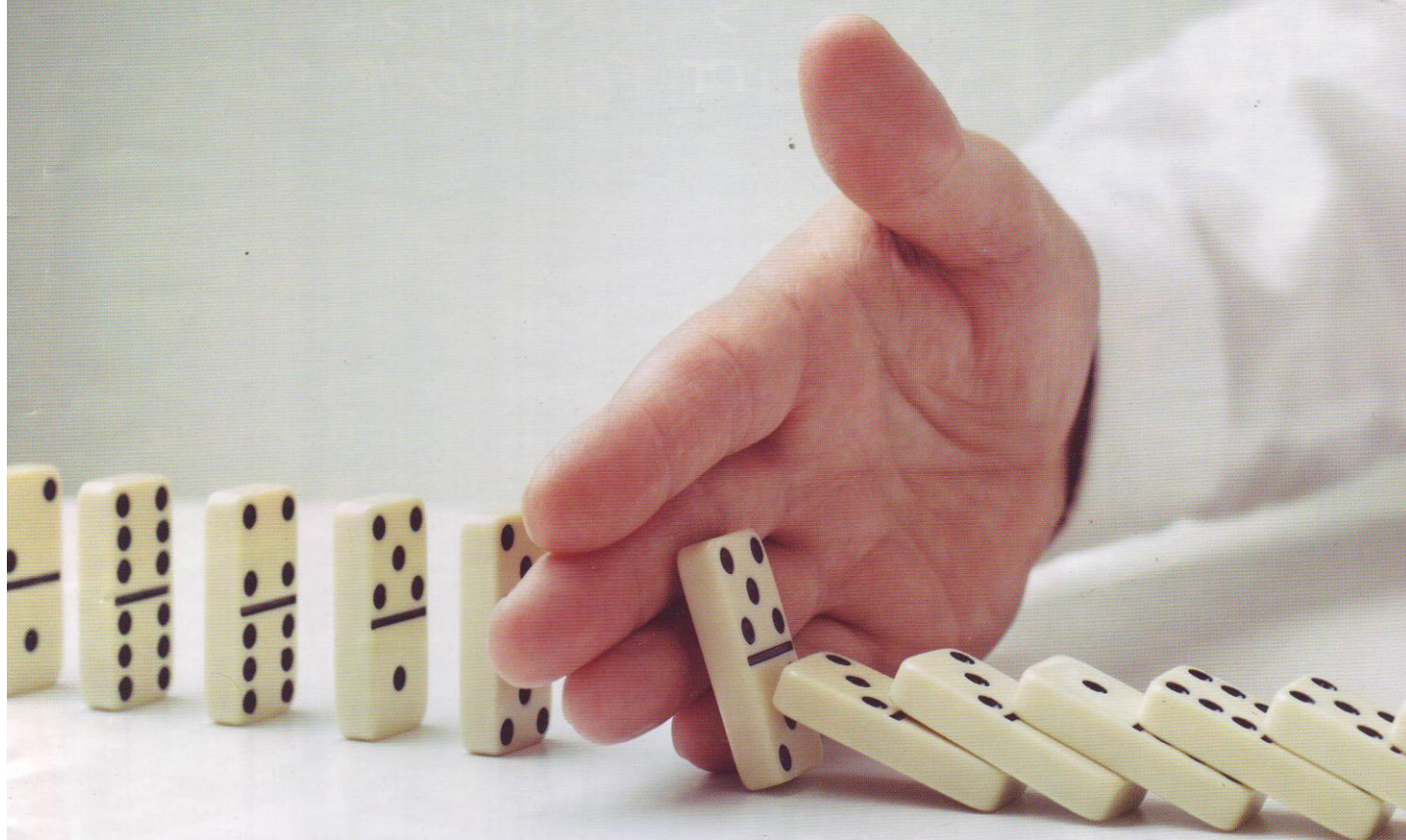


ISSUE 91 / MARCH 2016

# Leadership<sup>+</sup>

THE PROFESSIONAL VOICE OF PRINCIPALS



The change  
**agenda**  
itself needs to  
**CHANGE**



# Anti-Bullying initiative

**TOM GATELY** PRINCIPAL OF BALLYMURRAY NATIONAL SCHOOL, ROSCOMMON



In a rural school, like ours in Ballymurray, I feel that behavioural issues, especially bullying, can be quite difficult to handle, as in most cases you're dealing with a small network of families who are familiar with every aspect of each other's lives. There's a risk of something in school having long-term consequences for the whole community. Last October the school took part in an anti-bullying pilot programme delivered by ABI and we're glad we did! The programme isn't a once-off awareness raising event, it's an annual initiative that threads itself through school life. The beauty about this programme is that everyone - pupils, parents and staff - learns to appreciate fairness and a more non-judgemental approach. As Irish people, we tend to not involve ourselves in situations we're not directly affected by, the 'stay out of it, it's none of your business' advice that our parents drilled into us. This acts as fuel to unfolding situations in school. Through the programme, the pupils get the importance of disclosure, and gain the confidence to say 'hang on, that's not fair'. The teachers are given the tools to recognize bullying behaviour patterns and to handle complaints and disclosures, without confusion and major disruptions in class. We now have clear procedures in place that everyone knows and follows, which allows pupils that have engaged in bullying to quickly reintegrate back into the class group.

As principals, we're entrusted with the safety and well being of pupils in our school, so if you're lucky enough to get the chance to partake in this programme, grab it with both hands - it's worth it. My colleagues from Knockcroghery and Clonown National Schools have similar things to say. Caroline Tully, Principal of Knockcroghery NS, says: 'We took part in the ABI Programme and in September 2015 we began to implement the Programme. It's proving to be very successful in our school. Students, staff and parents were all trained on what bullying is and positive behaviours that counteract it. We're all much more aware of how we can live

positive, caring behaviours ourselves. Adopting a no-blame approach when dealing with specific disclosures of bullying behaviour by teachers, parents and students really works. We feel the programme is very effective, as it encourages the pupils to discuss and disclose issues in a non-threatening environment. It has definitely promoted respectful relationships across our school community'.

Fiona O'Neill, Principal of Clonown NS, says 'We're delighted with the programme. We have moved away from dreading the potential problems surrounding the issue of 'anti-bullying' to sharing kindness, showing respect and helping one another on a daily basis. It is no longer a stand-alone subject to be addressed at one point of the year. Our regularly updated Care Corner is an important part of the classrooms, and anti-bullying lessons/events are now a normal part of school life. Regular surveys have provided us with vital information on how the children are feeling, and have

made us more aware of what's happening in our school. The programme is a great support to me as Principal, and has given me confidence in dealing with difficult behaviours and situations.'

## ABI Care Programme

The Anti-Bullying Institute (formerly NABC), offers an innovative support programme for schools. The programme promotes positive behaviours among students and staff through class sessions, parents' evenings, staff training and consultative meetings throughout the school year.

**If you have any queries about the Anti-bullying Programme, contact** Monica Monahan of the Anti-Bullying Institute at [www.abi.ie](http://www.abi.ie) or by phone to 087 269 4369.



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