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BEATING THE DRUM: James Adair and Aidan Rowley help drummer Tara Artura during the NISCCY anti-bullying initiative at the Movie House on Monday

SCHOOLS across Belfast are launching a crackdown on bullying.

Advice is being given to teachers and parents to tackle the scourge which has been blamed for self-harm and suicide among young people.

Schools in the Republic are also taking part in the campaign to beat the bully.

TV adverts featuring the cartoon character Bulko are being

screened north and south of the border as part of the initiative between the Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People (NISCCY) and the Ombudsman for Children in the Republic.

Barney McNeary, Northern Ireland Commissioner, said: "This cartoon is a vital step in helping children understand at an early stage that bullying is wrong and that they can take

steps together to stop their friends suffering bullying.

"At the same time NISCCY is publishing guidance for primary and post-primary schools to help pupils and teachers stop bullying."

The adverts were aired for the first time on UTV, RTV and Channel 4 on Sunday.

This has been

dubbed anti-bullying week and there are a number of activities planned.

Bullying has been identified by suicide campaigners as a major danger to the mental and physical health of young people. Areas like north and west Belfast have seen rising numbers of those taking their own lives.

Nipps, an early-years organisation, is helping co-educational activities and its chief executive, Siobhán Fitzpatrick, said research showed it could make a difference to children's behaviour.

"The message is part of Nipps's 10-year strategy to build strong, confident children who can value and respect others who are different," she said.

Nipps has been helping more than 1,600 children across Belfast deal with socialisation, racism and physical discrimination.

Meanwhile, a leading health education charity has published research which shows bullying is as big a concern amongst parents as the threat of drugs. Researchers with Life Education also discovered that some parents recognise their own behaviour may be contributing towards their children's bullying.

In the poll, carried out to mark the launch of anti-bullying week, parents and carers of children who were about to leave primary schools were asked what their main concerns were.

As well as being worried about drugs, all said they were worried about their children being bullied.

Evidence emerging from its work, shows that if parents try different strategies and avoid shouting or using physical discipline, this can have very positive results on children.