

Bullying

It did not happen all the time, but Ben was always careful not to upset Tom. They had not been friends since Year Three when Ben started at the school. Tom had always hurt Ben. Sometimes Tom kicked, hit or pinched him. Nobody ever saw it happen. It was always in school. On some days it was in lessons and on other days it was at playtimes but Tom always hurt him, and it always upset him. It was worse for Ben that it did not happen every day; sometimes weeks would go by and nothing would happen.

Ben and Tom were now in Year Six. A visitor had come to school to talk about their new high school. The woman was joking about some of the stories they might hear – older children flushing bags down the toilet or new children being dared to do silly or dangerous things and, finally, bullying. Ben looked over to where Tom was sitting. Tom was smiling and quietly looked back over to Ben.

Ben's heart began to race. He felt tears well up in his eyes. The teacher said that these things did not happen because the school listened to any worries the pupils had. Ben was scared because he knew he couldn't say anything.

Ben did not go to school the next day. He told his mum that he was not well. Instead, he lay in bed, not talking to anyone, whilst he thought how much worse the bullying would get at secondary school.

After three days of pretending he was ill his mum told him he was to go to school. Ben nervously walked into the playground but did not play football as usual. He just watched Tom. He sat on the wall. Nothing happened, he was just thinking.

In class Ben could not concentrate on his work. Tom did nothing until lunchtime when, on the way out to lunch, he hit Ben hard in his back. It made him fall to the ground.

Ben looked round. No one saw it. He started to cry. He thought about Tom, the secondary school and how disappointed his parents would be in him. All these thoughts filled his head at the same time. He sat on the floor, put his head in his folded arms and quietly wept.

Soon after, he felt a gentle hand on his shoulder. Ben slowly looked up and saw his teacher. She said nothing but helped him up and took him somewhere quiet. Ben told the teacher everything. His teacher said she would have to tell others. Ben sadly nodded.

That afternoon Ben helped in the infants. He saw Tom going to the headteacher's room. He saw him come out upset and trying not to cry and at the end of the day he saw Tom's parents come into school. For the first time since Year Two his mum was also waiting for him after school. She gave him a big hug and held him tightly as they walked home.

Follow-up question

- ◆ How could Ben have stopped Tom earlier?