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New Independent Report Reveals the Need to Bridge the Gap Between Students, Parents, Carers and School Staff to Transform Anti-Bullying Strategies in Schools

- The *'Embracing Difference, Ending Bullying' Research & Impact Report* follows the culmination of a three-year Department for Education (DfE) funded project.
- Diversity Role Models have worked with the National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO) throughout this project which they have independently evaluated in this final year.
- The report includes unique insights into prejudice-based bullying in schools in England.
- This will help to further the understanding of the views of young people, staff, governors and parents and carers.
- The report highlights the critical need for continued efforts in creating safe, inclusive educational environments
- Alongside this report, a teacher-friendly Best Practice Guide has also been created.

"The findings of this report are a call to action for schools and the wider education sector. We must prioritise data-driven approaches, engagement with parents and carers, and bridge the gap between school leadership teams and the reality of school students' experiences, especially those who are marginalised because of their identity as young people."

- Alex Feis-Bryce, CEO of [Diversity Role Models](#).

11.06.2024:

An independent impact report produced by the [National Council for Voluntary Organisations \(NCVO\)](#) underscores the urgent need for a comprehensive and collaborative whole-school approach to address and prevent bullying in schools in England.

The report is the outcome of a pioneering three-year programme, "Embracing Difference, Ending Bullying", commissioned by the Department for Education (DfE) and delivered by the charity [Diversity Role Models](#). The aim of the programme is to support schools across England to tackle and prevent all forms of bullying, and create safer and more inclusive school environments for young people. Launched in 2021, the programme reached over **300 schools, 10,000 staff and 8,435 students** to build empathy, awareness and understanding of diversity, perceived differences¹ and protected characteristics²

Key Findings

- **School Leadership vs. Reality:** 90% of the senior leadership team (SLT) respondents and 93% of school governors believed bullying was rare, while approximately half of the parents and carers agreed. Only 58% of primary students felt safe in their schools, compared to 83% of governors who believed all students were safe.
- **Prevalence of Bullying**
 - **Primary Schools:** The most reported forms of bullying were related to looks (15%) and perceived differences (14%). Only 59% of primary students said their classmates understand that their words can hurt others.
 - **Secondary Schools:** Bullying remains common in secondary schools. For secondary students, the most prevalent forms of bullying were based on: looks (34%), sexuality (32%), gender expression – i.e. not behaving like a typical boy or girl (31%) or for being a girl (31%).

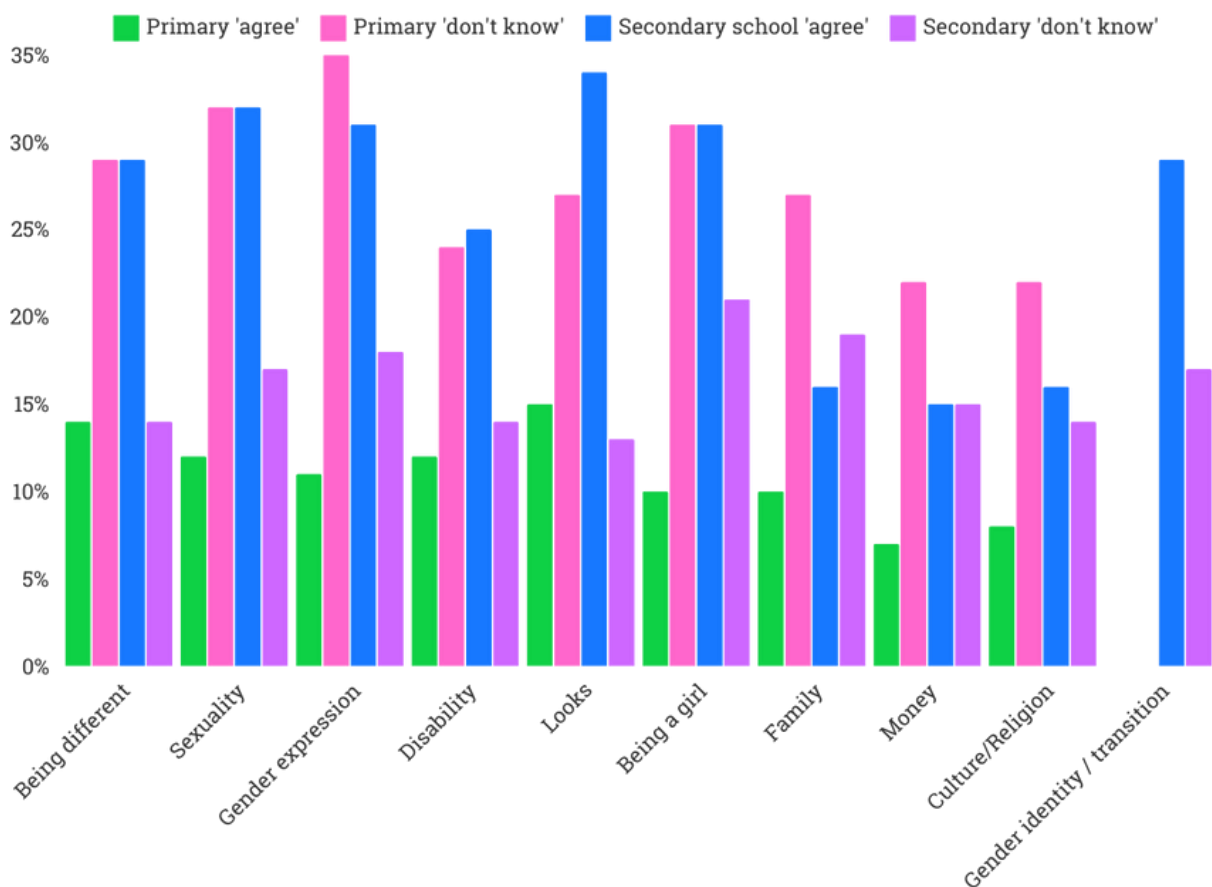
¹ Perceived differences include race, ethnicity, religion, neurodiversity, sexual orientation, gender identity, disability and age.

² Protected characteristics are the grounds on which it is unlawful to discriminate against someone under the Equality Act 2010. The Equality and Human Rights Commission sets these out as: age, disability, gender reassignment, sexual orientation, sex, religion or belief, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, and race.

- Secondary students from marginalised identities and/or those with multiple and intersecting identities consistently reported higher levels of bullying. For example, disabled students were 84% more likely to agree that bullying takes place related to disabilities.
- Primary students were more likely to report bullying to a teacher, but this dropped from 81% to 65% between primary and secondary school.
- **Persistent Issues:** These trends remained consistent over three years, indicating persistent problems. Social media, parental attitudes, home and friendship challenges, and a lack of empathy and awareness among students were identified by school staff as key contributors to bullying.
- **Lack of education:** Students consistently identified disability and LGBTQ+ as the areas of diversity which were least covered by the school curriculum across the three years. Staff also identified LGBTQ+ as the least taught area over the three years.
- **The solutions:** The evaluation report showed a positive long-term impact of training and workshops, and analysis demonstrated that where schools focus on delivering a diverse curriculum, students are less likely to say that they were bullied related to protected characteristics.

Graph:

Students were asked whether they agree that bullying takes place in their school related to the following reasons...



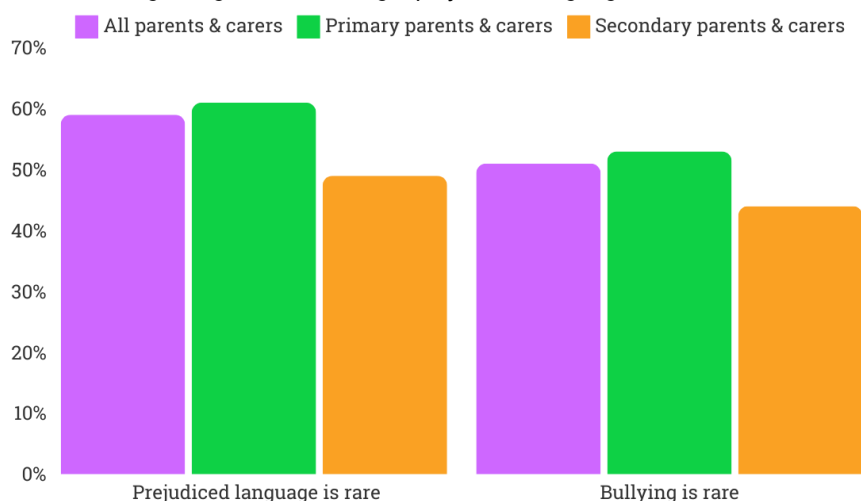
"I've heard a lot of 'kill yourself' or saying something is 'gay' or 'you're gay if you do so and so.' These are meant as jokes or banter."

- (Primary student survey comment)

"The school has a horrific bullying culture. Many are bullied and the most that has been done is a 2/3 day isolation. People are scared to come forward because they know nothing can be done. I know people who have been filmed without consent and spread through the year, physically abused, and emotionally abused. We need to sort it out, because it is unacceptable and needs to actually be addressed and not swept under the rug."
 - (Secondary student comment)

The Parent And Carer Perspective

Nearly 1 in 2 parents and carers disagreed that, or did not know if, bullying was rare in their school, with a further 41% also disagreeing or not knowing if prejudiced language was rare.



Reflections from school staff as to the main drivers of bullying:

"YouTube and other online platforms are often linked to some of the language coming into school."

"The outside community has prejudice surrounding other cultures, religions and races."

"Lack of empathy from children and not caring or understanding that they are hurting others"

Feedback from the programme:

Through a combination of school staff training, student workshops, Role Model stories, and multimedia resources, Diversity Role Models tailored its approach to meet each school's unique needs. This personalised strategy was informed by comprehensive whole-school research, the findings of which form the basis of the NCVO report.

- Respondents praised the training, the facilitator, Role Models and activities, with over 96% stating excellence.
- 89% of staff reported they had increased confidence and were motivated to effect changes at both a personal and school level.
- 88% of staff stated the training enhanced their knowledge and understanding of the protected characteristics and deepened their understanding of the impacts of prejudice and bullying.
- The training encouraged staff to review their anti-bullying policies and procedures, and equipped them with new tools, resources and confidence to tackle bullying.
- Students were also inspired by the workshops, committing to be upstanders and embracing difference.

- There was demand for additional diversity and anti-bullying training, with suggestions to extend to parents and carers.
- Post-intervention evaluation showed sustained improvements in understanding diversity and difference (100% agreement) and confidence regarding protected characteristics (97% agreement).

“Learning about differences is really great, and knowing that I can be myself around others.”
- student feedback.

During the workshop, primary students pledged to:

Primary Students’ Pledges Made In The Workshop

- Be themselves
- Not assume things about people
- Commit to be upstanders
- Fight against stereotypes
- Understand and not bully others for their differences
- Support those who are different
- Treat others with kindness
- Always tell a teacher or adult if they saw someone being bullied.

“We are planning a whole school community project based on today’s training. We will focus on ensuring that all of our anti-bullying work which has been undertaken previously is revisited and shared with parents and carers. There will be a renewed focus on identifying and using diverse role models for children which link to the curriculum and ensure that protected characteristics are on display throughout school, ensuring everyone is confident in teaching and discussing them.”
- (Staff evaluation form comment)

A key feature of the staff training and student workshops delivered by Diversity Role Models over the three-year programme was sharing personal stories from volunteer Role Models whose identities were linked to one or more protected characteristics.

In the NCVO report, the role model stories received overwhelmingly positive feedback, with staff and students highlighting how impactful and compelling they are as an educational tool and reporting that these stories helped increase empathy, raise awareness, and challenge misconceptions long after the workshops or training.

“It helped to see another’s perspective and to be able to ask questions of someone who has experienced discrimination and difficulty firsthand. This was an invaluable lesson for the children, especially when [the Role Model] was explaining that ‘When you say ‘gay’ in a negative way, this hurts me’.”
- (Staff evaluation form respondent)

Jac Bastian, Chief Education Officer at Diversity Role Models, said:

“Our approach to understanding perceived differences through storytelling and role models is unique. In workshops, our Role Models share their experiences of having diverse family structures and of experiencing stereotyping, bullying, and prejudice in an age—and developmentally-appropriate way. They also discuss how they celebrate and take pride in their differences and encourage others to be upstanders rather than bystanders to prejudice and bullying.”

The report highlights the critical need for continued efforts in creating safe, inclusive educational environments. The report also sets out a series of recommendations, as detailed below.

Key Recommendations:

- Teaching a diverse and inclusive curriculum, including harnessing the power of personal stories and embedding a celebration of difference across a school's culture, can help reduce bullying and discrimination.
- Diversity Role Models should continue delivering its broader anti-bullying initiative focused on protected characteristics, in addition to its core LGBTQ+ work, to address bullying in schools.
- Schools should improve their response to bullying by consulting with governors, parents, and carers and implementing robust reporting and tracking mechanisms.
- Bridging the gap between students, parents, carers, and school staff is essential, particularly centring student voices, in particular, those from marginalised identities through initiatives such as student-led equality groups.
- External expertise, like that provided by Diversity Role Models, is crucial in offering practical solutions to address the time and resource constraints schools face.

Both the programme, and report reveals the importance of collaboration, and taking a whole-school approach to raising awareness of perceived differences and encouraging young people to be upstanders rather than bystanders to bullying. By implementing these findings into secondary and primary schools, we can create more inclusive and accepting school environments, leading to a more inclusive society as a whole.

Sarah Menzies, Senior Consultant at NCVO says;

"This research highlights the unacceptable rates of bullying in schools, which are worse for students from marginalised identities. The evaluation shows that the Diversity Role Models' programme, 'Embracing Difference, Ending Bullying,' was well received by school stakeholders and had a lasting positive impact on school environments. Additionally, there was a strong demand for more training from various school stakeholders."

This report, along with Diversity Role Models 13 years' of experience supporting schools to tackle and prevent prejudice-based bullying, has enabled the charity to create a **teacher-friendly Best Practice Guide**. This maps out innovative and practical methods that teachers and school leaders can take to ensure that a celebration of diversity forms the heart of an effective, research-backed, preventative approach to bullying in schools.

For more information [please contact - TBC] and to access the full report, please visit [insert link].

-END-

Notes to Editors:

[Diversity Role Models](#) CEO, Chief Education Officer and Project Manager will be launching their **'Embracing Difference, Ending Bullying Research and Impact Report'** on the evening of 11th June at the iconic ARUP Offices, London.

They will be joined by Sarah Menzies, Senior Consultant at NCVO (National Council for Voluntary Organisations), Nick Turpin, Headteacher (St John's Upper Holloway CE Primary) and Lorraine King, Health Improvement Adviser (Islington Council) to discuss some of the key findings from the report.

They will also be revealing our **Best Practice Guide for schools and colleges**, which brings to life the evidence-based findings from the Impact Report in a practical guide for educators. **Press copies are available.**

A webinar will be hosted on 25th June 2024, for those who cannot make the launch event.

About Diversity Role Models

[Diversity Role Models](#) is a registered charity whose vision is a world where everyone embraces diversity and can thrive.

Their mission is to end bullying based on sexual orientation and gender identity in schools and promote understanding and acceptance of broader individual differences. They work collaboratively to create inclusive learning environments where young people know they are valued and supported, regardless of their differences.

Their experienced team of educators and volunteer Role Models deliver in-person and online workshops for students in schools and colleges. They have also developed training sessions for school staff, governors, parents, and carers. Each session is underpinned by the power of storytelling, utilising volunteer Role Models who speak openly about their lived experiences of difference and bullying.

Since their formation in 2011, they have worked directly with 1,000+ schools in the UK. They have delivered workshops directly to 200,000+ young people and trained 24,000+ school staff members*. In addition to providing workshops, they develop educational resources for teachers, governors, parents/carers, and communities. *This data was accurate at the point of writing (02.04.2024).

About NCVO

[The National Council for Voluntary Organisations \(NCVO\)](#) is the umbrella body for England's voluntary and community sector. It aims to strengthen voluntary organisations, grow and enhance volunteering, connect people and organisations, and be a sustainable and socially responsible organisation itself. NCVO offers practical resources, consultancy services, training courses, and quality standards like the Investing in Volunteers award for excellence in volunteer management.