

## Student handout 3.2

### Hope is for everyone

The principal of Hope College was a generous and humane woman. She believed strongly in the importance of education. “Everyone deserves a good start in life,” she used to tell the staff. “I do not want you to treat any one person more favourably than another in this school. That would not be fair.”

Then one day a group of refugee children arrived at the school. Their families had fled from a conflict in a neighbouring country. The principal told the staff,

*“These unfortunate young people have lost everything. Make them welcome in your classes. They should suffer as little as possible. The war was not their fault.”*

The staff agreed. The children were put in classes according to their age. Most of the refugee children were on their own in the class, but in one class there was a group of four refugee boys.

It wasn’t long before the staff began to realise there were some difficulties in treating the refugee children the same as the others in the class. One by one, they came to the principal with their problems. “The refugee child in my class doesn’t speak our language,” said one teacher. “I haven’t got the time to translate everything for her. It’s taking too much of my time. Other students are suffering.” “The refugee student in my class won’t speak to anyone,” another teacher observed. “He may be traumatised by the war. Or he may just have difficulties with learning. What can I do?” A third teacher said, “I have a child who was injured. She cannot walk. She cannot join in any physical activity and she can’t get up the stairs to the science laboratory.”

Then other problems began to emerge. At lunchtimes, some of the refugee children were bullied and teased. They were called insulting names and some of the other children told them to go back where they came from.

The four boys in the same class formed a gang to protect themselves. One day, there was a fight between one of them and a local boy. The refugee boy hurt his opponent very badly. The staff complained to the principal that the boy should be expelled from the school, but the principal wondered if that would be fair, given what the young refugee had been through. The staff said:

*“We have tried to make this work, but our own children are suffering too much. We cannot teach these children and do our best for the local students at the same time.”*

Shortly after, the parents of the refugee children asked to see the Principal. They said:

*“We don’t like the fact that you teach boys and girls together in sport classes. That is against our religion and culture.”*

The principal was finally beginning to run out of patience. She was finding this a difficult problem but knew in her heart that she should not lose hope.