Cyflwynwyd yr ymateb hwn i ymchwiliad y [Pwyllgor Plant, Pobl Ifanc ac Addysg](#) ynghylch [aflonyddu rhywiol rhwng cyfoedion ymysg dysgwyr](#)

This response was submitted to the [Children, Young People and Education Committee](#) inquiry into [Peer on peer sexual harassment among learners](#)

PPSH 22

Ymateb gan: Cyngor Abertawe

Response from: Swansea Council

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Nodwch eich barn mewn perthynas â chylch gorchwyl yr ymchwiliad, sydd wedi'u grwpio'n 5 thema: | Record your views against the inquiry's terms of reference, which have been grouped into 5 themes:

1. Maint | Scale
2. Effaith | Impact
3. Effeithiolrwydd ymyriadau | Effectiveness of interventions
4. Y cyd-destun ehangach | Wider context
5. Arall | Other

1. Maint | Scale

The scale and nature of the issue in education settings and how many learners are affected

Sexual harassment has been an issue for a number of years and has been addressed by school staff as part of their behaviour and school discipline structures. Instances of sexual assaults have been low, but we acknowledge that this is an area that we believe is under-reported.

The number of reported incidents vary from time to time and school to school and can be influenced by reports in the media.

Capturing this across Swansea is a challenge. Currently there is no specific data collection focusing on this and young people may not reveal this. SHRN asks some specific questions and provides data. The scale of the issue in terms of name calling and verbal harassment was not a surprise given the findings in other research (Children's Commissioner report on bullying, Show Racism the Red Card's findings about the use of racist language in schools 2020, Stonewall's research into young LGBT pupils experiences of bullying in school). All these studies have found a mismatch between the data schools are aware of and children's experiences.

We are working towards multi-agency, county wide audits of Harmful Sexual Behaviours, through specific working groups, leading to subsequent action plans.

The extent to which this issue also occurs outside the formal education setting, including online

This tends to mostly occur on social media outside the educational setting. The pandemic took a lot of activity back online and there has been increased activity recently, in particular via use of Tik-Tok, however due to more informed staff this can be addressed quicker. Proactive use of youth services also support young people outside the school setting. Promotion of tools such as Kooth allows young people to access support themselves.

There are occasions when schools will ask for advice on pupils becoming embroiled in issues on social media outside of school e.g. inappropriate/sexualised pictures distributed/sexualised comments made etc. which spill into school, affecting friendship groups and parents getting involved, however, the scale of this and the level of unreported incidents mean this would be challenging to measure.

Other support and education is delivered by Schoolbeat Officers, PCSOs and Community Safety Teams, who will speak with individual children and also deliver sessions to classes and year groups to reinforce messaging.

Schools, colleges and local authorities' collection and use of bullying and harassment data

Data is collected by the LA, however we believe that this could be improved, and a level of consistency developed. Where schools have unusually high incidents or a particular spike in incidents, this would be followed up by discussions with Headteacher/relevant staff member and the identification of professional learning if needed. The LA takes a contextual safeguarding approach working in conjunction with other directorates. This allows schools can refer peer groups and contexts in for a multi agency safeguarding assessment, and provides access to youth worker support with specialiaities in sexual exploitation and can offer advice, guidance and support to pupils and peer groups.

The report highlights the need to support schools to develop systems to record information on bullying or incidents relating to sexual harassment and other protected characteristics. It would be helpful if such systems were established on an LA / regional basis to support better data collection and monitoring.

The challenge we face is that schools use different systems to record issues. My Concern is the primary mechanism but is not used by all schools. There is no

consistency in labels or flags in the system and so this needs further development before an LA system can become effective.

2. Effaith | Impact

The impact on pupils' learning, mental health and well-being

It is often difficult to correlate impact specifically related to peer-on-peer sexual harassment and sexual assault but individuals would be supported by different agencies and professionals as appropriate to the individual case to mitigate serious impact - any specific impact on their learning, mental health and well-being would also be considered with support provided and measures / allowances put in place to ensure their ongoing mental health and wellbeing, as well as support for learning.

The impact of sexual harassment varies from person to person, their perception of the incidents, the severity and frequency of the incidents as well as factors supporting individual's resilience such as having good peer networks or family support. Case work with individual young people has found significant impact on some LGBT pupils' willingness to attend school, their well-being and learning clearly linked to sexual harassment and discriminatory bullying. Bullying is often a factor in pupils non-attendance at school however data on whether this bullying is related to sexual harassment is not usually discussed

The impact on education settings and staff, for example in terms of discipline and the extent to which harassment among learners has become 'normalised'

Different approaches are undertaken in primary and secondary settings, as appropriate to age, physical development etc. Schools operate a culture of no tolerance, as evidenced in school policies, and is backed up by age-appropriate education in relation to rights, respect etc.

The report clearly indicates that a significant amount of harassment is normalised and is seen as "banter" or insignificant and is not perceived as a discipline matter. This concurs with knowledge from individual children who may not report individual incidents as they feel it won't make a positive difference or fear it may make the situation worse.

Schools support children to understand positive relationships and the impact of their behaviour on others - identifying and breaking the cycle of normalisation especially where home background or culture in a community are feeding unsafe norms.

The Keeping Learners Safe agenda and Welsh Government's good practice guide and the overlap with the whole education Approach to Violence against Women, Domestic Abuse & Sexual Violence in Wales assist all staff in this agenda.

The specific impacts on particular groups of learners, for example older pupils, girls and LGBTQ+ pupils

Harassment of groups with protected characteristics is an area that local authorities and schools have been focusing in on, and these have been addressed by utilising a multi-agency approach. A wide range of external providers have been involved to provide services to schools as and when they need advice regarding how to support transitioning or LGBTQ+ learners, as well as training and awareness. Many LAs were in process of adapting their guidance for LGBTQ+ learners and staff but are still awaiting WG guidance before finalising this so as to ensure there is a nationwide approach and to avoid legal challenge.

The report confirms existing perceptions based on individual children and other reports and what becomes more salient as young people develop. For example, pupil voice questionnaires of pupils' perceptions of bullying in primary-aged pupils tend not to find bullying based on protected characteristics such as gender, sexuality or race but is focused more on friendship groups and academic ability.

We also work with groups such as gypsy travellers and ethnic minority communities where children are not attending school where they have indicated they do not feel safe to support and encourage continuation of their education.

3. Effeithiolrwydd ymyriadau | Effectiveness of interventions

Write **The effectiveness of existing policies and guidance, and the identification of potential solutions and improvements**

Recent Welsh Government guidance on anti-bullying included aspects of sexual harassment and all LAs issued appropriate statutory guidance to schools when this was published.

Local Authorities also support schools with equality policies. Local Authorities are awaiting Welsh Government Transgender policy - where LAs have tried to implement their own, they are often met with conflicting views from lobby groups / external organisations and have faced legal challenges.

We have well-established systems for collecting discriminatory data from schools needs more thought as to its utility. A number of potential barriers have been identified and one potential solution is the linking to existing schools' classroom-based systems for recording behaviour.

Guidance in the Rights, Respect, Equality guidance document is very clear. Support to develop good record keeping systems which enable schools and LAs to easily collect and use data in meaningful ways would be helpful.

Work on trauma-informed schools and the importance of pupils being able to access trusted members of staff and feel confident that their concerns will be treated seriously can also be extended to this area of work. Staff need time and training to develop their confidence so responsibility for wellbeing and being a trusted adult is more evenly distributed across the school. Schools do not always know where to access good training in terms of equalities / diversity work and such training often comes at a cost.

The AOLE in the new Curriculum for Wales covering ethical, informed citizens offers a good opportunity for schools to more proactively discuss issues with students.

The effectiveness of the roles of a wide range of statutory bodies in respect of this issue, including the police, social services, local authority education departments, pupil referral units and schools themselves, and the extent to which a multi-agency approach is being taken where appropriate

West Glamorgan Safeguarding Boards offer multi-agency training to support this agenda. Following the Estyn report individual LAs have revised their arrangements including their resources to schools so that children and young people can be best supported. LAs and individual schools are held to account by Estyn, Welsh Government and the Children's Commissioner for Wales.

Communication routes for children and families in Wales have been further developed with a wide range of individuals and organisations that can be contacted as issues arise.

The effectiveness of the Welsh Government's response across all its relevant departments with a focus on education, social services and community safety and its inclusion of non-devolved services such as the police and the criminal justice system

A range of statutory and non-statutory guidance is available and helps local authorities to support children, young people and the wider community, but areas such as Transgender guidance is still awaited. Guidance from different areas in

Welsh Government can sometimes create issues in not being integrated and can create inconsistencies when put into practice.

4. Y cyd-destun ehangach | Wider context

The impact of online content and influences on young people's attitudes, and the wider context of online safety and potential legislation at Westminster

Recent Tik ToK messaging relating to abusing teachers have been addressed by education departments with clear guidance given to schools.

The role of families, parents, and carers

Schools share policy documents and behavioural expectations with their community to ensure they understand what is expected. Information is also available through regional safeguarding websites and other social media platforms.

Families, parents and carers are signposted to relevant resources on https://hwb.gov.wales/zones/keeping-safe-online/ as well as regional resources when developed.

Parents and carers have a massive role in this but many are unsure how to broach sensitive topics and often don't know when to start talking about the things which matter. It is important that we offer parents tools or opportunities to talk to their younger children (in age-appropriate ways) about relationship issues, gender equality etc., so it is not suddenly about more challenging topics such as pornography when their children move away from their sphere of influence in adolescence. Many parents also have less than ideal attitudes to these issues and are also subject to societal and media influences.

The role of the new Curriculum for Wales in developing healthier attitudes towards relationships and sexuality issues

The new curriculum and the greater emphasis on personal education and healthy relationships is much welcomed and will continue to enhance current curriculum delivery.

The mandatory Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) Code (published 25/1/22) has a dedicated learning strand centred on 'empowerment, safety and respect' which supports schools to design their RSE curriculum.

The entire RSE Code takes a 'rights-based approach' to learning and has clear references directing schools to support learners in developing empathy, compassion, respect and their understanding of healthy relationships and the imperative to treat

everyone equally whatever their sex, gender, sexuality, faith or belief. The code emphasises that by learning about healthy relationships and identity, learners should learn to recognise positive and harmful behaviours so that they *may "have the confidence to speak up for themselves and to speak out and advocate for the rights and respect of others".*

The opportunity to engage and explore how positive and negative social and cultural norms regarding sex, gender and sexuality influence relationships and behaviours also provides a critical opportunity to improve learners' understanding of appropriate behaviour. Moreover, the RSE code sets out how the law and human rights must be covered within the 'empowerment, safety and respect' strand of learning so that all learners, at the developmentally appropriate age, should understand how the law and human rights protects individuals and secures freedoms around sex, gender and sexuality. Linked to this is the statement outlining how learners should be able to recognise *"harmful, abusive or coercive behaviour in personal relationships including control, violence and sexual violence and how to respond and seek help for self and others".* This mandatory code therefore should strengthen current curriculum delivery and support in tackling abusive and inappropriate behaviour.

As previously mentioned, the AOLE for ethical, informed citizens offers a good opportunity for schools to more proactively discuss issues with students.

5. Arall | Other

During the pandemic, it has become clear that many children have missed the benefits of being in the school environment and other community resources where behaviours and respect would be modelled. Particularly affected where the important transition years, and the sector is working closely to increase positive influences to ensure the development of citizenship values.