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For the:



Knowledge Phase: Part 3 – Validating practice in schools and local authorities

Responding to Bullying among Children with Special Educational Needs and/or Disabilities

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Summary

This report presents the findings of a national call for evidence of local practice in schools, local authorities and voluntary organisations in responding to bullying of children with special educational needs (SEN) and disabilities. The exercise was carried out between October 2010 and February 2011 by the research team at the Faculty of Education, University of Cambridge, on behalf of the Anti-Bullying Alliance. It is the second arm of an examination of evidence – the first part was a review of existing research (McLaughlin et al, 2010).

The primary purpose of this report is to review the evidence of local practice in response to one key review question:

- 1) What does the evidence say are the most effective approaches that schools can take to a) preventing and b) responding to the bullying of children with SEN and disabilities?

It also contributes where relevant to the three other supplementary questions of the research agenda:

- 2) What evidence is there that children and young people with SEN or disabilities are disproportionately vulnerable to experiencing bullying and/or peer victimisation within the school context?
- 3) What is particular about this group of children in respect of their vulnerability to bullying?
- 4) What does the evidence tell us about the challenges that schools face in effectively preventing and responding to the bullying of children with SEN or disabilities?

This section will provide brief summaries of the findings of the main report about the national call for validated local practice relating to:

- The approaches used and the challenges that arise
- Issues of effectiveness and of validating practice
- Implications for policy and practice

Summary of the main messages

1. The approaches used and the challenges that arise

Responses to the national call for practice demonstrated a plethora of approaches being used by organisations and schools to address bullying among children with SEN and/or disabilities, often in complementary ways. These included:

- **General preventative training and awareness-raising;**
Small local authority anti-bullying teams offer specific and general training workshops or guidance within schools. While welcomed by teachers and pupils as encouraging inclusive practices and offering support in dealing with the problem, there were some

concerns about the effectiveness of short-term or one-off events as well as the fact that they may not always be tailored to the needs of children with SEN and/or disabilities.

- **Monitoring of bullying and SEN and/or disabilities and policy work;**

Frequency and type of bullying are monitored, and anti-bullying policies are tailored to reflect SEN and/or disability related bullying. This enables anti-bullying work to be more responsive to trends, although it was not currently applied to assess the effectiveness of related strategies nor was it used everywhere because of resource implications.

- **Raising awareness and understanding of children with SEN and/or disabilities;**

Programmes aim to increase understanding of the experiences of people with SEN and/or disabilities, often through joint leisure or work activities undertaken with people with and without SEN and/or disabilities. By addressing misunderstandings in how children with SEN and/or disabilities are conceptualised, the programmes challenge ignorance that often rationalises bullying behaviour. However, they require intensive time commitment, vigilant support and their benefits may be limited in the long term.

- **The development of a whole school ethos;**

A holistic approach, through which an inclusive school culture is generated via open communication, 'joined up' practice, positive modelling of behaviour and individualised approaches to children's relationships and problems. The success of many of the other strategies were felt to be dependent on the extent to which such a culture was in place, but it is a challenging approach to implement, requiring resources, coordination and strong leadership.

- **Preventative and reactive small group work with peers to resolve bullying incidents;**

Small group sessions include support group and solution focused approaches, anti-bullying councils, restorative justice sessions and other peer group work (e.g. transitions groups, circle of friends and buddying). These approaches recognise the psychosocial aspects of bullying, exploiting children's own understandings of their peers and ability to develop their own solutions. However, there is little rigorous evaluation of programmes and limited evidence about how these relatively short term approaches are – or may need to be – adapted for children with SEN and/or disabilities.

- **Individualised support and counselling;**

One to one support is offered to pupils involved in bullying events, either as one off events or in regular casework. Rather than working preventatively, these respond to actual events, enabling teachers to work with pupils in ways that are responsive to their SEN and/or disabilities if relevant. However, this type of attention may further stigmatise children, it relies on their self-disclosure and may place an untenable burden on few staff if not effectively managed within a whole school ethos.

- **Confidence raising and skills training;**

Skills work is intended to equip children with SEN and/or disabilities with appropriate coping skills, confidence and resilience to deflect bullying behaviours. They offer children lifelong skills to respond to threats of bullying at any point in their lives and address wider factors associated with bullying, such as avoidance strategies,

inappropriate dress and body language and limited instigation of friendships. However, the approaches require confident verbal communication, which many children with SEN and/or disabilities do not possess and the approach requires ongoing support over a number of weeks.

- **Improvements to environment and contexts;**

Spaces and periods of time in which bullying is feared to or actually occurs are modified to reduce the potential for bullying, through initiatives such as quiet zones, 'positive playtimes', shortened lunch breaks and identification of bullying hot spots. The initiatives often develop out of action research projects and may enhance students' feelings of empowerment when it is evident that schools respond to their concerns, often at minimal cost. However, these approaches cannot address cyber-bullying in non-physical spaces and may also require further training for staff (i.e. lunchtime supervisors).

Multiple approaches are often used by schools, however, the research demonstrates a real need for educational and school leaders to develop an integrated approach to bullying of pupils with SEN and/or disabilities, which involves demonstrable leadership, policies, effective systems and targeted training and support (see point 3 – implications for policy and practice).

2. Issues of effectiveness and of validating practice

The research confirmed that many approaches are being used by organisations and schools to address bullying among children with SEN and/or disabilities. However, in demonstrating the effectiveness of these approaches for children with SEN and/or disabilities, it is notable that:

- Several of the approaches used are well-known anti-bullying strategies but there is limited evidence that they are being effectively adapted for pupils with SEN and/or disabilities. While there is evidence on the wider effectiveness of such strategies, there is little research on the effectiveness of such strategies for children with SEN and/or disabilities;
- Effectiveness can be identified across a variety of dimensions not merely relating to the reduced frequency of bullying behaviour, but also encompassing wider issues, such as improvements in reported emotional well-being, enhanced resilience or social participation. However, clear data on the effectiveness of strategies offered by participants were limited;
- Although most of these approaches are evaluated as effective by practitioners involved, few of the approaches used were based on known effectiveness but rather opinion and anecdotal observations of change;
- There is concern among some practitioners that existing approaches offer short-term solutions which may be too short in duration to effectively respond to the issues of children with SEN and/or disabilities.

Consequently there is a real need:

- To develop a robust and comprehensive evaluation research programme to assess how effective different strategies are for young people with disabilities and to inform conversely a more solution supportive theory development;
- To develop a warrant for research on practice which is valuable to both practitioners and others working in this field.

3. Implications for Policy and Practice

The implications arise from the views and recommendations of participants who were consulted in the national call for practices. The research suggests that to develop more effective anti-bullying procedures for children with SEN and/or disabilities, the following elements are required:

Implications for leadership

- The development of whole-school approaches to fostering the personal, social and emotional well-being of young people is integral to the success of interventions that focus on bullying and pupils with SEN and/or disabilities. These approaches rely on vision, the commitment to provide resources and on leadership strategies that are focused, purposeful and well-informed.

Implications for strategy and policy

- Empathy building among peers is valuable, but its success rests on strategies that address the wider psychosocial contexts of bullying specifically in relation to pupils with SEN and/or disabilities.
- Consultations with pupils and action research allow schools to respond to pupils' concerns, but practitioners need to develop ways of working that are both accessible and inclusive to children with SEN and/or disabilities.
- Individualised approaches can bring real benefits for particular children who are marginalised and vulnerable but inevitably raise concerns about the availability and sustainability of funding and resources.
- Staff in schools should be reminded of their legal duty to address bullying and of the acknowledged tendency of adults to underestimate the bullying experienced by young people with SEN and/or disabilities.

Implications for systems

- The monitoring of incidents of bullying involving children and young people with SEN and/or disabilities should be a priority since insights into the specific nature of these events can enable schools and organisations supporting schools to deploy resources to best effect and to improve anti-bullying provision.
- Monitoring the victimisation that affects pupils with SEN and/or disabilities is most effective when it is used in association with policies that actively challenge disability-related bullying and that promote innovative ways of working with difference.

Implications for training and support

- Training and group work are likely to be more effective when anti-bullying teams have the capacity to offer focused input over a longer time period than is currently the case.
- Personalised approaches, including skills, communication and confidence training and responsive individualised support when bullying events occur, can be used both to deal with occurrences of bullying of pupils with SEN and/or disabilities and to diminish the likelihood of recurrences.
- Skills, communication and confidence training for pupils with SEN and/or disabilities require specialised and ongoing support by adults to avoid the risk of exacerbating bullying situations.
- In-depth professional development should be provided in order to give practitioners confidence in dealing with bullying and managing relationships in their classrooms.

It has become clear that there are a variety of established and emerging practices, mostly in the arenas of approaches/strategies, systems and training; there is less evidence of leadership. Whilst that is indicative of a lack of maturity of the topic, it is concerning that there were few single practices that covered the whole spectrum, from leadership to training and support, and contained all the necessary elements of an effective anti-bullying approach tailored to children with SEN and/or disabilities.

Secondly, it has become clear that there is a real gap between the theories behind bullying and disability on one hand and local practices on the other. It is vital that this gap is bridged to ensure theory development is grounded in informed practice. The key to both is establishing a robust evaluation that provides a solid evidence base of demonstrably effective strategies to enable teachers and researchers to take account of its complexity and address this problem with confidence. These issues are explored further in the next two sections of the report.

1. Introduction and Methodology

This section outlines the purpose, focus and remit of the research, which aimed to identify interventions that address bullying among children with special educational needs and/or disabilities. This work forms the final strand of a research programme which began in early 2010. It was conducted by a research team at the Faculty of Education, University of Cambridge on behalf of the Anti-Bullying Alliance (ABA) and forms part of the Department for Children, Schools and Families' response to the Lamb Inquiry into Parental Confidence and Special Educational Needs. The Lamb Inquiry's final report urged the Government to review the effectiveness of a range of approaches to tackle SEN and/or disabilities related bullying and invest in those found to be most effective.

The research programme has to date involved a scoping study and literature review¹. The final strand explored in this report was developed out of key recommendations of the literature review, which suggested that there is a key gap in terms of evidence informed interventions at the level of the whole school. This report presents findings of a national call to collect and interrogate examples of validated local practice and aims to contribute to how schools can be best supported in addressing this issue.

Main methods

In responding to the key research questions set by the Anti-Bullying Alliance, the research team aimed to identify examples of effective practice. There were two discrete phases of data collection that followed the scoping study, with the first phase aiming to explore research evidence around the issue through:

- **An extensive literature review:** Searches of bibliographic databases, project and organisation websites were supplemented by individual contact with specialists in the field to identify materials relating to the research questions. The full report is available as McLaughlin, C, Byers, R. and Peppin Vaughan, R. (2010). Knowledge Phase: Part 2 – A comprehensive review of the literature. *Responding to Bullying among Children with Special Educational Needs and/or Disabilities* (www.anti-bullyingalliance.org.uk).

The second phase aimed to identify validated local practice adopted by practitioners around bullying and SEN and/or disabilities, comprising:

- **A national call for evidence** distributed to school, local authority and voluntary organisation contacts through regional SEN networks, national voluntary organisations and via recommendations from specialists in the field.
- **A one-day conference** held at the Faculty of Education, Cambridge with participants from schools, local authorities and voluntary organisations to interrogate examples of local practice addressing bullying among children with SEN and/or disabilities and to assess the extent to which they are known to be effective.
- **Telephone interviews** with individuals recommended through trusted professionals in the networks above, critically exploring further examples of relevant practice.

¹ See McLaughlin, C, Byers, R. and Peppin Vaughan, R. 2010. Knowledge Phase: Part 2 – A comprehensive review of the literature. *Responding to Bullying among Children with Special Educational Needs and/or Disabilities*.

The methods employed on the literature review can be accessed in detail in the report above and will not be repeated here. The methods used for the second stage of evidence building are outlined below.

1) A national call for evidence was sent through numerous local, regional and national networks to gather examples of practice relating to bullying among children with SEN and/or disabilities (see Appendix 1). An accompanying pro-forma was attached to the letter (Appendix 2) inviting respondents to outline:

- α) the intervention they apply in their local authorities, schools or organisations to prevent or respond to bullying among pupils with SEN and/or disabilities
- β) the extent of their provision (numbers of staff, pupils, its development)
- χ) any evidence collected on its effectiveness.

This call was disseminated with the assistance of a number of key advocates and specialists in the field. These included:

- The Anti Bullying Alliance SEN/D expert group;
- Regional local authorities (Essex, Herts, Luton, Cambridgeshire, Newham) and regional SEN networks;
- National voluntary organisations: Nasen, Foundation for People with Learning Disabilities, Changing Faces, British Stammering Association and Mencap; local organisations where identified (Grapevine, Coventry);
- Regional schools working in partnership with Cambridge University through the PGCE programme, SUPER and HertsCam initiatives;
- Experienced advisors identified as developing good practice in the literature review stage of the project which had identified research into bullying and SEN and/or disabilities;
- Additional contacts in schools, local authorities and voluntary organisations known to be demonstrating interesting practice suggested via the above networks.

The original call for responses was repeated with a further general follow up call. This was supplemented by intensive email and personal telephone contact over three weeks to encourage contacts to either respond themselves, pass the call on to other hubs and mailing lists, or to identify specific schools engaging in examples of interesting practice of which they were aware. When responses arrived, they were examined to ensure they:

- Gave details of the type of intervention: preventative, reactive or targeted;
- Gave details of the focus of the intervention: social skills, empathy development, peer support etc;
- Outlined the extent of the provision;
- Outlined the extent of evaluation or evidence collected on efficacy and whether this was short or long term;
- Gave details about the background of the school.

2) A one day seminar was held in November 2010, in which respondents from the original call were invited to present and interrogate the interventions they had offered, providing they met the following criteria by:

- Giving details of the type of intervention: preventative, reactive or targeted

- Giving details of the focus of the intervention: social skills, empathy development, peer support etc.
- Outlining the extent of the provision
- Outlining the extent of evaluation or evidence collected on efficacy and whether this was short or long term
- Giving details about the background of the school

Two invitations per organisation or school were offered, and of twenty-nine invitations issued, twenty four participants indicated they were available to attend, offering potentially eighteen local practices. On the day, three participants were unable to come. Participants at the seminar comprised of five representatives from local authorities, three from voluntary organisations, three teachers at special schools, nine teachers from mainstream schools and one representative from a research institution². Further details about participants are given in Appendix 3.

Structure of the seminar:

1) Morning session

Introduction: The aims of the day were set to gather stories of practice; to validate these accounts; to present findings from the literature review and to develop priorities for future work.

Stories of Practice: Participants were invited to work in small groups, preparing accounts of their practice to present to the other group members (see Appendix 5 for the record sheet). Group members were invited to ask questions and document details on a 'listener's sheet' (see Appendix 6). This process aimed to encourage group members to a) ascertain to what extent the practice was validated already and b) interrogate the practice and its strengths and weaknesses.

2) Noon session

The findings of the literature review: The team presented findings from the literature review and disseminated the report. It detailed the disproportionate risk of bullying faced by children with SEN and/or disabilities, particularly in experiencing relational bullying. Social engagement was presented as an important factor in protecting children at risk. Many traits of pupils with SEN and/or disabilities make them vulnerable, thus improving pupils' social competence was demonstrated as important. The challenges facing schools was also discussed, with problems ranging from underreporting by teachers and difficulties in managing the logistics of intervention. Finally, the need for more research into effective strategies was presented, as well as the limited existing evidence on such strategies. These findings were purposefully held back until after the initial session to avoid influencing participants' stories. Animated discussions were held, some of which will be explored further in the analysis of interventions.

3) Afternoon session

² For purposes of clarity, we have discounted the case study presented by the representative at Birkbeck College as an intervention, and utilised it instead as part of the research evidence base.

The development and validation of practice. Discussion and prioritisation: Groups were invited to converge and asked to note responses to the following questions:

- What should be the developments in practice and school policy? What should have priority?
- How does this compare with current practice?
- How should practice be validated?

Discussion was facilitated by members of the research team and a representative from the Anti-Bullying Alliance. A plenary was held in which groups offered their responses and perspectives, which has, where relevant, informed the critical commentary of the report.

Phase 3: Telephone interviews were employed to solicit information from people who were identified through trusted professionals as offering good examples of practice around bullying and SEN and/or disabilities. Telephone interviews were held with five contacts, two from local authorities and three from schools and a college, raising the total accounts of local practices to twenty. Details of organisations involved in this final strand of the research can be found in Appendix 7.

The interviews followed a similar structure as used in the seminar, encouraging interviewees to discuss their practice, outline the extent to which it had been established and discuss knowledge of effectiveness. The interviews were recorded.

Limitations of the approach

The following limitations should be noted:

- The exercise was time-limited and this had some impacts on the recruitment process; in some cases, relevant individuals were not identified in sufficient time for them to attend the seminar;
- Confidentiality restrictions inhibited the possibility of us directly contacting individual hub members who were known by trusted professionals to offer interesting practice. To a large extent, the research was reliant on voluntary responses, when personal contact from the research team may have been more successful;
- Budget cuts and restructuring processes in some local authorities prohibited participation of some individuals;
- It is impossible to identify the numbers of people the call reached, because it was distributed through numerous networks. However, there is some evidence of the scale of the dissemination as responses were volunteered not only from many regional contacts but many others nationwide including from Dorset, the Isle of Wight, Newcastle and Wiltshire;
- The report is dependent on practitioners' accounts of practice, rather than being drawn from observations or any other methods employed by the research team.

2. Assessment of the evidence base

This section explores the evidence drawn together in relation to the prevention and response to bullying of children with SEN and/or disabilities.

Nature of the evidence

The national call for validated local practice collected evidence emerging from special and mainstream schools, local authorities and voluntary organisations. In contrast to the examples in the literature review, many of the practices offered were impossible to identify as relating specifically to any specific disability or even to SEN and/or disabilities related bullying, and were often situated as part of a more general anti-bullying programme.

This strand focuses on UK based practices, compared with the research-based evidence explored as part of the literature review, which was drawn mainly from studies done in the US or UK, with a small proportion from other countries. That study included reports in peer reviewed journals, voluntary sector reports, reports from advocacy groups and policy-related literature. Again, in contrast to the evidence from the call for practice, many of the research studies focused on specific disabilities rather than a general population of pupils with SEN and/or disabilities.

Gaps in the evidence base

The application of general anti-bullying approaches to children with SEN and/or disabilities (such as circle of friends, peer mentoring, student voice) is prevalent in local responses. However, as noted also in the literature review, while there is evidence on the wider effectiveness of such strategies, there is little research on the effectiveness of such strategies for children with SEN and/or disabilities. Moreover, it was evident from the interrogations of local practice that few of the interventions identified are used in isolation, but are rather employed in a layered approach as part of a school or local authority package. Therefore SEN and/or disabilities related practice is very often embedded in more general programmes to address bullying and wider aspects of inclusion, such as social relationships. This makes it very difficult to isolate how far evaluations of general 'success' relate to or differ from effectiveness in relation to children with SEN and/or disabilities.

The evidence on effective practices responding to bullying of pupils with SEN and/or disabilities

This section considers to what extent preventative and responsive practices to bullying and SEN and/or disabilities are known to be effective. In answering this question, in line with the literature review, we have adopted a flexible interpretation of what are the 'most effective approaches'. The literature suggests that effectiveness can be identified across a variety of dimensions not merely relating to the reduced frequency of bullying behaviour, but also encompassing wider issues, such as improvements in reported emotional well-being, enhanced resilience or social participation. Nevertheless and perhaps related to this, clear data on the effectiveness of strategies offered by participants were limited. It became evident that there are many challenges about the extent of, possibility for and means of validating local practice. This is discussed in detail in section 3.

The strategies and extent of effectiveness

For the purpose of clarity, we have separated the current local practices offered by practitioners into eight categories (by type). However, these categories often overlap and blur, reflecting the way the interventions work in practice. The interventions are:

1. General preventative group work/training/conferences for practitioners and students;
2. Monitoring of bullying and SEN and/or disabilities and policy work
3. Raising awareness and understanding of children with SEN and/or disabilities;
4. Developing a whole school ethos;
5. Small group work to prevent or problem solve bullying incidents including peer support strategies
6. Individualised support and counselling;
7. Confidence raising and resilience work through skills, language and communication training;
8. Environment and Context: Vulnerable students lunch club, safe zones, lunchtime supervisors, positive playtimes.

The case study approach and the nature of exploration prohibit meaningful quantifying of these categories³. Of itself, this demonstrates a gap within the research, as a survey of approaches would be helpful in identifying where out of all these interventions, schools most often put their efforts. However, one relevant observation can be made about the use of the interventions which contrasts sharply with the literature review and that is around the prevalence of the whole schools ethos (intervention 4). In the literature review, it was identified that there was a big gap in the research on the level of whole school or large approaches and interventions, yet from the small sample obtained from the national call, there were several examples of whole school approaches being employed.

Brief summaries of each practice will be presented with more detailed examples highlighted as 'cameos of practice'.

1. General preventative group work/training/conferences for practitioners and students

This practice involves small teams of dedicated anti-bullying personnel, working within local authorities, acting as external advisors to school teachers on anti-bullying practices and delivering training events. Examples include:

- General and specialist anti-bullying training workshops. SEN and/or disabilities related bullying is one theme among others offered, including cyber safety, homophobic bullying, gender, peer mentoring/mediation and lunchtime supervisor training (see intervention 8).

³ The accounts were self-reported and varied in focus, with some practitioners for example outlining several practices and others emphasising only one out of a range employed.

- A conference aimed at professionals in schools, social care and health settings exploring SEN and/or disabilities related bullying.
- Training with SENCos on how to make anti-bullying policy and practice relevant to SEN and/or disabilities.
- Events in schools for wider initiatives such as *Feeling Safe, Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning (SEAL)*, UNICEF's *Rights of the Child* and NASEN's *Breaking down Barriers*.
- Project work during anti-bullying week and other specific times⁴
- Bespoke support and guidance to schools, tailor-made to the needs of the school.

These local authority initiatives are also supplemented by events run in schools, including events organised by outreach teams working between special and mainstream schools.

**CAMEO OF PRACTICE
NEWCASTLE LOCAL AUTHORITY**

Newcastle County Council's 'RESPONSE' anti bullying team offers a range of interventions and support to young people and families in respect of bullying issues. One such initiative was their hosting of a Special Educational Needs and Disability Bullying conference at the Newcastle Assembly Rooms in 2008. The aim of the conference was to highlight some of the issues around bullying and disability, identify current legislation and guidelines in place to support vulnerable young people and their families, and also explore good practice. Professionals from education, children's services and health attended the day, while young people from local schools were involved in the planning and delivery of the event. One of the key recommendations of the conference was the need for more awareness raising work in schools about Disability Bullying.

RESPONSE subsequently developed a number of sessions which have been delivered into schools. They use DVD and case studies to tell stories of young people experiencing disability bullying. Through activities and using age-appropriate literature young people are encouraged to think of ways they can make their school more inclusive and develop strategies that will enable them to effectively challenge Disability bullying. Post-event evaluations have been positive and will inform future practice.

Effectiveness

⁴ An example of such a project was where activities were carried out to allow students to try to 'experience' what it would be like to have dyslexia.

Training is generally seen by practitioners as an effective means of addressing bullying and SEN and/or disabilities, principally through strengthening existing anti-bullying programmes and fostering the development of inclusive attitudes among pupils in schools. Although not all of the approaches are specifically designed to address SEN and/or disabilities related bullying, they signal a local authority's awareness of the problem and the availability of support for schools when the issue arises. Post-event evaluations show that training days are well received and are appreciated. They offer informal opportunities to both deal with sensitive issues and promote awareness. There is also some evidence of the success of the wider programmes in which these initiatives are embedded; the independent evaluation of the Unicef 'Rights of the Child' approach by Brighton and Sussex Universities suggests that in the schools evaluated, 'there was little or no bullying or shouting', an improvement in positive attitudes towards peers with disabilities and challenging of externally imposed stereotypes or prejudices (Unicef 2010, executive summary).

Challenges

There are however some doubts about the effectiveness of 'one off' and short-term events in reducing bullying, particularly for children with SEN and/or disabilities. In many of the examples we found, the development of specific SEN and/or disabilities focused resources were inhibited by the limited capacity and insecure funding for some of these initiatives, which prevented local authorities working intensively with schools or in one to one situations when this might have allowed a deeper engagement with some of the problems (see intervention 6). When training days occur, local authority teams may not be aware of how many pupils with SEN and/or disabilities they are working with, nor aware of any particular difficulties, which is problematic given that a significant challenge facing children with SEN and/or disabilities is around communicating the problem. Therefore, although the strategies work in promoting inclusivity among the whole school body, there are particular and specific problems associated with SEN and/or disabilities which these events, can by nature, only briefly address.

2. Monitoring of bullying and SEN and/or disabilities and policy work

Monitoring of bullying is undertaken by many local authorities, with data held on the frequency and type of bullying incidents:

- Schools are required to report bullying incidents to the local authority, in which SEN and/or disabilities is an integral part of the requirement, as well as homophobic bullying. Local authorities maintain year on year data.
- Some local authorities have piloted the Sentinel database⁵ for recording incidents in schools which allows for effective comparison.

A number of local authority initiatives have also attempted to raise the profile of SEN related bullying through:

⁵ Sentinel is a complete recording system, which help local authorities manage child protection. It allows 'users to monitor incidents, and investigate whether advice has been given, followed and whether the incident has been referred' (<http://www.tascsoftware.co.uk/>)

- Tailoring of anti-bullying policies through involving SEN and/or disabilities advisors in strategic anti-bullying work or through consultation with behaviour support workers, parents and specialist teachers.
- Accreditation of schools' anti-bullying policies to ensure there is evidence of disability equality work and attention to the needs of vulnerable groups.
- Anti-bullying awards encouraging schools to gather evidence of good practice.

**CAMEO OF PRACTICE
EAST SUSSEX LOCAL AUTHORITY**

East Sussex local authority monitors all referrals to the anti-bullying team for SEN and/or disabilities. They have found that their local figures 'would appear to mirror the national trend with children and young people with SEND disproportionately more likely to be referred to the Anti-Bullying Team than their non-disabled peers' (East Sussex Anti Bullying Team 2010: 7).

On the basis of their monitoring work, the local authority became aware that their existing anti-bullying strategies had not always proved successful for children with SEN and/or disabilities. They judge their work as successful if bullying of a child stops within three to four weeks, with no repeat event within three months. Figures showed that 86% of their work is effective by these standards. However, by monitoring effectively, their team has been able to recognise that it is the young people with SEN who comprise the minority for whom it is unsuccessful. As a result, the anti-bullying team developed an adapted toolkit for one-to-one support applicable for children with SEN and/or disabilities and developed systems for schools to report and record incidents consistently.

The toolkit utilises a solution-focused approach to be used by children with SEN and/or disabilities as well as siblings, parents and carers of the child where necessary to reinforce or reassert their anti-bullying strategies. The toolkit has sessions tailored to the children's SEN and/or disabilities – for example, by using communication in print or in working with children with Autistic Spectrum Disorder on building up peer support and friendships, which are recognised as essential protective factors against bullying, but known to be problematic among this group.

Effectiveness

Research has suggested that there is a strong case for monitoring disability related bullying, especially because the phenomenon has been significantly underestimated (Frederickson et al, 2007; Hanish and Guerra, 2000; Pepler et al, 1994; Sharp, 1996) It offers a means through which anti-bullying work is data driven and becomes more responsive, especially when trends are observed through collection of year on year data and around specific types of bullying. Specific types of bullying can be reduced as a result; for example, in one case identified within the research, monitoring in one local authority had shown an increase in racist bullying, but it was claimed that due to more careful monitoring of incidents, there was a significant decrease.

Challenges

Monitoring in and of itself is not a solution for SEN and/or disabilities related bullying; the process offers the means to collect data and does not lead to effective responses unless those data are used as part of a wider strategy (as in the example of East Sussex, see Cameo of Practice on page 18). Although bullying monitoring is widespread, not all local authorities monitor specifically for SEN and/or disabilities and even when this is integral, it is not often used to monitor impacts of particular anti-bullying interventions. Monitoring also relies on a consistent commitment from the local authority; some local authorities do not monitor the prevalence of bullying and SEN and/or disabilities because it is not felt to be high priority. It also relies on consistent reporting locally and can be difficult to embed because it is centrally driven.

3. Raising awareness and understanding of children with SEN and/or disabilities

Interventions in this category aim to improve the social contexts in which bullying occur, fostering understanding of the experiences of people with disabilities and thereby minimising the potential for bullying, including:

- Projects run by voluntary organisations to promote cohesive relationships between young people with learning difficulties and those without.
- Projects across or within schools to foster dialogue and understanding between mainstream pupils and those at special schools/units (e.g. fundraising projects for students with SEN and/or disabilities).
- Collaborations between special and mainstream schools on joint projects (such as making a film) to raise awareness of experiences of disability and encourage learning through cooperation.
- Voluntary organisations presenting information to groups of children about the nature of a specific disability prior to a child with SEN and/or disabilities starting a new class or school.

The project, 'we're all the same' was established by Grapevine, a locally based NGO in Coventry. It was conceived on the basis of evidence obtained anecdotally and from questionnaires given to young people without learning difficulties about their perceptions of people with learning difficulties. These suggested that the two groups of people rarely spend time together. The project was established to overcome this social distance and to foster cohesive relationships between young people with and without learning difficulties. It involved advisory groups, myth busting workshops, the creation of a DVD and a shared holiday.

The Grapevine project was evaluated with pre- and post- intervention questionnaires about the perceptions of young people with learning disabilities. Evidence of efficacy was suggested via positive feedback from the young people involved in the project (including letters from family members and other stakeholders) and attitudinal changes among students who had formerly held negative attitudes. Further evidence of success is seen through the fact that because firm friendships were developed, three years after the project has finished, the advisory group still maintains sustained contact with Grapevine. The project was positively evaluated for involving the wider community, thereby reaching a wider target group than can be achieved by working in schools alone.

Effectiveness

It is clear from both phases of our research that awareness raising projects can offer significant positive experiences for those involved. Saylor and Leach's (2009) study of one such programme which brought peers together for shared arts, sports, camps, service and leisure activities concluded that this led to increased empathy between those with and without disabilities and a decrease in bullying. Anecdotal evidence from our responses considered in this report reinforces this finding, suggesting that these ventures lead to enhanced tolerance, reduced conflict and important changes within the young people involved, such as improved feelings of self-worth among students. The projects or information sessions address difficulties in how children with SEN and/or disabilities are conceptualised and as such, form part of a wider education for mainstream peers, challenging the misunderstanding and ignorance that often forms the root of disability related bullying. The interventions have the potential to encourage understanding of the problems, which may not always lead to participants developing intense friendships with children with SEN and/or disabilities but may have other ramifications, such as encouraging them to challenge bystander behaviour.

Challenges

The success of project work to raise awareness relies on committed and responsible leadership; projects can often prove time consuming to ensure that young people are supported and safe throughout the process. For example, the Peer EXPRESS scheme discussed by Saylor and Leach (2009) required considerable commitment, requiring students' participation in activities held at least once a week during the school day for a period lasting between 24 and 27 weeks. These types of projects also assume a certain level of maturity on the part of individuals involved, requiring them to be 'ready' for this work. Furthermore there are questions about the duration of effects in challenging bullying; there is a risk that benefits are time limited and specific only to the individuals involved while the projects are running. Although some of the reports suggest that the initiatives may lead to the creation of sustained

relationships which can create a protective peer group - a known factor in protecting individuals against bullying - this cannot be assumed and may not always be the case.

4. Developing a whole school ethos

The development of a whole school strategy is a holistic approach used in schools, not limited to addressing bullying and SEN and/or disabilities but rather attempting to create a positive and inclusive school culture as their *raison d'être*. This approach was found among many of the schools responding to the call for practice. They include:

- Open communication strategies in schools, such as the creation of a 'telling environment' where children feel able to report incidents without fear of exacerbating a situation.
- Commitment to coordinated or 'joined up' practice across staff groups to deal with problems and embed holistic strategies.
- Positive modelling of behaviour (e.g. creating a calm environment with raised voices kept to a minimum).
- Focussing on children's individuality.
- The use of non-punitive measures to address bullying (see group and individual work, intervention).
- Alternatively, in other cases, schools adopted a harder-line 'zero tolerance' school philosophy around bullying, supported by the use of CCTV and serious punitive action if bullying continued.

CAMEO OF PRACTICE OAK FIELD SCHOOL

Oak Field is a Special School that is engaged in 'lifetime' work to foster an 'anti-victim' mentality among its pupils with SEN and/or disabilities. The school aims to empower students from nursery onwards, to encourage them to develop a strong sense of self-worth and avoid adopting a victim mentality whereby they 'allow' things to happen to them. Young people with SEN and/or disabilities learn to gain insight into their behaviours, which is helpful in addressing behaviours in children who are at risk of becoming bullies themselves. The school has spent twenty years developing a programme including language, communication and emotional work, verbal and non-verbal signals (such as bodily demeanour, clothing choice and deference to others) addressing weaknesses typically exploited by bullies. Role play is used to enact events so that young people with SEN and/or disabilities, many of whom are visual learners, can see the justice and injustice of situations.

These attitudes are not only cultivated in relation to school contexts but also prepare young people with SEN and/or disabilities for local community situations where bullying is likely to occur. The school challenges the avoidance strategies that are common with people with SEN and/or disabilities and encourages their pupils to go out to events, theatres and sports to learn

to cope in real life situations. It is a very broad and holistic whole school approach, including work with parents and families who have learning difficulties, as well as collaboration with local day services.

Effectiveness

The importance of the whole school ethos is noted in the consultation with pupils with SEN and/or disabilities conducted by the Anti-Bullying Alliance (2010). The degree to which pupils feel believed and responded to when they report bullying is important for any pupil, and whole school strategies aim to create the conditions in which this is possible. Many of the schools involved in our sample cited their low levels of bullying and fixed exclusion rates. Although it is wise to be cautious of self-reporting by teachers because of the known prevalence for underreporting (see, for example, Olweus, 1978; Besag, 1989; Martlew and Hodson, 1991), supplementary evidence was produced in our sample by way of positive staff and parent comments.

Challenges

As noted in the literature review, 'a whole-school approach of any kind requires resources, coordination and commitment' (2010: 38). It takes time to embed, particularly when involving the community. Crucially it relies on strong leadership; if the approach is only partially embedded and not all staff members are committed, bullying incidents are likely to recur. Furthermore, when extended to the lifetime and family based work (as evident in the cameo of practice) it has resource implications, and may be dependent on funding from sources such as community services, which may be unable to support projects in the long term.

4. Small group work to prevent or problem solve bullying incidents including peer support strategies

Small group sessions for peer groups and teachers which prevent or respond to actual bullying behaviours include:

- Support Group/solution focused approaches, anti-bullying councils and restorative justice sessions which create a safe environment for pupils to problem-solve and repair conflict situations.
- Nurture and transitions groups easing the move from primary to secondary for vulnerable groups, often using skills and confidence work (see intervention 8)
- Circle of compassion or circle of friends to encourage students to express their feelings around difficult events.
- Peer support and buddying, whereby selected group of friends 'look out' for vulnerable children.

**CAMEO OF PRACTICE
QUINTIN KYNASTON**

Quintin Kynaston School is a large school in Westminster, with a student support faculty devoted to dealing with personal, emotional and relationship issues among pupils. Staff members supporting this work include a clinical psychologist, nurse and psychotherapist. Multiple group sessions are offered, on an 'as needs' basis, including groups on: Restorative Justice, Emotional Management, Transition, Speech and Language, Think First and Social Communication. There are also Nurture Groups, Circle of Friends, Circle Time, Family Group and Inclusion Voice, a novel initiative where students with SEN are supported in making contributions to school's 'student voice'.

Group sessions are based on therapeutic listening and cognitive behavioural therapy, dealing with issues including anger management, emotional management, relaxation, social skills and emotional resilience, often with the support of families. Many reinforce what to do in general when a student is being bullied, but others such as restorative justice sessions more specifically respond to actual bullying incidents. The interventions are evaluated using pre and post intervention measures by participants or facilitators on their behalf. Staff feedback is also used to assess the effectiveness of interventions through regular referrals meetings. The group work is part of a whole school approach.

Effectiveness

The groups are evidence of a shift towards the recognition of the importance of psychosocial aspects of SEN and/or disabilities and the role of peer relations in preventing and responding to bullying (McLaughlin et al 2010:41). They fall into two approaches: those that provide opportunities for students to develop friendships to provide protective resources, such as nurture and transition groups (but which as a result set those children apart) and those that directly address incidences through managing interpersonal conflicts between individuals, such as circle time and restorative justice approaches. Both approaches exploit children's understanding of their peers and their ability to conceive of imaginative solutions. Within our sample, effectiveness was demonstrated by pupil perception scores taken before and after group interventions as well as personal testimony, which suggest these approaches are effective in stopping bullying. The literature based research shows that there is a growing body of evidence for the effectiveness of peer education and researchers have explored specific approaches: buddy systems (Frederickson, 2010); Circle of Friends (Etherington 2007); and peer mediation (Warne, 2003) but there is little rigorous evaluation of programmes and little detail about how these are managed with children with SEN and/or disabilities (Moore, 2009). A recent review of the effectiveness of group interventions with particular groups of pupils suggests caution when working with some groups, such as anti social youth, and about the unintended peer effects (e.g. see Farrington and Ttofi , 2009). This underlines the need for clear, skilled peer education or peer intervention and the need to monitor interventions.

Challenges

There is a danger that some group approaches may offer a 'quick-fix' and are inappropriate for some children with SEN and/or disabilities, who may not respond to short periods of activity and may instead require several sessions to gain trust. This problem is confirmed by wider research, which suggest that the duration and intensity of programmes are important factors in leading to decreases in bullying in general; as Farrington and Ttofi (2009: 70) suggest,

programs need to be intensive and long-lasting to have an impact on this troubling problem. It could be that a considerable time is needed in order to build up an appropriate school ethos that efficiently tackles bullying.

There are also concerns that some peer initiatives such as anti-bullying councils are variable in outcome because of the difficulty that 'it is only as good as its participants'. They are time consuming, requiring both time for training and ongoing support for pupils involved. On the other hand, there are further difficulties when groups are run by external agencies (such as voluntary groups or local authorities) as schools may not take ownership over the problem. As noted in the literature review and reinforced by wider research, 'the effectiveness of individual and peer support interventions depends in part on whether they are supported by the general classroom and school social climate' (McLaughlin et al 2010: 42). In support of this problem, among our sample, we found cases where local authorities found schools' belief sets about pupils with SEN and/or disabilities concerning (e.g. whereby pupils with Autistic Spectrum Disorder [ASD] are deemed as problematic and needing to be 'fixed', rather than other pupils' reactions). As a result, these interventions run the risk of offering short to medium term solutions to bullying behaviour, which can falter if not reinforced through other approaches, such as a whole school/community ethos. There is the possibility that while they deal with an isolated event, they may not provide measures to stop the bullying happening again by other people at other times.

5. **Individualised support and counselling**

This practice involves working with children on a one to one basis to understand bullying events; both to problem solve and respond to bullying. This may involve:

- The use of one-to-one 'talk time' with specialist teachers to explore bullying situations through appropriate modes of play, including metaphor, sand tray play and puppets.
- One-to-one casework with members of local authority teams to support young people who are being bullied (see East Sussex's cameo of practice, intervention 2).
- Availability of on-site counsellors for confidential talk with practitioners trained in anti-bullying/counselling techniques.
- Tailored personalised curriculum for students with SEN and/or disabilities and support via Learning Support Staff to raise confidence.

Wroxham School is a special school with around 240 pupils. They use a whole school individualised approach, using mentoring in addition to other initiatives such as circle time, restorative justice approaches and quiet clubs. The individualised approach implies teachers know the children very well and respond to their specific individual needs, which they suggest is particularly important when dealing with children with SEN and/or disabilities.

One example of this approach employed in a bullying context was a situation where one child with ASD lashed out in the playground. A mentor was called, and removed the child from the situation. They sat in the school's book bus and the boy was given a clipboard and asked to observe all the other children, while the mentor gently unpicked what had happened. This enabled the child to feel contained, safe and in control. From the individualised counselling, it became apparent that this child needed certain toys to make playtimes easier, which was then facilitated. An incident form was completed and shared with all people working with the child, from the Head teacher to lunchtime supervisors.

This approach enables everyone to learn from specific incidents, understand the perspective of some of the school's more vulnerable students and respond with appropriate changes (in another occasion for example, a quiet club was set up after monitoring of the lunchtime incident forms). The school claims low levels of bullying and cites positive feedback from parents, teachers and lunchtime supervisors as further evidence of effectiveness.

Effectiveness

While many of the approaches explored in the report offer useful initiatives to *prevent* bullying, individualised approaches offer important sources of support when the bullying actually occurs, through the availability of sympathetic adult help for individuals involved. One to one work is also more likely than other group-based approaches to address the specific needs of children with SEN and/or disabilities. Advocates in our sample suggested that there was positive feedback from parents and anecdotal evidence that because children knew who to turn to if they had difficulties, children who had previously found school attendance difficult were now attending. Lunchtime staff and teachers had also noted calmer classrooms and children making good progress in their studies.

Challenges

These initiatives often rely on the willingness of children to disclose that there is a problem, which can be problematic if the children are victims, as many children do not take this step for fear of retribution and further victimisation. Furthermore, isolating the children for individualised support may mark children with SEN and/or disabilities out as 'special' and increase feelings of stigmatisation. There are also implications for staff, requiring significant time commitment. This can be mollified if all staff are committed to individualised attention as part of a whole school ethos, but may place an untenable burden on few personnel identified as responsible for bullying and/or SEN if this is not the case. Where therapy approaches are used, there are also significant cost implications, which only schools with adequate scale can support. To be successful, therapy approaches rely on adequate training and ongoing supervision.

6. Confidence raising and resilience work through skills, language and communication training

This intervention focuses specifically on raising confidence and resilience through skills work (see also Cameo of Practice of Oak field, intervention 4). Examples include:

- Equipping children with general skills and attitudes, such as coping skills for going out in the community, gaining confidence in communicating, relationship and friendship advice etc.
- Specific skills to deflect bullying behaviours such as fogging techniques (i.e. responding positively to name calling), assertiveness and body language.

CAMEO OF PRACTICE CHANGING FACES

Changing Faces is a voluntary organisation aimed at supporting young people with facial disfigurement. Among its responses to bullying is to teach children 'fogging' techniques (non-aggressive fielding of attitudes) and other special social skills training. Individuals learn a range of practices dealing with fielding curiosity, staring, rude comments and verbal bullying. Other strategies addressing body language and positive self talk are used. These training sessions are often used in transitions groups over the summer vacation to prepare children for attendance at secondary schools.

Changing Faces attempt to evaluate their work through individual feedback, measuring the confidence and skills of children before and after intervention. They report that these showed that after a term, children's experiences of bullying were halved. Feedback from the young people who had worked in this way also suggests that because it is fun and interesting, everyone involved feels more confident and competent. On the other hand, these strategies may rely on young people having adequate speech and language skills, which many children with SEN and/or disabilities do not have.

Effectiveness

Skills training approaches are deemed an important preventative strategy in stopping children with SEN from 'allowing' things happen to them. In the review of research we concluded that 'Social skills and communication emerge as key issues in the bullying of pupils with SEN and/or disabilities since social behaviours are crucially important with regard to peer victimisation and language and communication are key to social competence.' (p.5 McLaughlin et al, 2010) They offer a longer-term approach by equipping children with lifelong skills, in contrast to approaches which were likened rather to 'emergency sticking plasters' applied when bullying incidents occur. The practice could be compared favourably with reactive interventions such as restorative justice, which deal with an event, but do not provide measures to stop the bullying occurring at other times, by other people. These approaches equip the child at risk of bullying with appropriate responses that give them confidence to address the problem whenever they occur in their lifetime. They also address deeper rooted problems, such as the

avoidance of challenging situations and the reluctance and limited skills of some children with SEN and/or disabilities to instigate friendships, which is a known factor in protecting against bullying.

Challenges

A central difficulty with this approach is that the practices require competent and confident verbal communication, which many children with SEN and/or disabilities do not possess. There is also a danger that if managed poorly, it could exacerbate a bullying situation and places responsibility on the individual involved rather than others to adapt their behaviours. To be effective, it also requires ongoing support over a number of sessions, which has obvious resource implications.

7. Environment/Contexts Work: Vulnerable students lunch club, safe zones, training of lunchtime supervisors, positive playtimes

Further initiatives focused on improving the experiences of space in which bullying most commonly occurs – in the playgrounds and during break times, including:

- Dedicated anti-bullying monitors patrolling the playground; anonymous reporting of bullying, and follow up by group strategies to seek resolutions (see intervention 6).
- Quiet clubs, safe zones and vulnerable students' lunchtime clubs.
- Training of lunchtime supervisors and the development of playtime projects, such as 'positive playtimes' and inclusive play.
- Shortened lunch breaks to reduce the opportunity for bullying.
- Identification of 'hot spots', such as toilets, and adaptation of facilities.

Bottisham Village College, secured a £15,000 grant from the government's TaMHS⁶ programme and developed a number of action research initiatives. Vulnerable students approaching transition in primary schools were consulted. They identified bullying as a key concern in approaching transitions, especially because of an ongoing myth that children were often thrown into 'the prickly bush' in the school grounds. Year 7, 8 and 9 children made a video with professional help to address these pupils' worries and pupils were trained to show the videos and do circle work in the younger schools. Vulnerable prospective students were also invited into the school in the summer holidays, to familiarise themselves with the grounds through fun events such as a treasure hunt. Parent information evenings were also established to help manage parents' anxieties about issues such as travelling on the bus.

Second, in English lessons, pupils used the textbook *Kingdom of the Sea* (by Robert Westall) to discuss perceptions of safety, and mapped where they felt safe and where they did not in the college. It emerged that Year 7s felt genuinely unsafe in the toilets, and this issue was brought to school council through student voice. The college is due to launch a trial of a 'year 7 only' toilet in the brand new block, so that new students feel safe and unthreatened.

The college collects data on effectiveness because they will be required to demonstrate outcomes to their funders. They have before and after information from the maps of pupil safety, post event evaluations and baseline data from their health promoting behaviour survey to compare with a follow up survey in which to show evidence of effectiveness.

Effectiveness

The projects discussed above are generally recommended as offering simple and low cost solutions, requiring only very minimal adaptations on the part of schools. Amongst the responses, the projects seemed particularly effective when they responded to concerns raised by children themselves through action research projects. The suggestions offered required only small changes that had the consequences of genuine improvements in student perceptions of safety. They may also engender a sense of empowerment and have wider ramifications if as a result, students feel listened to and genuine changes are made which respond to pupil fears.

Challenges

Initiatives addressing environmental features of the school rely on the existence of effective channels of communication to adequately respond to students' concerns. Furthermore, some interventions, such as the use of anti-bullying patrols, require ongoing training and effective adult support to ensure responses do not exacerbate situations. Moreover, they cannot address other forms of bullying occurring in non-physical spaces, such as cyber-bullying, for which children with SEN and/or disabilities may be potentially more vulnerable. Some of the initiatives also require training for lunchtime supervisors, which would involve extending their contracts and requiring further commitment from school employees.

⁶ Targeted Mental Health in Schools programme.

Implications for Policy and Practice

The evidence explored from the national call for practices responding to bullying among children with SEN and/or disabilities undoubtedly show pockets of interesting practice. There are implications for policy and practice arising from the data explored and recommendations from those we consulted. In presenting these, we have put these in 5 complementary categories that are often used to enable change: leadership, strategies & policies, systems, training and support.

(1) Leadership

- The development of a whole school ethos is integral to underpin the success of many of the interventions. However, they rely on adequate vision, leadership and commitment, as well as the development of initiatives that go beyond a school's usual remit, with implications for resources. They also rely on an understanding of the particularity of working with bullying of pupils with SEN and/or disabilities, i.e. the leadership strategies and approaches need to be well informed and well directed.

(2) Strategies & policies

- Empathy building among peers relies on positive strategies that address the wider psychosocial contexts of SEN and/or disabilities related bullying.
- Consultations and/or action research (with students and/or teachers as researchers) is recommended as an important means of responding to pupils' concerns, with case studies suggesting that this enacts important changes in school environments and practices. However it must be linked with systems to turn recommendations into practice.
- Inclusive consultation such as student voice strategy and action research is said to be effective by practitioners because it empowers otherwise vulnerable children, but it is necessary to consider further how accessible established mechanisms are made to students with SEN and/or disabilities.
- Individualised approaches come at some cost and inevitably raise issues around funding and resourcing. We found examples of local authorities who would like to apply an individualised model such as that demonstrated by East Sussex (see Cameo of Practice, Intervention 2) but just did not have the scale to do so.
- Minimisation of bullying by teachers is acknowledged as a known problem; however, from April 2010 schools have a legal duty to address bullying and are open to legal redress if they fail to comply with the demands of the Equality Act 2010.

(3) Systems

- Monitoring offers insight into the specific nature of bullying incidences which enables work in and around schools to target resources where they are required and improve the effectiveness of anti-bullying provision. However, not all anti-bullying teams monitor for SEN and/or disabilities because it is not prioritised.
- Monitoring around SEN and/or disabilities works best when done not for its own sake but when linked to direct adaptations of policy that actively challenge disability-related bullying and working with difference.

(4) Training & support

- More personalised approaches such as skills, communication and confidence training, as well as responsive individualised support when bullying events occur are vaunted by practitioners as highly effective for pupils with SEN and/or disabilities, both to deal with occurrences of bullying or to diminish its likelihood.
- Skills and confidence training require specialised and ongoing support by adults, to avoid risking exacerbating bullying situations.
- Training and group work may be more effective when anti-bullying teams have the capacity to offer more individualised sessions over a longer time period.
- More in-depth education of practitioners is required as some teachers feel limited confidence in dealing with bullying if they perceive it as a failure to successfully manage relationships in their class/school.

It has become clear that there are a variety of established and emerging practices, mostly in the arenas of approaches/strategies, systems and training; there is less evidence of leadership. Whilst that is indicative of a lack of maturity of the topic, it is concerning that there were few single practices that covered the whole spectrum, from leadership to training and support, and contained all the necessary elements of an effective anti-bullying approach tailored to children with SEN and/or disabilities.

Secondly, it has become clear that there is a real gap between the theories behind bullying and disability on one hand and local practices on the other. It is vital that this gap is bridged to ensure theory development is grounded in informed practice. The key to both is establishing a robust evaluation that provides a solid evidence base of demonstrably effective strategies to enable teachers and researchers to take account of its complexity and address this problem with confidence. These issues are explored further in the next two sections of the report.

3. Discussion: What counts as validation?

Section 2 demonstrates a great deal of interesting practice that is being carried out in schools. However, discussion of its effectiveness is marred by the limited evidence that can be produced to support practitioners' theories. Reinforcing the findings of the literature review, the enterprise to find examples of validated local practice has been dogged by the difficulty of accessing *any* data around effectiveness. It is clear that practitioners may wish to validate their practice, but they do not know how to and find their search for methods to do so thwarted by a lack of expertise. The unease around validation was evident even in the initial response to our call for practice, where respondents who may have been open to sharing practice seemed deterred by our requests for evidence of efficacy.

Most participants were reflexive about this matter, and aware that there was little or no evidence-based evaluation of whether their practices were effective. Self evaluations for interventions among our sample noted, '[the weakness in terms of evidence based evaluation] and that 'measuring [the intervention's] impact is not embedded'. The event at Cambridge University gave practitioners an opportunity to validate practice, enabling informed listeners to probe interventions further and consider their effectiveness. However, as was to be expected, the evaluation was mainly positive, because the exercise was conducted as a participatory process with the representative of practice present, giving limited opportunity for critical commentary. Nevertheless, numerous suggestions focused on the difficulty of measuring success and the need for more formal assessments of impact.

In terms of 'data' offered, most of the practices were evidenced through opinions that could be considered as offering some indication of success (for example through evaluations of training days). Another interesting form of rating efficacy was offered by pre- and post-intervention surveys or scales, used particularly in the group approaches (intervention 5) assessing whether bullying had decreased. These were important because they used the perspectives of young people themselves, rather than teachers' impressions of their effectiveness. This was also the case in examples of action research in our sample, where schools found solutions in response to listening to the fears and difficulties of children. However, in both cases, the measures of effectiveness tended to offer only a snapshot opinion on delivery rather than record sustained improvement in long term reduction of bullying.

The use of monitoring and school audits allowed a realistic assessment of bullying incidents, and a baseline through which to compare trends year on year. However, apart from in the example of East Sussex (intervention 2), thus far this does not seem to be used to assess the efficacy of particular programmes. One local authority spokesperson reported for example that, 'measuring [its] impact is not embedded in much of the activity, especially because many are individual initiatives'. Where this is done, monitoring activity is useful to help inform and direct practice; at East Sussex, their existing approach to tackling bullying was not working well enough with the pupils with SEN and/or disabilities but they secured funding and developed a more accessible toolkit for children with SEN and/or disabilities.

However, the fact that there is little hard data to support the efficacy of their practice does not mean that their strategies are not effective. In fact, people in our consultation spoke passionately and enthusiastically, with most believing strongly that their practice had real results, evident in softer forms of validation such as anecdotal accounts of behaviour improvement by teachers or lesser incidences of conflicts in classrooms. Others just had the

'feeling' that these strategies worked. This seems to support observations suggested by Farrington and Ttofi (2009:10) in their review of School-Based Programs to Reduce Bullying and Victimization who comment:

Many programs seem to have been based on commonsense ideas about what might reduce bullying rather than on empirically-supported theories of why children bully, why children become victims, or why bullying events occur (Farrington and Ttofi 2009: 10)

We will return to these observations in the conclusion.

4. Conclusions and Recommendations

1) What does the evidence say are the most effective approaches that schools can take to a) preventing and b) responding to the bullying of children with SEN and disabilities?

Although there was much evidence of excellent initiatives and interventions addressed at bullying among children with SEN and/or disabilities, it is difficult to ascertain from the evidence raised 'the most effective responses'. It was evident from the outset that schools were reluctant to offer examples of practice because they do not possess data on effectiveness and do not know how to evaluate these initiatives effectively. The validation is typically soft data, or even opinion, with many practitioners providing a circular reasoning that the interventions must be doing well because 'it feels like it is doing good' to them or other related parties. It is also clear that local practice varies enormously, but there is just too little known about the effects and outcomes to make firm conclusions about which are 'the most effective'.

On the other hand, if the use of convincing testimony is to be accepted, it is clear that all the local practices offered are to some degree all examples of the sorts of strategies that positively aid prevention and response to bullying and SEN and/or disabilities. A concern is however that the majority may in practice tend to reflect existing anti bullying strategies for all children, rather than offer approaches adapted to fit the needs of children with SEN and/or disabilities. For example in the case of group work based around a small number of sessions, a child with SEN and/or disabilities may need a programme of longer duration to ensure that everything is fully understood. Indeed, it is refreshing to see the example of East Sussex Local Authority's toolkit, which was specifically designed to tackle bullying among children with SEN and/or disabilities which arose out of their recognition that their existing anti-bullying work was not meeting the needs of these children, who were overrepresented in the numbers of children being bullied. This led to their programmes being developed for example with resources provided through communication in print and with the adaption of sessions for pupils with ASD on friendship issues.

A further complication is that many of the 'same' interventions are used differentially in different contexts, which makes it difficult to assess their efficacy in general. So not only is there a plethora of approaches often packaged differently in various guises in school guidance, policy and curriculum areas, but there is patchwork implementation. Thus certain elements of approaches are found in very different settings, cultures and contexts, which potentially change the outcomes entirely. For instance, we know that SEAL, Citizenship and PSHE provide the contexts for much of the anti-bullying work going on, yet how these are delivered and used will vary across schools. And it may be that for example the 'Restorative Justice' approach used in a 'zero tolerance' situation is in practice vastly different to that found in another school with a softer approach. While both schools use the same language, they may in fact be demonstrating quite different practice. Similarly 'solution-focused' approaches used in small group settings may have different outcomes if done with individuals in one to one case-work.

In conclusion, we suggest a two tiered typology for which the interventions are – and also could be - judged. At present, most of the programmes we encountered fall in the top half of this typology – being judged as effective because of common sense and anecdotal evidence. There are also differences in the degree to which they are SEN specific:

Basis of assessment of evidence	Level of Approach
1. 'Hunch', feels good, common sense assumption	1. Strategies for everyone
2. Anecdotal evidence; from teachers, parents, pupils	2. Strategies for some
3. Systematic data collection to yield data	3. Strategies for a few
4. Evidence that informs practice	4. Proactively SEN and/or disabilities specific

A more robust strategy for effectively responding to SEN and/or disabilities related bullying would involve developing initiatives that are both evidence based and SEN and/or disabilities specific.

Certainly a central finding of the validating practice exercise is to confirm that there is lively local practice going on in schools. Some of this we suggest can be highlighted for wider dissemination. To this end, the final stage of the knowledge base will be further visits to some of the schools and local authorities to develop case studies of good practice. However, perhaps the most significant finding of the event is the observation that although indeed interesting practice is going on, little of it is empirically validated as effective.

There is also a real need to build an evidence base around validated practice. The review of research showed that there is research about interventions and their effectiveness, but that it is also limited or not evenly spread i.e. we concluded in that study that the research had developed considerably but 'that there is still a need for much more research on school-based interventions and their efficacy' (McLaughlin et al, 2010, p.6). There is also a need to develop different warrants for the research on interventions. Much of the research examined in the review of research was of university based research which has its own standards of rigour. What is also needed is a warrant for research on school practices and one that practitioners can use and adapt.

Strong recommendations emerge from the work:

- To urge local authorities and school leaders to develop an integrated approach which involves demonstrable leadership, policies, effective systems and targeted training and support
- To develop a robust and comprehensive evaluation research programme to assess how effective different strategies are for young people with disabilities and to inform conversely a more solution supportive theory development
- To develop a warrant for research on practice which will be of value to practitioners and others working in this field.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: National call disseminated in October 2010

Dear colleagues

Responding to Bullying among Children with Special Educational Needs and/or Disabilities

We are a group of researchers working in a partnership between the Anti-Bullying Alliance and the University of Cambridge Faculty of Education. We are currently collating a list of schools, local authorities and other agencies from whom we can gather examples of interesting practice relating to bullying and, in particular, the bullying and victimisation of children and young people with SEN and/or disabilities. We have recently completed a comprehensive literature review which highlighted the effectiveness of some targeted interventions. We would now like to see if schools are using the measures the review identified or, indeed, developing responses that we have not yet read about in published sources.

This practice does not have to be comprehensive. We are interested in practices that have been evaluated and demonstrated to be effective on the basis of evidence but we are also keen to find out more about interventions that schools have put into place on the basis of skilled judgement and intuition and that are proving to be effective.

We are interested in practice in mainstream schools (primary and secondary), special schools, independent and maintained schools and academies. You may have heard about this practice through your role as a local authority officer, as an inspector – or because the practice takes place in your own school. The sorts of practices that we know about that seem to be effective include:

- interventions focused on prevention
- reactive responses designed for use as problems occur
- interventions targeted on the needs of particular groups of young people
- interventions that focus on:
 - social skills
 - language and communication
 - the development of empathy among peers
- training, awareness-raising or development opportunities for staff
- peer support
- consultation with pupils
- consultation with parents.

You may be using interventions that fall into one or more of these categories – or working in ways that we have not heard about yet. If you want to share your experiences with us, you can respond using the one-sided record sheet attached to this email. We need to know, if possible by a return date of 18th October 2010:

- about your intervention in outline
- the extent of your provision (how many pupils are involved, how long you have been working in this way, the staff members responsible etc.)
- whether you have gathered any evidence on effectiveness (for example, through an evaluation process) either in the short or long term.

We will collate the responses you provide at this stage. We will then invite some respondents to come to Cambridge on 8th November 2010 to elaborate on the work they are doing in groups with other practitioners. It would be helpful to indicate whether you would be available to attend this event. Ultimately we plan to disseminate our findings on effective practice more widely, acknowledging, of course, the contributions made by our respondents. Please contact us if you feel you require more information about this project at this stage. We hope you can help and we look forward to hearing from you.

Yours faithfully

Colleen McLaughlin
Richard Byers
Caroline Oliver

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Appendix 2: Pro-forma disseminated



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Responding to Bullying among Children with Special Educational Needs and/or Disabilities

<p>Please outline your intervention (<i>type, focus</i>)</p>
<p>Please give details about the extent of your provision (<i>how many pupils are involved, how long you have been working in this way, the staff members responsible etc.</i>)</p>
<p>Please outline whether you have gathered any evidence on effectiveness (such as an evaluation process) either in the short or long term.</p>

Please return this form to Caroline Oliver on co269@cam.ac.uk by **18th October 2010** indicating whether you would be available to attend an event on 8th November 2010.

Appendix 3: Details of conference participants

Local Authorities

Local Authority	Brief Summary of Intervention/s presented to the conference	Scale of Intervention
Essex	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Specific reactive group work (Support Group Approach) 	Range from individual to whole school and beyond
Herts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Preventative group work/training/conferences within schools; adaptation of policies for SEN and/or disabilities; monitoring including for SEN and/or disabilities bullying 	Wider than school approach
Isle of Wight	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Preventative groupwork/training/conferences within schools e.g. on 'feeling safe' 	Schools across the county
Suffolk	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monitoring across all schools, year on year collated, including numbers of disability related bullying; Preventative groupwork/training/conferences within schools 	Schools across the county

Voluntary and Other Organizations

Organization	Brief Summary of Intervention/s presented to the conference	Scale of Intervention
Changing Faces	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Confidence raising through skills, language and communication training; raising awareness for pupils with disfigurement and more generally 	Individual, whole school, parents etc.
Foundation for People with Learning Difficulties	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Action Research leading to changes in playtime context 	Individual and groups in 6 schools
Grapevine	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Raising awareness; peer projects 	Individuals with SEN and/or disabilities and mainstream

Schools and Colleges

School/College	Type	Nos. of pupils	Intervention	Scale
Ventnor Middle	Mainstream	350, 90 with SEN and/or disabilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Whole school ethos based on conference (SEAL and Unicef Rights of Child) 	Whole school
St Christopher, Southend	Special	185	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Awareness raising through DVD collaboration 	Class and mainstream school
Highview/Foxwood federation	Special	112	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Inclusion/outreach events run at mainstream schools Reactive group work 	Mainstream school
Samuel Whitbreads Community College	Mainstream	1750, 300 with SEN and/or disabilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Zero tolerance Restorative justice 	School
St Andrews CoE Primary	Mainstream	430, 128 with SEN and/or disabilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Whole school ethos, individualised support, reactive group work 	Individual to whole school
Quintin Kynaston	Mainstream	1400, 85% with SEN and/or disabilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Whole school ethos confidence raising and resilience work through skills, language and communication training counselling, small group work, transitions groups, playtime projects, restorative justice 	Small groups to whole school
Wroxham	Special	240	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Whole school ethos based on individualised approach Group work, circle time, restorative justice etc. 	Individual to whole school
Bar Hill Primary	Mainstream	240, 24 with SEN and/or disabilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Anti-bullying council 	Peer group/ whole school
Icknield	Mainstream	1500	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Individualised and peer support (curriculum adaptation, student 	Individual to whole school

			voice); counselling	
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Appendix 4: Details of participants in phase 3

Local Authorities

Local Authority	Brief Summary of Intervention/s offered	Scale of Intervention
East Sussex	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Adapted bullying toolkit for one to one casework with children with SEN and/or disabilities, including skills training and specific reactive group work; monitoring including for SEN and/or disabilities bullying 	Individual and groups
Newcastle	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Preventative groupwork/training/conferences (one specifically on bullying and SEN and/or disabilities) 	Schools across county

Schools

School/College	Type	Nos. of pupils	Intervention	Scale
Oak field	Special	145	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Whole school ethos; Confidence raising and resilience work through skills, language and communication training 	Individual to whole school
Marlborough and Ormerod base	Mainstream and special	1063 with 120 School action and 24 with statements; 25 pupils in Ormerod with statements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Whole school ethos; awareness raising; restorative approaches 	Whole school
Bottisham Village College	Mainstream	1050, approx. 10% with SEN and/or disabilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Transitions groups; restorative approaches hot spot identifications 	
Abbey Meadows Primary	Mainstream	350, 10 with statements of SEN	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Nurture groups, positive playtimes 	
St Philips Primary	Mainstream	335, with above average SEN and/or disabilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Group work e.g. silver seal and happy and sad club 	

Appendix 4: Stories of Practice Sheet



Responding to bullying among
children with SEN and/or disabilities

Stories of Practice

1. Background information

Your name _____

The name of your organisation: _____

Do you represent a:

- | | |
|-------------------------|--------------------------|
| school or college? | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| local authority? | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| voluntary organisation? | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Other, please specify | <input type="checkbox"/> |

If you represent a school/college:

Is this a:

- | | |
|-------------------------------------|--------------------------|
| primary school? | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| secondary school? | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| college? | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| mainstream? | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| special school? | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| unit or resourced provision | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| <i>(please tick all that apply)</i> | |

Roughly how many pupils attend the school? _____

Roughly how many pupils would you describe as having SEN and/or disabilities? _____

2. Your practice:

Brief name of intervention _____

Does it focus on:

- | | |
|---------------------------------|--------------------------|
| Individual pupils? | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Selected groups of pupils? | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Whole classes? | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| The whole school? | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Other bodies/wider than school? | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Please write an account of the practice/s your school/local authority/other body has used to address bullying among children with special educational needs and/or disabilities.

What is the timeframe of the intervention?

Who is involved?

What are the strengths/weaknesses of the approach?

Please continue overleaf if necessary.

Appendix 5: Listener's Sheet



Responding to bullying among children with SEN and/or disabilities

Validations of Practice

Please listen to the account of practice that has been directed at addressing bullying among children with SEN and/or disabilities and discuss the extent to which it is validated.

Name of organisation _____

Name of practice _____

Has any evidence been collected on the effectiveness of this practice? (e.g. evaluation processes?)

Is there anything else that suggests this is an effective practice? (e.g. personal testimony, perceived improvement in bullying reduction?)

On the basis of what you have heard, do you:

a) consider this an effective approach to address bullying among children with special educational needs and/or disabilities?

b) have any suggestions for how it should be validated further?

[END]