

*'Since mediation has been a normal part of school life, Highfield has become a better place. It has an air of calm and co-operation. Attendance has improved and incidents in school have decreased.'*

Bill Rogers

# Mediation has certainly worked for us

Last May we were invited to lead a session at a one-day conference on *A whole-school approach to preventing and responding to bullying*. This was organised by Kingston Friends Workshop Group and held at the Guildhall in Kingston-on-Thames.

The Deputy Head Alan Bamber, Deborah Long-Finlay — the class teacher who has been the inspiration to staff and mediators at Highfield JI School — and I duly attended with 12 young mediators.

In the past year, Highfield mediators have been involved in four major conferences, and on this occasion as always the staff input was brief. The children then explained the process of mediation and demonstrated, through role play, how the process worked. They then stunned the assembly of over 100 teachers and educationalists into silence by saying that they would be only too pleased to answer questions!

When someone finally broke the ice, questions came freely and were answered with confidence. The session concluded with a group activity with the 'parachute'. This involved everyone's co-operation for the activities to be

successful. The children then took part in two of the working parties, giving freely of their knowledge, suggesting ways forward, and answering further questions.

## *Confidence and enthusiasm*

Highfield has been involved in the mediation process for about four years. Mediators are trained in Year 5, but the actual process begins in Key Stage 1. Classes participate in circle time on all areas of the curriculum, and also air their views or problems.

They are encouraged to develop language, listening, and communication skills. These are then linked to affirmation and co-operation activities, and are then developed into problem-solving exercises leading to mediation.

They become very skilled at their job. The whole process just outlined greatly develops children's self-esteem. They become increasingly confident in their role and ability as mediators.

No matter how many times I see and hear the children explain to complete strangers what they do, I never cease to be amazed and overwhelmed

by their confidence, knowledge, and enthusiasm. We should never under-estimate the ability of our children.

### Behaviour Management

Mediation links in with Highfield's Behaviour Management Programme. This began when interviews involving more than a hundred children revealed disturbing evidence of pupils suffering from repeated acts of aggression, both verbal and physical.

A series of multi-lingual meetings with parents revealed their concerns about 'bullying'. Further discussion revealed that these were often isolated incidents which, though important, would probably not be labelled 'bullying' by staff.

The Behaviour Management Programme was formed as a result of this inquiry. Its core is a working party of self-selected members of staff. We have been fortunate to have representation from every year group in the school!

The working party has a core of about 12 members, and its two main purposes are:

1. To prepare and present to the whole staff a draft Behaviour Policy.

2. To co-ordinate the ever-increasing key elements of the Behaviour Management Programme.

The panel shows the key elements of the Behaviour Management Programme.

### Co-ordinating policies

The programme has led to policy and action with respect to a range of issues, including:

- **General behaviour** (including rewards systems). All the children were involved in devising school guidelines for behaviour. Class guidelines are displayed in each classroom, and school guidelines are displayed multi-lingually around the school. Rewards systems were developed throughout the school, including a weekly Awards Assembly, gold stars, regular praise, and positive home visits. Attendance Certificates are awarded each term.
- **Attendance**
- **Punctuality**
- **Equal opportunities**
- **The school's physical environment.** The Behaviour Management team recognised the importance of the school environment on behaviour. As a result, a sub-group has

### Behaviour Management Programme

#### Mediation

Behaviour Management Team  
Behaviour Policy  
Anti-Bullying Activities  
Attendance Policy  
School Environment  
Curriculum Links  
Lunchtime Supervision  
Equal Opportunities Group  
Behaviour Management Pack  
Guidelines for Behaviour

drawn up plans for developing the grounds. A successful SRB bid has resulted in funding being made available for the commencement of these plans.

- **Curriculum links** (creating positive environment, developing mediation skills, an Affirmation Programme recognising each pupil's qualities).
- **A Mediation Pack** has been devised by a number of Saltley schools. These ideas are gradually being incorporated into other schemes and policies.

### Addressing bullying

The staff agreed their own definition of 'bullying', a term they disliked because it is thought to be a simplistic way of addressing complex problems.

Common guidelines have been introduced for dealing with incidents of aggression.

Bullying is identified as an Assembly theme at least once per term.

In-service training was arranged for lunchtime supervisors to help develop positive play skills; games apparatus was purchased for use at lunchtime.

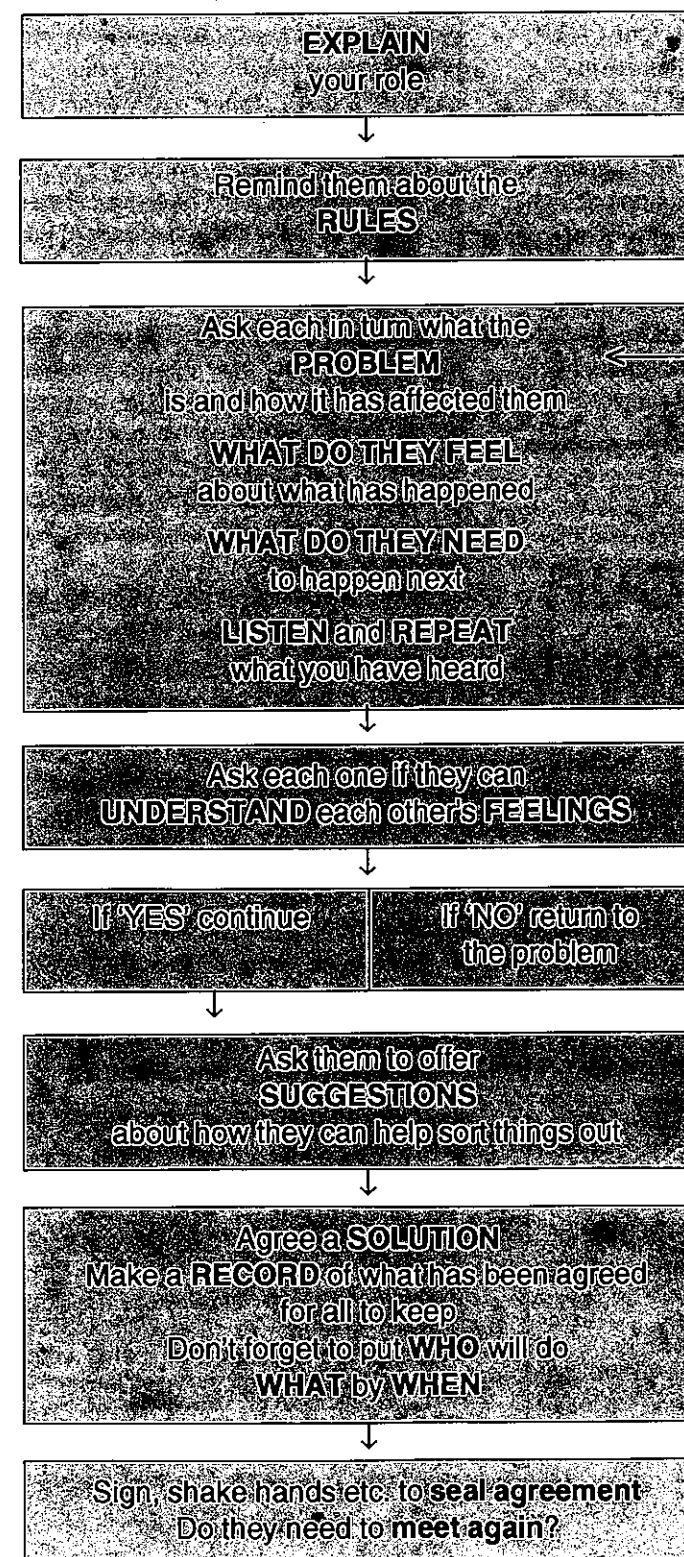
### The mediation initiative

You will see that mediation is one strand, though a very important one, in implementing policy. It has obvious application to bullying problems, but can also be used to resolve other kinds of dispute.

A member of staff received mediation train-

## LET'S MEDIATE

As a mediator you:



ing through the GEST Attendance Project. Eight staff have now received full training, although all staff have received some training. The fully-trained teachers have worked alongside colleagues to develop issues in the classroom.

In 1994, eight Year 5 pupils were trained as mediators; in 1995 a total of 20 were trained. Mediation skills were gradually built into the curriculum from reception to Year 6.

Credit for the success of the programme is largely due to Deborah Long-Finlay. As the teacher initially involved she inspired the rest of us, but has received little media recognition for her work despite the attention paid to the school's initiatives by television and the press.

### What is mediation?

Mediation is a structured process in which a neutral third party assists voluntary participants in resolving their dispute.

Mediation is not about deciding who is right or wrong, or apportioning blame, or even focusing on the past any more than is necessary to help the disputants to work out the way forward in the future. The mediator does not offer solutions. Participants take responsibility for arriving at a resolution.

Mediation allows the disputants to:

- Define the problem from their point of view
- Identify and express their feelings and needs
- Hear the feelings and needs of the other person
- Acknowledge each other's point of view
- Create solutions
- Agree a course of action
- Evaluate progress and repeat if necessary

This is all done in a safe and structured environment in which the mediator is in control of the process. Certain ground rules are laid down which the mediator and disputants must agree to and keep if the process is to go ahead. These are:

#### The mediator should

- Treat both people equally
  - Leave it for them to suggest solutions
  - Keep what is said private
- #### The disputants should
- Wait their turn to speak
  - Speak without name-calling or swearing
  - Avoid blaming or accusing each other

*Looking back. . . and ahead*

It is very clear that incidents of aggression and racism have been greatly reduced by the introduction and development of mediation.

In a recent survey we have also found that attendance has greatly improved. Out of 740 children we now have only seven that are giving us serious attendance concerns.

Mediation has also become a part of consortium governor training, making all governors aware of positive aspects of this approach in schools.

Since mediation has become a normal part of school life, Highfield has become a better place. It has an air of calm and co-operation. Attendance has improved and incidents in school have decreased. It has certainly worked for us.

Bill Rogers is Head of Highfield JI School, Saltley, Birmingham B8 3QF (0121 327 0798). Highfield belongs to the Saltley Plus Group of schools, within which the methodology described here is being developed. He will be pleased to make contact with other schools and agencies interested in the work being done at Highfield.