

BULLDOZING BULLYING

Celebrating individuality with quirk, eccentricity

With 'odd dress day', students of Aditya Birla World Academy in Tardeo learn to embrace differences, celebrate diversity

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TWEETS @MumbaiMirror

When everyone is wearing something odd, it's no longer odd," remarked Anush Gandhi, a Grade XI student at Aditya Birla World Academy (ABWA) in Tardeo as he adjusted a plain grey tee tucked inside a blue-checked lungi.

On Friday, the campus of the Tardeo school was filled with students – and teachers – dressed in an eclectic mix of sartorial choices for 'odd dress day', flagging off a week-long anti-bullying drive.

Students and teachers made the most of the opportunity giving uniforms and formal clothes a break. Mismatched shoes, socks and separates, pyjamas, lungis, quirky hairdos, fascinators haphazardly put on as if done last minute, and unconventional lipstick shades – the theme was to stand out. The endeavour aimed at normalising individual oddities that are often at the heart of bullying.

"This is a small step in our fight. The idea is to sensitise everyone to the fact that each individual is different and has his/her own idiosyncrasies. It's about empowering each one to



The event marked the first day of a week-long anti-bullying drive

break the silence through our campaign #BulldozeBullying," Radikha Sinha, Principal, ABWA, told Mirror.

"Differences that make us unique and give us individuality, unfortunately sometimes, lead to prejudices and bullying. 'Odd dress day' is an attempt to encourage students to embrace differences and celebrate diver-

sity," said Neerja Birla, chairperson of the Aditya Birla Education Trust.

While students were given the freedom to dress the way they liked, they were also instructed to do so within the ambit of the school environment. This was their first such campaign against bullying.

Grade XI student Antara Parekh,

who turned up in a florescent green hoodie and harem pants, said the initiative allowed students to embrace their identity. "We need to normalise and accept differences so that no one feels left out," she said.

Gandhi's classmate Vivek Chokshi chose to go traditional to address diversity. He wore loose pants,

kurta and a jacket.

As classrooms, corridors, stairways and the staffroom rang with excitement, students and staff assessed one another on the oddness quotient.

The initiative gave Gayatri Viswanath, the Spanish teacher, an opportunity to introspect her own attitude back in college.

Dressed in a patiala salwar and a short top, she recalled engaging in subtle bullying herself. "Whenever I saw foreigners pairing salwars with tops and not kurtas, I would remark, 'Look at them, what are they wearing.' Now I think back and realise it was wrong. They were comfortable dressing that way and need not have been judged. That's why I chose the same combination today."

"Name-calling," said Aanchal Jain, pastoral care coordinator, in-charge of student wellbeing at the school, "is one of the major concerns in bullying behaviour. This kind of day enables teachers to have open conversations about bullying."

Other activities for the week include, an extempore contest, inter-house exhibit competition, special assemblies and in-class activities centred around the themes of 'Change Starts with Us' and 'Breaking the Silence', and sessions on cyber-bullying for parents, teachers and students.

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