OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD

8 MARCH 2011

**FINAL REPORT OF THE CHILDREN AND
LEARNING SCRUTINY PANEL -
ANTI-BULLYING WORK
IN MIDDLESBROUGH SCHOOLS**

PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1.	To present the Children and Learning Scrutiny Panel's findings, conclusions and recommendations following its investigation of anti-bullying work in Middlesbrough schools.

INTRODUCTION

2.	In 2007 The Government made tackling bullying in schools a key priority and the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) made it clear that no form of bullying should be tolerated. Bullying in our schools should be taken very seriously - it is not a normal part of growing up and it can ruin lives.

3.	The law requires schools, through their governing bodies and teaching staff, to have measures in place to encourage good behaviour and respect for others and to prevent all forms of bullying. Local authorities also have a role to play in safeguarding and promoting the safety and wellbeing of children and young people.

4.	The scrutiny panel sought to investigate the current position regarding bullying in Middlesbrough schools and the role and involvement of the Council in supporting schools in this regard.

MEMBERSHIP OF THE PANEL

5.	The membership of the scrutiny panel was as follows:

	Councillors Ismail (Chair), Williams (Vice-Chair); and Councillors,
	Hawthorne, Majid, McTigue, Mrs Pearson OBE, Sanderson, Taylor and JA Walker;
	plus the following Co-optee: Father G Holland.

TERMS OF REFERENCE

6.   The terms of reference of the scrutiny investigation were as follows:

   1. To examine the role of Middlesbrough Council in addressing bullying in schools, particularly the implications of moves towards increased numbers of academies and the impact of reduced funding.
   2. To consider examples of school anti-bullying policies, differences between the primary and secondary sector and examples of best practice, if available.
   3. To examine how the effectiveness of anti-bullying work is monitored.

HOW INFORMATION AND EVIDENCE WAS OBTAINED

7.   The scrutiny panel undertook an in-depth investigation and met on four occasions between 14 October 2020 and 27 January 2011 to gather evidence and information. The panel also visited Acklam Grange School to speak to students who act as mentors for other students who are experiencing problems, including bullying.

8.   Information was submitted by Council officers, teaching staff and school students. The panel's final report was approved by the scrutiny panel on 22 February 2011.

9.   A Scrutiny Support Officer from Legal and Democratic Services co-ordinated and arranged the submission of written and oral evidence and arranged witnesses for the review. Meetings administration, including preparation of agenda and minutes, was undertaken by a Governance Officer from Legal and Democratic Services.

10.   A detailed record of the topics discussed at Panel meetings, including agenda, minutes and reports, is available from the Council's Committee Management System (COMMIS), which can be accessed via the Council's website at www.middlesbrough.gov.uk.

THE PANEL'S FINDINGS

11.   The scrutiny panel's findings in respect of anti-bullying work in Middlesbrough schools are set out in this report. Due to areas of overlap between all of the terms of reference, the panel's findings are not set out against a specific term of reference but cover the issues highlighted by them under the following headings:

   • Types of bullying
   • The law on bullying for schools and local authorities
   • The local position on bullying and the Council's involvement
   • Available support for victims of bullying
   • Development of bullying policies
   • Peer Mentor Support

TYPES OF BULLYING

12.   Before establishing what schools can do to reduce bullying it is worth considering what constitutes bullying to begin with. Bullying does not necessarily have to involve inflicting any kind of physical abuse on another pupil although that does unfortunately happen. Bullying can also be undertaken as:

- Taunting
- Physical contact or violence
- Verbal abuse
- Racial or homophobic abuse
- Cyberbullying

13.	These types of bullying can sometimes be very difficult to detect and may only come to the attention of teachers and/or parents if a pupil is being bullied so much that their attitude to school, behaviour and interaction with others is affected.

14.	Of the types of bullying listed above, 'cyberbullying' is the most recent form and has evolved via modern communication methods. It occurs when a child or young person is tormented, threatened, harassed, humiliated, embarrassed or otherwise targeted by another child or young person - typically, but not exclusively, using mobile phones or social networking sites on the internet. This type of bullying can be particularly harmful and upsetting for victims as, in many cases, the perpetrators can remain anonymous.

THE LAW ON BULLYING FOR SCHOOLS AND LOCAL AUTHORITIES

15.	The law[1] places duties on Children's Services Authorities, governing bodies, headteachers and teaching staff in respect of the safety and wellbeing of children. These cover a number of areas which can relate directly, or indirectly, to bullying - such as procedures relating to behaviour and discipline.

16.	**Children's Services Authorities** must:

- promote co-operation between the authority, its partners and others with a view to improving the well-being of children in their area - including children's physical and mental health and emotional well-being.
- ensure that their functions are discharged with regard to the need to safeguard and promote the welfare of children.

17.	The panel heard that the Council is involved in providing support services to Middlesbrough's schools and academies - including in respect of anti-bullying work. While the local authority can, through arrangements such as its Behaviour and Attendance Group, seek to influence schools on issues such as sharing best practice or standardising anti-bullying policies, schools are, in the main, responsible for determining their own arrangements and setting their own policies etc.

18.	**Governing bodies** are required, amongst other things, to:
- Produce a written statement of general principles to guide the headteacher in determining measures to promote good behaviour.
- Promote the well-being of pupils in their schools.
- Produce an annual profile answering the question 'How do we make sure our pupils are healthy, safe and well-supported?'
- Have a race-equality policy, and assess and monitor the impact of the policy.
- Establish procedures for dealing with complaints about bullying and all matters relating to the school, and publicise these procedures.

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[1] Including the Children Act 2002, Education Act 2004 and Education and Inspections Act 2006.

19.	**Headteachers** must:
- Determine the more detailed measures (rules, rewards, sanctions and behaviour-management strategies) on behaviour and discipline that form the school's behaviour policy. This must include measures to be taken with a view to 'encouraging good behaviour and respect for others on the part of pupils and, in particular, preventing all forms of bullying among pupils'.
- Publicise the measures in the behaviour policy and draw them to the attention of pupils, parents and staff at least once a year.
- Determine and ensure the implementation of a policy for pastoral care of the pupils.
- Ensure the maintenance of good order and discipline at all times during the school day and whenever the pupils are engaged in authorised school activities, whether on the school premises or elsewhere.

20.	**Teachers** must promote the general well-being of individual pupils, including ensuring as far as possible that pupils are free from bullying and harassment.

21.	In addition to the above, the law empowers members of school staff to act on bullying (or other inappropriate behaviour) by imposing disciplinary penalties for inappropriate behaviour. This can include regulating the behaviour of pupils when they are off the school site - which is particularly pertinent to cases of cyberbullying.

THE LOCAL POSITION

22.	In looking at the above, the scrutiny panel considered information in respect of

- The Strategic Needs Assessment of Middlesbrough's Children and Young People's Plan 2011-14.
- Action taken by the local authority.
- National TellUs Survey and Use of Performance Indicators

The Strategic Needs Assessment of Middlesbrough's Children and Young People's Plan 2011-14.

23.	Information was considered from The Strategic Needs Assessment of Middlesbrough's Children and Young People's Plan 2011-14. This was submitted to the Council's Overview and Scrutiny Board on 13 January 2011, as part of an update report on the Middlesbrough Children's Trust, and states that:

Analysis of Middlesbrough's Annual Pupil Survey for 2009 indicates that bullying is a serious and persistent problem that is highly prevalent among children and young people.

24.	The Needs Assessment goes on to indicate that bullying is significantly higher for younger children at primary school than for secondary aged children - with 40% of this age group stating that they had been bullied or picked on in the previous 12 months - an increase of 5% since 2008. Comparatively, 14% of secondary school pupils indicated that they had been bullied, which was an 8% decrease in comparison to the previous year.

25.	Data derived from the national Tellus4 survey of pupils in 2009 (see further details from paragraph 37 onwards) indicates an average rate of bullying experienced by young people in Middlesbrough of 30.2%. This:

- Represented a significant reduction from 52.3% in 2008.
- Was in line with rates of regional and statistical neighbours.
- Was higher than the national rate of 28.8%.

26.   The Tellus survey also indicated that:
- 42% of respondents had experienced bullying at some time.
- Of these pupils, 21% had been bullied in the previous four weeks and a further 10% in the previous six months.
- Of those bullied in the past year, 23% had been bullied at school on most days; a further 8% every day; and a further 11% every week.

27.   The scrutiny panel was advised that the results of the TellUs survey have been challenged by headteachers, especially in primary schools, with the view being expressed that these are at odds with recorded statistics on levels of bullying. Reference was also made to the generally positive findings of OFSTED inspections of Middlesbrough schools in respect of levels of bullying and how it is dealt with.

Action taken by the local authority
28.   The scrutiny panel was advised of action that has been taken by the Council's Children, Families and Learning Department in recent years to address bullying.

29.   In Autumn 2008 the Children, Families and Learning Department's Senior Management Team undertook a review of progress made towards targets set in relation to key national indicators. In relation to National Indicator 69 (the number of young people who had experienced bullying) a gap in service provision was identified - in that Middlesbrough, unlike most other local authorities, did not have an Anti-Bullying Co-ordinator. A bid was then submitted in 2009 to Action for Children[2] for funding to commission an Anti-Bullying Consultant and for a project aimed at ensuring that primary, secondary and special needs school children aged 5-16 took a leading role in developing and sustaining their own anti-bullying schemes and projects. The funding bid was successful and An Anti-Bullying Consultant was subsequently appointed with the aims of:

- Achieving high standards of emotional health and well-being amongst children and young people through the development of an anti-bullying project.
- Actively engaging children and young people in the design and planning of a programme to ensure that schools were emotionally healthy places to be.
- Focussing on strategies and procedures that would support the reduction of bullying in schools.
- Introducing an accreditation scheme that would set the standard for positive emotional health and well-being in Middlesbrough Schools.

30.   In early 2009, a steering group comprising the Behaviour and Attendance Adviser, Anti-Bullying Consultant and other professionals from Children's Services, began to develop an Emotional Health and Well-being Accreditation Scheme. Central to the steering group's considerations was the fact that the scheme should be owned by the young people themselves and should be simple to follow and flexible.

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[2] Action for Children is a registered charity which 'Supports and speaks out for the most vulnerable and neglected children and young people in the UK.'

31.   The Project was launched at a Conference in March 2009 with thirty-one schools in attendance. The schools received an overview of how the scheme operated in three sequential steps, starting with bronze and ending with gold.

32.   The scrutiny panel was advised that there are currently four secondary, sixteen primary and four special schools engaged in the scheme, with an Action Plan produced for each school. Around two thirds of the schools had implemented their Action Plans at November 2010, with the remainder well on the way to completion. It is envisaged that the Silver Award schools would start to implement their independent 'Gold' research and evaluation stage in the next academic year.

33.   Members also heard that the Accreditation Scheme has produced some unexpected benefits due to the fact it is entirely student led. This has been the range of individual projects that have been undertaken. Schools initially explored areas of self-awareness, managing feelings, motivation, social skills and empathy and bullying issues but as the participants' initial research highlighted different priorities, the nature of the projects became quite diverse. For example:

- Some schools that looked specifically at anti-bullying, opted to implement training for peer mentors and also produced educational videos around issues such as cyber-bullying.
- Other schools, citing social skills as a main causal factor of negative relationships, created outdoor spaces and activities to help students to integrate more successfully.
- A collection of schools identified young men exhibiting aggressive behaviour or at risk of exclusion as participants for a sports programme aimed at boosting their self-esteem, managing their feelings and channelling their aggression in a positive way.
- Another school, whose young people cited lack of motivation in some pupils as a reason for a slow start to the day, implemented new breakfast club activities to wake pupils up and ensure that they were looking forward to their learning.

34.   The scrutiny panel was advised that one of the lasting legacies of the project has been the increased awareness of how young people can themselves actively set priorities and commission resources in a cost-effective way

35.   In addition to the work above, a number of schools, and individuals in schools, have received input from the Anti-Bullying Consultant, either through self-referral, referrals from Education Welfare, or from the Behaviour Support Team. Also, the North East Regional Anti-bullying Alliance Adviser had been involved with the authority since early 2009 owing to Middlesbrough being targeted by national strategies. As a result, an Anti-bullying Strategies training course has been delivered to the Behaviour Support Team to assist it with its work in schools, with further training scheduled for relevant agencies/focus groups.

36.   Arrangements have also been made to involve a Children's Social Care Team in anti-bullying training. The aim of this approach is to ensure that anti-bullying strategy/practice is embedded within the authority and local schools. An information leaflet for schools has also been produced. This includes a definition of bullying plus guidelines and guidance on support available.

National TellUs Survey and Use of Performance Indicators

37.   Further details were provided in respect of the national Tellus Survey, which was a survey that was introduced in 2007. This was initially undertaken by OFSTED, to ask children and young people from years 6, 8 and 10 for their views about their local area. The basis of the survey was to ensure that the first-hand views of children and young people were taken into account as part of each local authority's inspection process, and to provide data to compare at a national level. In 2009, responsibility for the 2009 survey was taken on by the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF), which commissioned the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) to develop and deliver TellUs in Autumn 2009.

38.   Five National Indicators (NIs) are derived from data produced by the TellUs Survey. As outlined above, one of these indicators (NI 69) shows the percentage of children that have experienced bullying - with the rate of children experiencing bullying in Middlesbrough having dropped by 22.1% - TellUs 3 survey reported 52.3%, with TellUs 4 at 30.2%.

39.   The panel was advised that the change of National Government in May 2010 has impacted on anti-bullying work. In particular:

- The TellUs survey was cancelled by the Government's Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) with effect from August 2010. It will therefore be difficult to measure how well Middlesbrough is performing in relation to national and statistical neighbours as there will not be future TellUs surveys
- There is no intention at the present time, especially given current Government cut backs on funding, to request any future financial support towards anti-bullying work.
- Further work in this area may be possible on the basis of schools 'buying back' the service - but there will no longer be central funding available to maintain earlier work with schools.
- The Behaviour and Attendance Adviser is at risk of redundancy due to cuts in Government grants.
- The Anti-Bullying Alliance's[3] contract with the Department for Education will terminate from April 2011.

AVAILABLE SUPPORT

40.   Bullying is recognised as a serious issue that requires action to support victims and also perpetrators to change their actions. The Government's Department for Children, Schools and Families (renamed 'Department of Education' in May 2010) - as well as other bodies and organisations supporting teaching staff, such as the online 'Teachernet' (see www.teachernet.gov.uk) - have produced numerous documents to provide comprehensive and practical guidance to tackle bullying. The DCSF also provided advisers with expertise in the field of bullying to help schools implement the guidance and draw on best practice.

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[3] The Anti-Bullying Alliance is a national umbrella group of over 60 charitable and other organisations working in the anti-bullying field.

41.   The importance of addressing bullying, and perhaps the scale of the task facing those involved, is illustrated by the amount of support that is available from a number of diverse sources and organisations nationally. This covers support for victims of bullying, as well as providing examples of the different ways in which bullying can be addressed and resolved, both for perpetrators and victims.

42.   The scrutiny panel was informed of examples of the type of support that is available, as follows. This is not an exhaustive list but perhaps illustrates the seriousness of bullying in that there are numerous organisations and support resources available to address it.

Beatbullying

43.   Beatbullying[4] is a registered national charity which works with children and young people across the UK to provide them with all important opportunities to make positive and lasting changes to their lives and outlook. In particular, the organisation works intensively with those so deeply affected by bullying that they can barely face going to school the next morning.

44.   Beatbullying aims to make changes in attitude of those young people that bully, working with them to take responsibility and a sense of ownership over their actions, building foundations for change and improvement in their life chances and opportunities. The focus is on shaping attitudes and changing behaviours through a range of programmes which have peer mentoring and peer activism at their heart.

NHS UK

45.   The link between bullying and potential adverse effects on health is an obvious one. The NHS UK website[5] provides information for victims of bullying and also for bullies on how they can stop bullying.

Childline

46.   Childline is a free telephone counselling service for children and young people who are experiencing any problems in their lives, including bullying. Support is also available via online forums and via text messages. A specific section of the Childline website[6] deals with bullying.

Directgov

47.   Directgov is a national information website which 'puts all public services in one place.' A section of the Directgov website[7] includes information and support for young people who are being bullied, young people who know someone who is being bullied and for bullies themselves, to help them to change their behaviour. It also includes a section on cyberbullying.

Kidscape

48.   Kidscape[8] is a national charity which is committed to keeping children safe from abuse. Kidscape is the first charity in the UK established specifically to prevent bullying and child sexual abuse. It believes that protecting children from harm is key.

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[4] See http://www.beatbullying.org/dox/home/about-bb.html
[5] See www.nhs.uk/Livewell/Bullying/Pages/Howtostopbeingabully.aspx
[6] See www.childline.org.uk/explore/bullying/pages/bullying.aspx
[7] See www.direct.gov.uk/en/YoungPeople/HealthAndRelationships/Bullying/DG_10031374
[8] See www.kidscape.org.uk/childrenteens/index.asp

49.   The organisation works UK-wide to provide individuals and organisations with practical skills and resources necessary to keep children safe from harm. The Kidscape staff equip vulnerable children with practical non-threatening knowledge and skills in how to keep themselves safe and reduce the likelihood of future harm. Kidscape works with children and young people under the age of 16, their parents/carers, and those who work with them, via a helpline and other support measures. The Kidscape website indicates that:

- Bullied children are 6 times more likely to contemplate suicide than their non-bullied counterparts.
- Each year 10-14 youth suicides are directly attributed to bullying (Home Office Statistics).
- 1 in 12 children are badly bullied to the point that it affects their education, relationships and even their prospects for jobs in later life.

NSPCC
50.   The NSPCC website is a useful resource which provides links to numerous reports and policy documents[9] covering issues such as anti-bullying policies, bullying behaviour, best practice policies and sexual bullying in educational settings.

Stonewall
51.   Stonewall is the UK's lesbian, gay and bisexual charity. The organisation has an Education for All Programme[10] which aims to work to tackle homophobic bullying. The programme also covers youth volunteering and teaching resources.

DEVELOPMENT OF ANTI-BULLYING POLICIES

52.   The scrutiny panel was interested to examine examples of Middlesbrough schools' bullying policies. As the following paragraph explains, these are fairly standardised across the Borough. A copy of Acklam Grange Secondary School's Anti-Bullying Policy was made available to the scrutiny panel, together with those of Breckon Hill and Captain Cook Primary Schools.

53.   A member of staff from Acklam Grange Secondary School attended a panel meeting to speak to Members. It was explained that the policy had been adapted from a generic example produced by Middlesbrough Council. It is understood that most, if not all, local schools have developed their anti-bullying policies in this way.

54.   Reference was also made to a Behaviour and Attendance Group, which comprises representatives from all Middlesbrough secondary schools and academies and local authority officers. The starting point for addressing bullying is an acknowledgement that it does happen in all schools. It is also recognised that a consistent approach to dealing with bullying is beneficial and the Behaviour and Attendance Group is involved in sharing information and best practice and developing core principles - for example it has been acknowledged that, due to the transient nature of pupils in Middlesbrough, maintaining consistency between schools is important. Early intervention has also been recognised as important, together with an approach of support for victims and sanctions for the bullies. Action is also encouraged in partnership with parents.

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[9] See documents listed at www.nspcc.org.uk/Applications/Search/Search/aspx
[10] See website link http://www.stonewall.org.uk/at_school/default.asp

55.   The panel was also informed of how Acklam Grange has developed the detail of its Anti-Bullying Policy. As part of established transition arrangements, Year 6 pupils were asked for their perceptions of life in a secondary school. One of the most frequent issues that was highlighted was a fear of bullying and in particular cyber-bullying.

56.   Reference was made to the fact that in the past the school had had a complete ban on pupils taking mobile phones into school. However, after the views of the pupils were taken into account, they were now permitted to take phones to school but restricted to using them only during lunchtime and at the end of the school day. The school representative informed the scrutiny panel that this system appears to work well and has not been abused. There had also been no reported instances of cyberbullying in the previous term. In addition, pupils have said that having access to their mobile phones makes them feel safer on their way to and from school. The school is also looking at the possibility of sending homework and messages to pupils via their mobile phones in the future.

57.   A copy of the School's Anti-Bullying Policy is included in the information/planner that is supplied to every pupil and is also made available via the school website. In addition, all Year 7 pupils receive a starter pack that forms a contract between school, pupils and parents and copies of all relevant policies are supplied in the pack.

58.   Acklam Grange's Anti-Bullying Policy was studied by the scrutiny panel, with Members being advised on how cases of bullying are addressed and dealt with. This is normally in partnership with parents through a sanctions process with strict criteria and guidelines. The school's belief is that the key to any behaviour policy was consistency of approach and zero tolerance to bullying.

59.   It was noted that the school also has a system in place to record and monitor all reported cases of bullying. The scrutiny panel welcomed this approach but was advised that this is not necessarily the case in all Middlesbrough schools as each is responsible for devising its own administration systems.

60.   As part of its investigations, the scrutiny panel was advised that the development of Peer Mentors was included in the Secondary Education Improvement Partnership Strategic Plan as part of work being undertaken by the Anti-Bullying Co-ordinator. This is aimed at ensuring that peer mentors add capacity to work being undertaken to ensure that all pupils regularly attend and enjoy school. Funding of £15,000 has been allocated to enable student representatives from each secondary school to strategically manage four areas of peer mentoring that will support behaviour and attendance in schools. These specific areas are cyber-bullying, one to one support for persistent absentees, restorative approach and sports leadership for social, emotional aspects of learning (SEAL) development. Meetings to progress these issues commenced in November 2010.

61.   Particular reference was made to the Peer Mentoring Programme that has been operating at Acklam Grange School for a number of years. The scrutiny panel indicated that it would like to explore this issue further and, accordingly, arrangements were made for the scrutiny panel to visit the school and speak to some of its Peer Mentors.

PEER MENTOR SUPPORT

62.   Main points arising from the visit to Acklam Grange School and speaking to teaching staff and Pupil Peer Mentors were as follows:

a) The school has recently been re-built as part of the national Building Schools for the Future Programme. Anti-bullying measures were incorporated into the design and have worked well to date. These include the design of toilets. When the plans for the new school were designed, it was identified by pupils that one of the main areas where bullying took place was in school toilets. With this in mind, toilet areas at the new school comprise single cubicles in blocks of three or four, located in main corridors/thoroughfares. Associated washing facilities are of an open plan design adjacent to the toilets. Staff offices overlook all toilet/washing areas.

b) CCTV is used throughout the school. This covers areas outside toilets/washing facilities and stairs/corridors.

c) All pupils are consulted each time the School's Anti-Bullying Policy was updated. This has provided valuable content and also empowers pupils to assist in addressing bullying issues.

d) There are currently 80 trained Peer Mentors in Years 10 and 11 and all are volunteers. Eight of the Peer Mentors have also received specialist training on Cyber-Bullying, which has been identified by Year 7 pupils as a particular issue for them.

e) The mentors support vulnerable pupils on any issues that are of concern to them, including bullying.

f) The scheme initially began about seven years ago using a National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC) trainer after funding was received by the school from that organisation. The NSPCC trained 10 school staff on the scheme's operation at that time, although training since then has been undertaken in-house on a rolling programme basis. The main resource for the success of the Peer Mentor scheme has been the pupils themselves, although there are costs for the initial training and an annual residential at Lanehead Outdoor Education Centre in the Lake District. There were previously two residential courses per year but this has now reduced to one due to funding issues.

g) The school considers that the scheme has worked well, with positive results achieved.

h) The Peer Mentor scheme is not unique to Acklam Grange School, with similar schemes operating in other Middlesbrough Schools. The Council's Head of Inclusion attends a joint schools Behaviour and Attendance Group where good practice is shared.

i) Members of the scrutiny panel met three Year 10 pupils, who are Peer Mentors and heard that:

- They have been advised (by pupils) that they are more approachable than teachers - though it is noted that peer mentors do make it clear to fellow pupils that their confidence might have to be broken if an issue requires adult intervention. Teaching staff confirmed that any action needed when a bully is identified would be dealt with by a member of staff.
- They are aware (through training) of the particular issues surrounding bullying and have supported pupils in this area. A particular issue is trying to ensure that pupils are confident enough to make initial contact and report bullying.

- The most difficult aspect of the mentor's role is getting to know the pupils that they are supporting, for example finding out about their lives and interests.
- Mentors are trained in a group setting and are taught different techniques including listening and befriending skills. The pupils work as teams and discuss what bullying might feel like to a victim and how they can help more vulnerable pupils.
- They work through building up trust, with examples being given of vulnerable pupils who have gained confidence and formed very positive relationships as a result.
- The Peer Mentors visit form groups for about 20 minutes each week and get to know the pupils in that group. Quiet areas are available if pupils want to speak privately.
- The school's residential trips to Lanehead, for vulnerable pupils in Years 7 and 8, have proved especially beneficial. These have provided an excellent forum for mentors to work and support mentees on a one to one basis, with excellent results. An example was given of a pupil who was a non-attender at the school and who, following a week at Lanehead Outdoor Education Centre, and support from a peer mentor, was now achieving 75% attendance.
- The Peer Mentors consider that it may be worthwhile to consider training for the bullies themselves, in order to help them understand the consequences of their actions.

CONCLUSIONS

63. Based on the evidence gathered in the scrutiny investigation the Panel concluded that:

1. Providing a safe and happy place to learn is essential to ensuring the safety and well-being of all members of the school community. This assists with achieving school improvement, raising attainment, attendance and promoting equality and diversity. The effects of bullying can seriously impact on all of these areas - bullying is not a normal part of growing up and can ruin lives.
2. The amount of support that is available from a large number of organisations and bodies nationally illustrates that bullying is, unfortunately, a common problem. Although history would seem to indicate that bullying is always likely to be a part of school life, and that it is unlikely to ever be completely eradicated, this must remain an aspiration for all involved in anti-bullying work. Acknowledgment that bullying does occur is an important part of taking steps to address the problem. It is also important to ensure that anti-bullying work keeps up to date with modern forms of bullying, such as cyberbullying.
3. Middlesbrough Council has a legal duty to protect children's physical and mental health and emotional well-being and to ensure that its functions take into account the need to safeguard and promote the welfare of children. The local authority can also seek to influence schools, although it is recognised by the scrutiny panel that each school is responsible for developing and delivering its own anti-bullying strategy and ensuring that measures are in place to address bullying. The consistent approach to developing school strategies, as promoted through the Council's Behaviour and Attendance Group,

which is involved in sharing best practice between schools, is welcomed by the panel. In addition, the success of Acklam Grange School's Peer Mentor Scheme in supporting vulnerable pupils in areas such as bullying is welcomed as an example of good practice - although it is recognised that this approach may not always be appropriate and that different approaches to resolving bullying problems have been taken by other schools.

4. Bullying was recognised in Middlesbrough in recent years as an area where action was needed. The scrutiny panel is pleased to see the work that has been undertaken (by the Council, by local schools and also in partnership) in this regard - such as through the Behaviour And Attendance Team, the appointment of an Anti-Bullying Co-ordinator and work carried out by individual schools to develop and implement anti-bullying strategies. As a result, it is hoped that the trend highlighted by the last TellUs Survey - ie of a significant reduction in the percentage of children in Middlesbrough who have been subjected to bullying - can be continued.

5. Following the Department of Education's decision to abolish the annual TellUs survey for schoolchildren, it is probable that there will no longer be a formal system of assessing the level of bullying in Middlesbrough, and thereby measuring the effectiveness of anti-bullying work. In particular, the impact of the Action Plans developed by schools as part of the ongoing development of the Emotional Health and Well-being Accreditation Scheme is unlikely to be measured.

6. Cuts which are currently being implemented in local government funding are likely to impact on the Council's involvement in anti-bullying work. As indicated above, the scrutiny panel recognises and welcomes progress that has been made locally but is concerned at the possible implications of budget reductions and potential uncertainty in respect of service areas such as behaviour support and on posts such as the Anti-Bullying Co-ordinator.

RECOMMENDATIONS

64.   Following the submitted evidence, and based on the conclusions above, the scrutiny panel's recommendations for consideration by the Overview and Scrutiny Board and the Executive are as follows:

1. That Middlesbrough Council's commitment towards addressing bullying in local schools - and therefore fulfilling its duty of protecting children's physical and mental health and safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children - is reiterated. This should be achieved by ensuring that, as far as possible in the current difficult financial climate, schools continue to be supported through the work of local authority behaviour support staff and in particular the continuation of the Behaviour and Attendance Group to ensure that examples of best practice - such as the successful use of peer mentors - continue to be promoted and shared.

2. That measures are put in place to mitigate the impact of any funding reductions - for example by liaising with schools so that victims of bullying can be directed towards the wide range of provision that is available to support them both within and outside schools; or by promoting and publicising available support through Council agencies and facilities such as the Connexions service or MyPlace development.

3. That, following the abolition of the annual TellUs survey, schools are encouraged to introduce a recording system for all reported instances of bullying. Results of this exercise should be collated centrally by the local authority so that the effectiveness of anti-bullying work can continue to be monitored.
4. The Children and Learning Scrutiny Panel is updated with information and statistics on bullying as part of the Annual Standards Report that is currently considered by the panel.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

65. The Panel is grateful to all those who have presented evidence during the course of this investigation, and who have assisted in its work, and would like to place on record its thanks for the willingness and co-operation of the following:

- J Bate - Headteacher, Acklam Grange School.
- M Burnett - Head of Inclusion, Acklam Grange School.
- J Catron - Head of Achievement - Children, Families and Learning, Middlesbrough Council.
- P Swann, Deputy Headteacher, Acklam Grange School.
- Year 10 Pupil Mentors, Acklam Grange School

BACKGROUND PAPERS

66. The following background papers were consulted or referred to in preparing this report:
- Agenda, Reports and Minutes of Children and Learning Scrutiny Panel Meetings held on 14 October and 9 November 2011 and 4 and 27 January 2011.
- Department of Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) Publication: 'Safe to Learn: Embedding Anti-bullying Work in Schools' (September 2007).
- DFES Publication: 'Bullying -Don't Suffer in Silence - An Anti-bullying Pack for Schools' (February 2004).
- Acklam Grange School's Published Anti-Bullying Policy.
- Breckon Hill School's Published Bullying Policy.

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23 February 2011

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