

Tupton Hall School takes Positive Action against Bullying with Text Someone

Tupton Hall School in Derbyshire is using Contact Group's Text Someone anti-bullying solution which encourages young people to report via text and email 24/7 incidents of bullying or any anti-social behaviour directly to schools. Martin Ebbage, Deputy Headteacher, discusses how he receives notifications from the system to let him know that messages have been sent so that he can take action immediately. Martin also discusses implementing the technology and the positive effect it has had on the school in conjunction with assemblies and workshops to make it easier for students to report incidences of bullying inside or outside of the school gates.

Tupton Hall School is a Specialist Sports College with ICT, catering for 1,850 students from 11-18 with 400 in the sixth form. The school values its policies on bullying and uses Text Someone from Contact Group to offer students another way to report incidences through the technology they use every day such as texting, reporting online or leaving a voice message.

Commenting on Text Someone Martin Ebbage said, "We have used this solution for 3 years now and we take the line that children often 'talk with their thumbs' and that texting provides them with a familiar medium to communicate issues that they might otherwise find difficult."

Extra assurance to students

The school has many different ways to speak to students about bullying and as soon as Year 7 arrive in September they are given all the facts and information they need to report it, "When the Year 7 students start secondary school, we take them offsite to an anti-bullying workshop at which we discuss the different forms of bullying and how to report them using the system. In addition to this we have regular assemblies which we run to highlight the technology. The assurance I give is that if they report an incident then the message comes to me and I will deal with it. The knowledge that their message is coming through to a person is very important to them."

Phones in the classroom

Some schools are frightened by the Bring Your Own Device BYOD revolution but Martin believes that the technology that a child brings in to the classroom can be something that the school can use in a positive way.

Martin explains, "We don't ban mobile phones in school, we run assemblies on cyber bullying and e-safety to let the children know how to keep safe online and to ensure that they are not giving out information or talking to anyone they shouldn't. We also work with parents to encourage them to be friends with their children on Facebook."

The school also uses face-to-face strategies to support children and encourages them to talk about any problems they might have, "Communication is important as we can't read the minds of students so we provide them with various options that they can use to get in touch. They can have a face-to-face conversation with a teacher or myself, there are specific counsellors in school with whom they can talk and we have magic rooms in which a team of learning mentors are on hand 5 days a week to help with bullying or other issues a child may be facing."

Immediate response

Text Someone is the backbone of Tupton Hall's anti-bullying strategy and is used to alert staff about isolated and persistent issues. Martin, said, "It's very simple to use, I get a text when someone has made a report and I can listen to it as a voicemail and reply by text. We always respond the same day. The commitment I give is that I will drop whatever I'm doing and will arrange for the most appropriate person to deal with the incident immediately."

Different kinds of bullying

Bullying can take many forms: from teasing and spreading rumours, to pushing someone around and causing physical harm, or cyber bullying via the internet.

Martin explains, "We don't have a great deal of bullying reported but it is dealt with quickly. The work we do with the technology and the assemblies is to raise awareness of the different kinds of bullying and to explain to pupils the difference between simply falling out with a friend and sustained bullying."

Bullying is not something that happens just within the confines of the school gates, it can happen on the way to school, online or at home. Students may not always wish to report incidents at school and the benefit of text messaging, going online or an automated phone call, is that it can be done from a familiar and safe environment such as at home.

Martin says, "The technology has provided a mechanism where parents and friends can report a situation on behalf of someone else. They can go to the homepage of our website and make a report that way, or find the number to text or leave a voice message. It speeds things up and gives us a way of keeping a record of any problems."

Easy set-up

When Text Someone was first introduced all the staff had to attend a beginning of term assembly to learn about the new strategy and how it would be publicised within the school. Martin recalls, "We also publicise it to students through posters in every room, in the school planner and each student is given a 'business card' with details of how to report bullying."

More openness

Tupton Hall has tried to create a more open atmosphere through its anti-bullying strategy by embracing technology and using it as another way to communicate. Safety and security is also of utmost importance when using an electronic system, "All messaging is done through the system so that there is no direct contact between the teachers and children. It has raised the whole profile of bullying and changed the attitude so that students feel it is OK to report it."

According to the NSPCC 18% of children and young people who are worried about bullying said they would not talk to their parents about it. Martin explains, "I don't want anyone to feel uncomfortable with an issue and feel that there is not a way out of it. It is a secure and private way of reporting a problem and we have had positive feedback from parents and teachers on the swiftness of it and the response."

The school is already planning the next strategy of increasing communication with staff and pupils. "We always want to keep up with the times and we are encouraging staff to use Twitter so that there is another form of communication open to students. Due to the publicity it has meant that children are more confident in reporting problems and we have seen an increase in the incidents being reported. It isn't the case that bullying has gone up, it just that pupils now have a better way to communicate."

Notes to editors

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About Contact Group:

Contact Group, the new trading name of Truancy Call Ltd is the leading provider of automatic notification systems which facilitate two-way communication between public sector organisations and schools. Its solutions enable schools and local authorities to disseminate important information quickly and easily via email, SMS and automated phone call.

With over a decade's experience delivering solutions informed by, and designed to answer real school needs, Contact Group works with over 2,000 state and independent primary and secondary schools, academies, nurseries and sixth form colleges in the UK and Ireland.

Highly flexible, Contact Group's solutions help facilitate whole-school communication with parents, governors, staff and students, providing an efficient and cost-effective way to manage student behaviour, attendance and bullying and notify parents quickly of school closures, payment reminders and general announcements

Contact Group has strong partnerships with many top academies and federations including ARK, Oasis Learning Community, EACT and Pimlico Academy.

Contact Group solutions integrate seamlessly with all school Management Information Systems (MIS), enabling schools to send messages at the touch of a button, dramatically reducing the administrative time and costs associated with contacting parents individually by phone.