus routes, such as the 381, be considered.
11. That training to teachers be promoted on bullying and involvement with gangs/serious offending so that they are more able to work effectively with young people at risk. That it be ensured that the training is done by people who are credible and knowledgeable.
12. That a forum be provided for teachers to share concerns and information on young people involved, or at risk of involvement, with gangs/serious offending.
13. That encouragement and support be provided for schools to develop Gang Prevention Strategies.
14. That groups such as Safe 'N' Sound, Empowering People for Excellence and Citysafe be invited to join the Safer Schools Steering Group.
15. That more accessible information be provided on local LGBT networks for young people and

consideration be given to developing a network for Southwark young people, possibly with the support of Southwark's LGBT forum.

16. That Speakerbox, the Looked After Children Panel, the Children Safeguarding Board and the Corporate Parenting Panel be consulted on anti-bullying work with children receiving care.