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# A Survey into the Prevalence and Incidence of School Bullying in Wales Summary Report



# **A Survey into the Prevalence and Incidence of School Bullying in Wales**

## **Summary Report**

### **The People and Work Unit**

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Views expressed in this report are those of the researcher and not necessarily those of the Welsh Assembly Government

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## 1. BACKGROUND

1.1 The Welsh Assembly Government commissioned the People & Work Unit (PWU) to undertake a survey of school bullying in Wales. The survey focuses on pupils' experiences of bullying by other pupils within their school life.

1.2 The survey aimed to provide baseline evidence of the "incidence and prevalence of bullying" among compulsory school aged pupils in Wales and allow the Assembly Government to "measure future changes to the level of bullying in Wales". The specific objectives of the survey were to:

- Establish the prevalence of bullying in primary and secondary schools, and pupil referral units (PRU) via a representative survey of school pupils, capturing the reported level of bullying from both the perpetrators and the victims of bullying;
- Set a baseline measurement on the level of bullying in 2009;
- Identify the nature, extent and reasons of bullying that is ascribed to a pupil's age, gender, ethnicity, sexuality, disability, perceived economic deprivation and language;
- Understand the level and type of cyber bullying that takes place – through text messages, email, chat rooms etc.;
- Assess the awareness of pupils of sources of help with bullying problems and school based anti-bullying policies and support networks available to support young people, schools and parents;
- Assess pupils' views on schools' approach to tackling bullying, especially from those pupils who have been bullied; and
- Provide empirical evidence for policy development and recommendations designed to improve anti-bullying approaches and policies within schools, local education authorities and the Assembly Government.

1.3 The survey used self-completion questionnaires, which were completed by pupils in years 4, 6, 7 and 10 in participating schools between April 2009 and July 2009. In total, 7,448 pupils from 167 schools and 5 pupil referral units (PRUs) took part in the survey. This report focuses upon bullying in primary and

secondary schools only, because the number of special schools and PRUs who took part was too low to be representative.

1.4 The questionnaires were based upon the Olweus Bully/Victim questionnaire<sup>i</sup>, an internationally recognised measure, which has been widely used in other studies. The questionnaires used for years 6, 7, and 10 were very similar and therefore these results are comparable. However, the questionnaire for year 4 was simplified, meaning that for most questions, the findings for year 4 pupils are not directly comparable with other year groups.

1.5 In order to ensure that the survey is as representative as possible, the sample of primary schools was stratified on the basis of the language of instruction of the school (English/Welsh), the proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals (an indicator of socio economic disadvantage) and the ethnicity of pupils. Given the lower number of secondary schools and Pupil Referral Units in Wales, all were invited to participate in the survey and the data was subsequently quality assured to check for any bias.

1.6 Since this was the first time a comprehensive national survey of bullying in Wales has been undertaken, where possible, comparisons are made with similar studies that use the same measure of bullying.

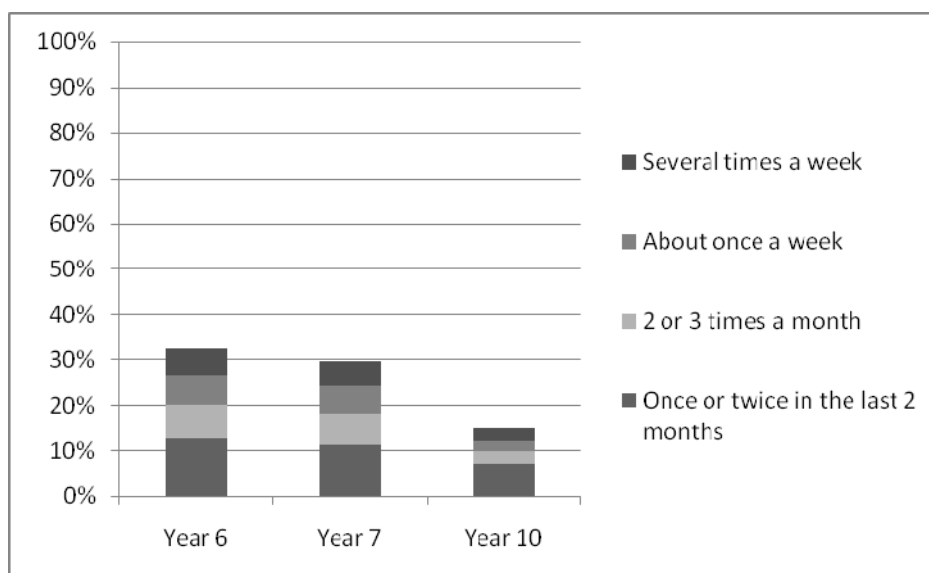
## 2. FINDINGS

### The prevalence of bullying

2.1 **Introduction:** The survey collected information about bullying over a two month time frame as longer time frames are known to be less reliable due to pupils' recall of bullying<sup>ii</sup>. This is the same time period as used in the Olweus/Victim questionnaire. Therefore, unless stated otherwise, all the rates of bullying in this report are for the last two months.

2.2 For each of the different types of bullying that were measured, pupils were asked if they had experienced it and if so, how often. Graph 2.1 shows most pupils who reported being bullied, are bullied infrequently.

**Graph 2.1 the incidence and frequency of pupils in Wales bullied within the last two months**



2.3 The results for year 4 (15% of pupils reported being bullied “all the time”) are not directly comparable, and are therefore not included.

2.4 **Incidence and frequency of bullying:** In order to provide a full picture on the incidence and frequency of bullying in Wales, pupils in years 6, 7 and 10 were also asked whether they had been bullied in the last school year. The proportions of pupils reporting being bullied within the last school year, were:

- 47% in year 6
- 44% in year 7
- 25% in year 10

2.5 **The incidence of severe bullying:** Although the proportion of pupils reporting being bullied in the last two months declines with age, the proportion of pupils in years 6, 7, and 10 reporting being bullied for “about a year” (8% - 7% - 6% respectively) does not show the same decline with age. This is consistent with other research, suggesting that between 5% and 10% of the pupil population experience “severe” bullying.<sup>iii</sup> Moreover, those pupils in years 6, 7, and 10 who

were bullied for a “about a year” tended to report a much higher frequency of bullying: they were at least seven times more likely to report being bullied “several times a week” and they were less likely to agree that they were confident that the school could help them if they were bullied. Further analysis of this group of pupils who were being persistently bullied, showed no difference in the characteristics of the schools<sup>1</sup> in which this group of pupils were from, compared to pupils who had not been bullied for such a long period. Moreover, there was no difference in the proportion of girls or boys who were persistently bullied.

**2.6 Location of bullying:** In years 4, 6, and 7, the school yard was the most common location of bullying within the school. In year 10, this changes, with the classroom becoming the most common location, followed by the school yard.

**2.7 Bullying others:** 18% of pupils in year 6, falling to 11% of pupils in year 10, admit to bullying other pupils “as part of a group”. Smaller proportions admit bullying others “on their own”. For example, in years 7 and 10, around 7% of pupils report bullying others “on their own”.

### **The nature and extent of bullying**

**2.8** This section outlines the key results about both the reported and observed rates of bullying (seeing others being bullied). The observed rates are often higher than the reported rates. This may be because each single event (which will be recorded as one person reporting being bullied) is witnessed by several others, who will each report that they have seen someone being bullied. The variation may also relate to differences in the judgements of victims and observers as to whether an event constitutes bullying.

**2.9 Age:** there is an inverse relationship between a pupil’s age and the incidence and frequency of bullying they experience: older pupils tend to experience less bullying than young pupils (see graph 2.1 page 5). This is consistent with other

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<sup>1</sup> The school characteristics were: the language of instruction (i.e. English or Welsh Medium); the proportion of pupils whose ethnicity is other than white; the proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals, an indicator of socio-economic disadvantage, and the size of the school.

studies into bullying in the UK<sup>iv</sup>. The types and relative frequency of bullying are fairly stable across all four age groups. For example, the most common form of bullying across all age groups is being called names or teased in a hurtful way and the least common is having money or other things being taken away from them or damaged.

2.10 **Gender:** girls and boys tend to experience different types of bullying. Girls in all year groups were more likely than boys to report indirect forms of bullying, such as being excluded from activities on purpose. They were also more likely to be cyber-bullied. For example, in year 7, girls were three times more likely to report being bullied through social websites (16% of girls compared to 5% for boys). Moreover, in years 6 and 10, girls were more likely to report that they had been bullied within the last school year (52% of girls and 43% of boys in year 6 and 29% of girls and 21% of boys in year 10). Girls in year 6 were also more likely to report being bullied within the last two months (36% of girls and 28% of boys in year 6). Boys in years 6, 7, 10 were more likely to report homophobic bullying, and boys in years 4, and 7 were more likely to report being physically bullied. For example, boys in year 7 were more likely to be hit, kicked, pushed, shoved around, or locked indoors than girls (19% of boys compared to 8% of girls).

2.11 **Race and ethnicity:** The survey shows that the proportion of pupils reporting being bullied due to their race or ethnicity is low, with 1% of pupils in year 4 bullied (“all the time”); and between 1% and 2% of pupils in years 6, 7 and 10 reporting being bullied. However, between 12% of pupils in year 7, rising to over 20% of pupils in year 10, report seeing others being bullied due to their race or ethnicity.

2.12 Studies have suggested that racist bullying can be a difficult for some children or young people to interpret<sup>v</sup>. Therefore, other questions were asked in years 7 and 10 on issues, which are often associated with ethnicity, such as whether pupils experienced bullying due to their religion or culture and beliefs. A low proportion of pupils (2%) reported being bullied due to their religion and marginally more reported ‘culture and beliefs’ as reasons (3%-4%).

2.13 **Sexuality:** Pupils in years 6, 7, and 10 were asked whether they had been bullied by other pupils with “mean names, comments, or gestures that had a sexual meaning”<sup>2</sup>. The proportions reporting this were:

- 19% of pupils in year 6;
- 15% of pupils in year 7: and
- 10% of pupils in year 10.

This indicates that a relatively high proportion of pupils, particularly in years 6 and 7, experience this type of bullying, when compared to some other types of bullying.

2.14 Pupils in years 6, 7, and 10 were also asked whether they were “bullied in a homophobic way, e.g. being called gay as an insult, whether or not it is true.” This is a measure of the incidence and frequency of bullying of a homophobic nature, rather than of the proportion of pupils who are bullied because of their sexuality. Subject to this caveat, the survey shows that, in year 6, 22% pupils were bullied in a homophobic way, declining to 9% in year 10.

2.15 The proportion of pupils reporting seeing others being bullied in a homophobic way was high and fairly steady across years 6, 7, and 10, with 40% or over of pupils reporting seeing others bullied in this way.

2.16 **Disability:** the proportions of pupils in years 4, 6, 7 and 10 reporting being bullied on the basis of their disability were:

- 1% of pupils in year 4 reporting being bullied “all the time”;
- 4% of pupils in year 6 reporting bullied within the last two months; and
- 2% of pupils in years 7 and 10 reporting bullied within the last two months.

2.17 The proportion of pupils reporting seeing others being bullied due to their disability was 20% for year 6 and 19% for year 7, increasing to 24% in year 10.

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<sup>2</sup> Pupils in year 4 were not asked this question.



2.18 **Learning difficulties:** Pupils were asked whether they had been bullied due to their learning difficulties or had seen others bullied due to their learning difficulties. The proportions reporting bullying due to their learning difficulties:

- 2% of pupils in year 4 bullied “all the time”;
- 9% of pupils in year 6
- 7% of pupils in years 7 and
- 4% of pupils in year 10 bullied within the last two months.

2.19 These rates appear to be high when compared to the estimated proportion of pupils with special educational needs (0.5%-1%).<sup>3</sup> However, “learning difficulties” may have been interpreted broadly by pupils and pupils without special educational needs, may still have additional learning needs.

2.20 The proportion of pupils reporting seeing others being bullied due to their learning difficulties was 29% for year 6 and 30% for year 7, increasing to 36% in year 10.

2.21 **Perceived economic deprivation:** the analysis of bullying ascribed to economic deprivation focused upon the proportion of pupils in years 6, 7 and 10 reporting<sup>4</sup> being bullied because of “a lack of money or not having certain things”:

- 10% of pupils in year 6;
- 8% of pupils in year 7; and
- 4% of pupils in year 10

2.22 The responses from pupils from schools with different proportions of pupils eligible for free school meals (FSMs), an indicator of socio-economic disadvantage, were also analysed and compared. This analysis showed that pupils in year 7 in schools with a high proportion of pupils eligible for FSMs, were more likely to be bullied within the school year than schools with a low

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<sup>3</sup> It is estimated that between 0.5-1% of the pupil population have severe and complex needs and qualify for a statement and up to around 4.5% have less complex needs met through School Action Plus.

<sup>4</sup> Pupils in year 4 were not asked this question.

proportion of pupils eligible for FSMs. This is consistent with some U.K studies<sup>vi</sup> which have indicated a link between socio economic disadvantage and increased incidence of bullying.

2.23 Moreover, in secondary schools with a high proportion of pupils eligible for FSMs, pupils tended to report higher rates of bullying attributed to some specific traits. For example, in years 7 and 10, pupils in schools with high proportion of pupils eligible for FSMs, were more likely to see others bullied due to their ethnicity and appearance than schools with a low proportion of FSM eligibility. Information gathered from the survey does not provide evidence on why these differences exist, and there may be other causal links, for example, schools with a high proportion of pupils eligible for FSMs, may have a higher proportion of pupils with these characteristics

2.24 **Language:** Our analysis of the extent to bullying ascribed to language focused on the proportions of pupils in years 6, 7 and 10 reporting<sup>5</sup> being bullied for the “language I spoke”:

- 4% of pupils in years 6 and 7; and
- 3% of pupils in year 10.

### **The level and type of cyber-bullying**

2.25 Pupils were asked about three types of cyber-bullying: bullying through social websites, such as Facebook and Bebo, bullying using mobile phones and bullying using email. Overall:

- 17% of pupils in Year 6,
- 15% of pupils in year 7, and,
- 11% of pupils in year 10

reported experiencing one or more of these forms of cyber-bullying.

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<sup>5</sup> Pupils in year 4 were not asked this question.

2.26 Of these three different forms of cyber-bullying, bullying using social websites was consistently higher than the other forms of cyber bullying.

<b>Table 2.1. The proportion of pupils in years 4 reporting different types of cyber bullying “sometimes” or “all the time”.</b>			
	<b>Social website</b>	<b>Mobile phone</b>	<b>Email</b>
<b>Year 4</b>	13%	10%	7%

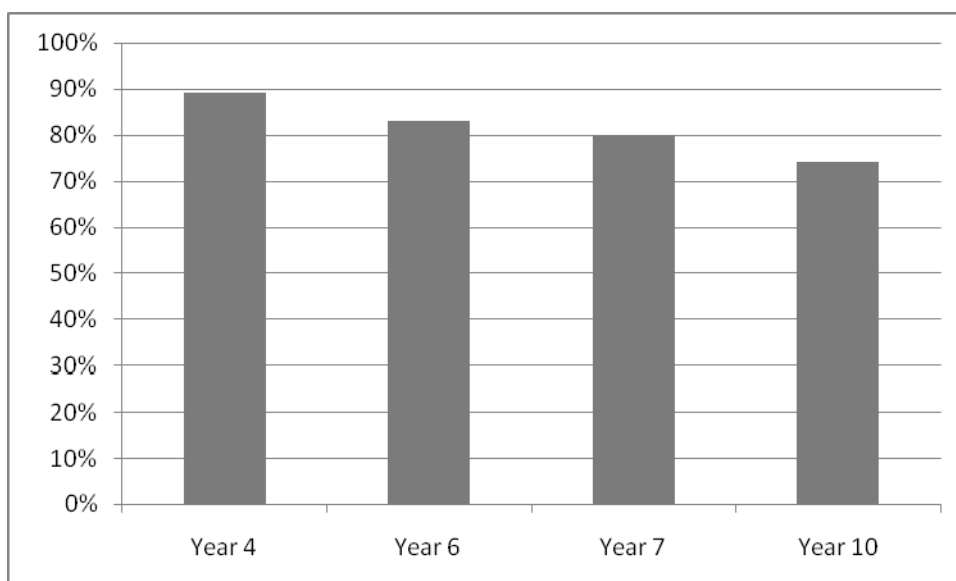
2.27 As Table 2.2. shows, unlike other forms of bullying, the decline in the percentage of pupils experiencing cyber bullying as pupils get older is small.

<b>Table 2.2. The proportion of pupils in years 6, 7 and 10 reporting different types of cyber bullying within last two months.</b>			
	<b>Social website</b>	<b>Mobile phone</b>	<b>Email</b>
<b>Year 6</b>	12%	7%	6%
<b>Year 7</b>	11%	7%	6%
<b>Year 10</b>	9%	6%	4%

### **Pupils’ awareness of sources of help, school policies and support networks.**

2.28 **Awareness of sources of help and support networks:** Pupils in years 4, 6, 7 and 10 were asked if they knew who to talk to in the school if they were bullied. Graph 2.2 shows that the vast majority of pupils knew who to talk to in the school. However, there are still a large numbers of pupils who did not know who to talk to in the school if they were bullied and the proportions who do not know who to talk to increases with age.

**Graph 2.2 the proportion of pupils in Wales who knew who to talk to in school if they were being bullied**



**2.29 Awareness of school based anti-bullying policies:** The proportion of pupils who knew if there was an anti-bullying policy in the school were:

- 67% of pupils in year 6;
- 65% of pupils in year 7; and
- 69% of pupils in year 10;

**2.30** Pupils in years 4, 6, 7 and 10 were asked if bullying had been talked about within the school by teachers or a school council. The proportion who agreed were:

- 84% of pupils in year 4;
- 67% of pupils in year 6;
- 68% of pupils in year 7; and
- 72% of pupils in year 10

**2.31** With the exception of year 4, the proportions of pupils reporting that bullying had been talked about in their school are similar to the proportions of pupils reporting that they knew their school has an anti-bullying policy. This may indicate that bullying has a low priority within a minority of schools.

## **Pupils' views on schools' approaches to tackling bullying**

2.32 **Confidence in the school's ability to help:** Pupils were asked if they were "sure" (year 4) or "confident" (years 6, 7 and 10) that the school could help them if they were bullied. The proportion who agreed were:

- 84% of pupils in year 4;
- 70% of pupils in year 6;
- 68% of pupils in year 7; and
- 55% of pupils in year 10.

This shows that although the majority of pupils were confident their school could help them, a large proportion of those in year 10 were not.

2.33 In addition, girls in year 10 were less likely to be confident than boys, that the school could help them if they were being bullied. (52% of girls and 59% of boys).

2.34 **Pupils' views on how to stop bullying:** In all year groups, the most common advice pupils provided on how to stop bullying was to tell someone, such as teaching staff, family, and/or friends. Other common themes in all year groups included support and raising awareness for bullies or victims, such as the use of anti-bullying posters and help lines, disciplining or punishing the bullies in some way, for example, through suspension, or stopping them doing certain activities and confronting the bullies in some way, by for example, standing up to them.

2.35 The popularity of different suggestions on how to stop bullying changes with age. For example, as pupils became older they were more likely to suggest a form of discipline or punishing the bullies and younger pupils were more likely to suggest ignoring or avoiding contact with the bully or resolving the bullying by trying to get along with them.

**2.36 Satisfaction with the schools' response amongst pupils who have been bullied:** Pupils in years 6, 7 and 10 who had been bullied were asked if they were happy with the way their school deals with bullying:

- 31% of pupils in year 6 “strongly agreed” and 40% “agreed”;
- 29% of pupils in year 7 “strongly agreed” and 42% “agreed”; and
- 17% of pupils in year 10 “strongly agreed” and 39% “agreed”.

**2.37** Whilst between half and around two thirds were satisfied or very satisfied, a significant proportion, especially in year 10, “strongly disagreed” or “disagreed” with the statement, indicating dissatisfaction with the way their school dealt with bullying:

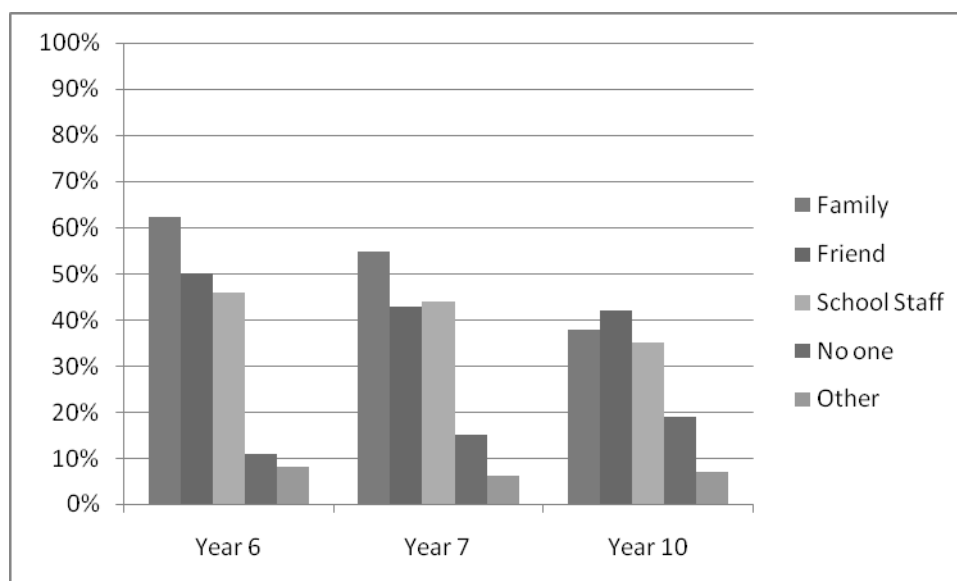
- 14% of pupils in year 6;
- 12% of pupils in year 7; and
- 26% of pupils in year 10.

**2.38** In addition, girls in year 10 were less satisfied than boys with the way their school dealt with bullying (53% of girls and 59% of boys “strongly agreed” and “agreed”).

**2.39 Who did the pupils tell when they had been bullied?:** Pupils in years 6, 7, and 10 were given five multiple choice options of who they told when they experienced bullying (this included the option of “no-one”). Because pupils could tick more than one option, the percentages shown in graph 2.3 are higher than one hundred percent.

**2.40** Graph 2.3 shows that pupils in years 6 and 7 were most likely to talk to someone in their family and in year 10, they were more likely to tell their friends. Although the majority of pupils who had been bullied told someone, a notable proportion of pupils in years 6 and 7 and particularly in year 10, did not tell anyone.

**Graph 2.3 the proportions of pupils in Wales who experienced bullying who reported who they talked to about it.**



### 3. CONCLUSIONS

**3.1 There is encouraging evidence suggesting that levels of bullying have declined:** A survey of pupils in Wales<sup>vii</sup> in 2005/2006, found that 36% of pupils aged 11, and 24% of pupils aged 15 had been bullied within the last two months. This is higher than this survey, which found that 32% of pupils in year 6, the majority of whom were 11 years old, and 15% of pupils in year 10, the majority of whom were 15 years old, had been bullied within the last two months. This suggests that the percentage of pupils that are being bullied in Wales has declined since 2005/6.

**3.2 The urgent need to tackle sustained and frequent bullying:** Despite the encouraging evidence suggesting that bullying is declining in Wales, large numbers of pupils are victims of bullying and a small proportion of pupils in years 6, 7, and 10 are victims of bullying which is often both frequent and sustained over long periods of time. Pupils experiencing frequent and sustained bullying also had less confidence that their school could help them if they were bullied, when compared to other pupils. This was a consistent finding across different types of schools and suggests that all schools need to identify more effective

ways to both reduce this frequent and sustained bullying and to support these pupils.

**3.3 The pressing need to improve anti-bullying policies for older pupils:**

although the incidence of bullying declines with age, older pupils tend to be less satisfied with the support offered by schools. This is particularly marked amongst year 10 pupils. There may also be a need to raise awareness among older pupils.

**3.4 The need for anti-bullying policies to consider priorities:** The types and locations of bullying which have traditionally been common, such as name calling, bullying due to appearance, or being different, and bullying in the yard or classroom, remain the most common for all year groups. The prevalence of some types of bullying, such as homophobic bullying are also relatively high. In contrast, newer forms of bullying, such as cyber-bullying, whilst not insignificant, are much less prevalent. This indicates priorities for anti-bullying strategies. Nevertheless, because this survey did not measure the impact of different types of bullying on individuals, schools may still judge that whilst the prevalence of some types of bullying is low, they should still be prioritised, because they have a particularly negative impact upon pupils.

**3.5 The need for anti-bullying policies to consider gender differences:** Girls and boys experience different types of bullying to a different extent within all year groups, and in some year groups respond differently to schools' support. It is important that anti-bullying and support strategies reflect these differences.



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