

CYPE(6)-20-23 - Paper to note 12



FAO Children, Young People and Education Committee

We are writing to the Children, Young People and Education Committee to highlight concerns around racist bullying in schools. Albeit not a new issue, we specifically want to share the following:

- Challenges around reporting bullying for children and young people in schools.
- The lack of recording of bullying as race related by schools and local authorities.
- School exclusions and ethnic minority pupils, including racist bullying as a contributing factor to behavioural issues.

We will share case studies¹ with you to highlight these issues, to communicate the urgent situation of these young people that we are supporting.

Our work at EYST Wales

[Ethnic Minorities & Youth Support Team Wales \(EYST\)](#) was established in 2005 to ensure all ethnic minority young people could reach their full potential in Wales. We offer many areas of support including youth, family, asylum seekers and refugees, as well as engaging with the wider community to challenge negative perceptions of those from ethnic minority backgrounds living in Wales. During this time, we have found that issues in education really do have wider impacts for family members (family conflict and breakdowns, parents not believing and invalidating children's experiences) and the community (mistrust in education and authority figures). It has been difficult to hear these stories from young people of what they are going through in schools, often with little recourse to solve the issue. Despite EYST being established nearly 20 years ago, the stories and experiences are worryingly similar to when it started.

Young people experience all forms of racism in schools. They experience both direct racism (name calling, attacks) and indirect racism (microaggressions such as being underestimated by teachers, told they speak English well, asked where they are from). Through these forms of racism, from an early age they are excluded, told they do not belong, and are not treated equally to their white peers – especially in terms of aspirations and discipline. This can result in young people experiencing many forms of identity-based issues, including serious mental health issues (suicidal thoughts and attempts) and a lack of progression after school due to confidence, trust, and lack of aspiration. Starting at a very young age, the seeds for inequality are sown in our schools. These ethnic minority young people experience the same problems year upon year with, seemingly, very little action or changes at a higher level (please see evidence from [EYST Wales](#)² & [Race Alliance Wales](#)).

In response to this ongoing concern, we are asking the committee to consider escalating some of these issues with the Minister for Education and within the committee's inquiry review process. We will now outline three complex cases of racist bullying in schools across Wales, namely in Wrexham, Carmarthenshire, and Cardiff. All three cases are ongoing with wider impacts on these young peoples' families, friends, and communities.

¹ Trigger warning: These case studies include references to racism, threats of sexual assault and suicide.

² <https://eyst.org.uk/assets/racism-in-education-2021-where-are-we-now-forum-notes.pdf>

Wrexham, primary school pupil

A 7-year-old boy in Wrexham has been experiencing racist bullying from his peers in his primary school. He is called names due to his skin colour and his clothes are torn regularly. The boy is emotionally affected, he has lost his confidence and has started to refuse to go to school.

Mum has spoken with the school many times about this, but the school has not done anything to address her concerns. There have been no efforts to discipline or educate the perpetrators for these worrying actions. The school has suggested that mum should place her child in home schooling as a solution. Mum has also spoken to local authority who told her to report the incidents to the police. When she did this the police said they couldn't do anything as the children are minors.

Mum is afraid that one day the child will react to the bullying with aggression which will mean he is excluded from school. He would only be defending himself if this were the case, but he would end up with the punishment.

Carmarthenshire, secondary school pupils

A brother (12 years old) and sister (14 years old) in a Carmarthenshire school, are experiencing racist bullying, including name calling and threats, both in school and when leaving school. In particular, the sister is being targeted by a group of girls, picking on her ethnicity and faith, telling her to "just kill yourself". The words of these bullies are particularly heavy for her, and she is struggling with her mental health. She finds it difficult to talk to parents about what the bullies are saying due to cultural stigma, especially around suicide.

This matter has been escalated to the police, but the family are currently waiting for the police to take a statement and have been waiting for a few weeks. The school has said it doesn't need to be involved because it is now a police matter. They have provided 'safe spaces' to the brother and sister (come to school early/late) but this is disruptive for young people but are not tackling the root of the issue, the bullies and their actions.

What do we want to see?

There is a great deal of inconsistency across schools in dealing with racism, not giving it the attention and gravity that it deserves. These young people could become another statistic. They could become yet another school exclusion case due to sustained racist bullying experienced during their formative years.

We would like to know:

- How does Welsh Government intend for local authorities and schools to start recording bullying incidents under race?
- How does Welsh Government ensure independent and transparent monitoring of bullying cases, especially when schools record their incidents with the local authority?

Cardiff, secondary school pupil

As part of our school exclusions work, the [Right to Education](#) service aims to provide support and advocacy for ethnic minority young people and their families when navigating the school exclusions process. We feel that this work has further highlighted the need to address racist bullying in schools as nearly all our cases received so far have escalated from the young person/peers being bullied due to their race. Ethnic minority young people are not treated equally by school guidance and policies, ultimately resulting in school disengagement and exclusion.

A boy in year 9 who was a model student in school was permanently excluded for pushing two members of staff. Whilst we do not seek to excuse the behaviour, we believe there were mitigating circumstances. It is those mitigating circumstances that led this boy to losing control which resulted in him pushing two members of staff. The model student has been attempting to support and protect his younger sister who has been constantly racially bullied in school by three boys. In addition, the same three boys have been targeting his family home by throwing stones at the house and harassing those inside. These incidents have been taking place over months and their mother repeatedly reported it to the school, but nothing changed. On the day of the incident the boy reacted to the same boys that had been bullying his sister. They boys called him and his sister racist names in an inappropriate manner which led to him losing control. He was permanently excluded. The mum appealed to both the governors and independent review panel which both decided to uphold the exclusion.

Following his exclusion, a message was received by his younger sister stating that the three boys had been heard plotting to beat up and then rape her. This has been reported to the Police who felt it serious enough to allocate a crime number to the complaint and only then the school decided to put a safety plan in place. The actions of these boys are not only deemed as bullying but can also be classed as a hate crime, given the racial elements involved in the bullying of the boy and his younger sister. This, we would argue, is a good indication of what this family has had to endure over a long period of time. The bullies have not acknowledged that their behaviour was unacceptable but have instead increased the severity of threats, being aware that the brother is no longer in the school to protect his younger sister.

Thankfully, the boy is now enrolled in another school, but his younger sister is still experiencing bullying in the same school. Her mental health is deteriorating. Just like her brother, she is very bright but has now lost her confidence and self-esteem due to what happened. She blames herself every single day for seeking comfort from her brother. She blames herself for her brother's exclusion as a result of the racist comments by bullies. The single mum also suffered from a loss of earnings as she had to take 6 weeks off work to deal with the situation. This case clearly captures the wider and long-term impact of racist bullying in schools.

What do we want to see?

Welsh Government's school exclusions guidance says to "*check whether the incident may have been provoked, e.g. by bullying or by racial or sexual harassment*" (p.10, [Welsh Government Exclusions Guidance](#)).

We would like to know:

- How is the current revision of schools' exclusion guidance going to make these criteria clearer for headteachers when excluding pupils?
- Will the revision of school exclusion guidance be put out for consultation or review? If not, is there diverse representation in the group who are reviewing this guidance?

These are just three recent examples which only show a small snapshot of the wider picture in Wales. We want the committee to be aware of these issues in your ongoing correspondence and inquiries as the issues stemming from racist bullying in schools can be cross cutting with other areas, such as poverty, mental health and those young people with Additional Learning Needs (ALN).

We understand the issues presented here are wide ranging, but we strongly believe that preventative steps to challenge racist bullying in schools will counter escalation to negative outcomes for ethnic minority young people, such as: lower school attendance, poor mental health, and school exclusion rates. If Welsh Government can do more to guide local authorities and schools to be transparent and encouraging in their reporting of racism in schools, we believe that longer term problems can be alleviated and prevented.

We deeply appreciate the committee taking the time to listen to our concerns and for reading this letter.

Yours sincerely,

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Sent on behalf of EYST Wales