

School Stories

Protective Physical Environment – Example 1

Brief background to school initiative

While all staff at this school recognised that bullying was happening, they felt the students were less aware as they didn't seem to understand what bullying was. A survey conducted by the school psychologist also supported these findings.

School profile

- Government school
- 320 students
- Years: F - 7

Action

The principal and deputy principal participated in schoolyard duty to keep in touch with what was happening in the school. The teachers on duty were very vigilant and an upper school teacher was always rostered with a lower school teacher so all of the students were known to the teachers. There was a communication book for staff to write which students were potentially at risk and to monitor them more closely.

The play areas that were out of sight of staff were reduced or made off limits to the students. The school introduced non-aggressive lunchtime activities at certain times of the year. In winter students played football; when it became too rough the staff introduced marble season. This was the only time of the year that students were allowed to bring marbles into the school. The library was also opened at various times through the year and sometimes the table tennis equipment was set up. On occasion, a particular class was allowed to take their sports bag out at lunchtime and play with the equipment (cricket bats, basketballs, soccer balls and tee ball equipment).



Lunchtime had been reduced from 45 to 40 minutes as the school found that it was during the last five minutes that most behavioural problems would occur. This strategy worked particularly well. Students had 10 minutes to eat, 25 minutes to play and 5 minutes to get a drink and go to the toilet, which was still plenty of time.

What we learnt

Difficulties encountered

Inexperienced staff, who were busy planning and preparing their classroom, often forgot to listen to what students were telling them. It was found on the survey, in the second year of implementation that bullying levels had increased which concerned many parents.

Overcoming difficulties

By training and mentoring younger and newer staff, they were able to quickly adjust to their new environment and concentrate on the needs of their students. An explanation of the survey results quickly assured parents, staff and students that the increase in bullying reports was not due to a fault in the policy but was due to students having a better understanding of what bullying was and feeling more confident about reporting their experiences.

Recommendations for other schools

Use a whole-school approach, because if one teacher isn't listening to student concerns, the whole program suffers.