

Lynne Neagle MS
Cabinet Secretary for Education

15 August 2025

Follow-up to 2022 reports on peer-on-peer sexual harassment and pupil absence

Dear Lynne,

On 3 July we discussed our priorities for legacy work during the final terms of the Sixth Senedd. We decided to follow-up on two areas of work that we carried out during the early years of the Senedd: peer-on-peer sexual harassment and pupil absence.

We would therefore be grateful if you could provide an update on the Welsh Government's progress in implementing the accepted recommendations from our 2022 reports on the above and related topics by responding to the queries set out in annex A and B respectively. We are flexible in how you wish to respond; if you wish, you can respond separately in respect of the two inquiries.

We have also agreed to do some further work around learner travel (which links closely to pupil absence) and the introduction of the new £1 bus fare fee for children and young people. We will be writing to the Cabinet Secretary for Transport and North Wales separately on this issue, and we will copy you into this correspondence.

We appreciate the workload involved in supporting us to carry out reviews of this nature. We would therefore be grateful for your response by the end of October 2025 to help us plan and carry out our legacy work in spring 2026. If you envisage any issues with the proposed timeline, please let the Clerk know.

Yours sincerely,



Buffy Williams MS

Chair
Children, Young People and Education Committee

Croesewir gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg neu Saesneg.
We welcome correspondence in Welsh or English.

Annex A: request for information relating to the July 2022 report 'Everybody's affected: peer on peer harassment among learners'

Please can you set out:

1. your updated perspective on the following:
 - peer-on-peer sexual harassment in schools;
 - bullying in schools;
 - inappropriate behaviour by pupils towards school staff (sexual or otherwise); and
 - any other issues that relate directly or indirectly to the behaviour of pupils towards each other or towards staff.
2. how work is progressing in implementing the accepted recommendations from Estyn's June 2023 report into peer-on-peer sexual harassment among 16 to 18 year old learners in further education (FE) colleges, and its 2021 report on the issue in secondary schools.
3. the Welsh Government's progress in implementing the following accepted, accepted in principle or partially accepted recommendations from our July 2022 report (including any significant achievements or challenges faced in implementing them, or where the recommendations have been superseded by events, policy changes or otherwise):

Recommendation 1: The Welsh Government and Estyn must adopt/continue to use the definition of sexual harassment used by Estyn in its 2021 report 'We Don't Tell our Teachers', including the specific examples of peer on peer sexual harassment Estyn used in its work with pupils.

Welsh Government response: Accept.

Recommendation 2: The Welsh Government must create a Young People's Advisory Board, made up of a representative sample of young people across Wales, to co-design the Welsh Government's response to peer on peer sexual harassment.

Welsh Government response: Accept.

Recommendation 3: The Welsh Government must carry out an awareness-raising campaign, co-designed with the Young People's Advisory Board (see Recommendation 2), targeted at learners across Wales, to improve understanding of what constitutes sexual harassment.

Welsh Government response: Accept.

Recommendation 4: The Welsh Government must commission a review into peer on peer sexual harassment among primary school-aged children, drawing on the expertise and guidance of children's charities, academics and the Children's Commissioner for Wales as appropriate.

Welsh Government response: Accept.

Recommendation 5: The Welsh Government must update its statutory guidance to ensure that local authorities collect data from schools on sexual harassment specifically on a monthly basis, analyse that data to identify trends and patterns, and report on their findings at least annually. The data should: be collected on the basis of the definition of sexual harassment adopted by Estyn in its 2021 report; and be broken down by the nine protected characteristics of the Equality Act 2010.

Welsh Government response: Accept.

Recommendation 6: Estyn must include within its inspection framework for routine school inspections, no later than January 2023, consideration of schools' approaches to keeping records of incidents of peer on peer sexual harassment specifically, how schools interrogate that data to identify trends and patterns, and the extent to which that data informs the development of school-based interventions.

Welsh Government response: Accept.

Recommendation 7: The Welsh Government must ensure that any reviews into peer on peer sexual harassment in Further Education and primary schools consider how effectively schools and colleges collect, categorise and analyse sexual harassment data to identify trends and develop school-/college-based interventions.

Welsh Government response: Accept.

Recommendation 8: The Welsh Government must ensure that pupils are taught about the underlying causes of peer on peer sexual harassment – such as unhealthy depictions of sexual relationships and behaviours across society amplified by pornography, social media, online gaming platforms and others – as part of current Personal and Social Education and future Relationships and Sexuality Education curricula.

Welsh Government response: Accept.

Recommendation 10: The Welsh Government must, alongside the Young People’s Advisory Board (see Recommendation 2), carry out a review into the support provided to young people who have experienced peer on peer sexual harassment, with a view to making recommendations to schools, local authorities and others as required to improve the quality and timeliness of that support.

Welsh Government response: Accept.

Recommendation 11: The Welsh Government must ensure that schools and colleges create a culture in which sexual harassment is unacceptable, reports of sexual harassment are taken seriously and responded to promptly and consistently.

Welsh Government response: Accept.

Recommendation 12: Estyn must include within its inspection framework for routine school inspections specific consideration of how schools and colleges respond to and support learners who have reported and/or experienced sexual harassment, and to address the behaviour of individuals who have perpetrated it.

Welsh Government response: Accept.

Recommendation 13: The Welsh Government must make ring-fenced funding available to schools for all school staff to undertake training on identifying, responding to, and reporting peer on peer sexual harassment. That funding should include provision for schools to provide cover for teachers who are taken out of class, if necessary.

Welsh Government response: Accept.

Recommendation 14: The Welsh Government must work alongside Estyn, relevant academics, and the Young People’s Advisory Board (see Recommendation 2) to gather and collate examples of sex and relationships education that learners consider to be effective in addressing peer on peer sexual harassment, with a view to creating a bank of resources for schools and colleges.

Welsh Government response: Accept.

Recommendation 15: The Welsh Government must write to local authorities and/or schools to ensure that schools have clear policies on acceptable mobile phone use by learners throughout the school day, those policies are well-communicated to learners, staff and parents, and are consistently enforced by school staff.

Welsh Government response: Accept.

Recommendation 17: The Welsh Government must work with local authorities to create and maintain databases of third sector organisations that provide support services for schools and colleges that could assist them in their response to peer on peer sexual harassment.

Welsh Government response: Accept.

Recommendation 18: As part of its wider work on raising awareness of peer on peer sexual harassment in schools, the Welsh Government, alongside the Young People's Advisory Board (see Recommendation 2), must carry out an awareness raising campaign targeted at parents and families.

Welsh Government response: Accept.

Recommendation 19: The Welsh Government must publish its statutory national trans guidance for schools and local authorities no later than January 2023.

Welsh Government response: Accept in principle.

Recommendation 20: The Welsh Government must amend its Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence strategy to acknowledge the impact of peer on peer sexual harassment on the safety and wellbeing of female learners.

Welsh Government response: Accept in principle.

Recommendation 21: The Welsh Government must publish the LGBTQ+ action plan no later than autumn 2022. The action plan must acknowledge the scale and impact of sexual harassment on LGBTQ+ learners.

Welsh Government response: Accept.

Recommendation 22: The Welsh Government must proceed with pace on its work to publish a multi-agency action plan to tackle the problem of peer on peer sexual harassment.

Welsh Government response: Accept.

Recommendation 23: The Welsh Government must provide the Committee with an update in September 2022, and then at 6 month intervals thereafter, on the numbers and proportions of local authorities and schools with RSE leads in place.

Welsh Government response: Accept.

Recommendation 24: The UK Government and the Welsh Government should ensure that there is sufficient time given to the Senedd for scrutiny of any future Legislative Consent Memoranda relating to the Online Safety Bill.

Welsh Government response: Accept in principle.

4. Any other issues you think are relevant to this issue, which we should consider as part of our follow up work.

Annex B: request for information relating to the November 2022 report 'Pupil absence'

Please can you set out:

1. The latest trends in relation to pupil absence, including persistent absence, and how these compare to when we published our report, in particular for those pupils who are:
 - in years 10 and 11;
 - from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds; or
 - those with additional learning needs.
2. Any new policy interventions that have been developed and introduced since we published our report, with details of whether they are effective or plans for evaluation.
3. How work is progressing in implementing the accepted recommendations from Estyn's January 2024 report on improving attendance in secondary schools, and how this work has accounted for Estyn's updated report in May 2025.
4. the Welsh Government's progress in implementing the following accepted, accepted in principle or partially accepted recommendations from the above report, including any significant achievements or challenges faced in implementing them, or where the recommendations have been superseded by events, policy changes or otherwise.

Recommendation 1: The Welsh Government runs a national campaign to emphasise the positive impacts of regular school attendance. Alongside this, the Welsh Government should provide support to local authorities and schools to deliver similar, local positive campaigns about school attendance. The different campaigns should reinforce messages from the other campaigns.

Welsh Government response: Accept.

Recommendation 2: The Welsh Government should commission an urgent study into how the cost of living crisis is impacting on pupils' ability to attend school. This should be done within two months following the Welsh Government's response to this report and made publicly available. The review should be supported by an action plan which details what work will be done to address any of the issues highlighted in the report.

Welsh Government response: Accept.

Recommendation 3: The Welsh Government should ensure that decisions on learner travel are driven by the individual and specific needs of children and young people. To support local authorities in taking this approach, the Welsh Government should ensure that local authorities have sufficient funding to ensure all children and young people have access to appropriate transport options to get them to school safely. The current review should look to prioritising a learner-first solution and should be radical in looking for innovative solutions.

Welsh Government response: Accept in principle.

Recommendation 4: That the Welsh Government outlines how they intend to take forward the work looking at the use of attendance data to support early interventions. In providing this detail, the Welsh Government should provide outline timeframes for the delivery of this work.

Welsh Government response: Accept.

Recommendation 5: That the Welsh Government monitors educational outcomes and the links with attendance rates, and publishes this data on a regular basis.

Welsh Government response: Accept in principle.

Recommendation 6: That the Welsh Government publishes more detailed data on the reasons for de-registration and for returning to schools after de-registration, alongside data on the support being provided to families. This data should be disaggregated by local authority and key demographics, such as age, gender, ethnicity, disability, and eligibility for free school meals.

Welsh Government response: Accept.

Recommendation 7: That the Welsh Government, as part of its current review of school attendance policy and guidance, agrees and sets consistent trigger levels for intervention which apply across all local authorities in Wales.

Welsh Government response: Accept.

5. Any other issues you think are relevant to this issue, which we should consider as part of our follow up work.