

School Stories

Brief background to school initiative

This school developed a consultative process to help them to create a new policy on bullying and harassment.

School profile

- Metropolitan non-government boys school
- 1210 students
- Years: F - 12
- Education support school – catering for learning difficulties

Supportive School Culture – Example 1

Action

This school stated in its bullying policy that an aim of the school was to “...provide an environment in which each student is personally involved...”. To this end, they worked to establish a school community where everyone could feel valued and safe, and where individual differences are understood and celebrated. They communicated to the school community that every student had the right to enjoy their time at school and that the school community expects respect for others and does not tolerate bullying or harassment.

The school promoted an ethos that valued individual differences. Assemblies were used to validate students’ achievements. Modelling by staff and senior students was a valuable tool in promoting positive behaviour. An example of an activity that promoted leadership and positive role modelling was their Peer Support Program. The program integrated Year 1 students with Year 12 students during physical education studies. Each Year 12 student was placed in charge of two Year 1 boys to teach them aquatic skills. The

Year 12 students were externally examined on their teaching skills, with some attaining qualifications as swimming instructors for children at primary and secondary level. The Year 1 boys enhanced their swimming skills and made some ‘big friends’.

The tutor system promoted the development of individual and social skills. The school was divided into houses and within the houses were smaller vertically structured tutorial groups. Each tutorial group was made up of students from different year levels. The house system ensured that each student had a home base in the school and that there was at least one staff member who knew what was going on in their day- to-day life. Students kept a diary that was signed each week by the tutor and the student's parents. This provided a line of communication between the students, their tutor and their parents. The groups provided senior students with the opportunity to show responsible stewardship and for juniors to learn from positive senior role models. Several other opportunities were provided to seniors to further develop their leadership skills. For example, there was an annual camp for newly appointed prefects, a training program for Peer Support scheme leaders and volunteer positions that assist in Year 8 camps. The Peer Support Program consisted of small groups of Year 8 students meeting with a trained Year 11 leader. The program built confidence and self-esteem, provided support for boys in their first year of secondary schooling, developed communications and relationship skills, and improved the students' ability to resist harmful peer pressures and make responsible decisions.

Reports of being bullied were responded to with listening and empathy. Staff reinforced to students that they had done nothing wrong by talking about the situation. Staff then made a judgment as to whether the student required additional help , for example, counselling. Students who engage in bullying are directed to discussions with counsellors. These discussions focus on what they can do to change their behaviour.

Parents are contacted to support the proposed changes.

The school views education as a partnership between a school and its student's parents. Effort was taken to clearly explain to parents the expectations of the school regarding its students.

What we learnt

Difficulties encountered

A large number of the students' fathers were brought up under a different system—one that included 'tit for tat' type retaliation. Many of the fathers felt that learning to 'stand up for themselves' was a necessary part of growing up. Thus, much of the bullying behaviour was perceived as a rite of passage, both for the person who bullied others and the person bullied. There was also a strong belief of "whatever you do, don't dob on your mates".

Overcoming difficulties

The school recognised these barriers and attempted to change them through the provision of knowledge. The school introduced the concept of bystander power to the students. The students were encouraged to participate and contribute to the anti-bullying policy.



Recommendations for other schools

Educate the staff, students and parents about the importance of anti-bullying policies.