5.5. SEND and A Whole Education Approach to School-Based Bullying Prevention

Research, however, indicates that programmes related to bullying prevention are most effective when they are located as part of a wider **Whole Education Approach** (WEA) that is communicated effectively at student, school staff and parent level. What constitutes effective communication will differ according to the profiles of students involved and will need to be identified in collaboration with students and teachers on a school-by-school basis.

A WEA to prevention of school-based bullying emphasises the importance of recognising schools operate within the communities within which they are located, which have values and norms of behaviour which impact school initiatives. A WEA ensures that local school initiatives recognise the importance of the interconnectedness of the school with the wider community including education, technological and societal systems, values and pressures, all of which can influence the prevalence and type of bullying and cyberbullying that occurs in a school.

A WEA comprises nine components which are considered to be interlined and interconnected within a holistic systemic framework. These components are outlined in figure 3 below and include legal and policy influence that are beyond a whole-school approach. This approach contributes to the pursuit of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This is especially the case for SDG4, which aims to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education, and SDG16, which aims to promote peaceful and inclusive societies. This approach aims to foster a more inclusive and participatory education system which would be to the benefit of SYP with SEND in schools.

https://tacklebullying.ie/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/cc-e1605190364935.png



Figure. 8: A Whole Education Approach to School-Based Bullying Prevention

The impact of school based climate and culture has been shown to have a significant impact on social inclusion and school-based bullying prevention. Whitted & Dupper, (2005) identified three key areas of focus in designing bullying prevention interventions in school settings, which include;

- School-level to change culture and climate

- Classroom level targeting teachers and other adults
- Student level targeting bullying, pupils who engage in bullying behaviour, & bystanders

These were further codified in work by Sipal (2013) who outlined a range of stratified and detailed considerations regarding how schools can develop inclusive Anti-Bullying Policies and practices.

School-level components

1. Questionnaires are utilized to assess the nature and extent of bullying and raise awareness.
    - Does the questionnaire given to students match the reading comprehension level of students with disabilities participating in the survey?
    - Does the student with disabilities understand the definitions of terms such as bully, victim, bystander, and the meaning of various forms of bullying?
    - Does the lowering functioning student with disabilities understand that he/she is actually being bullied?

2. The principal shows good leadership skills in implementing the program.
    - Is the principal a strong advocate for students with disabilities or does he/she treat them as a “surplus population”?

3. Anonymous reporting procedures are established in schools.
    - Do lower functioning students with disabilities understand the concept or the mechanism of telling faculty or staff about bullying incidents?

4. All areas of the school territory are well supervised.
    - This implies that some areas of the school are better supervised than others. Students with disabilities may lack awareness of problem areas or “hot spots” that should be avoided.

Classroom-level components

1. Regular classroom meetings are held to discuss bullying.
    - Students with disabilities may not be capable of full participation in this type of meeting. Some form of prompting may be required to enhance student participation and enable them to benefit from the classroom meetings.

2. Students are involved in developing rules about bullying.
    - Students with disabilities may not be capable of full or meaningful participation in this type of activity. Some form of prompting may be required to enhance their partial

participation.

3. The concept of bullying is integrated into the curriculum.

- Accommodations may be needed in order for higher functioning students with disabilities to master content related to bullying.
- Modifications may be needed in order for lower functioning students with disabilities to grasp developmentally appropriate curriculum content.

4. All school staff model positive interpersonal skills and cooperative learning and do not set a bad example by exhibiting dominating or authoritarian behaviour with students.

- Students with disabilities may be particularly sensitive to negative interpersonal interactions with adult school personnel.

5. Adults respond swiftly and consistently and are sympathetic to students who need support.

- Some students with disabilities infrequently display teacher-pleasing behavior and find that they are not well received by teachers and other adult school personnel. This may lead some adults to be less sympathetic to the student that is a victim of bullying.

6. Adults encourage students to include all students in play and activities.

- Students with disabilities may be excluded from play and activities because of characteristics or behaviours related to their disability and the fact that they are primary targets of bullies.

7. Adults send clear messages that bullying is not tolerated.

- Does the student with disabilities get the message?
- Is it clear to students with limited comprehension and reasoning skills?

8. Parents are encouraged to contact the school if they suspect their child is involved in bullying.

- Do parents of students with disabilities see school administrators as allies?
- Is there a history of positive interaction or hostility between the parents and school officials?
- Is the child capable of, or likely to, communicate bullying concerns to his/her parents?

Student-level components

1. Pupils experiencing bullying are taught social skills (i.e., assertiveness skills) and problem-solving skills.

- Is the curriculum appropriate for the functioning level of students with disabilities?
- Will accommodations or modifications be made?
- Give consideration to supporting agency and clear understanding of responsibility among bystanders who witness incidences of bullying behaviour.
- Restorative practices or approaches to develop empathy and understanding of the impact of bullying for other is an important response for pupils who engage in bullying towards others.

2. A support system is established for students who are the targets of bullies.
    - Is the student with disabilities capable of receiving the full benefit of the support system?
    - Will school staff recognize unique needs that may influence the dynamics of staff/student interactions?

There are a range of guidelines and specific consideration available to support schools, teachers, and school leaders in bringing about positive change in their school setting, focusing on social inclusion and participation for pupils with SEND. One example of comprehensive whole school guidelines for developing differentiated and inclusive school-based bullying prevention procedures that consider the needs of CYP with SEND is the below framework developed by the New Jersey Coalition for Bullying Prevention and Awareness (2012)

Key actions for school leaders, staff, Parents and community stakeholders

- Ensure that school policies and procedures specifically include CYP with SEND.
- Create an understanding of diversity among all students. Help students to understand ways in which we all are different and that disability is simply one of these differences.
- Ensure that materials and communications about anti-bullying and climate-strengthening approaches are modified as/if needed so that CYP with SEND understand the basic tenets and are engaged. Barriers to such understanding/engagement, including language, communication, emotional/behavioural and cognitive challenges, can all be overcome with proper modifications
- Include information that addresses anti-bullying issues specific to students with SEND in all School policy and code of behaviour training/initiatives.
- Involve families. Include students with SEND and their families in the school's anti-bullying assessment, planning and implementation activities.
- Include staff and parent/s with special education experience on the school safety (climate) team.
- Having team members who are familiar with a wide range of students with SEND will help your team be sensitive to their specific issues and challenges.

- Include students with SEND in data collection and assessment of bullying and school climate. Their voices will contribute to the development of more effective programs and policies.
- Encourage all students to participate in anti-bullying programs. For example, students with intellectual and developmental disabilities can successfully participate in curricula and programs related to improving school climate, inclusion, and anti-bullying as long as these programs are appropriately modified to meet their learning needs.
- Address isolation and moderate exclusion. Be sensitive to the needs of students who are separated out of the mainstream because they attend special class or school settings. Establish peer support programs and activities to promote friendships between students with disabilities and their mainstream peers.
- Encourage and provide for safe, accessible means for students to let an adult know about any bullying or negative behavioural interactions they have experienced.
- Address the needs of students with emotional and behavioural conditions. This subgroup may experience greater frequency of bullying (being bullied and engaging in bullying behaviour), partly due to issues related to their diagnosed condition or emotional self-regulation and impulse control challenges. All school staff should receive training in understanding and responding to children with emotional and behavioural disabilities in a supportive manner. Counselling services which focus on prosocial skill development, including anger management training, should be available.
- When bullying occurs, specific services should be available at school to help students with disabilities. Individualised plans should be developed to help students with disabilities cope with the negative impact of bullying experiences. This may include individual counselling or group counselling and restorative practice approaches to develop and strengthen relevant social and behavioural skills. Students with disabilities who engage in bullying behaviour may also need an individualised plan of intervention that provides individual counselling and/or group counselling with a focus on social skill, behavioural skill, and anger management skill development.
- School specialists, such as guidance counsellor and Special Educational Needs Coordinators may have an important role. External professionals such as psychologists and social workers can also have an important supportive roles. These professionals can work with all adults involved with the student, preparing the adults to be vigilant, protective, and ready to support skill development relevant to bullying. Specialists should consult with teachers to help teachers provide the specific support students with disabilities may need.

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