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A content analysis of school anti-bullying policies: progress and limitations

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Schools in England are legally required to have an anti-bullying policy, but the little research so far suggests that they may lack coverage in important areas. An analysis of 142 school anti-bullying policies, from 115 primary schools and 27 secondary schools in one county was undertaken. A 31-item scoring scheme was devised to assess policy. Overall, schools had about 40% of the items in their policies. Most included improving school climate, a definition of bullying including reference to physical, verbal and relational forms, and a statement regarding contact with parents when bullying incidents occurred. But many schools did not mention other important aspects, and there was low coverage of responsibilities beyond those of teaching staff; following up of incidents; management and use of records; and specific preventative measures such as playground work and peer support. There was infrequent mention of homophobic bullying, and of cyberbullying. There was little difference between policies from primary and secondary schools. Findings are discussed in terms of national policy, and ways to support schools in maximising the potential of their policies for reducing bullying.

Introduction

Following the government-funded Sheffield Anti-Bullying Project of 1991–1994, the DfES anti-bullying pack Don’t suffer in silence (1994, 2000, 2002) advocated the development of a whole school anti-bullying policy. This has had some legal enforcement in England since the School Standards and Framework Act (SSFA) 1998, Section 61(4), which stated that “Head teachers in state schools have a duty to encourage good behaviour and respect for others on the part of pupils and, in particular, prevent all forms of bullying among pupils”. The DfEE Circular 10/99: “School inclusion: Pupil support” stated that head teachers have a “legal duty to take measures to prevent all forms of bullying among pupils. All teaching staff, including lunchtime supervisors, should be alert to signs of bullying and act promptly and firmly”. Circular 10/99 has since been replaced with the web-based “Locating advice and guidance to schools and local authorities on managing behaviour and attendance” (www.dfes.gov.uk/behaviourandattendance/guidance).

The legal duty for schools to prevent all forms of bullying is set out further in the Education and Inspections Act (EIA) 2006. The discipline provisions of this (EIA, 2006, s89(1)(b)) came into force on 1 April 2007, when Section 61 of SSFA 1998 was repealed. The measures which the head teacher determines “must include the making of rules and provision for disciplinary penalties”. A new guidance document, “School discipline and pupil behaviour policies: guidance for schools” (web-based and available in hard copy) was published to coincide with the new legal provisions in EIA (2006).

Some schools will have a separate anti-bullying policy, others will include measures to tackle bullying within their overall school behaviour policy; both are seen as acceptable by DfES, so long as measures aimed at the prevention of bullying are determined.

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The importance of having effective anti-bullying policies was reinforced by the Report of the House of Commons Education and Skills Committee on Bullying (House of Commons, 2007). Recommendation 15 (p. 37) states that:

We accept that there are significant advantages to schools being allowed to develop their own anti-bullying policy. However, the Department and local authorities should provide clear guidance on how to develop effective policies. This guidance should include information on the minimum standard expected for schools’ policies and what should be included.

The proportion of schools having an anti-bullying policy has increased dramatically over the last 12 years. Surveys carried out in relation to use of the Don’t suffer in silence pack indicate that from 1994–1996 about 55% of schools had an anti-bullying policy (either separately, or as part of a wider behaviour/discipline policy); this had risen to 91% in 2002, with 8% developing a policy, and 1% providing no information (Samara & Smith, submitted).

The guidance provided in the Don’t suffer in silence pack (1994, pp. 11–21; 2002, pp. 4–7) included some advice on policy development and content. The first edition stated (p. 14) that it should be explicit about what bullying behaviour is; establish what preventive measures the school will take and how these will be implemented; tell people what procedure to follow when bullying takes place (for example, what steps they should take immediately; what records should be kept; who should be informed; what sanctions – perhaps graded sanctions – may be implemented); and be written in appropriate language for the audience and be the right length. The pack also emphasised the importance of a consultation process in developing the policy, of communicating it effectively, of monitoring and evaluating, and maintaining and revising the policy in the future. The advice given in the second edition (2000, slightly revised 2002) was very similar in these respects. However it specified that the policy should be “short, succinct, and written in language that everyone understands”. It should include a definition of bullying that included racist, sexist and homophobic bullying. Under procedures to follow, it specified who to tell, how to record bullying, and sanctions; policies should be clear what the sanctions are for bullying and in what circumstances they will apply (p. 5). It also mentioned intervention techniques (curriculum support, training policy, play policy); and the importance of following up incidents to ensure the bullying did not restart.

The school anti-bullying policy is thus perceived as a framework for signalling the school’s commitment to anti-bullying work, organising its response (including both proactive and reactive strategies), and communicating this to all stakeholders in the school community. However, previous research has indicated that the nature and quality of school policies varies widely, and there has been some scepticism about their effectiveness in impacting upon levels of bullying.

Prior research on school anti-bullying policies

Glover, Cartwright, Gough and Johnson (1998) discussed the introduction of anti-bullying policies in 25 secondary schools, 23 of which had written policies. They found considerable variation in the amount of consultation that had taken place in policy development, and in implementation. Schools with fuller policies did however have slightly lower rates of bullying. Further analysis of data from 14 schools which had recent Ofsted reports showed that a fully developed policy correlated with a better Ofsted rating, but not necessarily with less reporting of bullying; the authors attributed this latter finding to the possibility that a good policy and Ofsted report will help pupils feel confident in reporting incidents (and vice versa).

Woods and Wolke (2003) obtained policies from 34 primary schools in the Hertfordshire and north London region of England. Out of a total score of 18, approximately equal numbers of schools were classed as having low scores (2), moderate scores (3–8) or high scores (9–16). These
groups of schools were then compared on pupil reports of victim or bully behaviour. There were no differences for direct victimisation or direct bullying; although high scoring policy scores did have fewer pupils reporting being directly bullied in the playground. However, high policy scoring schools also had more pupils who reported bullying others relationally (via social exclusion or rumour spreading), and fewer pupils classed as neutral (non-involved) as regards relational victimisation.

Woods and Wolke discuss possible explanations for the unexpected findings regarding relational bullying. One was that there were previous differences in the schools, and/or that schools with more bullying were more concerned to develop policies. Another was that policies effectively shifted bullying from direct (e.g., physical) to relational (e.g., social exclusion) forms, by for example improving playground supervision, but neglecting to deal with less obviously noticed kinds of bullying. Yet another explanation was a lack of relationship between policy content scores, and actual implementation. These authors do not mention the hypothesis by Glover et al. (1998) that a good policy will help pupils feel confident in reporting incidents.

The study by Woods and Wolke (2003) does not report the actual content of policies in detail; but the somewhat pessimistic slant on the effectiveness of policies is rather thrown into question by the nature of the content analysis they employed. This was based on the Olweus (1993) whole-school intervention program, used in Norway; this has some similarities to the approach advocated in Don’t suffer in silence, but also some differences: for example, the Olweus program includes a “school bullying conference day”, “class rules against bullying”, and “teacher and parent use of imagination in terms of bullying behaviour”, and these featured in the content analysis used. But these are not widely used in approaches in English schools (first two criteria), or is vague as a criterion (third criterion). Indeed, Woods and Wolke do state that only 3% of their policies (i.e., one school) had held a whole school conference day; but this is not surprising, given the kinds of guidance given to schools in the government pack. Conversely, the Olweus program, and the content analysis used by Woods and Wolke, did not include issues such as what victims should do if bullying happens, what pupil bystanders should do, whether there are graded sanctions, how incidents will be recorded, whether the policy will be reviewed, and other issues commonly highlighted such as proactive strategies, and issues of inclusiveness; in the section they called “prerequisites” (referring to awareness and definition of bullying), there was no coverage of prejudice-driven bullying (racial, sexual, homophobic); nor was there any scoring of the inclusion of cyberbullying (bullying by electronic means; mobile phones and the Internet), which did not become widely discussed until around 2002.

In Wales, Lambert, Scourfield, Smalley and Jones (in press) found a significant association between lower levels of bullying, and pupils reporting that the school had clear rules on bullying. The latter however is an indirect measure of the actual policy content. Epstein, Dowler, Mellor and Madden (2006) have carried out an analysis of anti-bullying policies across the Principality. All 1893 schools were approached, with policies received from 480; a response rate of only 25.4%. Policies were assigned scores on a five-point scale (from unsatisfactory to outstanding) in eight areas. For two of these areas – consultation and monitoring – the great majority of policies could not be given a score as the information was lacking. In the other six areas – definitions, identifying bullying, school strategies, strategies for parents, strategies for pupils, and procedures – the modal response was “3” (satisfactory). Overall the profile of final scores given was outstanding (3%), good with some excellent features (18%), satisfactory (46%), some significant problems (24%), and unsatisfactory, many problems (9%). This report gives very helpful examples of good and less good policy extracts; however, it gives global rather than discrete scores, so that we do not know how many policies mentioned specific items such as racist, or homophobic, bullying.
Coverage in school policies of prejudice-driven bullying (or “bias bullying”) has been highlighted by recent concerns about homophobic bullying, especially in secondary schools. A survey by Douglas et al. (1999) sent questionnaires to 1000 secondary schools in England and Wales; the response rate was 30.7%. Although the school anti-bullying policies were not accessed directly, only 6% of respondents stated that their bullying and discipline policies addressed lesbian and gay bullying. The YWCA (2004) produced a report on bullying of young lesbian and bisexual women, and cited the 6% figure above; in their website they have also referred to a survey of 137 schools, of which “only 13% have policies which mention bullying relating to sexuality”. These were secondary schools, and this data remains unpublished (C. Jones, YWCA, personal communication, 17 January 2007).

These reservations about the nature and effectiveness of school anti-bullying policies mainly reflect on their coverage and implementation, rather than on the principle of having a policy. Besides the continuing legal requirement, a written policy is the obvious way to signal and communicate the school’s intentions regarding dealing with and reducing bullying. If anything the scope and the scrutiny of such policies will increase, with expectations of schools and local authorities to show evidence of fulfilling the criteria in the Every Child Matters agenda (Ofsted, 2005). However there is a lack of analysis even of the content of existing school anti-bullying policies. Implementation of policies is obviously vital; but the policies must be clear and comprehensive in the first instance, if they are to be used properly by teachers, pupils, parents and other members of the school community; and so that local authorities or Ofsted inspectors can judge if they are being used effectively. In this report, the detailed content of anti-bullying policies is analysed, from a sample of 142 schools, primary and secondary. The content analysis is based on the kinds of guidance given in the Don’t suffer in silence pack; but includes a few recent relevant issues that emerged in the consultation process of developing the scheme, notably peer support as an intervention strategy; cyberbullying; and mention of adult–pupil bullying.

Method

Participants

Policies were obtained from 142 schools; 115 (81%) primary schools and 27 (19%) secondary schools, all from one large English county. In total this county has 226 primary schools and 54 secondary schools, so the response rate was just over 50%. The educational psychologists each have a responsibility for a group of schools with whom they work throughout the year. Reducing bullying is one of the three priorities of the Educational Psychology Service; and copies of schools’ anti-bullying policies were obtained at the start of the autumn term.

Procedure

A content analysis was designed for the anti-bullying policies. This started with the guidance in the Don’t suffer in silence pack, and the similar analysis used by Sharp and Smith (1994) in the documentation of the Sheffield Anti-Bullying Project. An initial list was devised, and discussed within the research team and with members of the Advisory Group of the Anti-Bullying Alliance. It was then trialled on 11 anti-bullying policies obtained in another area. Modifications were made, and a revised scheme used on 10 policies from the main sample. Minor revisions were again made: for example, it was clear that a number of schools referred to “material bullying” (damage to belongings, extorting money) and it seemed sensible to acknowledge this with a separate category within the definitional section. In addition, the scoring of a number of categories was clarified: for example, under B3 (mentioning the role of staff other than teaching staff), an unelaborated statement about “all staff” was deemed insufficient
for a score, when in fact some schools did explicitly mention teaching assistants or lunchtime supervisors.

The final scheme arrived at is shown in Table 1. There are altogether 31 categories. These were divided into four sections: (A) 11 categories concerning the definition of bullying; (B) 11 categories concerning reporting and responding to bullying; (C) four categories concerning

Table 1. Mean scores (s.d. in brackets) for each section (A, B, C, D) and for total anti-bullying content (in bold); and for each of 31 items the numbers of all, primary and secondary schools (percentage in brackets) that mentioned the item in their school policy.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Definition of bullying behaviour (11 items)</th>
<th>All schools (N = 142)</th>
<th>Primary schools (N = 115)</th>
<th>Secondary schools (N = 27)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>5.5 (2.2)</td>
<td>5.4 (2.3)</td>
<td>5.5 (1.9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Have a definition of bullying?</td>
<td>109 (76.8)</td>
<td>89 (77.4)</td>
<td>20 (74.1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Does the definition make it clear that bullying is different from other kinds of aggressive behaviour?</td>
<td>38 (26.8)</td>
<td>31 (27.0)</td>
<td>7 (25.9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Mention physical bullying (hits, kicks)?</td>
<td>130 (91.5)</td>
<td>104 (90.4)</td>
<td>26 (96.3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Mention direct verbal bullying (threats, insults, nasty teasing)?</td>
<td>123 (86.6)</td>
<td>97 (84.3)</td>
<td>26 (96.3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Mention relational bullying (rumours, social exclusion)?</td>
<td>101 (71.1)</td>
<td>81 (70.4)</td>
<td>20 (74.1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Mention material bullying (damage to belongings, extortion of money)?</td>
<td>93 (65.5)</td>
<td>78 (67.8)</td>
<td>15 (55.6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Mention cyberbullying (email, text messages)?</td>
<td>12 (8.5)</td>
<td>9 (7.8)</td>
<td>3 (11.1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8**</td>
<td>Mention homophobic bullying?</td>
<td>17 (12.0)</td>
<td>8 (7.0)</td>
<td>9 (33.3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Mention racial bullying (or harassment)?</td>
<td>75 (52.8)</td>
<td>62 (53.9)</td>
<td>13 (48.1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Mention sexual bullying (or harassment)?</td>
<td>57 (40.1)</td>
<td>48 (41.7)</td>
<td>9 (33.3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>As well as pupil–pupil bullying, discuss the issue of adult/teacher–pupil bullying or vice versa?</td>
<td>20 (14.1)</td>
<td>19 (16.5)</td>
<td>1 (3.7)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

|   | Reporting and responding to bullying incidents (11 items) | 4.2 (2.3) | 4.0 (2.1) | 4.6 (3.0) |
|1  | State what victims of bullying should do (e.g. tell a teacher)? | 88 (62.0) | 71 (61.7) | 17 (63)   |
|2  | Say how teaching staff should respond to a report of bullying (should specifically mention bullying, and be more specific than just ‘deal promptly’)? | 78 (54.9) | 63 (54.8) | 15 (55.6) |
|3  | Mention the responsibilities of other school staff (teaching assistants, lunchtime supervisors, etc) if they know of bullying? (This should be more specific than simply referring to ‘all staff’.) | 23 (16.2) | 18 (15.7) | 5 (18.5)  |
|4  | Mention the responsibilities of parents if they know of bullying (this can include knowing if their child has a behaviour problem if bullying is included elsewhere)? | 43 (30.3) | 32 (27.8) | 11 (40.7) |
|5  | Mention the responsibilities of pupil bystanders if they know of bullying? | 47 (33.1) | 37 (32.2) | 10 (37.0) |
|6  | State whether sanctions applied for bullying will depend on type or severity of incident? (It should be clear that the sanctions apply to bullying behaviour.) | 74 (52.1) | 59 (51.3) | 15 (55.6) |
recording bullying and evaluating the policy; and (D) five categories on strategies for preventing bullying. For each category the school scored either one for meeting the criterion (including that aspect in the policy) or zero for not meeting it. Each section was subtotalled; and in addition a total overall anti-bullying policy content score was generated ranging from 0–31.

The number of pages of the policy were also recorded; this included cover sheets and all full pages (even if reduced to half-pages in photocopying), but did not include duplicate or extraneous material (e.g., letters to parents) that were sometimes included.

Table 1. (Continued).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>All schools (N = 142)</th>
<th>Primary schools (N = 115)</th>
<th>Secondary schools (N = 27)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Mention follow-up to see whether the sanctions were effective?</td>
<td>29 (20.4)</td>
<td>19 (16.5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Discuss what action will be taken if the bullying persists?</td>
<td>38 (26.8)</td>
<td>27 (23.5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Suggest how to support the victim? (More than just ‘we will support victims’.)</td>
<td>39 (27.5)</td>
<td>30 (26.1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Suggest how to help the pupil(s) doing the bullying to change their behaviour (apart from sanctions)? (More than just ‘we will support …’)</td>
<td>31 (21.8)</td>
<td>23 (20.0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11*</td>
<td>Discuss if, when or how parents will be informed? (‘Parents will be informed’ is sufficient if it clearly refers to bullying.)</td>
<td>100 (70.4)</td>
<td>86 (74.8)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

C Recording bullying, communicating and evaluating the policy (4 items)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>All schools (N = 142)</th>
<th>Primary schools (N = 115)</th>
<th>Secondary schools (N = 27)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Say reports of bullying will be recorded?</td>
<td>73 (51.4)</td>
<td>59 (51.3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Say who is responsible for coordinating the recording system?</td>
<td>24 (16.9)</td>
<td>18 (15.7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Show how this information will be used (e.g. to know whether the policy is working or not)?</td>
<td>22 (15.5)</td>
<td>18 (15.7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Mention periodic review and updating of the policy?</td>
<td>52 (36.6)</td>
<td>44 (38.3)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

D Strategies for preventing bullying (5 items)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>All schools (N = 142)</th>
<th>Primary schools (N = 115)</th>
<th>Secondary schools (N = 27)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Mention any of encouraging co-operative behaviour, rewarding good behaviour, improving school climate, or creating a safe environment?</td>
<td>108 (76.1)</td>
<td>89 (77.4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Discuss general issues of peer support (beyond B5)?</td>
<td>21 (14.8)</td>
<td>15 (13)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Discuss advice for parents about bullying (beyond B4)?</td>
<td>52 (36.6)</td>
<td>38 (33)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Mention the preventative role of playground activities or lunchtime supervisors?</td>
<td>21 (14.8)</td>
<td>15 (13)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Discuss issues of inclusiveness (e.g., non English speakers; pupils with learning difficulties)?</td>
<td>38 (26.8)</td>
<td>29 (25.2)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total anti-bullying policy content (31 items) | 12.4 (4.5) | 12.4 (4.3) | 13.0 (5.3) |

Notes: *p < 0.05; **p < 0.001 comparing primary and secondary school policies.
Results

Reliability of the coding scheme

Once the coding scheme had been finalised, the policies were scored by one coder who initially scored 10 policies, which were independently coded by another coder. There was 100% agreement on 23 categories, 90% agreement on five categories, and 80% agreement on three categories; overall agreement being 96%. After all the policies had been scored, the second coder randomly chose another 10 policies and independently coded them. There was 100% agreement on 27 categories, 90% agreement on three categories, and 80% agreement on one category; overall agreement being 98%. The only category falling below an average of 95% over both the reliability codings was B11 (see Table 1), which averaged 85%.

Internal reliability of the scale

As the scheme and its sections had face validity, there was no strong expectation that that there would be high internal reliability of items within the scale, or within sections (i.e., whether schools which scored on one item in a section would also tend to score on others). In fact however the internal reliability (Cronbach’s alpha) of the total anti-bullying policy content scale was reasonably high (.76) (see Coolican, 2004). The reliability for the four sections of the total anti-bullying policy content was also moderately high (.69 for Section A; .64 for Section B; .68 for Section C), except for Section D (.32). Section D included a range of different preventative strategies, and it would appear that a school doing one of these only predicts weakly to it doing others.

Overall policy and sub-section scores

Table 1 shows (in bold) the summed scores (e.g., out of 11 for Section A) in terms of mean and standard deviation, for each section, and at the bottom for the total scale. These are also shown separately for type of school (primary and secondary). In terms of percentages, overall 40% of items were checked for the average school.

The total anti-bullying policy content scores ranged from 1 to 24 (out of 31). Each section received a full range of scores, demonstrating that the coding scheme was strongly discriminating amongst the school policies. For Section A: Definition, scores ranged from 0 to 11 (out of 11; average, 50%); for Section B: Reporting and responding, from 0 to 10 (out of 11; average, 38%); for Section C: Recording, communicating and evaluating, from 0 to 4 (out of 4; average, 30%); and for Section D: Strategies for preventing bullying, from 0 to 5 (out of 5; average, 34%).

Analysis of specific criteria

Table 1 also shows for each criterion the number of schools (and percentage in brackets) that scored for the presence of this criterion in their policy. For simplifying discussion response is taken as being high when at least two-thirds of schools (95 or more) have satisfied a criterion; moderate when the response is between one-third and two-thirds; and low when less than one-third of schools (47 or less) have satisfied it.

The best range of responses comes in Section A on the definition of bullying behaviour. Responses are high for having a definition, and for mentioning physical, verbal, and relational forms of bullying. Responses are moderate for mentioning material bullying, and racist and sexist bullying or harassment. However, responses were low for making it clear that bullying is different from other kinds of aggressive behaviour; for mentioning the possibility of adult/teacher–pupil bullying or vice versa; and for mentioning homophobic bullying and cyberbullying.
In Section B, on reporting and responding to bullying incidents, the only high response rate was for mentioning if, when or how parents will be informed. There were moderate levels of response for mentioning what victims of bullying should do, saying how teaching staff should respond to a report of bullying and stating whether sanctions applied for bullying will depend on the type or severity of incident. However responses were low for mentioning the responsibilities of other teaching staff, of parents if they know of bullying, and of pupil bystanders; for mentioning follow-up action to see whether sanctions were effective, and what action would be taken if bullying persists; and for mentioning how victims will be supported or how pupils doing the bullying will be helped to change their behaviour.

Section C, on recording bullying, communicating and evaluating policy, got the lowest scores. Two items, that reports of bullying will be recorded, and that the policy would be periodically reviewed and updated, were moderately mentioned. Two items, about saying who is responsible for coordinating the recording system, and for showing how the information from the records would be used, received low mentions.

In Section D, on strategies for preventing bullying, the item on encouraging co-operative behaviour, rewarding good behaviour, improving school climate, or creating a safe environment was highly mentioned. Schools only had to mention one of these to meet the criterion, so this was a rather easy item to score on. One item, on advice for parents about bullying (beyond just responsibilities of reporting as in B4), was moderately mentioned. The other three items, on general peer support issues, the preventative role of playground supervisors or lunchtime supervisors, and issues of inclusiveness, received low mentions.

Comparing primary and secondary schools
Type of school (primary, secondary) differences were analysed (SPSS version 10). No differences were found between primary and secondary schools for overall content score or on any section subtotal scores, using one way ANOVAs.

Individual criteria were compared using chi-square tests. Only two significant differences were found (shown in Table 1). Criterion A8, homophobic bullying, was significantly more likely to be mentioned in secondary schools compared to primary schools (33% vs. 7%), $\chi^2(1,142) = 14.4, p < .001$. Criterion B11, concerning if, when or how parents will be informed about bullying incidents, was more likely in primary schools compared to secondary schools (75% vs. 52%), $\chi^2(1,142) = 5.5, p < .05$.

Anti-bullying policy content and number of pages
The mean number of pages was 5.4, and the range was from 1 to 24 pages. No correlations between total anti-bullying policy content scores or section scores and the number of pages of each of the school policies approached significance. There was no difference in length of policies between primary schools (mean 5.6 pages) and secondary schools (mean 4.9 pages).

Discussion
The findings show a great range of scores for the adequacy and coverage of school anti-bullying policies. This was not correlated with the length of the policy document. Many documents included material on for example general exhortations to behave well and that bullying was taken very seriously; or the hurt caused by bullying; or the reasons why some children bully others; which did not score on any of our criteria. While none of these are objectionable, they might be considered as not central to a policy designed to show what action a school will take, and indeed undesirable in so far as the best policies will be succinct documents that can be read easily. Of
course some documents presented also included policies on general discipline and behaviour. No attempt was made to separate out the “bullying-specific” parts of these policies, as this was not always straightforward. These were the documents supplied by schools as their anti-bullying policy, and therefore what would be available for parents or others concerned about bullying.

The analyses made showed very little difference between policies from primary and secondary schools. In both cases, policies averaged around five pages, and (with two exceptions discussed below) differed little on responses to the 31 criteria.

Taking the criterion of responses as being high when present in over two-thirds of schools and low when in less than one-third, one can summarise that the typical anti-bullying policy will provide a general statement about encouraging cooperative behaviour or a good school climate; it will give a definition of bullying (but not making clear it is different from other forms of aggression), and will mention physical, verbal and relational bullying. It will also say if, when or how parents will be informed when a bullying incident occurs involving their child. On the other hand, it is unlikely to include guidance for response of anyone other than teaching staff to bullying incidents (i.e., other school staff, parents, pupil bystanders), follow-up of immediate responses, more general support for either victims or bullies, saying how records will be kept (who is responsible) and used, preventative roles of peer support or playground activities/lunchtime supervisors, and issues of inclusiveness. Few policies mentioned the possibility of bullying beyond pupil–pupil (i.e., involving teachers or adults); and the lowest responses of all were for cyberbullying (8.5%) and homophobic bullying (12%).

The possibility of bullying between teachers or other adults, and pupils (in either direction) is not explicitly covered in government guidance on anti-bullying policies. Nevertheless it is a salient issue for a policy designed for the whole school community. Surveys have shown the risks of pupils bullying teachers (Terry, 1998) and of pupil violence to teachers (Neill, 2001). Also, pupil reports indicate that they can experience bullying from teachers (Olweus, 1999; Rivers, 1995), and this is an important indicator of school climate (Roland & Galloway, 2002).

Cyberbullying – primarily by text messages and emails – is a relatively recent phenomenon (Smith, Mahdavi, Carvalho, & Tippett, 2006). It was not mentioned in the 2000 edition of Don’t suffer in silence, but it is mentioned in the 2002 revision. The policies analysed were obtained in 2004, so (if they were regularly reviewed) would have had two years to take account of this. Only 12 out of 142 schools had done so, and this is quite likely due to an infrequent review of policy content. This was apparent from some covering material (e.g., letters to parents) included with policies; and only one-half of schools mentioned periodic review and updating of the policy, within it (Criterion C4).

The response rate for homophobic bullying was low at 12%, given the high publicity and advice on this issue in recent years. The DfEE Sex and relationship guidance (2000) stated that:

Schools need to be able to deal with homophobic bullying. Guidance issued by the department (DfES Social Inclusion: Pupil Support Circular 10/99), dealt with the unacceptability of and emotional distress and harm caused by bullying in whatever form – be it racial, as a result of a pupil’s appearance, related to sexual orientation or for any other reason. (Section 1, Paragraph 32)

However, the response rate here for secondary schools (33%) was significantly higher than for primary schools (7%). There is some dispute about when pupils become aware of sexual orientation, but it has been placed at around 10 years (D’Augelli, Hershberger, & Pilkington, 1998), which would make it relevant for primary schools. Nevertheless the issue is clearly much more salient for secondary schools and guidance has been strongest here (Warwick, Chase, Aggleton, & Sanders, 2004). The survey of secondary schools by Douglas et al. (1999) showed that most respondents among school staff knew of homophobic verbal bullying, and over one in four were aware of homophobic physical bullying. Our figure of 33% of secondary schools with
a policy mentioning homophobic bullying is clearly a substantial increase on the 6% they reported; it is also higher than the YWCA figure of 13% (unpublished). But it is far short of it being fully recognised in secondary school policies.

Although there were no specific expectations for differences between primary and secondary schools, one other difference was found; primary schools (75%) were more likely to discuss if, when and how parents would be informed about bullying incidents, than secondary schools (52%). The difference here is smaller than for homophobic bullying, and the significance level ($p < .05$) would disappear with a Bonferroni correction for the number of tests made (31 for individual criteria) (see Coolican, 2004). Also, this was the one criterion where coding reliability overall fell below 95%. Thus little weight is placed on this finding, but it may be that primary schools, being smaller, also feel a closer relation to parents and involve them more explicitly in their policies.

This study is the first to report on the detailed content of a large number of policies, but it is limited in various respects. First, it only reports on policies from one education authority. In common with earlier reports (Glover et al., 1998; Woods & Wolke, 2003), it cannot claim to be representative of schools across England. The county started to give some guidance in 2003, but this was not expected to have had much impact on the policies obtained in 2004; a follow-up of the policies obtained after more focussed guidance work that has taken place in the last two years, is being planned. More specific guidance on school policies may have been initiated in particular authorities elsewhere, although we have no reason to suppose that the county is lagging in such matters.

Another limitation is that the response rate from schools was low, at 50%. This is a common problem, and Epstein et al. (2006) only received a 25% response rate in their Welsh study. Finally, the coverage of our 31 criteria can obviously be questioned. Issues change, and earlier studies did not examine the issue of cyberbullying. More current issues that are not included, are bullying or harassment on grounds of religion, or related to disability; and whether policies should extend beyond the school grounds, to travel to or from school, or to cyberbullying by classmates after school hours or on websites.

Further research should examine correlations between the quality and scope of a policy and levels of bullying, following Woods and Wolke (2003) but using a more detailed and appropriate content analysis, such as attempted here. More generally, there is a need to know if schools show a willingness to engage with a process of policy review and improvement; and whether anti-bullying policies are little more than lip service to legal requirements, or whether they do they have some greater meaning/resonance to the entire school community and its practice.

Despite these limitations, the data provided here give important insights into the strengths and limitations of many school anti-bullying policies. Most include some definition of bullying with examples, and most discuss keeping parents informed. But many policies are weak in crucial areas, including other definitional issues; responsibilities beyond those of teaching staff; following up of incidents; management and use of records; and specific preventative measures such as playground work and peer support.

Schools would clearly benefit from more encouragement and guidance in maximising the effectiveness of their anti-bullying policies. The study in Wales (Epstein et al., 2006) recommended that schools and school governing bodies be given feedback and encouraged to self-assess their policies, and that responsible LEA officers be offered a one-day course on the issue. Those recommendations are also suggested for England. There is scope for some more centralised support for schools; this might take the form of training days supporting local teachers and policymaking in schools (Douglas et al., 1999), or a feedback/advisory service for schools that send in their policies. However the balance between guidance and autonomy is a sensitive one. The DfES view is that:
… schools are autonomous institutions and are best placed to make their own decisions on training issues and determine funding levels accordingly; and that it is for Local Authorities (LAs) to support and challenge those schools that fail to tackle bullying effectively, and this might include the organisation of LA wide training. The DfES has stated in guidance that it is for individual schools to draw up their own anti-bullying policy in consultation with the entire school community, including parents and pupils. Offering an anti-bullying policy review or correction service (and indeed a model or guide) would negate this important process of self-evaluation and policy development. (S. Miller, DfES, personal communication, 17 January 2007)

In advocating more support for schools in considering the wording and content of their policies, it is not suggested that the responsibility for details of the school policy is taken away, from the particular school. It is a strength of the national response that schools have ownership of the details of their policy, and of their anti-bullying strategies, within a broad agreed framework. The available evidence suggests that such issues of ownership of policies and strategies are an important factor in the success of anti-bullying work (Smith, Ananiadou, & Cowie, 2003). But schools clearly need more encouragement and support if this potential strength is to be put to maximum effect.

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