

Meriden Church of England
Primary School: Review of
Anti-Bullying Policies,
Procedures and Practice



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Meriden Church of England Primary School

Review of Anti-Bullying Policies, Procedures and Practice

Purpose of Review:

- To critically examine the anti-bullying policies, procedures and practice at the school
- To make any necessary recommendations for improvement

Schedule:

- Review of policy and procedures
- Visit to school on 14th April 2016
 - o Tour of school by head boy and head girl
 - o Meeting with senior member of staff, Mr Stephen Beamond
 - o Meeting with four parents
 - o Meeting with eight pupils (2 per class 3-6)

Key Findings:

1. *Positive, inclusive anti-bullying culture/ethos*

It was immediately obvious that the school mission statement “Friends, Faith and Lifelong Learning” is a thread which runs throughout the school. Effective anti-bullying work has to be built on the foundation of a caring, open, mutually respectful school community. It was clear from speaking to all parties and from a tour of the school that relationships within the school are very strong: staff and governors are genuinely concerned for the pupils and aware of the challenges they face; pupils are very aware of the role of the teachers and in particular the KiVa team in addressing serious concerns; parents are deeply conscious and appreciative of the sense of community in and around the school, and voiced their appreciation of the formative role that the anti-bullying programme has in preparing their children for future challenges in secondary school and in the workplace. There was a sense from documentation examined, from the displays and from speaking to pupils that there is complementarity and synergy between curricular work in PSHEE (SEAL resources), religious education, KiVa and work on British values.

2. *Proactive, strategic direction by governors and senior management*

Since the Ofsted inspection in October 2014, considerable work has been undertaken to develop the anti-bullying work in the school. A school’s anti-bullying policy provides the framework for the school’s response, involving the whole school community: pupils, teachers, non-teaching staff, governors and parents. Building on the strong pastoral ethos mentioned above, the school’s anti-bullying policy is detailed and comprehensive. It sets out clearly its aims and expectations, a system of rewards and sanctions, the role of staff, pupils, governors and parents, and includes examples of appropriate recording forms and a useful procedural flowchart.

The Ofsted report has been viewed as an opportunity to develop an effective whole-school approach, and that has been based around the KiVa programme. This well-respected Finnish programme, developed by Prof Christina Salmivalli over the past decade, has been introduced very successfully across over 90% of comprehensive schools in Finland and has more recently been introduced in a small number of schools within the UK. The programme is based on the participant role approach, espousing the view that the peer context is crucial and that peer

bystanders have a key role to play in preventing and addressing incidents of bullying behaviour in schools. The KiVa programme has been evaluated and is one of the most innovative and effective whole-school interventions in the world.

In Meriden, the KiVa programme has been introduced with external training for the assistant headteacher and the family community mentor, followed by in-school training for governors and parents as well as the work directly with the pupils. Although the KiVa materials are written for years 3-6, the school has wisely differentiated the materials and key messages for introduction to pupils in years 1 and 2 also. This facilitates consistency of understanding and approach throughout the school.

The school has developed a detailed post-Ofsted action plan which shows strategic planning to implement a whole-school approach and for this to be carefully evaluated. The procedures in place are clear: incidents are recorded on a proforma and logged centrally. The headteacher provides a report on a regular basis (at least quarterly) to governors detailing any recent incidents and the outcomes. From this central recording, trends can be established and there is evidence that action is taken to address specific issues with certain year groups e.g. through circle time, PSHE lessons etc.

Based on survey evidence that the playground was the most common place for bullying to occur, the school has introduced a number of measures over recent months. These include the relocation of the staff room to a position overlooking the main playground, the creation of a nurture group over lunchtime for some pupils with particular needs, playground supervision by very visible senior teaching staff/ KiVa team members, the introduction of more staff and pupil-led playground activities, a buddy bench, and the presence of identifiable peer mediators.

The introduction of peer mediators (year 6 pupils) is innovative and empowering for the pupils involved. The pupils are trained by the assistant headteacher (class 6 teacher) and the system is monitored carefully. The pupils work in pairs at all times. In other contexts the research is clear that the success of such innovations depends largely on the quality of the training and continued staff supervision of the process. In Meriden the pupils all spoke highly of the scheme and were aware of the mediators' role in helping deal with less serious playground issues. There was good awareness from the one peer mediator spoken to that more serious cases should be passed on to a member of the staff KiVa team.

Using the Anti-Bullying Alliance survey conducted in March 2015, the incidence of bullying across all year groups has fallen, in some cases considerably. A very high percentage of pupils across all year groups would report incidents of bullying, and would try to help someone being bullied. These are very positive measures of impact.

3. High levels of pupil engagement and understanding

In many schools there remains uncertainty and mixed messages around the definition of bullying, among teachers, parents and especially pupils. In Meriden all pupils spoken to had a very sound understanding of what is meant by bullying, using the STOP aide-mémoire ("Several Times on Purpose") to refer to the core criteria of repetition and intention to harm, and with the older pupils adding detail of the "power difference" to refer to the third core component, an imbalance of power. Pupils were clear that not all aggressive behaviour could be seen as bullying and were clear about what sorts of power difference might exist within the school context. In terms of

responding to incidents pupils also used STOP to refer to “Start Telling Other People” and were clear about the need to pass on concerns to teachers and/or the KiVa team.

Pupils were keen to stress that there was no bullying in Meriden now. They talked with enthusiasm about their class work and whole school work (e.g. T-shirt activities) undertaken around bullying and had an impressive grasp of the different participant roles such as “reinforcers”, “silent approvers”, “defenders” etc. One pupil in particular spoke with great maturity about the nature of the “Defender” role and understood the difference between the assertiveness of a “defender” and the aggression of bullying behaviour. When asked how they would respond to a bullying incident they might witness in the playground, the pupils readily volunteered a wide range of appropriate responses.

4. Strong parental support

Engaging effectively with parents is an important and often challenging part of anti-bullying work in schools. From the interview with parents in the school, it is apparent that the school has made considerable efforts to engage with parents through face-to-face meetings and use of a variety of online media. It was acknowledged that it was not always easy for parents to come in to school but the suggestion of meeting after the Friday morning celebration assemblies seemed to work for many. Online material was also appreciated.

The parents spoke warmly of the caring approach taken by the school and the way in which their concerns were addressed by individual teachers and/or by senior staff as appropriate. There was confidence that the school was effective in dealing with incidents of bullying and there was a welcoming of the renewed focus on bullying behaviour. The parents felt that both they and their children had a clearer understanding of the nature of bullying and how to address it as a result of the school’s involvement in the KiVa programme.

Recommendations for improvement:

While the school’s anti-bullying work is already of a commendable standard, the following recommendations are made to help the school make further progress:

- It will be important to maintain the current enthusiasm for the KiVa programme in future years. Some research in Finland has suggested that the enthusiasm can dip if efforts are not made to keep the ideas fresh.
- Parents felt that it would be important for any new parents to be introduced to the KiVa programme during the annual induction programme.
- Parents felt that the school should continue to communicate with them using as wide a variety of methods as possible, appreciating the busyness of family life.
- The school should try to encourage more boys to volunteer to become peer mediators, perhaps by introducing rewards for this role. The fact that more girls have volunteered to date is however typical of other schools’ experience of peer mediation.
- The school should set out more clearly the time frame for review of its Behaviour and Anti-Bullying Policy, for instance noting that it will be reviewed regularly and at least every two years, and noting who would be responsible for leading the review.
- It would be important for the school to document its planning in relation to cyberbullying. While there is ongoing work around e-safety (e-Safety week, year 6 work on social media) cyberbullying is different, and is not noted as an issue on the post-Ofsted action plan, even

though all of the pupils interviewed had access to tablets/PCs at home and half had mobile phones. Some guidance around the school's power and duty in dealing with out-of-school cyberbullying incidents should be provided in the policies, so that the school is clear about how to respond should an incident arise.

- While the current Behaviour and Anti-Bullying Policy is already comprehensive, in the next planned review of the policy, it would be useful to reconsider the section on page 3 in which are listed various methods and motivations for bullying. In terms of methods, it would be commonplace to list as follows: physical (punching, kicking, pinching etc.) material (theft, extortion etc.), verbal (name calling, teasing etc.), indirect (rumour spreading, gossip etc.), social exclusion, cyberbullying. This should correlate with the options provided in the bullying log (Appendix 3). It should also be noted that the list of motivations includes (but *is not limited to*) the various issues, which might also include age, gender, ability (including high ability), and social background. Again this should correspond to the list in the bullying log. It would also be useful to include more detail in the policy of the KiVa strategies for dealing with incidents of bullying. These often don't rush to attribute blame and seek to facilitate the rebuilding of positive relationships. Perhaps this needs to be reflected more clearly on the Behaviour Management Steps section of the policy (page 11).
- For further information, the most useful single text on school bullying is Peter Smith's *Understanding School Bullying: its nature and prevention strategies* (London, Sage, 2014) which I would recommend as a reference text.

Conclusion

From this review of the anti-bullying policy, procedures and practice, I am confident that Meriden Church of England Primary School provides a safe, caring and supportive environment for learning, in which relationships are highly valued, and where the strong pastoral ethos provides a firm foundation for the recent development of innovative, inclusive, empowering and effective anti-bullying work, using the whole-school KiVa programme. Such a positive school environment is conducive to learning, facilitating the development of responsible and respectful members of the school community and society in general.

I wish the whole school community well as they seek to further embed and refine the policy, procedures and practice over the coming months and years. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you would like further advice and support.

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