FOREIGN STUDENT ATTACKS LOCAL BULLY

He just couldn’t take it anymore

By Veena Bharwani

He has been bullied daily ever since he moved to Singapore three years ago. To the teenagers in the all-boys school, Adam (not his real name) was the perfect target — a foreign student and a loner.

They would tease him about his foreign accent, taunt him and sometimes throw objects at him. One day last year, he snapped for the first time.

The school’s principal confirmed that Adam charged at the bully and started hyperventilating. Teachers managed to calm him down. The bullies were punished, and Adam started regular counselling sessions to manage his anger. All of this, however, does not seem to have made much of a difference. The bullying continued.

On 16 Jul, the day of an O-Level oral exam which Adam was expected to do well in, he was taunted as usual. The teacher had left the classroom just before recess and the boys were getting restless.

One boy threw pens at Adam while the rest laughed.

Then, Adam snapped again. He charged at the boy who was throwing pens at him, and scratched him on the face.

Several classmate told The New Paper they were shocked when their usually quiet and reserved classmate went berserk.

One of them said: “I saw the boy making fun of him and throwing pens at him. The class was also laughing at them. They thought it was normal fun. “Then suddenly, (Adam) got very angry at the other boy and ran straight at him and attacked him.”

According to the student, there was a scuffle between the two. “The other boys in the class tried to restrain (Adam), but he was too strong and pushed them off,” said the witness. “He was so angry that it was rather scary. He was screaming.” By this time, the boy who was scratched had blood streaming down his face. The witness said he called a teacher, who also failed to calm Adam down. “The teacher asked me to call more teachers and they too couldn’t restrain him,” said the student. “He continued screaming at the top of his lungs and wanted to charge and attack the bully again.” Finally, the principal was called in. He too could do nothing to calm Adam. It was only when Adam started hyperventilating that the drama died down.

The school called an ambulance and Adam was taken to hospital.

He was admitted for four days. Later, he returned to Indonesia to be with his parents for a while, the principal said. As a result, Adam missed his oral exam. The bully was given treatment at school for the scratches on his face. Students at the school confirmed that Adam was often teased because he’s different. A classmate said: “He always talks about funny things like magic. Everyone likes to tease him because he’s different and has a strong Indonesian accent.”

His accent and his fondness for writing poetry set him apart from the local students, who would rather play soccer or Xbox games, according to Adam’s classmates.

Another student said Adam often acted strangely in school and kept to himself. “I have seen him going to the back of the school and sitting in a yoga position and meditating all alone.”

The school principal said the teen has had problems with anger management.

He said the classmate who provoked Adam will be punished. “He will have to tell his side of the story and we will explain to him how his actions affected not just one person but the whole class.”

Since Adam had missed his exam, the school would write to the Examinations Board to ask for due consideration for what had happened, he added.

He said the school has about 10 foreign students per level, and they generally don’t have problems fitting in.

Schools keep a close watch on foreign students being bullied and go the extra mile to help them mesh with local students.

The biggest barrier for most of them...
China student drops out of NUS – and she’s not coming back

By Andrew Chin

PHOTOS: Kelvin Chia, Dominic Ting

This means foreign scholars do not deprive locals of places in junior college.

Sometimes, she would hear hurtful comments being spoken in front of her by Singaporean students who ignored her presence.

The comments would poke fun at the way PRCs dressed, their nerdy looks or their "Chinaman" accents.

Once, she claimed she shed tears about a derogatory song being sung about PRCs in another school.

The song had an army tune to it and it went: "I wanna be a PRC, I wanna talk and act funny..." she said she wasn’t surprised.

"Hurtful talk like that... is quietly tolerated by everyone in Singapore," she said.

What hurt her most was that people seemed to judge her even before they got to know her, just because she was a PRC student.

She agreed there were those who behaved and acted the stereotype, which rubbed her the wrong way too.

"But not all of us are like that," she said. Another student from China said life was hell for the first two years.

Michael Daming, 17, said he was bullied on a daily basis after he arrived in Singapore five years ago.

"They called me rude names everyday and pushed me around everyday," he said. "It was because I couldn’t speak English at all."

He was in primary six at that time. He wanted to scold them.

"But I couldn’t. I didn’t know any words. I had to walk away because I lost my temper and hit them," he said.

"I didn’t want to get thrown out of school. It was the language barrier that made it so hard."

Now, five years later, things are much better. Michael has both local friends and foreign friends and mingles well.

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Said Dunman Secondary principal Edwells Neo: "We have about 30 foreign students and those from China struggle most with the language. But they make an effort to blend in."

Two China students have even taken up English Literature to improve in the language."

She added that she encourages all students to keep her in the loop if there is any bullying.

"They can SMS me to inform me and we will take action immediately," she said.

One secondary school teacher, who has five foreign students from China in her Secondary 1 form class, said she enforces a strict "no teasing" policy in her class.

"My students are very young, and I make sure they take this very seriously," said the 28-year-old, who declined to be named.

She added that each foreign student in her class has a "buddy" to explain to them things they don’t understand during lessons, as they can’t speak English well.

"I don’t allow them to call these students China students or China boys. They have to learn from an early age that it’s wrong," she said.

It’s not just a problem plaguing primary and secondary schools. Even tertiary students face a hard time adjusting, it seems.

The April edition of The National University of Singapore alumni magazine, AlumNUS, ran a story on their counselling centre and problems students face on campus.

The article said that some 60 per cent of students counselled at the NUS Counselling Centre are international students.

Not surprisingly, the article added that language barrier ranks as one of the more common problems faced by the foreign students.

"Lectures and tutorials are conducted in the English language, rendering some students handicapped... putting them at a disadvantage when it comes to homework, examinations or the simple act of socialisation," said the article.

The centre conducts workshops and talks to help students deal with the issues.

The counselling centre has started a 24-hour hotline for students in life-threatening situations.

Meanwhile, a Singapore Management University graduate decided to take a lighter approach, and published a handbook called Not The Stuffy Guide, which is described as a "Lonely Planet guide for international students".

The book educates foreign readers on the quirks of Singapore life, touching on local English and Singlish and the various festivals celebrated here.

It is to be distributed free to all incoming foreign students this year.

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The New Paper

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