Setting Up a Whole-School Policy on Bullying

1. Introduction

Every educator hopes that all students can learn happily and grow healthily in a harmonious environment. Bullying, a common school discipline problem, will damage a school's harmonious atmosphere and hence we should face up to the problem. Since complicated interpersonal relationships are usually involved in bullying, the immediate intervention measures taken by individual teachers can only stop bullying temporarily. To have sustained effect in preventing school bullying, a whole-school policy on anti-bullying and related measures is required (DFES, 2002; Newman, Home & Bartolomucci, 2000; Smith, 1999). Some research studies point out that bullying is closely related to other misbehaviour (Chazan, Laing & Davies, 1994). An effective whole-school policy on anti-bullying can not only stop bullying, but also greatly improve school discipline (Olwells, 1991). In the long run, it will enhance students' self-discipline, self-respect and team spirit and help create a school culture of harmony, order, care and love.

2. Definition and Objective

A whole-school policy on anti-bullying implies that all school personnel work out together the objectives, methods, follow-up strategies, preventive measures and evaluation mechanism in tackling bullying. All staff have a clear understanding of the

policy. At the same time, there should also be close collaboration among functional teams to facilitate effective implementation and system review of the policy. The objective of setting a whole-school policy on anti-bullying is to stop and prevent school bullying, cultivate a harmonious and loving school culture, and enable students to enjoy a happy school life for healthy growth.

3. Characteristics

All stakeholders of the school, including members of the School Board or School Management Committee, the school head, teachers, students, janitors and parents, etc., will participate in devising a whole-school policy on anti-bullying. A thorough understanding of the bullying situation in school will help raise the concern of teachers and students, forge a consensus on the objectives and approach, and lay down principles and clear handling procedures for all teachers and students to follow in solving the problem of bullying. Apart from tackling bullying behaviour of individual or group of students, teachers can also launch preventive work at class or school levels. Only when school bullying becomes a whole-school concern, bullying behavior can then be stopped effectively, resulting in a harmonious and orderly school.

4. Implementation Method

Implementation of the whole-school policy on anti-bullying can be divided into three stages: Firstly, the Preparation Stage on setting up the policy; secondly, the Implementation Stage on full enforcement of the policy; and finally, the Evaluation Stage on reviewing the effectiveness of the policy with amendments (DFE, 1994). Depending on its own circumstances and needs, a school may pilot in a certain grade level first. For example, a school can try to implement the policy at the junior secondary level if it

considers bullying is more serious at this level. This, however, does not mean that bullying in other levels will not be handled.

Flow Chart of Implementing Whole-School Policy on Anti-Bullying

Preparation stage

Defining bullying
Conducting data collection, opinion survey and discussion
Forming a working group on anti-bullying policy
Training teachers

Implementation stage

Announcing the policy
Implementing the policy
Implementing support programmes

Evaluation stage

Assessing effectiveness
Making amendments

The procedures, details and points to note in implementing a whole-school policy on anti-bullying at different stages are as follows:

Preparation Stage

1. Defining Bullying

- Define bullying clearly and concretely

2. Conducting data research, opinion survey and discussion

- Purpose
  - Understand the bullying situation in school and raise awareness.
  - Examine the bullying situation in depth in school.
  - Review present preventive measures and contingency plans.
  - Lay down the direction and focus of the anti-bullying policy. Proposed policy contents are as follows:
    - The stance of the school on bullying
    - Definition of bullying
    - The right of students to study in a safe environment
    - Responsibility of a witness in a bullying incident
    - Strategies to stop bullying
    - Review of the policy

- Areas
  - Motives, types and methods of bullying; location and time that bullying cases frequently take place.
  - Sex, age and class, etc. of bullies and victims.
  - Victims' ways to face bullying.
  - Impacts of bullying cases to the victims, classmates, parents, teachers and school culture.

- Reactions and suggestions of students and teachers with regard to bullying incidents.

- Channels:
  - Conduct a whole-school opinion survey with a **questionnaire below** relationship and draw up a simple school layout plan to show the locations where bullying incidents took place for easy reference.
  - Conduct individual or group interviews to collect students' opinions.
  - Refer to relevant school records.
  - Report the findings in meetings or workshops, collect opinions from staff and social workers and invite representatives of parents and students to attend these meetings or workshops.

3. Forming a working group

- Aim: Draw up an anti-bullying policy and collaborate with different parties in implementing the policy.

- Scope of work of the working group:
  - Draw up preventive measures on bullying
  - Develop mechanisms and strategies on handling bullying and lay down guidelines.
  - Decide which categories of information are needed for record purpose and design the record form.
  - Explain in detail the anti-bullying policy to everyone in school.
  - Implement the policy and oversee the implementation process.
  - Review, assess and improve the policy.

4. Training teachers

- Given the crucial role of teachers in implementing the whole-school policy on anti-bullying, schools should provide them with relevant training in order to help them understand bullying and grasp the strategies and skills in handling /

preventing bullying.

Implementation Stage

1. **Announcing the policy**
   - Schools should explain the anti-bullying policy to all staff, social workers, students and parents to gain their trust and hence, to achieve consistency in implementing the policy.

2. **Implementing the policy**
   - School administrators (such as the principal, assistant principals, senior teachers, levels-in-charge, etc.)
     - Provide and allocate resources.
     - Coordinate among the working group, other functional teams and departments for better cooperation.
     - Provide administrative and management support
     - Establish communication channels and listen to teachers' feedback and comments on the policy.

   - Teachers
     - Teachers should take immediate action if there is any suspected bullying incident in class, during change of class or when they are on duty.
     - Follow up bullying cases, including investigation, intervention and recording.
     - For any suspected bullying case, contact and communicate with parents as early as possible and let them know their children's situation in school.
     - Explain the school's anti-bullying policy to students in morning assembly or week assembly.

   - **Students**
     - Victims and witnesses should report any bullying incident to their teachers immediately.

- Class monitors or student leaders on duty should watch out for bullying incidents. If there is any suspected case, they should inform their teachers immediately.
- Reject outright joining hands with the bullies. Do not watch, mock, cheer for or participate in bullying.
- Try to stop the bullies.
- Show concern to the victims.
- Learn to respect others and accept differences in thought, personality and behaviour.

Parents

- Parents should inform the school of any bullying incidents happened to their children as soon as possible.
- Parents should maintain good communication with the school to make a concerted effort and to implement a consistent strategy on bullying.

3. Implementing support programmes

Handling bullying behaviour does not confine to guidance and discipline. The working group should collaborate with other functional teams and departments in designing a range of support programmes on anti-bullying, for example:

- Integration into academic subjects: Teach students the attitudes and skills in handling bullying cases through different subjects and integrate elements of mutual respect, equality and love into their teaching contents.
- Class programmes: Teach students how to respect, care and cooperate with others through class-teacher periods, personal growth lessons or life education lessons.
- Cross-curricular activities: Through participation in whole-school activities, such as inter-class / house drama competition, comics competition, debates and slogan design competition, etc., teachers can arouse students' awareness

and invite all students to promote the message of anti-bullying.

- Prefects / student leaders' training: Provide prefects / student leaders relevant training, as they may encounter bullying incidents during their duty of school patrolling.
- Parent education: Prepare brochures and pamphlets on anti-bullying policy and distribute them to parents; enhance parents' understanding of the policy through talks on Parents' Day, parent orientation programmes or parents' newsletters.

Evaluation Stage

1. Schools should assess the effectiveness of anti-bullying policy continuously and make necessary amendments accordingly.
2. Schools may use the questionnaire on 'Peer Relationship' or design their own questionnaires to assess the effectiveness of the whole-school policy on anti-bullying. They may refer to the following indicators to conduct their analysis:

	Yes	No
Teachers are more alert towards bullying cases.	□	□
Teachers patrol the black spots where bullying incidents may take place regularly.	□	□
Teachers use an educational approach to tackle bullying cases effectively.	□	□
Students know that their school is committed to stop bullying.	□	□
Students feel that there are now fewer bullying cases in school.	□	□
Complaints from students on bullying decline in number. (Reported cases may increase tremendously at the early stage of the implementation of the policy, but this does not mean that bullying is getting more serious or the policy fails.)	□	□

Students indicate that they will report to the school when they are bullied.	☐	☐
Students will stand up and report any bullying incident.	☐	☐
There are more activities to promote peace, harmony, reconciliation and mutual understanding among students.	☐	☐
Bullying cases decline in number.	☐	☐