

Bullying Prevention and Response Guide: Schools' Awareness and Use (February 2015)

Children at many schools in New Zealand experience bullying. The Bullying Prevention Advisory Group, set up by the Secretary for Education, has developed a resource called Bullying prevention and response: A guide for schools.

ERO asked 129 schools reviewed during Term 3, 2014 about their use of the guide. Most schools were aware of the resource and more than a third had used it. Schools most commonly used the guide as a tool to review their bullying policies and procedures.

Read more about ERO's findings using the links to the right.



Overview

Children at many schools in New Zealand experience bullying. The Bullying Prevention Advisory Group, set up by the Secretary for Education, has developed a resource called *Bullying prevention and response: A guide for schools*. This guide gives schools information and strategies to minimise bullying, and to respond appropriately when it occurs. The guide was sent to schools at the end of Term 1, 2014.

ERO asked 129 schools about the guide during Term 3, 2014. Most schools were aware of the resource and more than a third had used it. Schools most commonly used the guide as a tool to review their bullying policies and procedures. Some schools used information from it in their curriculum planning.

All the schools that did not know about the guide and most of those not using it were primary schools.

Introduction

Bullying Prevention and Response: A Guide for Schools (the guide) states that “bullying is one particular form of aggressive behaviour. It can be covert or overt in nature. Most widely accepted definitions of bullying behaviour are based around the following four characteristics: bullying is deliberate; involves a power imbalance; has an element of repetition; and is harmful.” [1]

Bullying is increasingly seen as a socio-ecological issue – related to interactions between students, and between students and their environment – rather than an issue where individuals are to blame. This means that multiple factors influence the likelihood of bullying, and the most effective way to reduce it is to create a respectful and inclusive school environment. [2]

The guide highlights the need for a whole-school approach to addressing bullying. It notes that rates of student-reported bullying decrease when schools create a “safe, positive, physical and emotional environment”. [3] If staff, students, parents and whānau work together to proactively create and maintain a respectful and inclusive school environment, bullying incidents and the need to respond to these should drop.

Students who attend schools with frequent bullying experience lower rates of achievement than students at similar schools with less bullying. [4] In some cases victims of bullying have been stood down from schools, reducing their ability to learn. [5] Students who experience frequent bullying are more likely to experience symptoms of depression, avoid going to school or attempt suicide. [6]

New Zealand students experience high rates of bullying compared with many other countries. Two thirds of students in Year 5 and nearly half of Year 9 students reported being bullied weekly or monthly. [7]

In a 2007 report on safety in schools, [8] ERO found that schools tended to have limited information about whether their practices, processes and behaviours were helping them to effectively reduce and respond to bullying incidents.

[1]

BPAG. (2014). Bullying prevention and response: A guide for schools (p.7). Retrieved from www.education.govt.nz/bullyingprevention

[2]

Boyd, S and Barwick, H. (2011) Wellbeing at School: Building a safe and caring school

climate that deters bullying, (pp.7-9). Retrieved from
<http://www.wellbeingatschool.org.nz/sites/default/files/wellbeing-at-school-booklet.pdf>

[3]

BPAG. (2014). Bullying prevention and response: A guide for schools (p.9). Retrieved from
www.education.govt.nz/bullyingprevention

[4]

Mullis, I. M. (2012). TIMSS 2011 International Results in Mathematics. Boston: TIMSS & PIRLS International Study Centre.

[5]

Towl, P. (2014). Would the real bully please stand up? New Zealand Journal of Educational Studies, 49 (1), 59-71.

[6]

Boyd, S and Barwick, H. (2011). Wellbeing at School: Building a safe and caring school climate that deters bullying, (p.6). Retrieved from
<http://www.wellbeingatschool.org.nz/sites/default/files/wellbeing-at-school-booklet.pdf>

[7]

Mullis, I. M. (2012). TIMSS 2011 International Results in Mathematics. Boston: TIMSS & PIRLS International Study Centre.

[8]

ERO. (2007). Safe schools: Strategies to prevent bullying. Retrieved from
<http://ero.govt.nz/National-Reports/Safe-Schools-Strategies-to-Prevent-Bullying-May-2007>

Methodology

ERO gathered information about the guide from schools reviewed during Term 3, 2014.

Reviewers asked schools whether they knew about the guide, if they had used it and, if so, how. In doing so, ERO also raised the profile of the guide and obtained examples of how it was being used and shared these with schools.

Findings

ERO collected data from 129 schools, which was representative of the national distribution of schools in type, location (rural or urban), roll size and decile. ^[10] Of these, 45 schools knew about the guide and were using it, 75 knew about the guide but were not using it and nine did not know about it.

Schools that did not know about the guide

Schools that knew about the guide but were not using it

Schools that were using the guide

Schools' feedback on the guide

Schools that did not know about the guide

All nine of the schools that did not know about the guide were primary schools (either full primary or contributing primary schools) and around half had fewer than 40 students. There was no difference between these schools and those that were using the guide in terms of decile or location.

A further five schools had not known about the guide until they were told about it as part of their ERO review. Four of these found out through the pre-review information provided by ERO and the principal of the fifth school read the guide while ERO was reviewing the school. Three of the four schools had begun using the guide by the time of their review and the other one intended to use it to review its processes.

Schools that knew about the guide but were not using it

Fifty-nine of the 75 schools that knew about the guide but were not using it were in urban areas. Fifty-five were either full or contributing primary schools. There were:

- 12 secondary schools (Years 7 to 15 or Years 9 to 15)
- four composite schools (Years 1 to 15)
- three intermediate schools (Years 7 and 8)
- one restricted composite school (Years 7 to 10).

Nineteen schools that knew about the guide told ERO that they were planning to use it but had not yet done so. Most intended to use the guide as a tool to review their current processes for preventing bullying.

Six of the schools that knew about the guide did not intend to use it as they felt that their own bullying prevention and response procedures were adequate. One other school knew about

the guide, was not using it, and did not have strong policies or procedures to manage behaviour or prevent bullying.

Schools that were using the guide

Forty-five schools (12 secondary, one composite, two intermediate and 30 primary) were using the guide. Many of these were medium-sized and in secondary urban or minor urban areas. Few small, very small or rural schools were using the guide.

The guide was most commonly used to review and adjust schools' procedures for preventing and responding to bullying. Among the schools using the guide:

- seven had made changes to their bullying prevention and response policies in response to the guide
- five had drafted changes, which were not yet approved by their boards of trustees
- six were in the early stages of using the guide to review their procedures.

Many schools were integrating parts of the guide into their existing plans and policies. These schools aimed to put in place school-wide systems to manage behaviour, and saw that aspects of the guide would complement their other strategies and initiatives.

Three schools had used the guide in their classroom or curriculum planning by making bullying prevention part of their health curriculum. In addition, Life Education Trust, a charity that teaches health and nutrition, had included aspects of the guide in their programme for a large, medium decile primary school.

One secondary school adapted the guide to their school's context, with a very proactive response to the document:

The school has a staff member who evaluated the guide and made the information specific for the school. They have adapted some of the suggested approaches and worked with the guidance counsellor to establish userfriendly templates for responding to bullying incidents across the school.

For example, the guide's bullying-assessment matrix was adapted to align with the school's expectations, along with a separate matrix/referral sheet for each incident for teachers to use. These systems ensure that the principal and other relevant people get information about issues as soon as possible.

All classrooms have a quick reference guide for rating levels of bullying. Students are being made aware of what bullying behaviour looks like, the rating levels and the likely

consequences.

A medium-sized secondary school in a minor urban area

Nine schools focused on the guide as part of professional learning and development (PLD) sessions. The teaching and leadership teams at one primary school worked together to identify the guide's key messages and what these meant for their school.

The senior leadership team and teaching staff were given copies of the guide to read and were each allocated a section to summarise to present the main points at a staff meeting.

They collectively identified the overall messages and summarised these visually on a chart. This helped them identify areas for improvement and what they needed to do.

A medium-sized full primary school in a rural area

Some schools were making links between the guide and programmes they already had in place. The most common of these was Positive Behaviour for Learning (PB4L) ^[11]. The following example shows how one school fosters consistency in school processes:

Staff have been told about the bullying prevention guide and several extracts about recognising and responding to bullying have been put into the staff handbook for 2014. The guide is linked to PB4L and the professional learning and development (PLD) carried out through He Kākano, a programme focused on improving culturally responsive practices to support Māori learners to succeed as Māori. ^[12] The deputy principal is responsible for linking these initiatives. He refers to the guide in the context of the school's recent review of its discipline structures and move to restorative, or corrective, practices. These practices are still being put in place.

A medium-sized secondary school in a secondary urban area

Some schools found parts of the guide useful for guiding their approach to dealing with bullying incidents. One school used parts as a quick reference:

The school has found the bullying prevention guide helpful in dealing with a situation recently. It was evident by the way the guide looked that it had been well read.

The principal and board told ERO that they had read the document and used the section 'Responding to bullying incidents' as a quick reference to identify what they were dealing with. They used the document to ask themselves questions, seek further advice and support and

reassure themselves that their actions were on the right track.

A small full primary school in a rural area

The guide was particularly helpful in one school's response to cyber-bullying:

The principal and leadership team were managing several Facebook bullying incidents. As a result of this, the deputy principal went to a course on the guide.

The principal said the guide fitted well with what the school had been doing but prompted some changes to strengthen their processes. For example, safety plans were set up for monitoring individual students at risk of self harming. These plans involved teachers, deputy principals, and the school social worker.

A medium sized full primary school in a main urban area

Schools' feedback on the guide

Schools that offered feedback were generally positive about the guide and its usefulness. They saw some of its diagrams as particularly helpful:

- Types of bullying (page 20)
- Participant roles in bullying (pages 27)
- Bullying assessment matrix (pages 46-47)
- Responding to bullying incidents (pages 50-51)

The principal of a small secondary school told ERO that using the guide as to reflect on and adapt the school's systems and procedures had been affirming, as it showed that the school was "on the right path".

The principals at two contributing primary schools noted that the document was quite large and complex. One principal had taken what she thought was needed out of it. The other suggested the guide should be "kept simple" and that a parallel website with paragraph summaries and links to further information would be useful.

A principal of a large primary school felt the guide was more relevant for intermediate and secondary schools.

[10]

More information about the schools in this investigation can be found in Appendix A.

[11]

Positive Behaviour for Learning (PB4L) is a suite of initiatives aimed at addressing problem behaviour and improving children's wellbeing and achievement. It includes PB4L School-wide, Incredible Years programmes and an Intensive Wraparound Service. See <http://pb4l.tki.org.nz/>.

[12]

See <http://hekakano.tki.org.nz/>.

Conclusion

Over a third of the schools sampled were using the Bullying prevention and response guide by the second term after its release. Five schools accessed the guide because of their ERO review.

Less than 10 percent of the schools ERO spoke with did not know about the guide and only six of the schools were aware but did not intend to use it. These six schools believed their current systems were adequate or did not have policies relating to behaviour management or bullying.

Schools using the guide mainly did so as a tool to review their existing bullying prevention and response procedures. Many schools had integrated aspects of the guide into their existing policies and plans, or intended to do so in the future.

The guide was also used as a reference document for dealing with bullying incidents and as a resource for curriculum planning. Several schools were in the early stages of making changes based on the guide, and the value of these changes is yet to be seen.

Many schools mentioned using the guide to help them respond to bullying. However, not many talked about proactive actions to move their school towards a culture that minimises bullying. Schools that actively create inclusive, respectful environments experience less bullying than schools that simply respond to bullying incidents.

The schools in this investigation were overall representative of schools nationally. The schools that did not know about the guide were all primary schools, and many were small and further actions are needed to engage more primary school leaders and teachers.

Next steps

ERO recommends that:

- the Bullying Prevention Advisory Group investigates how to make more primary schools aware of the guide
- schools reflect on how their culture and environment can help minimise and respond to bullying.

Appendix 1: Schools in this investigation

The type, location, rolls and decile range of the 129 schools involved in this investigation are shown in Tables 1 to 4 below. The schools included in this investigation are statistically representative of schools nationally. ^[13]

Table 1: School type

School type	Number of schools in sample	Percentage of schools in sample	National percentage of schools ^[14]
Contributing (Years 1 to 6)	41	32	33
Full primary (Years 1 to 8)	53	41	44
Intermediate (Years 7 and 8)	5	4	5
Restricted Composite (Years 7 to 10)	1	1	<1
Composite (Years 1 to 15)	5	4	4
Secondary (Year 7 to 15)	8	6	4
Secondary (Year 9 to 15)	16	12	10
Total	129	100	100

Table 2: Location of schools

School location	Number of schools in sample	Percentage of schools in sample	National percentage of schools
Main urban (>30,000)	69	53	53
Secondary urban (10,000-30,000)	8	6	6
Minor urban (<10,000)	24	19	12

Rural	28	22	29
Total	129	100	100

Table 3: Roll size

Roll size ^[15]	Number of schools in sample	Percentage of schools in sample	National percentage of schools
Very small	9	7	8
Small	27	21	23
Medium	48	37	37
Large	31	24	21
Very large	14	11	11
Total	129	100	100

Table 4: Decile

School decile	Number of schools in sample	Percentage of schools in sample	National percentage of schools
Low decile (1-3)	33	26	29
Mid decile (4-7)	53	41	41
High decile (8-10)	43	33	30
Total	129	100	100

[13]

The differences between observed and expected values in Tables 1–4 were tested using a Chi square test. The level of statistical significance was $p < 0.05$.

[14]

The national percentage of schools is based on the total population of schools as at 16 October 2014.

[15]

Contributing, full primary, intermediate and restricted composite (Years 1-10) schools' rolls are grouped as follows: very small <30 students; small 31-100 students; medium 101-300 students; large- 301-500 students; very large >501 students. Secondary (Years 7-15 and Years 9-15) rolls are grouped differently: very small <100; small 101-400; medium 401-800; large 801-1500; very large >1501.