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BY LAURA MCDAID

NEW cartoon character Etkola made an appearance at the Dublin Road Movie House last week to launch an anti-bullying campaign aimed at younger children.

The event was organised by NIPPA, Northern Ireland's largest early years organisation, in partnership with the Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People (NICCY) and the Ombudsman for Children (OCO) in the Republic of Ireland, to mark Anti-Bullying Week and Universal Children's Day.

The cartoon aims to let children know from a very young age that bullying is wrong, that they should respect others, and that they should let someone know if they are being bullied.

The messages in the cartoon, dealing with sectarianism, racism and physical discrimination, were based on extensive consultations with young children.

Over 5,000 children have been involved in the programme so far.

Slobhan Fitzpatrick, Chief Executive of NIPPA, said: "Research results indicate a significant change in the behaviour of young children who have embarked on the media initiative programme which to date has dealt with sectarianism, racism and physical difference.

"The new message is part of NIPPA's 10-year strategy to build strong, com-



petent children who can value and respect others who are different."

Bonny McNoary, the Commissioner for Children and Young People, said: "Bullying has been in the news lately in a lot of forms."

"This cartoon is a vital step in help-

ing children understand at an early stage that bullying is wrong and that they can take steps together to stop their friends suffering bullying."

The media campaign will be shown during children's and adults' TV programmes on UTV, RTE and Channel 4.

Helen Farrimond, principal of Cranmore Integrated Primary School in South Belfast, supports the campaign and says that the school tries to make pupils aware at all stages that bullying is not acceptable.

"This is an issue that needs to be taken very seriously," she says.

"We have always taken a pre-emptive approach by marking Anti-Bullying Week on a voluntary basis, but it's great to see that it has become a national, official event that's taking off across Northern Ireland.

"We set clear boundaries and have high expectations of behaviour."

Cranmore Integrated pupils discuss bullying each year during Anti-Bullying Week through the use of its 'circle time', which allows children to bring up issues in a group led by their teacher.

"It's about ensuring that children know what to do if they're being bullied," says Ms Farrimond.

"They should know that they need to tell someone and that something will be done about it."

The school, which is attended by pupils from a number of different religions and cultures, has found its anti-bullying policies have proven very successful.

"Often children don't realise the harm they can cause.

"But if it's pointed out to them that what they did might have hurt someone's feelings, they will usually take that on board."