

Bullying of children and young people:

How is Southwark tackling it?

Report of the children's services and education
scrutiny sub-committee

March 2007



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Foreword

I think that I speak for all members of the sub-committee in thanking everyone involved for their frankness and openness whilst giving evidence to assist us in identifying the key areas for progress identified in this report.

I would especially like to thank the school councils who spoke to us in a very positive and knowledgeable way and who made the school visits such an enjoyable experience for all of the sub-committee members.

The overall picture is actually quite a reassuring one and we hope that the five key recommendations within this report, if implemented, will add significantly in the development of policy, procedures and practice that can further identify and tackle bullying and positively build upon the great deal of good practice that is already evident in Southwark.

Councillor John Friary
Chair

Executive summary

The 2006/07 children's services and education scrutiny committee decided to review the bullying of children and young people in Southwark. We were interested in finding out the extent that bullying is seen as a problem and what is being done to combat it.

Evidence was collected by talking to approximately 100 children and young people on school councils in the borough, teachers, hearing from the organisation 'Beatbullying', sending a questionnaire to schools about their anti-bullying policies and considering council data and officer information.

Our review confirms that many children and young people seem to have seen or experienced some level of bullying and that there is fear of bullying even amongst those who have not direct experience of being bullying. Bullying is not endemic, but it does occur.

Many schools have excellent initiatives in place to help combat bullying within the school environment, and students generally believe that schools take bullying seriously. The council is also going beyond its statutory requirements to provide support to schools. The next step is to share examples of effective initiatives across Southwark so we can all learn from it.

Safety outside school - particularly on journeys to and from school - is a serious concern of children and young people, and one that our sub-committee shares. It is an issue which no one agency can tackle on its own.

Our five recommendations to the executive are:

1. 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.
2. The council takes active steps to facilitate the sharing of information about bullying strategies amongst schools and other key agencies. This should include:
 - organising a two yearly bullying conference
 - 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
 - becoming involved with the Anti-Bullying Alliance.
3. 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. We think that schools should pay for this service on a case-by-case basis, but the council should organise the provision.
4. Officers look into whether schools want more training around bullying. If so, the LEA should support this either by actively promoting the council and Southwark-wide services available, or by directly organising training days.

5. That executive tasks an officer to look into what extent gambling is a problem amongst children and young people in Southwark.

Our sub-committee can only make recommendations to the council's executive about areas in which the council may make improvements. We are hopeful that schools in the borough will also take on board the key points that are pertinent to them.

Introduction

In 2006/07 the children's services and education scrutiny sub-committee decided to review the bullying of children and young people in Southwark.

The issue of bullying is high on the national agenda – both the Education and Skills Select Committee and the Children's Commissioner are currently looking into the issue. A key driver appears to be recognition that bullying should not be treated as an inevitable part of growing up and that action can be taken to reduce the incidence of it occurring.

Children and young people in Southwark schools had already told the council that they experience bullying. In 2006, one-third of primary and secondary students who responded to the council's 'Pupil Voice' survey said that they had been bullied by other children at school that year. Many children reported that they did not feel safe on their journey to and from school, or outside the school environment generally.

Being bullied can, for example, lead to poor levels of achievement at school, truancy, social withdrawal, poor self-esteem, anxiety, depression or even suicide. Children who bully are at greater risk of becoming involved in anti-social behaviour or more serious criminal activities¹.

The sub-committee therefore decided to talk to children and young people and teachers about bullying to find out to what extent bullying is a problem and what is being done to combat bullying. Our findings are presented in this report.

Everyone we spoke to agreed that bullying does occur in Southwark, but the evidence we received also shows that there are excellent strategies and initiatives within our borough and that schools aim to combat bullying and create an environment where children feel safe. Many of these initiatives are new, and will take time to filter through, but the movement is in the right direction.

However, there are also areas that need further consideration by the council and schools alike. We have identified the action that we feel should be taken in section seven of this report.

What is bullying?

There are a series of definitions of bullying used in the literature. Most definitions include the following features:

- aggression
- intentional hurtfulness
- abuse of power
- repetition

The sub-committee adopted as a working definition the definition used in the Office of the Children's Commissioner's report *Bullying Today: a report by the office of the children's commissioner, with recommendations and links to practitioner tools*:

¹ University of Edinburgh website: <http://www.ed.ac.uk/research/hss/crime.html>

Bullying involves a desire to hurt + hurtful action + (typically) repetition + an unjust use of power + evident enjoyment by the aggressor and generally a sense of being oppressed on the part of the victim.

We stress the elements of abuse of power and repetition. It would be wrong to think that every playground argument is fairly described as bullying.

Aims of the review

Our aims were:

1. To obtain a clear picture of the level of bullying across Southwark, and to review what the council is doing to reduce this
2. To find out whether there are examples of good practice in Southwark which have positively impacted on the levels of bullying and which should be promoted
3. To make recommendations to the executive in the light of our findings.

Method of review

The review took place between October 2006 and February 2007. We collected evidence in the following ways:

- formal evidence at our meetings on October 11 2006, December 5 2006 and February 5 2007
- visits to four primary and two secondary schools in the borough to talk to the school councils and to their teachers – where we spoke to approximately 100 children and young people²
- responses a to questionnaire sent to all maintained education settings in the borough in November 2006 (the summary of responses is attached at Appendix A)
- drawing on relevant literature, including:
 - *“Bullying: effective action in secondary schools”*, Ofsted, 2003
 - *“Bullying in schools in England: a review of the complaints system and a discussion of options for change”*, Office of the Children’s Commissioner, November 2006
 - *“Bullying today: a report by the office of the children’s commissioner, with recommendations and links to practitioner tools”*, Office of the Children’s Commissioner, November 2006

² Notes from the visits to schools can be seen at:
www.southwark.gov.uk/Uploads/FILE_26955.pdf

- attending a Westminster briefing organised by the House Magazine: *Zero tolerance: tackling indiscipline and bullying in schools*, held on November 9 2007.

Our sub-committee

Members of the sub-committee during the review were:

- Councillor John Friary (Chair)
- Councillor Nick Vineall (Vice-Chair)
- Councillor Jonathan Mitchell
- Councillor Adele Morris
- Councillor Sandra Rhule
- Councillor Bob Skelly
- Councillor Veronica Ward
- Reverend Nicholas Elder
- Ms Ann Marie Eastwood
- Mr Alie Kallon
- Ms Josie Spanswick

1. Level of bullying in Southwark

Our information about bullying in Southwark came from two main sources – council survey data and our visits to schools in the borough.

We found the Pupil Voice data particularly useful. This is a questionnaire, available to all maintained schools, which is filled in by pupils on an anonymous basis. We think that this method of annual survey (which began in 2005) is an extremely useful source of information and will in the future become an important tool for analysing changes in the experience of pupils in Southwark schools. Forty-five primary schools and seven secondary schools took part in the 2006 survey.

Schools are expected to record bullying inside school and more serious incidents outside school would be reported to the police as crime. Other instances of bullying outside school, such as name-calling and intimidation, racist and homophobic abuse or stealing small amounts of money, tend to fall between the gaps with no means for reporting it.

The information presented below is primarily based on children and young people's perceptions about whether they have experienced bullying.

Bullying at school

Both teachers and students alike acknowledge that bullying occurs in Southwark schools. Some examples we heard were of year 8 students bullying year 7 students into giving them money; of a student who had suffered bullying by peers over a number of years for not conforming to other students' expectations of normality; and of a girl who had bullied others "because she was bored".

But how extensive is the problem?

2006 Pupil Voice Survey

According to the 2006 Pupil Voice Survey, one-third of primary and secondary students said they had been bullied by other children at school that year. Being called names was the most common form of bullying, followed by being hit or kicked, having rumours spread about them, and feeling threatened. Being forced to hand over money or other possessions, or receiving nasty text messages/e-mails was reportedly less common.

However, there was considerable difference in the levels of bullying between individual schools in the borough. For example seven percent of the pupils at one primary school reported that they had experienced bullying often or quite often compared to 50% at another primary school. At secondary schools, the range of those who reported being bullied often or quite often varied from 0% to 37%. This could possibly reflect differences in the perception of what bullying is, suggest that some schools are much more effective at tackling bullying, or suggest that different parts of the borough have higher incidents of bullying. It is most likely a combination of all three factors.

It seems clear that the severity of bullying, when it occurs, is worse amongst secondary school students. Examples of bullying given by primary school children we talked to often seemed of a more low-level nature, such as being tripped up, hitting someone on the head with toys, or arguments about who to sit next to in class.

Secondary students were more likely to talk about the psychological nature of bullying. As one secondary student commented, older students “were capable of doing more serious things and in the knowledge that what they are doing is bad. Primary school children can more easily be controlled by the teachers”.

Both council survey data and the children and young people we spoke to informed us that constant bullying was taken seriously by the school and that the school did a good job in dealing with the bullying – though this was more likely to be the view from primary children rather than secondary students. As one primary school child commented “teachers tell off children for doing bad things because teachers don’t like bullying”.

Bullying outside the school setting

Bullying outside school is of great concern for children and young people in Southwark.

This appears to be a greater problem in some areas of the borough than it is in others. For example, children at one primary school we visited in the North of the borough had plenty of stories to share about violence they had either witnessed or heard about outside the school environment, and the teacher commented on how it was a rougher area of Southwark so they were exposed to more acts of violence. At another primary school, the children guessed that bullying outside school was worse but had considerably less experience of this.

Older children hanging around in groups were perceived as intimidating. The primary school children told us they were scared of older children in parks and on the street. One boy told us that he was often bullied by a group of youths when he went down to the local corner shop for his mother. Another primary school child mentioned how he was scared going home with his teenage cousin because his cousin often got involved in fights on the way home.

Travel to and from school was cited as a particular problem, and secondary school children in particular are less likely to feel safe on their school journeys. According to Pupil Voice 2006, 84% of primary school children felt safe on school journeys compared to 71% of secondary school children. This is not surprising given that a peak time for the robbery of young people in Southwark is between 2pm and 4pm when they are on their way home from school, and the largest group of victims are 14 to 16 year olds. A headteacher at one secondary school in the borough told us of his dismay that his students felt scared going home on the train.

Safety outside school – particularly on journeys to and from school – is a serious concern and one the council needs to be taking seriously.

2. What are schools doing about bullying?

Anti-bullying policies

“Having an anti-bullying policy...is still the single most important thing a school can do in terms of preventing both bullying and litigation over it”

(Evidence received from a teacher, February 2007)

Schools have a duty to combat bullying and headteachers are legally required to have a policy to prevent all forms of bullying amongst pupils. The students we spoke to during our review were aware that their school had an anti-bullying policy, although our survey indicated there may be one or two schools in Southwark who are still in the process of developing their policy.

The existence of an anti-bullying policy does not of itself guarantee that a school will be successful in tackling bullying. The literature on the subject emphasises the need for the whole school community to understand and be prepared to deliver the policy. Those who completed our survey were confident that teachers and teaching staff at their school were generally aware of their responsibilities under the school anti-bullying policy but were less sure that this was the case with governors, parents, support staff and volunteers.

Furthermore, there are striking differences between anti-bullying policies in place in Southwark schools. For example, one policy we looked at outlined the expectations of staff, gave clear guidance to pupils about what to do if they are being bullied, outlined to parents what they should do if their child is being bullied or if their child is bullying others and discussed the steps that the school would take. Another policy gave an overview of what the school would do but did not cover any of the other aspects about what the parent or child should do³.

We do not believe that it would be desirable for the council to try to prescribe in detail what a school's policy should be. A truly home-grown policy is much more likely to be taken seriously than a policy which is perceived as being imposed from outside. But we do think that the council has a role to play in sharing best practice.

We recommend that the council collates school anti-bullying policies and circulates good practice examples to head teachers and chairs of governors as an aid to other schools when reviewing their anti-bullying policies.

³ This is not unique to Southwark – the Ofsted report also commented that many anti-bullying policies “were insufficiently detailed in their coverage of all the elements of effective action in schools”.

Putting policies into effect

A policy is no use if it is not put into effect.

Our survey and site visits revealed that schools in Southwark also engage in a wide variety of activities to help combat bullying on an on-going basis.

Secondary schools, for example, tackle bullying by:

- Separate lunch hours for year groups
- Peer mediation
- Involvement of external agencies
- Developing an anti-bullying ethos
- Responding to all incidents promptly
- Supervision of all areas of school at breaks and lunchtime as well as before and after school
- Consideration in the school travel plans
- Restorative justice
- Peer mentoring between older and younger students

Primary schools also reported that they did most of the above⁴, with the addition of:

- Circle time e.g. to discuss friendships, conflict resolution, assertiveness and trust
- A 'bully box', whereby children can drop a note in a special post box which will be read and investigated by the school
- Discussions with school council
- Discussions at assembly e.g. using the social and emotional aspects of learning (SEAL) materials
- The school ethos. Some examples of the ethos schools were promoting were mutual unconditional respect, friendly nurturing behaviour, encouraging a reporting culture, assuring students that they can speak to the teachers and be taken seriously
- Class role play
- Theatre group work
- 'Thinking circles'
- 'Place2Be' – an area in a primary school where children can express their feelings to an adult through talking, creative work and play
- As part of the Personal, Social and Health Education (PSHE) and citizenship scheme of work
- Employing learning mentors to support existing pastoral arrangements
- Employing a home school liaison worker
- Positive behaviour strategies such as playground buddies scheme and friendship benches
- Identifying areas of the school environment that could be bullying hotspots
- Encouraging a 'listening school'
- Staff vigilance and training
- Ensuring that students are clear on how and when to report incidents
- Responding to incidents promptly and involving parents where necessary
- Reporting back to victims and their parents
- Considering the impact of incidents outside school

⁴ In responding to our survey, no primary schools listed that they had separate lunch hours for year groups or used restorative justice.

- Anti-bullying workshops and resources
- An unacceptable behaviour book and consequences ladder (if they reach the top of the ladder children are rewarded for good behaviour, if they reach the bottom they would be listed in the headteacher's unacceptable behaviour book and a letter sent home to their parents)
- Monitoring of incident books
- Questionnaires to pupils and parents

In addition, we observed anti-bullying displays at some of the schools we visited (such as a poster stating "We say no to bullying. Reject it. Report it. Remove it"), as well as examples of posters that children had created during anti-bullying week.

Some schools involved external agencies in their anti-bullying work. Beatbullying, a children's charity which aims to reduce and prevent incidents and impact of bullying between young people, provided the sub-committee with several examples of work they had been involved with in Southwark schools. This included training students as peer listeners, and working with children in challenging conflict and developing a new mediation centre. Beatbullying had also worked with the early intervention team on a workshop aimed at primary school children considered at risk in the transition to secondary school.

However, one area which we do think that schools need to address is the reluctance of children and young people to report bullying to teaching staff. Two points came across strongly in every school we visited: students often felt that they were not taken seriously by teachers when they did report bullying⁵, and witnesses to bullying were unlikely to report it for fear they would be identified and targeted by the bully. Victims were unlikely to report bullying for fear the bullying would become worse.

This is consistent with the advice an assistant principal gave to the sub-committee, emphasising how important it was for children and young people to have an adult they could trust with their concerns. Not only do students need to be encouraged to share their concerns but they also need to be assured that school staff will listen and that their views will be treated confidentially and taken seriously. While this relates to the ethos of the school and to some extent the personalities of the school staff, the Office of the Children's Commissioner (OCC) suggests it could help if anti-bullying policies set out the principles of confidentiality in which they operate⁶. This seems to be sensible advice.

⁵ Primary school students thought teachers were more likely to take bullying seriously if it was reported by their parents rather than themselves.

⁶ Page 84, *Bullying today: a report by the office of the children's commissioner, with recommendations and links to practitioner tools*, Office of the Children's Commissioner, November 2006

Bullying outside school

Bullying that takes place outside school is a complicated issue. While schools can work with other organisations such as Transport for London or the police around dealing with bullying outside school, teachers themselves have no more power than an ordinary citizen when intervening in bullying incidents outside school.

Guidance issued by the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) circular 0354/2004 discusses the basis for excluding pupils for behaviour outside school. Behaviour on school business such as school trips or work experience placements is subject to the school's behaviour policy. Otherwise, there needs to be a clear link between the individual's behaviour and maintaining good behaviour and discipline amongst the whole student body.

It is possible that this could lead to inconsistent responses by the school depending on whether their pupils are the victims or the perpetrators of bullying outside school. It was suggested to us that if someone was caught bullying whilst in school uniform, the school was likely to step in because it was tarnishing the school's reputation. On the other hand, schools were less likely to become involved if someone in school uniform was being bullied outside school. This is an issue that schools need to think about.

3. Particular instances of good practice in Southwark schools

In the previous section, we outlined some methods used by Southwark schools to tackle bullying on an on-going basis.

We were reassured by the degree of consistency we found between the best practice recommendations in academic literature around bullying and what the schools were doing.

Some initiatives we came across during the review that we were particularly impressed by and would like to share are listed below.

'Place2Be' and 'Place2Talk'

Under the Place2Be initiative, a counsellor comes into the primary school every week and children would be referred there by teachers if they needed emotional support. Reasons for referral could include if they were experiencing disruption in their home environment, if they were bullying others or if they were the victim of bullying. The child could express their feelings by talking, art, music or play. A room is set aside in the school for this purpose. According to www.theplace2be.org.uk, 11 primary schools in Southwark are involved with this initiative.

Place2Talk is a similar initiative, but rather than relying on teacher referrals, any child could pick up a piece of paper to say that they wanted to talk to someone who was not a teacher. The child would then be given a 10-minute appointment with the counsellor at lunchtime and could either attend the appointment on their own or take a friend for support. The primary school we spoke to about this initiative told us that it was used regularly by some children.

The Academy at Peckham's Community Inclusion Team

The community inclusion team is an initiative by which students are escorted on their school journey by a former student of the school who also lives on their estate. Members of the community inclusion team build up relationships with the students with involvement in other school activities, such as sports.

This initiative serves a dual purpose – as the former students also lived on the estates, they could also act as the liaison between the school and parents in cases where the parents were difficult to get hold of.

The community inclusion team is funded by the school.

Bullying agreement

One primary school had involved their pupils in putting together a code of conduct around bullying, which set out how to respond to bullying incidents. The agreement was signed by both the child and parents and would be kept on the child's file. It was to be re-signed annually.

In addition, sensible advice we received from a teacher about key principles for tackling bullying, and that we would like to mention, stressed the importance of:

- establishing school ethos
- taking incidents seriously, investigating, recording and acting upon them in a clear and consistent way
- involving and consulting staff, students and the families
- co-ordinating the anti-bullying work within the curriculum

Clearly, there are excellent examples of good practice in Southwark. However, there appears to be no existing mechanism for sharing information and experiences across the school network about bullying.

We need to ensure mechanisms are in place so that all schools are able to learn from those schools that deal with bullying effectively. This is a role that the council could fulfil.

We recommend the council takes active steps to promote the sharing of information about bullying strategies so that schools can make informed decisions around which programmes to commission for their anti-bullying work. We think this would be best achieved by organising a two yearly bullying conference, which involves key people who deal with bullying both in and outside of school (including the school's bullying and behaviour lead, school police officers and the safer neighbourhood team).

4. What is the council doing to reduce the levels of bullying?

“There are no direct legal responsibilities on local authorities to prevent bullying except in as much as local authorities have a duty to support their schools, which do have a responsibility to safeguard children and to agree a behaviour policy which must include a reference to tackling bullying.”

(e-mail from the DfES, October 4 2006)

The sub-committee heard evidence that the council has, in partnership with other agencies, a number of activities and strategies aimed at reducing bullying in Southwark.

At the strategic level, the issue of bullying is included in the Young Southwark Children and Young People’s plan in 2006-07 to 2008-09. One aim of the Children’s Trust is to reduce the involvement of young people in offending and anti-social behaviour – both as victims and perpetrators. Amongst other things, the plan outlines that this will be achieved by

- providing safe environment where children can learn, play and socialise
- providing safe routes to and from schools through the visible presence of police school beat officers and neighbourhood wardens
- delivering educational programmes in schools and youth settings to promote citizenship and increase awareness of harmful behaviours and their possible effects, including support for implementation of anti-bullying policies.

Officers told us that some of this work is going on already. For example, community wardens are present at all secondary schools at the end of the school day to see that pupils can leave without intimidation or being subject to bullying. The wardens may report any concerns they have around bullying to the school or keep an eye on particular children/areas where it has been indicated that bullying may be an issue. They also work actively within schools to provide personal safety presentations and to develop good relationships with teachers and pupils.

Similarly, all secondary schools have a dedicated police school beat officer who works in the school and patrols the immediate area after school in conjunction with community wardens. The officers are trained in restorative justice so that they can resolve small incidents without resorting to the criminal justice system. Their role is to get to know the pupils, deal with small incidents in the school and pick up local intelligence about pupils’ concerns. School beat officers for primary schools are provided by the relevant safer neighbourhood team, depending on the priorities of the local community.

Encouragingly, teachers commented to us about the difference that police school beat officers have made. At one school, a teacher reported that there had been significant reductions in muggings and in groups from other schools causing problems outside the school gate. The headteacher of another school spoke very highly of their school beat officer, who was trusted and respected by the students and who voluntarily gave his time outside of working hours to support students where necessary.

The sub-committee was also informed that a number of teams work within the council, either directly or indirectly, to support schools with bullying and other behaviour issues. This includes the healthy schools team, the behaviour and autism support service, the education welfare service and the educational psychology service. Each school cluster in Southwark has a behaviour support professional to support a whole school approach for individual schools. Officers said that whenever the council is made aware of bullying issues in individual schools, support teams act quickly to ensure that schools are following their policies and making best use of the support that can be offered.

In terms of specific initiatives around bullying, the council recently issued guidance (*Prevention of bullying in schools: Southwark LEA Policy and Guidance for schools and education establishments*) to schools to support discussion, policy and procedures around preventing and responding to bullying. Our survey of schools indicated that three-quarters of schools considered the council's guidance useful and some schools commented that they would use it when they next review their anti-bullying policies.

The council also initiated the Agencies Supporting Schools Programme (ASSP) to support a whole-school approach on bullying. It provided teacher training, support in developing school anti-bullying policies and 'theatre in action' support to primary schools in 2004/05 and 2005/06. In 2006/07 and 2007/08 it will provide further theatre in action for these schools.

As far as we are aware, there has been no formal evaluation of the ASSP programme, although comments we have seen from theatre groups and schools who were involved were very positive about it. Beatbullying also informed us that schools not involved in the ASSP had requested the teacher notes, which again is a positive reflection on the programme.

Some other examples of initiatives in Southwark helping to combat bullying are:

- The council's road safety team works in conjunction with TfL, the police, the fire brigade and the rail safety partnership in sending Year 6 pupils to a day long activity session. The focus is on secondary transition in the recognition that many will soon be travelling independently to secondary school.
- Additional patrols are assigned to areas identified as borough 'hotspots' for robberies against young people both during and outside term time, based on analysis of patterns of crime. Dulwich Park and the Camberwell area are two areas of focus. There are also five 'school priority' routes in the borough directed at safety during travel on school journeys.

It is important that anti-bullying work is carried out strategically. During our review we became aware of the existence of the Anti-bullying Alliance (ABA), an independent body made up of 60 organisations including other local authorities, researchers and anti-bullying agencies. The ABA's function includes building the evidence base for effective practice and information-sharing, and the ABA's regional co-ordinators work with LEAs to support schools and develop links with a range of organisations and initiatives. We believe this would be of value to Southwark's anti-bullying work.

We recommend the council becomes involved with the Anti-bullying Alliance.

5. Bullying outside school

As highlighted earlier, we are concerned about the need to address safety outside school.

It is a complicated area and one that schools cannot be expected to tackle alone. Once outside the school environment teachers have no more power than an ordinary citizen to step in and respond to issues. Students disperse widely once they leave the school gate, with different means and routes for travelling home. Particularly at secondary school, students are less likely to have older people providing a level of protection on their journey home or in weekends, and may have greater distances to travel to get to school.

While we have evidenced some excellent examples aimed at improving safety outside school, such as the dedication displayed by some police school beat officers and the Community Inclusion Team at the Academy at Peckham, there appears to be no consistent strategic multi-agency co-ordination with schools to tackle bullying in the wider community.

We therefore think that the council should organise meetings on (initially) a termly basis to encourage coordination between safer neighbourhood teams, police school beat officers, bus and train operators and secondary schools in order to encourage multi-agency responses to problems that arise for students on the way to and from school. These meetings should be brokered by the council and a named officer in the children's services department should be charged with organising these meetings and preparing a note of each meeting to be sent to the executive member for children's services and education and the chair of overview and scrutiny.

Such a meeting would potentially go beyond issues of bullying and could include more general issues of behaviour on the way to and from school. For instance, we know that in some areas in the borough the journey home from school can be the occasion for muggings and violent incidents, and sometimes groups of children from one school mass outside the gates of another school in a threatening manner.

It is unlikely that most primary schools face sufficient problems with the school journey for them to wish to be involved, but they would be welcome to attend if they wanted to do so.

We recommend 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.

6. What else did we learn?

Staff training

Some of the teachers we spoke to during our review thought that it would be helpful if there was more training on bullying. The last Southwark training on bullying was a 'policy and practice' training held two years ago for headteachers and/or PSHE co-ordinators as part of the Agencies Supporting Schools Programme (ASSP).

Research shows that teachers often underestimate the frequency and severity of bullying and are often not sufficiently aware of different forms of bullying⁷. They are also more likely to consider physical bullying more serious and therefore more likely to intervene (thus boys are more likely to be identified as bullies compared to girls, who are more likely to be involved in verbal or psychological forms of bullying rather than physical bullying).

We acknowledge that teachers do have different strengths and some may place more emphasis on pastoral learning than others. However it is important that all teaching staff identify and challenge bullying at the earliest possible opportunity. One student, who was subjected to a sustained campaign of bullying over a number of years, commented to us that teachers needed to take students seriously because "teasing can become bullying, which can then lead to more serious issues such as suicide".

The Education and Skills select committee received evidence during their review contending that there is a need for more knowledge of bullying as part of initial teacher training. However, given the focus on addressing bullying in a collective and collaborative whole-school approach, the training could be better provided in-service, and filtered to all other teaching staff in the school as necessary⁸.

While we did not canvass the views of all schools in the borough on whether more training would be useful, it seems that there is a need – not only in Southwark but across England – for more training to be available.

We recommend officers look into whether schools want more training around bullying. If so, the LEA should support this either by actively promoting the council and Southwark-wide services available, or by directly organising training days.

Provision of information to parents

Another theme that emerged during the review was that parents need more education around bullying. Comments we received from schools to our survey included:

"Some parents use the term [bullying] to describe disagreements or incidents between children which are not of a bullying nature"

⁷ Page 55, *Bullying today: a report by the office of the children's commissioner, with recommendations and links to practitioner tools*, Office of the Children's Commissioner, November 2006

⁸ The Ofsted report, for example, gives examples of how schools changed their procedures and systems as a result of in-service bullying training.

“Parents need more understanding on what bullying is, perhaps parent classes. There is also a greater need for us as a school to make parents aware about bullying”

“Up to date parent/pupil leaflets would be a positive addition” [to the council’s anti-bullying policy guidance]

Schools told us that parents knew who to approach if their child was being bullied, but they thought that parents did not always understand what bullying was and what to do about it.

Furthermore, many children and young people we spoke to said that there were conflicting messages between how they were told to deal with bullying at home (for example, to defend themselves) and what was acceptable at school. Some children and their parents expected that teachers would be able to resolve bullying incidents that occurred outside school.

Consideration needs to be given to ways to help educate parents about what bullying is and how to recognise and deal with it. While it is not reasonable to expect schools to deal with bullying on their own there are some steps they could take such as presenting information on bullying at their parent evening sessions.

Bullying disputes

Our sub-committee also considered the November 2006 report by the Office for the Children’s Commissioner (OCC): *Bullying in schools in England: A review of the current complaints system and a discussion of options for change*.

The report outlined the difficulties parents had in escalating their complaints about how the school handled bullying cases. Most complaints would not get further than the governing board, which was not seen as particularly neutral due to its relationship with the headteacher. According to the OCC, the current system is regarded by many parents and children as “unable or unwilling to address issues of bullying in a fair, just and effective manner”⁹. Many members of the sub-committee have had similar concerns raised with us by parents in our role as ward councillors.

The report made some sensible recommendations for change, and there was one in particular that we would like to single out: the recommendation that local authorities establish independent mediation services for bullying disputes – both where parents and the school are in dispute, as well as child to child mediation.

In regards to child to child mediation, we are aware from our school visits that some Southwark schools already do some form of restorative justice. We are less sure of the value of duplicating systems already in place, though this may be worth further exploration.

However, a mediation service does seem a sensible way forward resolving disputes between parents and schools. While there are potential limitations, such as that it relies on the school and parents voluntarily getting together to discuss concerns, we

⁹ Page 22, Office for the Children’s Commissioner (OCC): *Bullying in schools in England: A review of the current complaints system and a discussion of options for change*, November 2006

believe that the approach should be trialled in Southwark. Further, we believe that the role of the mediation service be extended beyond that recommended in the OCC report and deal with all issues between parents and schools in Southwark, not just bullying disputes.

We recommend 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. We think that schools should pay for this service on a case-by-case basis, but the council should organise the provision.

Cyberbullying

During the review, teachers shared concerns about the challenges being presented by information technologies. Teachers shared examples of children being persuaded to send their photos to people they met on internet chatrooms, or young people's sexual experiences being videoed on mobile phones and shared across a large group of peers. Similarly we are aware from national media that there have been cases where websites have been set up by students to humiliate teachers, though we are not aware of any examples of this in Southwark.

On the other hand, 'cyberbullying'¹⁰, as this form of bullying is termed, was not raised by *any* of the children and young people we spoke to during the review so perhaps it is not yet a mainstream form of bullying.

The 2006 Pupil Voice survey presented similar information: only around five percent of those primary and secondary pupils in Southwark who said they had experienced bullying over the past year reported that this was via nasty text messages or e-mail. This information is consistent with that presented to the Education and Skills select committee that cyberbullying is not currently as prevalent as suggested by some pieces of research or by the media.

Nonetheless, it is an area that may become more prevalent and needs to be addressed. The DfES have recently made guidance available on the Teachernet website about cyberbullying, but this is from the perspective of helping children stay safe and does not discuss what teachers should be doing to protect themselves from possible cyberbullying. The council's guidance on bullying makes no reference to cyberbullying, and according to our survey, very few schools include cyberbullying in their anti-bullying policies.

School staff and children and young people need protection from a modern technology which is capable of following them into their homes.

¹⁰ Cyberbullying is bullying using information technology communications, such as text messaging, e-mails, chatrooms and internet blogs

Gambling

A further issue we picked up during our review is that of gambling by children and young people. We heard from one secondary school teacher that 'pound-up', whereby students throw a pound coin towards the wall and whoever is closest to the wall gets all the money, is a big issue in schools. Another teacher commented on the lack of support available to schools as gambling amongst children is not recognised as a problem.

While this issue is not directly related to bullying, we have raised it because we do not want it to be ignored. There is evidence that taking part in gambling activities as a child or young person puts them a greater risk of subsequent gambling problems. Other research has associated it with lying and stealing, disruptive relationships at home and disruptive behaviour at school.¹¹

The council should be proactively seeking information to determine to what extent gambling is an issue among children and young people in Southwark, and what action needs to be taken to address it. A good starting point would be talking to schools, although we do not necessarily expect the gambling to be occurring within the school environment.

We recommend that executive tasks an officer to investigate the extent to which gambling is a problem amongst children and young people in Southwark.

¹¹ See for example, <http://www.co.lane.or.us/prevention/gambling/Youth.htm>

7. Our recommendations

Our recommendations are collated below.

Recommendation 1

We recommend 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.

Recommendation 2

We recommend the council takes active steps to facilitate the sharing of information about bullying strategies amongst schools and other key agencies. This should include:

- organising a two yearly bullying conference
- 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
- becoming involved with the Anti-Bullying Alliance.

Recommendation 3

We recommend 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. We think that schools should pay for this service on a case-by-case basis, but the council should organise the provision.

Recommendations 4 and 5

We have also identified two specific areas we think officers need to research further and report back to executive on:

We recommend officers look into whether schools want more training around bullying. If so, the LEA should support this either by actively promoting the council and Southwark-wide services available, or by directly organising training days.

We recommend that executive tasks an officer to look into what extent gambling is a problem amongst children and young people in Southwark.

Acknowledgements

We would like thank everyone who contributed to our review:

- Students on the school councils of Albion primary school, Joseph Lancaster primary school, Goodrich primary school, St John's and St Clement's Church of England primary school, St Thomas the Apostle College, Walworth School - as well as their teachers
- All the Southwark schools who took part in our questionnaire about anti-bullying policies and initiatives
- Southwark council officers from the community safety team, children's services department, legal division and scrutiny team
- John Quinn, development director at Beatbullying
- Peter Blewett, assistant principal at the Academy at Peckham

We initially thought that teachers and students would be reluctant to talk about bullying. In fact, we found quite the opposite, with people keen to share their experiences and thoughts with us and so would like to express our gratitude to those teachers and young people we spoke to for their openness and honesty. We were particularly impressed by the maturity and thoughtfulness of all students who were members of their school council.

Appendix

Summary of responses to the scrutiny questionnaire

Bullying of children and young people in Southwark: School anti-bullying policies

January 2007

This paper summarises a survey carried out for the children's services and education scrutiny sub-committee as part of their review into bullying of children and young people in Southwark.

In considering these findings, it is important to bear in mind that the survey is based on a small sample size and therefore gives a flavour, rather than a definitive picture, of what is happening in the borough.

Purpose of the survey

The purpose of the survey was to understand how schools develop and maintain their anti-bullying policies. It was based on the council's anti-bullying guidance *Preventing bullying in schools: Southwark LEA policy and guidance for schools and education establishments*, produced in January 2006.

Survey method

The questionnaire was sent to headteachers at all pupil referral units and maintained primary and secondary schools in Southwark during November 2006. Thirty-five responses were received (six from secondary schools, one from a pupil referral unit, one from a special school and 27 from primary schools) - a response rate of 36%.

Findings

1. All schools except one had an anti-bullying policy.
2. Schools were confident their policy had clear and identifiable links to, and were consistent with, their behaviour and safeguarding policies. The majority of the policies formed part of the schools' behaviour management policies.
3. Half of schools used the council's anti-bullying guidance when developing their anti-bullying policy though the guidance was produced too late for many schools (although some noted they would use it when reviewing their policy).
4. Three-quarters of schools found the council's guidance useful e.g. to start discussions, ensure that all relevant aspects were considered. While it was considered comprehensive by some, others thought it would be better if more concise.
5. Practically all schools consulted with both pupils and teachers, and to a lesser extent, with teaching assistants when developing their policy. Over half of schools

also consulted with parents and support staff. Few schools liaise with local police, the local authority, other schools or organisations.

6. Nearly all schools consulted with staff and pupils about how bullying should be reported and dealt with. Pupils were less likely to be included in discussions about how bullying should be recorded.
7. A third of school anti-bullying policies contained information about bullying by staff.
8. Few schools mentioned cyber-bullying and bullying outside of the school gate within their anti-bullying policy.
9. Schools commonly involved their pupils, teachers and teaching assistants when reviewing the effectiveness of their anti-bullying initiatives. Local authority staff, other schools and the local police were less frequently consulted or informed about the results of such reviews.
10. A third of schools reported that their anti-bullying policy would be reviewed within a year. A quarter of schools had not yet set timescales for reviewing the policy.
11. Everyone who completed the survey on behalf of the school believed that teachers and teaching assistants were aware of their responsibilities under their anti-bullying policies and three-quarters thought the same of school governors. Half of those responding to the survey thought that parents and support staff were aware of their responsibilities and a third thought volunteers were.
12. Most schools recorded incidents of bullying other than those required to be reported to the local authority i.e. race-related incidents and exclusions. The most common means of recording bullying was using an incident sheet/book.
13. There was an even split between schools around whether they provided information about bullying incidents to their governing bodies – a third did, another third provided it occasionally and the remainder not at all. The headteacher report was the most common way of reporting such information to the governing body.
14. Schools had a variety of ways of monitoring bullying at school. A number of the schools found the council's pupil voice survey useful for this purpose (although this was not the intention behind the survey), and a few schools had developed their own check-lists or used DfES check-lists/audits. Other ways included parent and pupil questionnaires, audits of the incidence book or other recording systems, playground monitoring and feedback from the school council.
15. Nearly all schools either had a designated person who led on bullying and behaviour issues, or intended to set up a lead. The lead was most often the headteacher or deputy headteacher, though others listed were the learning mentor/co-ordinator, behaviour manager, head of year and PSHE co-ordinator.
16. A third of schools had, or intended to set up, a bullying and behaviour action group. Over half of schools saw no need for such a group – for example, one school considered it would “institutionalise bullying” and commented how bullying generally involved individuals rather than the whole school; other schools felt that their peer mediation group or school council would suffice.

17. Schools had a variety of ways for tackling bullying on an on-going basis including through their school ethos, anti-bullying displays, talks at school assemblies, constant monitoring and vigilance and responding to all reported incidents of bullying. Other strategies included playground buddies, 'bully boxes' where students could write down their concerns, peer mediation, peer monitoring, circle time, identifying potential problem areas within the school environment and separate lunch hours for year groups.
18. Most schools were confident that parents knew who to approach if their child was being bullied. However, schools were less sure that parents understood what bullying is and what to do about it.
19. Additional comments from schools were generally along the themes of parental understanding and definitions of bullying:

"Difficult to know how to be more specific about definition of 'bullying'. Some parents use the term to describe disagreements or incidents between children which are not of a bullying nature"

"Parents need more understanding on what bullying is, perhaps parent classes. There is also a greater need for us as a school to make parents aware about bullying"

"Up to date parent/pupil leaflets would be a positive addition" [referring to the council's anti-bullying policy guidance]

"The current focus on 'bullying' as some sort of pandemic is not useful. The word is now used as a cover all for a disagreement, conflict or tiff. Bullying is a specific act or series of acts directed by one individual/s with the specific purpose of putting them down or hurting them. Children have arguments and fall out. This is a natural process of growing up and learning about boundaries. It would be helpful if the literature made this clear."

Prepared by Carina Kane, scrutiny project manager, January 2007