

Modifying the secondary school environment to reduce bullying and aggression: the INCLUSIVE cluster RCT

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†In memoriam

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Plain English summary

The INCLUSIVE cluster RCT

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Plain English summary

Bullying, aggression and violence among young people are important mental health problems. The trial reported here evaluated the Learning Together intervention, which involved school staff and students collaborating on an 'action group' to change school rules and policies and make other changes across the school to make it a healthier place. This included using restorative approaches (which focus on improving relationships) rather than merely punishment-based approaches to discipline and using a classroom curriculum aimed at fostering social and emotional skills. These aimed to reduce bullying and aggression and to promote student health and well-being.

We compared 20 schools in south-east England that were randomly allocated to deliver the intervention over 3 years with 20 schools continuing with existing practices. Schools were provided with an external facilitator to help convene the action group, with all-staff training in restorative approaches and with curriculum materials.

At the start, 6677 students (over 9 in every 10) completed questionnaires. No schools withdrew from the study. When questionnaires were repeated 3 years later, the numbers of students reporting experience of being bullied were significantly smaller among intervention schools than among comparison schools. There was no evidence of a difference in the numbers of students reporting acts of aggression. Students in intervention schools reported having higher quality of life and psychological well-being, lower psychological difficulties and lower chances of having smoked, drunk alcohol, been offered or tried illicit drugs and been in contact with the police in the previous 12 months. The intervention was acceptable to schools and provided strong value for money.

Learning Together is effective across a very broad range of key public health targets for adolescents.

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