School-based bullying and victimisation strategies: Are they effective?

Bullying is widely recognised as a major social issue that infringes on a person's human rights to feel safe and free from violence and fear. School-based bullying has been defined as

a pattern of repeated physical, verbal, psychological or social aggression that is directed towards a specific student by someone with more power and is intended to cause harm, distress and/or create fear...it is a sub-category of aggression and is different to, but also related to, harassment and violence. It is not the same as conflict or social dislike even though, in

some cases, the outcome of both can be bullying (MCEECDYA 2011: 8).

School-based anti-bullying strategies have shown a lot of promise. A 2009 systematic review of 44 school-based bullying and victimisation interventions found that school-based bullying and victimisation strategies were generally effective, with an average decrease of bullying by 20–23 percent and victimisation by 17–20 percent (Farrington & Ttofi 2009). Key components of effective anti-bullying and victimisation strategies include early intervention approaches that target youths at risk of bullying to access additional support and skills development, as well as problem-solving approaches to assist with managing conflict. Table 1 provides an overview of the key initiatives.

What does not work?

Not every school-based approach is effective. Evidence indicates that the following approaches are unlikely to effectively tackle bullying and in some cases may have a detrimental impact:

» approaches that advocate zero tolerance;

» tightly controlling student behaviour;

» only providing punitive and negative responses to the behaviour;

» increasing security;

» not providing adequate support mechanisms when punishment is given; and

» not applying discipline consistently or fairly (http://www.bullyingnoway.gov. au/teachers/school-strategies/safe-support.html).

Table 1 What works in school-based bullying prevention strategies	
A long-term, school-wide multifaceted approach	Partnerships with parents and the education of parents on school bullying prevention policies
Detailed school-wide policy on bullying behaviours	Effective classroom management and classroom rules against bullying
Promoting a school environment that provides safety, security and support for students and promotes positive relationships and student wellbeing	Consistent application of behaviour management strategies rather than punitive approaches directed at the offending student, These strategies should emphasise problem-solving and promote treating victims with empathy
Encouraging students to respond negatively to bullying behaviour (such as not remaining a bystander) and to support bullied students	Social skills development within teaching and learning activities
Enhancement of the school physical environment and its supervision	Commitment and training of teachers
Curriculum that addresses bullying and related issues (such as values education)	Counselling for individual students and collaboration with other appropriate professionals to provide support
Increasing awareness of bullying via existing channels such as assemblies, forums and student-led activities	

Source: Adapted from MCEECDYA 2011

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1 Farrington DP & Ttofi MM 2009. *School-based programs to reduce bullying and victimization*. Campbell Systematic Reviews 2009:6. Oslo: The Campbell Collaboration

2 Ministerial Council for Education, Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs (MCEECDYA) 2011. *National safe schools framework resource manual.* http://www.deewr.gov.au/Schooling/NationalSafeSchools/Documents/NSSFrameworkResourceManual.pdf