

Anti-bullying interventions in schools – what works?

Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation

Background

In 2017, the Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation prepared a literature review on effective anti-bullying interventions in schools. The literature review provided the evidence base for the department's anti-bullying strategy. Released in 2017, the NSW Anti-bullying Strategy brings together evidence-based resources and information to support schools, parents and carers, and students to prevent and respond to bullying effectively.

Bullying can be face-to-face, covert or online. It has three main features: it involves repeated actions, is intended to cause distress or harm, and is grounded in an imbalance of power.

In 2015, 14.8 per cent of Australian students reported being bullied at least a few times per month. Bullying peaks during the transition from primary school to high school, before decreasing to low levels by the end of high school. Boys tend to bully more than girls, however, girls use more covert bullying than boys.

Main findings

Anti-bullying programs reduce bullying behaviours by an average of 20 – 23 per cent.

The **most effective anti-bullying interventions:**

- take a holistic, whole-school and whole-community approach, which includes promoting awareness of anti-bullying interventions
- include educational content in the classroom that allows students to develop social and emotional competencies, and to learn appropriate ways to respond to bullying – both as a student who experiences bullying and as a bystander
- provide support and sustainable professional development for school staff on how best to enhance understanding, skills and self-efficacy to address and prevent bullying behaviours
- ensure systematic implementation and evaluation.

There are **Australian and international examples** of whole-schools approaches that have the characteristics common to effective anti-bullying interventions and have been subjected to program evaluations. Australian examples are the National Safe Schools Framework, Positive Behaviour for Learning, Friendly Schools, KidsMatter and MindMatters. International examples are the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program (Norway), Sheffield Anti-Bullying Project (England), Seville Anti-Bullying in School Project (Spain) and KiVa Anti-Bullying Program (Finland).

Schools need greater support to maximise the outcomes of anti-bullying interventions and to identify what is likely to be successful based on their specific contexts and requirements. There is very little available currently in the way of specific advice to guide schools in their choice of anti-bullying programs.

More information

Download the full literature review: [Anti-bullying interventions in schools – what works?](#) (audio paper also available). The department's anti-bullying website is: antibullying.nsw.gov.au

Related publications

[The role of student engagement in the transition from primary to secondary school – Learning Curve 1](#)