

The Anne Frank Trust partners with Signpost Hub to bring restorative approach to conflict to Luton schools.

Following a successful pilot project at The Linden Academy in Luton, the Anne Frank Trust UK and the Signpost Hub are implementing programmes across the county that tackle bullying, discrimination and prejudice in schools using a restorative approach.

This week (17 – 24 November) is International Restorative Awareness Week, and the Anne Frank Trust UK and the Signpost Hub are developing this innovative programme using feedback given by the school. It is being funded by Bedfordshire's Police and Crime Commissioner Kathryn Holloway.

During the pilot project, year five and six pupils were trained to become peer mediators, acting as intermediaries to resolve conflict or disruptive behaviour within the school environment. Staff were also given information on how to implement restorative approaches in the school.

A restorative approach in schools can be used to challenge the prejudice and discrimination found in hate incidents or bullying, before they escalate. As facilitators, students will enable those harmed to communicate with the person who caused the harm.

Victim Care Co-ordinator Sunya Hussain said: "The training was very well received by the school and their pupils. Using a restorative approach addresses the needs of both parties - the person who has been harmed and the person who caused the harm. If the harmer takes responsibility for their actions and acknowledges the impact this has had on the person who they harmed, it leads to a change of behaviour and the opportunity to make amends."

Kerry Ward, Director of Inclusion and SENDCo at The Linden Academy, added: "Pupils were taught how to use a 'talking stick' and 'circle time' to develop positive relationships between themselves and improve communication and active listening skills. They were also shown how to use key questions when resolving conflict. It's going to be a real benefit to the school and our pupils using this new approach to resolving any conflicts."

The Linden Academy pupils are now working with the Signpost Hub and Anne Frank Trust UK to create a toolkit to support the rollout of the project into primary schools. The development and implementation of the project into secondary schools will follow.

Val Ross, Eastern Regional Manager for the Anne Frank Trust, explained: "Training young people in how to use restorative justice approaches is very much in keeping with our educational methodology which seeks to empower young people themselves with the knowledge, skills and confidence to confront and challenge prejudice. We are committed to working with Bedfordshire Police, the Signpost Hub and our partners, including our networks of ambassadors, to create a more cohesive, supportive and positive environment for us all to thrive."

Commissioner Holloway added: "I'm a huge advocate of restorative justice, as it's such a powerful process when used in policing in helping victims to get closure after a traumatic time and offenders to understand the impact their actions have had and provides them with the opportunity to make amends. By using this approach in our schools, which promotes tolerance and respect, this will be another massive leap forward in taking a stand against hate in Bedfordshire. Research also shows a restorative approach can help with early intervention, resulting in less exclusions in school as well as avoiding offending later down the line."