School Stories

Proactive Policies and Practices – Example 1

Brief background to school initiative

The school had a philosophy of openness about bullying and introduced clear processes for student complaints and peer support. The school developed pastoralcurriculum learning programs to address myths surrounding bullying. The principal prompted action when he reinvigorated a 'no put down' program.

School profile

- Metropolitan non-government boys school
- Years: P–12
- 895 students
- This school has a significant boarding school population and a large number ofstudents of Asian descent

Action

The school believed that bullying should not be a hidden issue. They wanted to dispel the conspiracy of silence by increasing awareness and understanding of the behaviour. The school created an advice pamphlet for families and students that outlined what bullying was, how parents could spot the signs, information for siblings and friends, how the school could be contacted and the school's response to

bullying. During a term length anti-bullying program, conducted within the pastoral curriculum, students asked an adult about their experiences of bullying, particularly when they were at school. The responses were recorded, used for discussion and compiled in a learning resource.

The school believed that only punishing students who engaged in bullying could make matters worse. Students who bullied also needed help, coming to terms with different ways to behave or through building an understanding of the effects of their actions. The school decided that in the first instance students who bullied would not be punished. The initial action was conciliatory and non-punitive, encouraging an 'okay to tell' atmosphere, partnership between parents and the school and the development of social responsibility.

The school's primary concern was to protect the person being bullied. Initially, the school worked separately with both the student being bullied and the student bullying to find a solution to the conflict. Incidents of bullying were recorded, including the date, time, place and nature of the incident, the students involved,

the follow-up action and the name of the person who made the report. The records were reviewed on a weekly basis and recurring names were noted. Students who were named frequently were interviewed and counselled and their parents were informed. The school's priority was to stop bullying at an early stage, rather than waiting until it became serious enough for students engaging in bullying to be punished.

Peer support was used as an educative tool to promote positive values and relationships. Year 11 students volunteered to act as group leaders to small groups of Year 8 students. The program gave all senior students opportunities for self-development. They developed communication and leadership skills and a greater awareness of their own abilities. Juniors were provided with a supportive environment, security and friendship.

All implemented strategies were evaluated using pre- and post-event surveys. The school collected informal comments from teachers, parents and the school council, revealing that a significant change in behaviour and attitude had been achieved, as well as a significant reduction in the amount and type of bullying behaviour.

What we learnt

Difficulties encountered

It was difficult to sustain the initial impetus of the program. Changes in staff were particularly detrimental to maintaining the program's momentum.

Overcoming difficulties

Bullying was an ongoing issue. The school needed to remain vigilant in its response to the issue and maintain communication between parents, students and staff.

If we could do it over

A change in administration unfortunately resulted in a loss of momentum. The school would have liked greater parental involvement earlier in the process.

Recommendations for other schools

Ensure that the administration and parents are fully committed to the program. To facilitate this there needs to be an emphasis on educating staff and parents on the impact that bullying and harassment has on a child's life. The school must commit to a short, mid and long-term plan as it takes years to achieve a cultural change. Funding is essential, as such a whole-school approach requires additional resources and staffing, including bringing in external expertise.