



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

PUBLICATION

Incidence of peer-on-peer sexual harassment among secondary school pupils in Wales: government response

Our response to Estyn's report and recommendations on A report on the incidence of peer-on-peer sexual harassment among secondary school pupils in Wales.

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Report title

'A report on the incidence of peer-on-peer sexual harassment among secondary school pupils in Wales'

Report details

The review was commissioned by the Equity in Education Division of EPS on behalf of the Minister for Education and Welsh Language to consider the incidence of peer-on-peer sexual harassment in the lives of secondary-aged young people and the culture and processes that help protect and support young people in schools in Wales.

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Summary of main findings

Pupils

Around half of all pupils say they have personal experience of peer-on-peer sexual harassment and three quarters of all pupils report seeing other pupils experiencing this. Peer-on-peer sexual harassment is more prevalent online and outside school than in school.

The most common forms of peer-on-peer sexual harassment during the school day are pupils catcalling and making hurtful comments, making homophobic comments, and comments about appearance.

Generally, pupils do not tell teachers when they experience sexual harassment. They feel that it has become normalised behaviour and say that teachers are not aware of the extent of the problem. In addition, pupils say teachers often dismiss incidences as trivial or encourage pupils to ignore them.

Many LGBTQ learners say that homophobic bullying is happening all the time and that this is the most common type of harassment in their school.

More than half of boys speak about being personally involved in sexually harassing their peers, including pressurising girls to send nude photographs.

Many pupils across the whole age range say they have not had enough sex and relationships education during their time in school. Older pupils in many schools report that they have had no sex education at all and are very keen for more advice and guidance. Pupils value having lessons from 'real life people who talk about real life problems' and want to see more of this type of learning.

Schools

In the most effective schools, leaders promote a strong ethos of respect in all areas of their work. In many schools, there is a strong team approach to safeguarding. Staff have regular and appropriate training, understand their

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responsibility with regard to safeguarding children and discharge their safeguarding duties well. Normally, leaders respond suitably to formal complaints by parents or pupils about peer-on-peer sexual harassment and involve appropriate external agencies.

There is a general inconsistency across school staff about their understanding of what constitutes peer-on-peer sexual harassment including wider issues relating to equality and diversity and how they impact on pupils. Even within schools, there is inconsistency in the way in which teachers respond to incidences of sexual harassment.

In most schools, leaders, teachers and support staff are unaware of the high prevalence of peer-on-peer sexual harassment amongst young people because pupils do not systematically tell them about it. Generally, schools respond suitably when reacting to reported peer-on-peer sexual harassment but are not proactive enough in their approach to prevent it from taking place.

Despite the fact that schools generally record behaviour and bullying incidents, they do not make productive use of the data and information available to them to categorise and analyse incidences of peer-on-peer bullying and harassment well enough. In many schools, leaders do not make enough use of the findings of the biennial 'Student Health and Wellbeing Report' produced by School Health Research Network (SHRN) to plan provision.

In around half of schools, leaders have developed suitable provision for the 'Health and Wellbeing' Area of Learning Experience (AOLE) of the Curriculum for Wales for either Year 7 or Year 8 from September 2022. Overall, there is adequate inclusion of topics covering healthy relationships for these year groups.

There is too much variation in the time allocated for PSE across schools in Wales. Overall, there is not enough consideration of the breadth and depth to which PSE topics are covered as pupils progress through the school.

In most schools, largely due to the pressures of the curriculum, there are no regular PSE lessons for pupils at key stage 4 or those in the sixth form. In addition, the pandemic and remote learning have impacted disproportionately on

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the provision for PSE.

In a small minority of schools, leaders actively elicit pupils' views on personal and social issues, including peer sexual harassment and respond well to issues as they emerge or when they are shared by pupils and staff.

All schools value the support and collaboration of external agencies, such as the school police officer and youth workers, to supplement their PSE provision. However, schools report that there is now limited external specialist support for sex education.

All schools say they need more training and support to deliver relationships and sexuality education and to engage in conversations with pupils about gender issues and sexual harassment.

School staff voice strongly the need for collaboration with parents and for their cooperation in dealing with incidences of peer-on-peer sexual harassment.

Local authorities

Under the Welsh Government 2019 Statutory Anti-bullying Guidance, there is a responsibility on local authorities to monitor the termly bullying and equality data that schools share with them and advise them on local trends. Schools report few instances of bullying to local authorities and rarely report on peer-on-peer sexual harassment.

There is a lack of consistency in how local authorities collect, analyse and use school bullying and harassment data. Generally, local authority officers do not make effective use of such information to plan interventions or staff training. In addition, there is currently no statutory requirement for local authorities to share their data or their response to trends in bullying with the Welsh Government.

Recommendation 1

Secondary schools should:

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- Recognise that peer-on-peer sexual harassment is highly prevalent in the lives of young pupils and adopt a whole-school preventative and proactive approach to dealing with it. This importantly includes providing pupils with assurance that school staff will take every incidence of peer-on-peer sexual harassment seriously and work in partnership with parents and external agencies.

Welsh Government response:

We will write to local authority Directors of Education to make them aware of the recommendations for local authorities and secondary schools.

Recommendation 2

Secondary schools should:

- Provide sufficient, cumulative and beneficial learning opportunities for pupils across the whole age range about healthy relationships, sex and sexuality education. This includes providing a safe, enabling and supportive environment for open and honest discussions.

Welsh Government response:

We will write to local authority Directors of Education to make them aware of the recommendations for local authorities and secondary schools.

Recommendation 3

Secondary schools should:

- Improve the way they record, categorise and analyse incidences of harassment and bullying. Records should include details about the nature and type of incidences, the impact on the victim and appropriate actions in

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response to both perpetrators and victims. Leaders should ensure they review records regularly and evaluate the impact of their actions on pupils' wellbeing.

Welsh Government response:

We will write to local authority Directors of Education to make them aware of the recommendations for local authorities and secondary schools.

Recommendation 4

Secondary schools should:

- Ensure all school staff receive regular and purposeful professional learning opportunities on personal and social education matters, including relationships, sexuality, diversity and gender transitioning. This is so that they are able to provide an affirmative, proactive approach to supporting pupils as they grow and develop into young adults.

Welsh Government response:

We will write to local authority Directors of Education to make them aware of the recommendations for local authorities and secondary schools.

Recommendation 5

Local authorities should:

- Work with schools to collect and categorise and analyse all bullying and harassment data correctly and comprehensively. In addition, support schools to analyse this information regularly to identify trends and put restorative arrangements in place.

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Welsh Government response:

We will write to local authority Directors of Education to make them aware of the recommendations for local authorities and secondary schools.

Recommendation 6

Local authorities should:

- Plan suitable intervention and support on gender issues at both school and local authority level, evaluating regularly their impact on pupil wellbeing.

Welsh Government response:

We will write to local authority Directors of Education to make them aware of the recommendations for local authorities and secondary schools.

Recommendation 7

Local authorities should:

- Provide school staff with the necessary professional learning to adopt a proactive approach to peer-on-peer sexual harassment, including homophobic, biphobic and transphobic bullying and harassment.

Welsh Government response:

We will write to local authority Directors of Education to make them aware of the recommendations for local authorities and secondary schools.

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Recommendation 8

The Welsh Government should:

- Work with local authorities to improve the way they collect bullying and harassment information from schools and ensure that local authorities identify and respond to patterns and trends in behaviour. This is in order to plan suitable guidance, training and support for schools.

Welsh Government response:

Accept. We are already considering the changes we need to make to our anti-bullying guidance, **Rights, Respect, Equality** in relation to racial harassment and bullying in schools, in line with the Race Equality Action Plan. We will also consider how this work can be effectively widened to include robust and consistent reporting, recording and data collection of peer on peer sexual harassment, and homophobic harassment and bullying.

Recommendation 9

The Welsh Government should:

- Ensure schools receive regular and informative updates on suitable resources that are available to support them in the delivery of relationships and sexuality education

Welsh Government response:

Accept. This is a priority area for WG and a national plan of professional learning for RSE is currently being developed with practitioners and partners. Officials are in dialogue with wider Welsh Government and key stakeholders to identify gaps, and to commission new high quality resources where required to support implementation. National Network conversations will also provide an opportunity

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to discuss RSE resources, which resources are considered high-quality and to address any gaps where new resources may need to be commissioned.

Publication details

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