



prejudice-related
bullying



NASUWT

The Teachers' Union

The largest teachers' union in the UK

INTRODUCTION

The NASUWT has been at the forefront of the campaign to highlight the problem of prejudiced-related bullying.

The NASUWT believes that all children and young people and staff in schools have a right to learn and work in a safe and secure environment that is free from intimidation, harassment, abuse and fear and where they feel valued and respected. That is why the NASUWT is committed to a zero-tolerance approach to bullying and to supporting schools in their efforts to tackle the problem.

The effects of bullying can last a lifetime. It is an invidious problem that seriously damages individual self-esteem, confidence, health and participation.

The NASUWT is committed to equality of opportunity for all pupils and staff. The Union actively opposes all forms of unfair discrimination.

The NASUWT was the first union to launch a programme of work on prejudice-related bullying. Tackling prejudice-related bullying is a key part of the NASUWT equalities strategy.

DEFINING THE PROBLEM

Prejudice-related bullying is a social problem that has its roots within wider social discourses that seek to justify negative behaviours against particular groups within society.

Prejudice-related bullying is often characterised by abusive behaviour, intolerance or ostracism on grounds of an individual's gender, gender identity, ethnicity, body image/size, sexuality, disability, age, religion or belief.

Prejudice-related bullying implies not only that individuals may be targeted by bullies on grounds of their identity and social characteristics, it may also be the case that individual bullies form alliances with other individuals who they believe to have common interests and a common identity.

Given its roots, effective strategies to tackle prejudice-related bullying require concerted action across all spheres of society, as well as in schools, to create a climate in which difference and diversity are recognised, respected and celebrated.

Bullying that is prejudice-related can include verbal and physical assaults, threats, offensive 'jokes' or language, mockery and ridicule, insulting or abusive behaviour and gestures, graffiti, and theft and damage to property.

It can also include the exclusion of others on grounds of their identity or characteristics. In particular, it should be noted that prejudice-related bullying is based on irrational views, beliefs and fears, leading to dislike and hatred of different individuals and groups. This form of bullying seeks to exploit the most vulnerable. It attacks diversity and belonging within schools and society and cannot be tolerated or ignored.

PREJUDICE-RELATED BULLYING OF PUPILS

It is difficult to gauge the extent of bullying of children and young people within schools. A number of studies have attempted to quantify the problem. A number of surveys have been conducted by a number of organisations. Childline monitors the types of calls received each year and the concerns raised by children and young people. In 2007/08, Childline received 37,694 calls about bullying, which accounted for 21% of all calls answered and was the single most common reason for calling. In fact, for the last ten years bullying has been the number one reason that children call Childline.

The impact of bullying should not be underestimated. Bullying is a damaging activity and the effects can last into adulthood. In the short term, bullying has an immediate impact on the wellbeing of the target, lessening confidence and lowering self-esteem, and this can lead to a fear of attending school. The health of the target is affected and symptoms are similar to those associated with stress: anxiety, panic, sleeplessness, headaches and mental distress.

There is some evidence that some victims and perpetrators suffer long-term effects. Prolonged bullying can lead to other illnesses and there are cases of children suffering conditions such as skin rashes and hair loss. According to the Samaritans, there are about 24,000 cases of attempted suicide every year by young people aged 10-19 in England and Wales alone. This is one attempt every twenty minutes. In the UK, for people aged 15-24, suicide is the second biggest cause of death after road accidents. In numerous cases of suicide amongst young people, bullying is cited as a factor.

Bullying on the grounds of prejudice can be particularly harmful to individuals, whether on the grounds of gender, gender identity, ethnicity, body image/size, sexuality, disability, age, religion or belief. These forms of bullying thrive on exploiting the differences between pupils and therefore often rely on targeting those who are minorities within a peer group or class, isolating them and exacerbating any fears they have of not fitting in.

In adult life, those who have been chronically victimised and bullied can have lower self-esteem and be prone to depression. Where bullying has been prejudice related, problems can be exacerbated by any further discrimination that individuals face in society. The long-term outcomes for

bullies can also be serious and, compared to their peers, numerous studies show that bullies are more likely to be involved in other antisocial behaviour such as vandalism and drug abuse. There is also evidence to suggest that bullies are more likely to be convicted of crimes in adulthood.

Bullying must be recognised, understood and taken seriously. Bullying is too often dismissed as 'part of growing up' or just 'teasing and joking'. The latter, 'it was just a joke', has been used since time immemorial by perpetrators of bullying, victimisation and harassment to excuse and justify their behaviour.

Some schools claim that they do not have a problem with bullying. The NASUWT finds this difficult to accept. Often these schools either do not understand the issues or they believe that identifying the problem will harm the reputation of the school. The high-stakes accountability regime in which schools operate is a prime motivator for this latter reaction.

PREJUDICE-RELATED BULLYING AND THE LINK TO TEACHERS

The priority for the NASUWT is to look after the interests of teachers and headteachers so that they can focus on their core task of teaching and leading and managing teaching and learning and focus on the children and young people in their care. How a school responds to the bullying and harassment of its staff will be indicative of how seriously and also how effectively the bullying of pupils is tackled. A school that fails to tackle effectively the bullying of its employees will find it more difficult to develop an effective and credible response to safeguarding pupils.

Teachers face the issue of bullying on two levels. Firstly, as professionals they have to deal with the consequences of pupil-on-pupil bullying but secondly, they can also be the victims of bullying.

Prejudice-related bullying and harassment of teachers themselves regrettably appears to be widespread. The *Safe to Teach?* report of the NASUWT survey of 5,000 teachers on health and safety in schools showed that 67% of teachers have suffered some form of prejudice-related bullying themselves whilst at work in the last two years. 52% of incidents were committed by pupils, 23% by line managers, 16% by colleagues and 2% by a governor. The most common form of bullying reported by respondents was general abuse in 36% of the cases, 16% reported abuse on the basis of body image, 13% sexism, 6% racism, 5% homophobia, 4% faith and 2% disability. Over 73% of the incidents were reported; however, 45% of the respondents said that no appropriate action was taken following the incidents that took place.

Bullying must always be taken seriously and swift and firm action taken whoever is the victim. It should also be recognised that if pupils who themselves are victims of bullying see teachers being bullied and no action is taken, it will make their fear of reporting the bullies and their own isolation even worse.

TYPES OF PREJUDICE-RELATED BULLYING

Bullying on grounds of body image/size

Bullying on the grounds of body image/size is one of the most prevalent forms of prejudice-related bullying. Recently, the level of such bullying has been exacerbated by national concerns about rising levels of obesity. Research suggests that children who are perceived to be overweight are often considered to be inferior and less valued than others in educational and social terms. The media's constant reinforcement of concerns about body image/size and the trivialisation of these issues is a key factor related to this problem.

Research undertaken by Emma Halliwell at the Centre for Appearance Research in the University of the West of England shows that adolescents rate physical attractiveness as the most important aspect of their lives. From a sample of 1,000 secondary school pupils aged 11-16, 50% of girls and 37% boys reported being unhappy about their appearance. From another sample of 600 secondary school pupils (11-19), 48% were fearful about being bullied because of their appearance. Ten per cent reported that they didn't go out to school at times when their self confidence in their appearance was at its lowest.

The *Safe to Teach?* report of the NASUWT survey on health and safety in schools showed that bullying on the basis of body image is a common form of prejudiced-related bullying with 16% of respondents reporting they had been bullied or harassed on these grounds.

Examination of prejudice-related bullying demonstrates a hierarchy of bullying in which some forms of bullying are treated less seriously than others. Bullying on the grounds of body image/size emerges as often being considered the least important. It is often dismissed as 'part of growing up' or playground banter.

Homophobic bullying

Homophobic bullying is increasingly recognised as a widespread problem in schools and is the second most prevalent reason for bullying of children and young people. Given the nature of this bullying, however, many individuals who are bullied may be unwilling to report the problem to parents, staff or colleagues since they may fear being further stigmatised and isolated. The problem of homophobia is often a hidden problem, because individuals may be unwilling to talk about it and may not feel safe in doing so.

Childline reports receiving an estimated 2,725 calls a year about sexual orientation, with boys accounting for 55% of these calls, even though they represent only 25% of all calls to the helpline. Specifically, 27% of these calls related to individuals who report being bullied on the grounds of homophobia.

Surveys undertaken by Ian Rivers, Professor at the Queen Margaret University in Edinburgh, have looked into the long-term effects of homophobic bullying. From a sample of lesbian, gay and bisexual adults who had been bullied at school, 53% had contemplated self-harm or suicide. Rivers also found that 72% of young people who experience homophobic bullying have a history of absenteeism from school.

The language used by school children and the recent increased use of the word 'gay' to indicate something that is bad, 'uncool' or 'naff' has heightened these issues. Beat Bullying has reported that 81% of primary age children identify the use of the word 'gay' as a way of attacking or making fun of someone.

The School Report published by Stonewall in 2007 and sponsored by the NASUWT asked 1,145 lesbian, gay and bisexual children a range of questions around school. Sixty-five per cent reported experience of homophobic bullying in school. Ninety-eight per cent reported hearing "that's so gay" or "you're so gay" at school. Of those who reported being bullied, 92% had experienced verbal homophobic bullying, 41% had experienced physical bullying and 17% had alarmingly received death threats. Sixty-two per cent of those who had reported homophobic bullying had nothing done about their complaint. Seventy per cent of those who experienced homophobic bullying stated that this has had an impact on their school work.

Complaints of homophobic bullying are often treated less seriously than some other forms of bullying and complainants often are urged not to raise or pursue the issues.

Racist bullying

Bullying and harassment on racist grounds is a persistent issue that affects schools, including those where there are relatively few pupils or staff from black and minority ethnic groups. It is distinct from bullying on grounds of religion/belief. Racist bullying is often directed against individuals based on skin colour but might also include bullying against individuals because of their ethnic or national origin, including those from Traveller or gypsy communities. The Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000 requires local authorities and schools to establish a specific policy on promoting racial equality, to monitor the impact of this policy and to monitor and record racist bullying.

Compliance with this duty is at times inadequate. The NASUWT believes that there is a need for a comprehensive system of monitoring these policies.

Research has shown that those children from black and minority ethnic backgrounds being bullied were twice as likely to be severely bullied. Research has also shown that a higher proportion of black and Asian pupils were bullied than white pupils or pupils from other ethnic groups.

There is a growth in racist bullying directed towards immigrants from Eastern Europe and it is important that schools do not simply see racist bullying in terms of a perspective based on notions of black pupils and white pupils.

Schools in some areas are faced with organised racist or fascist activity and they may need additional support from local authorities, trade unions and other bodies to ensure that children and young people and staff are protected from these influences. Activities of racist and fascist groups can prompt bullying activities against black and minority ethnic pupils.

Faith-based bullying

Faith-based bullying is directed against individuals and groups because of their religious belief or affiliation. It may also include bullying behaviour directed against individuals who are of no faith. The problem of faith-based bullying in schools has intensified in recent years, particularly in the case of Islamophobia. The term 'Islamophobia' refers to anti-Muslim prejudice and racism, based upon an unfounded hostility towards Islam. It is an issue for all schools, regardless of the number of Muslim pupils or staff within the establishment. Many black or minority ethnic children will have been caught up in the rise in Islamophobia seen since the events of September 2001 and July 2005 regardless of their actual faith.

The prejudice is not confined to the perceptions of being Muslim, and children within faith schools particularly can be singled out for not being part of or being different from the predominant groupings within a school. The rise in the number of actual and aspiring faith-based schools and the widely held public perception that this sort of education is better than the secular alternative may well lead to a rise in bullying based on faith.

Sectarian divisions in schools also exacerbate prejudice-related bullying on the grounds of religion. Centred on schools in Northern Ireland, and to a lesser extent Scotland, divisions between the Catholic and Protestant faiths can lead to bullying amongst pupils.

There is some blurring of the lines between bullying on the grounds of faith and race. Whilst the two areas are inextricably linked, the manner in which these prejudices are manifested is often distinct and this should be tackled in different ways.

Ageist bullying

Ageist bullying is directed against individuals on the grounds of their age and may be targeted at children and young people and staff, often leading to exclusion from the social group or network. Pupil-on-pupil bullying in relation to age usually exists in the context of the hierarchies of power and seniority within schools of older children bullying younger children. This is the norm but not exclusively the case.

The *Safe to Teach?* report of the NASUWT survey on health and safety in schools showed that almost one in ten teachers (9%) reported having been bullied or harassed because of their age whilst in school in the last two years. Teachers who are 50 years old or over are the most likely to be bullied or harassed on grounds of their age (17%), followed by those who are 30 or under (10%).

Disability bullying

A report from the Office of the Children's Commissioner for England showed that children with disabilities and those with visible medical conditions are twice as likely to become a target for bullying. In a survey of children with learning disabilities, Mencap found that eight out of ten respondents had been bullied and six out of ten had been physically hurt.

The NASUWT *Safe to Teach?* report showed that 31% of respondents who identify themselves as having a disability reported being bullied or harassed on the grounds of the disability whilst on the school premises in the last two years. In these cases, the perpetrator was a line manager in 45% of instances, followed by a pupil in 40% of instances and a colleague in 15% of instances.

Bullying on grounds of disability, like other forms of prejudice-related bullying, is linked to irrational and unfounded beliefs, assumptions and stereotypes about the disabled person and her/his abilities. A lack of positive portrayals of disabled people (particularly children) in the media has exacerbated this type of bullying.

The lack of specialist educational support is also a contributory factor. The NASUWT supports the 'Make School Make Sense' campaign calling for improved provision for pupils with autism. A survey revealed that it took over a year for nearly 50% of autistic students to receive any specialist educational support. The campaign from the National Autistic Society calls for more in-school support for students, one of the key factors in helping to tackle the impact of this type of bullying. Forty per cent of children on the autistic spectrum are subjected to prejudice-related bullying and the experience of children from a black and minority ethnic background is consistently worse.

Sexist bullying

Sexist bullying is most commonly directed against girls and women. It is influenced by a range of factors, including those in the media and the home. Research indicates that the emotional wellbeing of children and young people who experience domestic violence in the home is seriously affected and this has a deleterious effect on their capacity to learn and on their behaviour.

Sexist bullying can be linked to bullying on the grounds of body image, particularly as the media reinforce many stereotypes around both the gender roles of women and society's ideas of femininity and beauty.

A 2003 Childline/DfES report on tackling bullying found that from a sample of pupils in year 5 and year 8, girls were almost twice as likely to have been bullied as boys. Girls also reported a higher level of sexualised bullying than boys, with 5% reporting unwanted sexual touching.

Government figures show that in the 2006/07 academic year there were 3,500 fixed-term exclusions and 140 expulsions from schools in England for sexual misconduct and 140 children were expelled for incidents including groping, using sexually insulting nicknames, daubing obscene graffiti and serious sexual attacks. Two hundred and eighty of those expulsions were from primary schools and in 20 cases the child responsible was just five years old.

In January 2009, the national domestic violence charity Women's Aid released the results of a survey carried out in conjunction with *Bliss*, the teenage girls' magazine. The results showed that approximately one in five *Bliss* readers have been physically hurt by someone they were dating – and for sixteen year old girls, this goes up to one in four. The survey also showed that nearly a quarter of fourteen year old girls have been forced to have sex or do something else sexual they didn't want to do by someone they were dating.

A study of 3,000 11 to 13 year olds found that cyberbullying between pupils was incredibly sexualised in its nature. The research found that in 2002 14.4% of girls had been subject to cyberbullying, a figure that rose to 20.6% in 2006. In the same period, this type of bullying amongst boys declined by 2%.

Sexist bullying is not confined to pupils. The *Safe to Teach?* report of the NASUWT survey on health and safety in schools showed that more than one in six (17%) female teachers have suffered from sexist abuse at school or college in the last two years compared to one in 17 (6%) male teachers, making female teachers three times more likely than male teachers to be bullied or harassed because of their gender whilst at school.

Transphobic Bullying

Despite the introduction of supportive legislation, trans people still experience discrimination in education, in the workplace and in society in general. Gender variance can be experienced at any age and may be detected in children as young as two. Gender variance may cause extreme stress for young people and those that care for them and may make them a target for bullying. Those who are entering puberty may experience intensifying stress, which may have a negative impact on their school work, as their bodies become increasingly discordant with their gender identities.

Trans teachers are also targets for transphobic bullying. They also experience stress, especially if they undertake the transition from the gender role assigned to them at birth to that which accords with their gender identity. Gender variant adults who undertake the transition to a new gender role and receive hormone and surgical treatment to realign their bodies correctly may require time off work to attend medical appointments, undergo surgery and convalesce.

Transition is a complex process that requires trans people also to undergo many non-medical changes in the way they live and work, as well as in their relationships and in their work and home environment.

Schools are bound by a general duty to protect all their trans pupils and staff from transphobic bullying. In the case of staff, there is also a range of specific legislation that requires schools to consider their needs in Gender Equality Schemes and in procedures for handling transition.

In responding to the challenge that transphobic bullying presents, schools need to understand the nature of gender variance, the biological factors involved in its occurrence and how it differs from sexual orientation. Trans people, like anyone else, may be gay, lesbian, bisexual or heterosexual. However, in pre-pubertal children, it may be difficult for them or those who care for them to distinguish between uncertainties of gender identity and sexual orientation. Transphobic bullying is not the same as homophobic bullying although there are many similarities.

CYBERBULLYING – A TOOL OF THE BULLY

The 'traditional' strategies of the bully have been physical or psychological, either used singularly or in combination. At one time bullies had to carry out their activities when they were face-to-face with their victim. Now they have sophisticated tools. The information communications technology (ICT) that has transformed the working lives of many people and enhanced learning and leisure for many children and young people has brought fear

and isolation for some. Abuse of technology, the text, voice mail and camera applications of mobile phones, e-mails and the Internet have become the tools of many bullies. This cyberbullying is emerging as a key challenge for schools.

Pupils and staff can be the victims and targets of cyberbullying.

The growth of websites such as YouTube, RateMyTeachers, Bebo and Facebook has meant that any individual can post material on the Internet in an effort to gain fame, credibility or notoriety amongst peers and in order to intimidate, humiliate and accuse others anonymously and with relative impunity and the problem is more likely to occur outside rather than inside schools.

Mobile phones are used to bully through silent or abusive calls and text messages. Mobile phones are often the source of the inappropriate images posted on websites or transmitted to others. The NASUWT maintains that mobile phones should be treated by schools in the same way as an offensive weapon and action should be taken to prevent their use or access by pupils whilst on school premises during school sessions.

Cyberbullying has given the bully more tools to target individuals when they are at home or in another part of the school. Through e-mail, chatrooms, message boards and websites, bullies can find it much easier to make anonymous threats and to ridicule and humiliate other pupils on a large scale.

Cyberbullying is used to perpetrate prejudice-related bullying. The anonymous nature of this tool makes it far easier for perpetrators to make discriminatory statements and exhibit prejudice without the threat of immediate sanctions from others or disapproval from their peers.

The growth in popularity of certain websites and social networking sites not only provide the facility for pupils to post insulting comments and allegations against teachers, some actively encourage it. The pupils who do this are afforded anonymity. The teachers are named, exposed to ridicule and subject to false and malicious allegations.

It is estimated that between a fifth and a quarter of young people have been cyberbullied at least once. The activity is more likely to occur out of school than in. Bullies can now conduct their activities from the comfort of their homes while the bullied can no longer find refuge in theirs.

The NASUWT national campaign on cyberbullying has resulted in the profile of this issue being raised and action to be taken by Government to tackle the growing problem.

TACKLING PREJUDICE-RELATED BULLYING

Schools need to have in place effective systems to deal specifically with the problem of prejudice-related bullying.

School anti-bullying policies and procedures should include specific reference to prejudice-related bullying in all its forms.

School behaviour policies and exclusion guidance should state specifically the sanctions to be applied to incidents of bullying. The NASUWT believes in zero tolerance.

In school policies mobile phones should be treated as potentially offensive weapons and pupils' access to them prohibited during school sessions.

School policies and procedures should not either require teachers or encourage them to provide individual mobile phone or e-mail contact details to pupils.

Local authorities already have a statutory duty under the Children Act in relation to vulnerable children and young people. The requirement to produce a children and young people's plan should be amended to include a provision to ensure that all governing bodies have a specific policy in relation to bullying within their behaviour policy.

Comprehensive professional development should be provided for governors and school staff on how to:

- spot the signs of bullying of staff and pupils and how to respond swiftly and sensitively;
- create an environment and response structure where those who experience bullying feel confident in reporting incidents of bullying;
- encourage those who witness bullying to speak up;
- safeguard children;
- assure the health, safety and welfare of staff.

NASUWT ACTION AGAINST PREJUDICE-RELATED BULLYING

The NASUWT has been at the forefront of raising the problem of prejudice-related bullying and has ensured that this particular type of bullying is included in Government anti-bullying guidance.

The NASUWT has been working with Government, the Anti-bullying Alliance, and other agencies to produce the *Safe to Learn* suite of advice documents for schools. This suite includes guidance on tackling

homophobic bullying, guidance on bullying involving children with special educational needs (SEN) and disabilities and also guidance related to gender and gender identity.

The NASUWT has worked in partnership with the Young Anti-Bullying Alliance to produce an anti-bullying DVD for use in schools entitled *We won't let bullying hold us back...will you?*

As a result of the Union's high profile campaign for the establishment of a national database for monitoring the incidence of prejudice-related bullying against staff and pupils, the Government has announced a commitment to a national system of recording bullying incidents of staff and pupils.

The Union has developed a range of publications dealing with the various forms of prejudice-related bullying. These publications are of particular relevance to the school and college workforce, governing bodies and local authorities. They include:

- Tackling Homophobic Bullying;
- Bullying at Work;
- Tackling Islamophobia;
- Racial Harassment of Teachers;
- Disability Discrimination and Behaviour Management;
- *Safe to Teach?* An NASUWT report on health and safety in schools.

THE NASUWT'S CONTINUING CAMPAIGN

The issue of bullying now has a much higher profile than ever before. However, the NASUWT believes there is still more to be done to raise awareness of its nature and effects to enable a coherent and comprehensive national framework for supporting schools in tackling bullying to be developed.

The curriculum must reflect and teach about the racial, cultural and religious diversity of the UK and the world. It must tackle issues around stereotyping of gender roles and sexual orientation.

The Union believes that there is a need for heightened awareness of the use employers are making of the contents of social networking sites;

The Health and Safety Executive's good practice guidance and workplace health and safety audits should include reference to the abuse of technology.

The Union continues to campaign for greater protection in law for the victims of cyberbullying.

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