

Jeremy Miles AS/MS
Gweinidog y Gymraeg ac Addysg
Minister for Education and Welsh Language



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Ein cyf/Our ref JMEWL/10851/21

Jack Sargeant MS
Chair - Petitions Committee
Senedd Cymru
Cardiff Bay
Cardiff
CF99 1SN

13 September 2021

Dear Jack,

Thank you for your letter of 4 August, regarding Petition P-06-1164 – Make bullying and harassment in schools a criminal offence from the age of criminal responsibility.

Challenging bullying in schools is a key priority for the Welsh Government. We are committed to ensuring all our learners feel safe, secure and are supported to achieve their full potential. We recognise the impact any form of bullying can have on a young person's wellbeing and we encourage schools not only to intervene when problems start to emerge but to promote respectful relationships within the school community to support wellbeing.

Laws are already in place to protect people when bullying behaviour or harassment constitutes a criminal offence. The Welsh Government does not plan to introduce additional legislation in this area.

All schools must, by law, have a school behaviour policy and this policy must set out clearly how the school will address bullying as well as strategies for challenging bullying behaviour. Schools must also record incidents of bullying as part of their wider safeguarding monitoring practice and impact evidence. Recording of incidents also supports schools to take proactive steps to challenge bullying.

To support this we published a suite of guidance 'Rights, respect, equality' in November 2019, which provides statutory guidance for schools and local authorities to help address and prevent bullying in education settings in Wales. The suite also includes advisory guidance for children, young people and their parents/carers to help those affected by bullying.

We continue to work with schools and local authorities to implement and deliver this guidance via training and support, to ensure it is being used as effectively as possible to support children and young people. The guidance will also be updated in due course to reflect the actions contained within the Welsh Government's Race Equality Action Plan.

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Rydym yn croesawu derbyn gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg. Byddwn yn ateb gohebiaeth a dderbynnir yn Gymraeg yn Gymraeg ac ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

We welcome receiving correspondence in Welsh. Any correspondence received in Welsh will be answered in Welsh and corresponding in Welsh will not lead to a delay in responding.

The Welsh Government has also recently published new framework guidance for schools on the development of a whole school approach to emotional and mental wellbeing, which issued in March 2021. The guidance has been designed to help schools develop and build their own consistent and equitable whole school approaches to wellbeing to meet their distinct needs and circumstances. We have also made available £9m in our 2021-22 budget to support this work. This builds on the £5m to support our whole schoolwork in 2020-21.

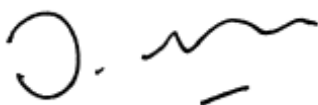
The Together for Mental Health Delivery Plan 2019-2022 highlights preventing suicide and self-harm as a key priority area. We are working with the National Advisory Group for the prevention of Suicide and Self-harm which advises the Welsh Government on this issue to further develop national and regional approaches and have appointed national and regional leads to support this work. We also provide funding through our section 64 grant scheme to Action for Children to deliver their Mental Health and High School Curriculum guide. The guide provides a complete set of online resources proven to increase the understanding of mental health and mental disorders, decrease the stigma of mental illness and increase the ability to seek help, amongst students and teachers.

Previous to the above work, in conjunction with the National Advisory Group, our *Suicide and Self-harm Guidance for Schools* was formally launched in September 2019, to coincide with World Suicide Prevention Day. This guidance adds to the arsenal of tools at the disposal of professionals to tackle the issue when it arises, de-escalating the problem and knowing how and when to seek further help and support.

The Welsh Government has also created an online resource which promotes the numerous digital tools designed specifically to support young people with their own mental health and emotional wellbeing. The Young person's mental health Toolkit links young people, aged 11 to 25, to websites, apps, helplines, and more to build resilience and support them through the Coronavirus pandemic and beyond.

I believe these actions clearly convey the fact that the Welsh Government takes the wellbeing of our children and young people extremely seriously.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a circular mark followed by a series of wavy lines and a short horizontal stroke.

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