The Bullying Breakthrough Framework
Your 4-Part Counter Bullying Framework

Starving bullying of oxygen
Awareness isn't the problem. We've known for decades that bullying harms kids, wrecks trust and poisons school culture. The problem is what comes next.

When schools obsess with awareness campaigns, posters and another 'Anti-Bullying Program,' they end up fueling over-diagnosis. They risk every conflict or poor behaviour being labelled bullying, while the core issue goes untouched.

Bullying isn't a behavioural problem. It's a cultural one.
And culture changes when the people inside it do. This framework highlights the four research-proven levers that have helped schools across the world reduce bullying at its root.

1. Ethos
Make Culture Your Curriculum

Culture is the sum of what we encourage and what we tolerate.

Programs don't stop bullying. Consistent adult modelling does.

A restorative ethos means:
- Every adult speaks and acts the way they want students to.
- Fairness, safety and belonging are lived values – not laminated ones.
- Conflicts are treated as teachable, not punishable.

Quick Audit:
What behaviours do we quietly tolerate that are eroding the culture?

Research Check:
Cowie's cross-national study of 1,378 schools found a restorative culture and ethos to be the single common factor in schools recording the lowest levels of bullying and the highest social cohesion.

2. Fair Process
Build Trust Before You Need It

When students (and staff) understand how decisions are made, they're more likely to accept them, even when they disagree.

A 'fair-process culture' means you lead every consequence, every policy and every interaction through three principles:

- Engagement: Let people tell their story before deciding.
- Explanation: Be clear about the why behind the decision.
- Expectation Clarity: Outline what happens next and why it's fair.

Quick Audit:
Do your processes build trust - or just enforce rules?

Practice Tip:
When tempers flare, fairness outlasts firmness. Always explain how you got to a decision. It restores calm faster than any policy.

3. Reintegrative Shame
Teach Conscience, Not Compliance

Punishment breeds stigma and resistance.
Reintegrative shame – the cornerstone of restorative practice – helps students feel the sting of doing wrong without being cast out.

When a student cleans up their own mess, apologises or repairs harm, they learn responsibility and re-earn their membership.

Quick Audit:
Are our responses helping students put things right – or applying the "bully" label?

In Practice:
- Replace detentions with conversations about impact.
- Always include a ceremony of re-acceptance – a handshake, a thank you, a return to the group.

That's what teaches accountability and empathy.

4. Language
Culture Lives in Our Words

Language is both the input and output of culture.

If adults speak restoratively, students will too.

Every affective statement you make tilts the earth either toward or away from bullying.

Instead of: "That's unacceptable."
Try: "It disappoints me to see that – I think you should fix that."

Each time you use a feelings word, you activate a student's thinking and empathy at the same time. If there's an antidote to bullying it lies in enacting the empathy/compassion switch in our students.

Quick Audit:
When staff talk about behaviour, do they talk about rules or relationships?

When ethos, process, reintegration and language align... bullying runs out of oxygen.

Culture always wins – so build one that bullying can't breathe in.