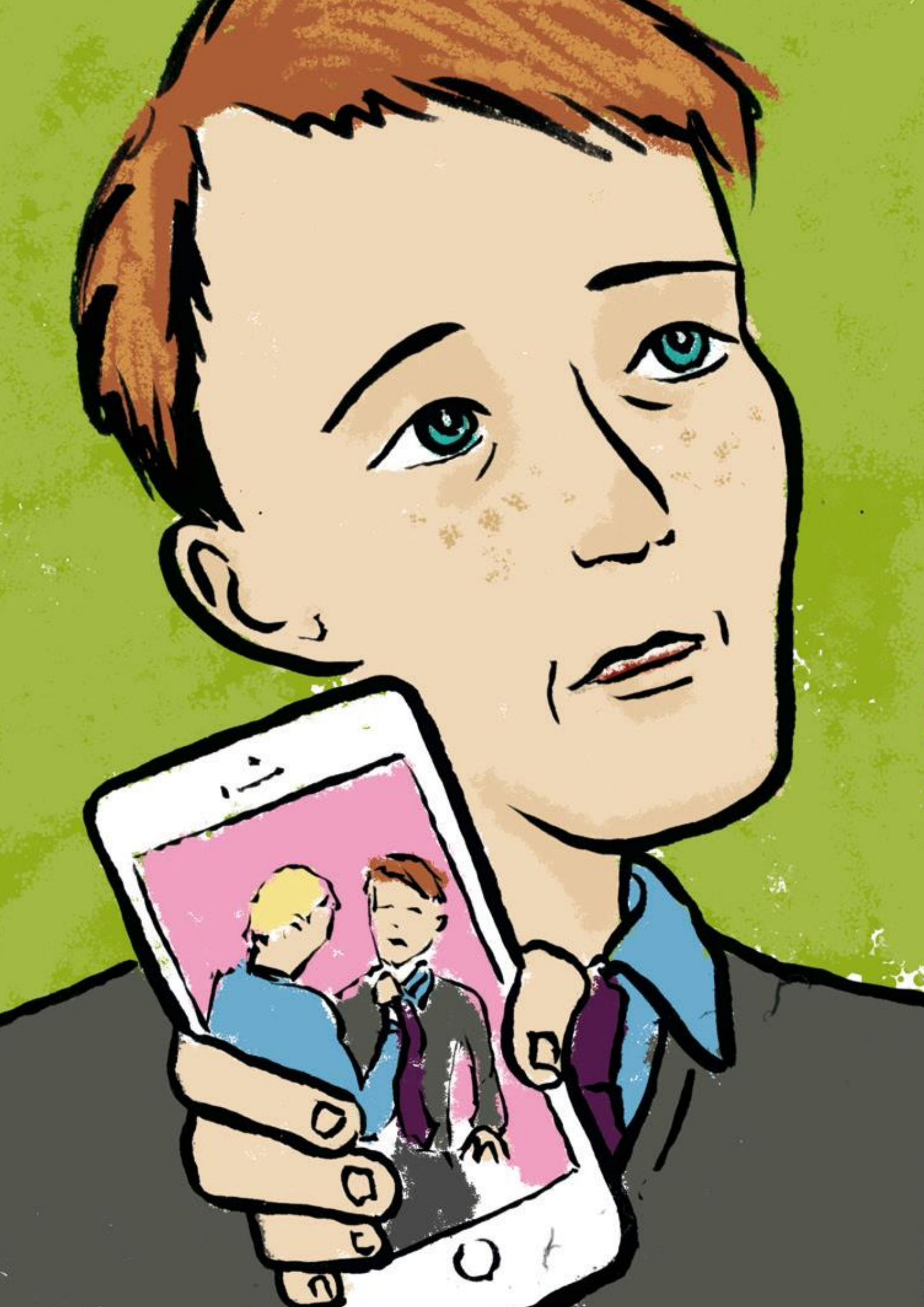
‘Don’t worry, I’m here for you’ — Children and young people’s experiences of cyberbullying in Wales

Comisiynydd Plant Cymru

Children’s Commissioner for Wales

Contents

Acknowledgments 3
Introduction 4
Key messages 6
Methodology 7
Young People's Experiences 9
Young People's Solutions 14
Views of professionals working with young people 18
Professionals' Solutions 22
Conclusion 25



Acknowledgments

Over four hundred children and young people and over 150 professionals from across Wales have provided very honest accounts of their online lives and their ideas about what could be done to tackle the implications of cyberbullying for children in Wales. My heartfelt thanks goes to those individuals and to my staff team for their creative and safe consultation practice.

Introduction

When I began in post, thousands of children and young people[1] asked me to prioritise tackling bullying during my first three-year plan. Since then I have followed a three-year programme of work on tackling bullying and this report is part of that programme. Bullying is a persistent problem in children's lives but, in recent years, has evolved into a problem that follows some children wherever they go: "Cyber-bullying happens anywhere and anytime". Mobile phones, social networks and gaming now enable bullying to take place in children's virtual worlds as well as in their off-line worlds. From this work, it is clear that its impact can be devastating on children's lives:

"You feel on your own when you get bullied online."

"I'm addicted to being online. So I can't escape the bullies."

"Hurt feelings are still there long afterwards."

"Teimlo'n fach." [feeling small]

It is also clear that parents and teachers have struggled to adapt quickly enough to the changing nature of children's online worlds. Parents may be disappointed that schools do not intervene enough in online bullying, but equally teachers feel that parents can undermine their efforts to encourage safe behaviour in their pupils. Young people tend to think that neither group of adults knows enough about social media to be able to help effectively.

Children and young people need support from adults when bullied. They also want to move beyond being simply taught about the dangers of the online world. They are asking for safe spaces to discuss their experiences and to share ideas about how to cope in the fast-moving world of social media. As one young person said, they need to feel that there is someone to say: 'Don't worry, I'm here for you'.

This report examines, for the first time, the views of children aged 9 to 18 about the effects of cyberbullying in Wales.

[1] www.childcomwales.org.uk/publications/what-next/

Views have been gathered from 423 children and 158 professionals about what they think should be done to tackle cyberbullying.

There is no legal definition of bullying or cyberbullying. As with our 2017 report into children's experience of bullying, *Sam's Story*, this report uses the definition of bullying outlined in the Welsh Government's 'Respecting Others' Guidance, which states bullying is behaviour that is:

- Deliberately hurtful;

- Repeated over time but that one-off incidents can cause trauma and require appropriate responses;

- Difficult for individuals to defend against.

Cyberbullying occurs when this behaviour uses digital technology.

Some of the experiences in this report are also related to more general negative experiences online that arose when discussing bullying.

"I'd like a support group led by older pupils — somewhere you could go and talk about the problems you are having if you felt too embarrassed to tell your family."

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Key messages

'Don't worry, I'm here for you', highlights how:

- Children and young people are able to identify a wide range of common negative online experiences, including negativity about looks and identity, being frozen out from the 'in' groups and threats of violence. They would like to have more opportunities to share their experiences of online bullying and discuss coping strategies in safe, non-judgmental spaces.

- Peer-led strategies and interventions are valued by many children and young people.

- Teachers often lack information about new technology and how they are used by children and young people and many feel overwhelmed by the issue. They often have to deal with the consequences of bullying taking place overnight and after school hours, as well as the impact this has on children's ability to learn. Some teachers can find parents' behaviour undermining if they intervene inappropriately online after their children have been bullied, or do not restrict children's access to apps and games designed for older young people or adults.

- Young people and professionals feel parents are unsure about what to do about online bullying and that they often do not understand their children's online lives. They can feel disappointed if schools do not take action regarding online bullying.

Methodology

We have gathered data from 423 children and young people, aged 9 to 18, to find out about their online lives, how they feel about cyberbullying, and what they think should be done to tackle it. This was done through a series of workshops and focus groups with young people, in addition to a survey in the Urdd Eisteddfod. We also consulted with 158 teachers and youth workers to hear how they deal with instances of cyberbullying and what improvements could be made in order to tackle the issue.

- **May 2018:** survey completed by 184 children and young people at Eisteddfod yr Urdd in Builth Wells. The survey investigated the positives and negatives of using social media as well as how children defined cyberbullying and how it could be stopped. Bullying emerged as one of the biggest drawbacks of using social media, before any specific questions about cyberbullying were asked.
- **July — September 2018:** school visits and workshops hosted across Wales. These provided a safe space within a familiar environment for 239 young people to convey their knowledge around online bullying. The key component of the workshop was a drama activity, where pupils were asked to demonstrate what could be happening to a character who was being bullied online through a 'freeze-frame' or still image. The wider group could then discuss what they thought was happening, before the facilitator entered the frame and talked with each character to find out who they were and what was going on. Each session finished with exploring solutions and how the character could be helped.

Workshops were carried out in schools and community groups, including groups for young carers, young people with additional learning needs and children from Gypsy and Traveller communities. An accessible format workshop was developed for young people with a learning disability. Many children and young people chose to share real-life experiences of online bullying during the workshops.

- **October 2018:** Our primary school scheme (Super Ambassadors) provided opportunities for us to explore with primary school teachers the following:
    - As a teaching professional, what is your main challenge when dealing with online bullying instances?
    - What do you find works when tackling online bullying or supporting children involved?
    - What do you think needs to be improved/provided to help teachers tackle online bullying more effectively?

  Secondary school teachers identified through our Student Ambassadors scheme were also asked to respond to the same questions through email, as well as youth workers in various local authorities.

In addition to contact with youth workers, we further involved community groups and Special Educational Needs (SEN) schools and community groups to deliver differentiated workshops.

- **November 2018:** Invited pupils and teachers from some of the schools we had already engaged with to our office where we explored our key messages with them to see whether they agreed. We also gave them the opportunity to develop and feedback on our draft resources for schools.

Young People's Experiences

Key messages

- Children and young people want to be involved in finding ways to promote positive online behaviour in schools and communities.
- Children and young people and teachers rated peer-led, peer supported initiatives as highly effective in tackling online bullying.
- Children and young people are aware of what to do when being bullied but often feel that they are not listened to and that online bullying is not dealt with or taken seriously.
- Children and young people would like more opportunities to share their experiences of online bullying, and they would like more safe non-judgmental spaces where they can discuss coping strategies.
- Children, young people and teachers all value support from the police and feel that additional opportunities to work with them would be useful.
- Young people and teachers face difficulties as many occurrences of online bullying have an impact on offline lives too, in and out of school.
- Children and young people often lack confidence in adults' knowledge of the online world, including cyberbullying.

We consulted with both primary and secondary aged children and young people around their experiences of cyberbullying. When discussing bullying in general, primary aged children more often associated it with physical bullying, whereas secondary aged young people usually referenced online bullying either in isolation or in addition to physical bullying. As a result, when discussing experiences of online bullying, the data mainly comes from children and young people aged over 11.

Gender

Young people tell us that different genders often have different experiences of bullying. The perception is that boys involved in bullying tend to be more violent and physical with one another, while girls are usually more involved in spreading rumours or appearance-based bullying. Our findings also highlighted that girls in particular were under pressure to send explicit photos, which often get shared without their consent. Young people also talked about bullying relating to whether a person identified as a particular gender and conformed to its stereotypes or not. This included illustrating people being bullied for being transgender or gender fluid, in addition to identifying as a boy but not acting like a typical boy, for example.

"It's 100% different for boys!"

"Boys do get called names, but they don't care as much."

"There is pressure to be a lad."

For girls, it's appearance-based bullying:

"I'm getting bullied because they are calling me greasy."

"I edit all my photos to look slimmer before I post."

Age

Young people across Wales noted that cyberbullying peaks during the early years of secondary school and that for many the impact can ease as you get older and more experienced. This is a time of transition for all young people, who may already be feeling anxiety or uncertain about a new school environment.

"Younger people get affected more — the older you get the less you care, you just learn to turn it off! "

"The older you get the less you care".

"As you get older you don't bother anymore."

Impact on health

Young people seemed well aware of the potential impact of bullying on health. Some groups described feelings of anxiety and low self-esteem, while others made specific reference to depression and self-harm associated with online behaviours including social media. Some groups also referred to the impacts on physical health that online bullying and more general online behaviours can bring; this included eye problems and headaches from looking at a screen frequently. The most prevalent was a feeling of physical addition to being online. This was highlighted as a problem where a young person could be addicted to being online and therefore "can't escape the bullies".

Popularity

A key theme in young people's descriptions of bullying was the notion of being 'in' with a particular group as opposed to 'out'. This could mean somebody being targeted because their likes and interests were different from the rest of the group, and as already mentioned focusing on differences in gender and identity. Young people also described the pressure of knowing what's popular or not and having to check with their friends before posting anything online to make sure it was acceptable. There is then further expectation to constantly like and comment on pictures and receive a high number in return to retain that popularity. The sense of being 'in' vs 'out' also identified that in these instances it tends to be a group targeting one individual who is in some way different from the others. Those different from the rest of the group were described as easy targets.

"If I didn't get 30 likes in 3 minutes, I would delete it."

"I share it with friends on private message first to make sure that it was cool."

Lifespan of messages

The use of Snapchat was mentioned in nearly every workshop with young people. It was emphasised on more than one occasion that it's difficult to retain evidence of bullying via Snapchat as messages disappear and often photos appear too quickly to screenshot. One group of young people also drew attention to the worry of the long term results of posting things online by stating "once it's there it's there forever".

(imagined scenario in a workshop) "I'm threatening him with a knife … I'm only sending a picture on Snapchat without my face — there's no evidence on Snapchat — even if you screenshot it."

"Snapchat is the worst for bullying because the messages disappear."

Invisibility

The issue of anonymity online also appeared in the majority of workshops with young people. It was a concern that a lot of bullying occurs behind anonymous accounts or fake profiles. Fake profiles are also sometimes used as a form of bullying itself, where a fake profile is made of another person to either make fun of them or create a backlash against them by using the profile to insult others. Young people also felt that having that element of invisibility online meant others were able to hide behind screens and send hateful messages. Further to this, some young people were concerned that people can abuse online chats by deleting what one person has said in order to present a different version of the conversation, and then have friends back them up to avoid any consequences.

"They are hiding behind phone screens."

"You can't trust anyone not to share your stuff."

"Even if you are not pretending to be someone else you might have more confidence online."

Method

There are several patterns in the methods that are used to cyberbully. The use of group chats appears frequently, where an individual is added to a group chat specifically for other members to abuse them. This is escalated when young people say they fear leaving the chat so that they at least know what is being said, or because you can see when someone has left a group chat so everyone would know.

The language used appears to range from mean messages to more serious threats, including death threats. It was highlighted that things often start as 'banter' and evolve into bullying, and it is sometimes difficult to differentiate between the two. In addition to language, photos are often used as a way to make fun of people. Sometimes it consists of taking pictures from somebody's profile and mocking them, or other times using pictures to 'rate' a person. It was even mentioned that sometimes a baby photo is taken from a parent's account which is then spread and used to mock that person.

"In actual life we would make a What's App group to fight, like if someone had beef with one of your friends you'd start a What's App group with their groups and roast each other for a couple of days and then organise a fight."

"You can get a message at 2am just telling you you're ugly."

"Year 7 + 8 rate accounts: send in picture and rate the person."

Online/offline crossover

It appears to be rare that online bullying remains online. Many young people mentioned that things that start online then spread around in person and things that happen in school are carried on online. Filming physical fights and uploading the video online was also discussed in several groups. Furthermore, young people stated that online bullying is 24/7 and is much more difficult to avoid or forget about as opposed to physical bullying.

"Beat 'em up online, beat 'em up in real life."

"It's like being bullied at school but it's online. At school it's 6 hours, online it's 24."

Ineffective actions

One of the key findings from the data is that young people know what they are recommended to do when dealing with online bullying, but it is often ineffective. It was stated that parents often don't understand social media and are powerless when their child is bullied. A smaller number stated that teachers don't take any action against bullying and wished it took more of a priority. Young people also complained that reporting to social media, web and gaming companies is often slow and complicated or doesn't work.

"Adults are shocked and powerless they don't know what to do."

"They (adults) try to, really, really try to 'get' stuff from 1 year ago that used to be trendy."

"Companies don't care."

"Does blocking help? No, they make new accounts and it might anger them more."

"Teachers don't do that much about it, that's the perception."

"I'm addicted to being online. So I can't escape the bullies."

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Young People's Solutions

Asking for help

Young people are aware that when dealing with an instance of bullying, they should ask for help. Some mention generally telling an adult, while others specifically mention parents, carers or teachers. They are also aware that there are external organisations available for support. ChildLine is named most frequently, however Child Exploitation and Online Protection command ('CEOP') and generic 'helplines' are also referenced.

"Don't keep it a secret!"

"Make sure if you are worried you go to someone you trust!"

"SPEAK! To parents, to teachers."

Dealing with an incident

Similarly, young people also know that you should report or block somebody if they are getting bullied by them. In addition, several talked about the importance of having a private profile and only following trusted people. Age limits for social media accounts was also discussed, with a handful of young people calling for higher age limits or stricter policies. Further data around dealing with an incident tells us that some young people are aware that recording evidence of the bullying is important.

"Report, block and tell a grown up."

"Block and log off."

Some young people noted that they would ignore the bullying or stand up to the person exhibiting the bullying behaviour rather than report it. Some also referred to 'self-help' therapies such as meditation or yoga, or adopting a positive mind-set.

Role of the police

During the consultation phase, young people discussed the role of the police in different ways. Some spoke of telling the police about an incident as a way of dealing a punishment or consequence to the person doing the bullying. One group mentioned their wish that cybercrime was taken more seriously and that police stations were more accessible. Others spoke about the police in terms of their ongoing support when dealing with online bullying. Suggestions were made for a hotline linked to the police specifically for people who are being bullied online and also for the police to continue to visit schools and educate pupils about online safety. In Wales, every school has a police liaison officer who offer lessons as well as deal with incidents.

"More accessible police stations so if you want to report cybercrime you can go and talk to someone."

"Cybercrimes to be taken more seriously."

Effective school strategies

Young people spoke about peer mentoring and support as one of their top solutions.

It was evident that young people are often more likely to listen to their peers. It was also highlighted that it is important to mix up friendship groups so young people don't feel as anxious about talking with others. In particular, it was mentioned that a connection between younger and older pupils would be beneficial in order to explain that things get better. Setting up a support group or mentoring system in school was also a popular suggestion.

Further education on bullying and its effects was also identified as a solution by young people. The majority specifically mentioned that they already have lessons or assemblies on the issue, however they would like more of this.

Several young people discussed the need for further sanctions in their school. This ranged from phones to only be used in an emergency in school, to harsher or stricter punishments when an incident of bullying occurs. It was also suggested that the school should provide more resources to help tackle online bullying. This included having more CCTV cameras in school and more staff available to monitor the school.

"Peer mentoring schemes can help. In this school pupils share experiences and mediate to repair groups and friendships."

"A support group led by older pupils — somewhere you could go and talk about the problems you are having if you felt too embarrassed to tell your family."

"Other kids can stop the bullying because they will listen to their peers."

(Someone to say), "Don't worry, I'm here for you."

"Stricter rules and punishment for bullying."

Counselling & support

Another key finding was the need for counselling or support. Young people told us they want safe spaces to be able to share their experience and discuss coping strategies. Some young people spoke about the need for better access to counselling services in general, however the majority of the data show that they would like school-based support. It should be noted that there is some access to counsellors in every secondary school in Wales.

While some identified a need for a specific member of staff for wellbeing support in schools, others suggested that more basic resources such as 'time-out rooms' or 'worry boxes' should be made available.

"Have more counsellors to talk to."

"Thinking about the bully — are they being neglected."

"Make talking to people about bullying more accessible for everyone."

Parental engagement

There were just a handful of young people who said they regularly discussed their online activity with their parents or carers. The majority felt that more parents and carers should be involved in their child's online lives and that Welsh Government should be encouraging them to do this. Further to this, a couple of young people thought that training should be available to parents to help them better understand online life.

"Parents should always be involved."

"Welsh Government should encourage parents to get more involved with their children."

Online support

A number of young people had suggestions for new ways young people experiencing bullying could receive help, all of which were online based. They told us that they would

like a website or social media account where they could discuss their experiences, access advice on what they could do and report bullying if necessary.

In addition to better online provision, some young people also want further restrictions and regulations on online content. They stated they would like better regulations on inappropriate and scary content and for more time to be taken in checking reported accounts.

"Social media training, so we don't just learn about the bad things, we can learn about how social media can affect us in the future."

"Mental health should be mentioned every week."

"Key skills shared right at the beginning of term."

"Restricted time for app use depending on age."

"Better regulations on the stuff that is shared e.g. chain mail and scary posts."

Views of professionals working with young people

Key messages

- Parents often don't understand children's online lives, and are not sure what to do about online bullying if it happens.
- Teachers would like to work with parents more effectively to help stop online bullying and they would like parents to promote the messages and guidance they give pupils in school.
- Teachers often feel that they don't have enough information about new apps and technology and how they are used by children and young people.
- Teachers find it difficult to resolve instances of cyberbullying due to the anonymity of pupils and due to it happening outside of school.
- Teachers appreciate the support of police school liaison officers when dealing with cyber-bullying

Challenges

Online life is too broad and fast-moving

One of the biggest challenges facing teachers is that technology changes quickly and they feel it is too difficult to keep up with what is happening in children and young people's lives. As a result, staff also have difficulty keeping track of online bullying, particularly when new apps are introduced. Teachers also feel like they have no control over what children use or the people they interact with. Time was mentioned as an issue, where due to the expansive nature of the internet, it takes a lot of time to collate evidence and there are sometimes a large number of individuals involved.

Youth workers also spoke of this as a challenge by stating that young people's online lives are so big that they cannot escape bullying in their own home. They also mentioned that the number of networks used by young people means that situations often snowball out of control.

"Getting all the necessary evidence from the phone can be challenging with schools not having the internet to connect to the various social media devices."

"School is overwhelmed with dealing with these issues."

"How quickly things that not suitable for students to see (videos etc) can be spread amongst them."

"There are so many types of online communication — hard to keep up and know what's out there."

"Technology develops so quickly — children move from network to network."

Anonymity

Teachers agree with young people that the anonymity of online life is an issue. Comments or accounts are often anonymous so it is challenging to identify the person or people behind the bullying and then help to resolve the issue. Teachers also find it difficult to gather evidence because of this, and feel that the anonymity makes it easier for young people to type things they would not normally say face to face.

Lack of support from parents

Teachers have told us that they would value more support from parents. Teachers face a challenge when parents don't follow guidance from schools regarding online safety and allow their children to use apps before they are legally old enough or mature enough to use them. This is intensified by the view of some parents that online bullying is a school issue, leading some to not take responsibility for the child's actions online. It was also stated by teachers that in instances of online bullying, parents sometimes get involved themselves and do not act as positive role models online. Teachers tell us that education for parents can help to increase their knowledge of young people's online lives and create a better relationship between parents and the school.

Youth workers told us that parents often aren't aware of the social media their children use and how often they spend time online. One youth worker reported stories of children falling asleep with smart phones in their hands. They reiterated that parents and teachers need to take joint responsibility in tackling online bullying.

"When dealing with parents, some are in denial about what their child has done, often making excuses for them, whilst others plead a lack of knowledge about various social media platforms."

"Parents don't follow school guidance information."

"Parents allowing their children to use apps before they reach the legal age and before they're mature enough to use sensibly, like year 7 students creating What's App group chats despite the minimum age requirement being 16."

"Parents often feel that cyberbullying is a school issue and it leaves us with parents feeling disheartened that the school have not done enough to support their child."

"A lack of support from parents — they sometimes aren't good role models themselves in the way they behave on social media platforms"

Inside vs outside school

The fact that online bullying usually happens outside of school hours and the school environment creates an issue for professional staff. Not only do they feel like they have no control over it, but instances of online bullying tend to occur over the weekend and schools are left to deal with the fallout on Monday morning. A further issue is that staff do not have the time to deal with these incidents and are not sure whether it is their responsibility in the first place.

"Things happen at home and then problems being brought into school for teachers to deal with."

"Arguments occur online are brought into school resulting in fighting."

"A lot goes on over the weekends and we are left to deal with the fall out on a Monday morning."

Offline effect on pupils

In addition to online issues being brought into school, teachers say that they change pupils' behaviour, creating further issues. Teachers are concerned for pupils' wellbeing and low self-esteem which appears to be a result of pressures on appearance and hurtful comments being circulated online. It was also reported that children and young people go into school exhausted after being on their phone or computer late into the night without their parents knowing.

Several teachers had observed changes in pupils' behaviour as a result of violence in games. They said it can lead to fighting in school, and the normalisation of violence.

This can lead to physical fights in school and the belief that this is normal behaviour. Furthermore, teachers are seeing pupils' spelling and communication affected due to excessive use of online messaging and auto-correct.

"Exhausted children who have been on TV, laptop, phones, Xbox etc all night without parents knowing."

"Mood swings if behaviour is aggressive in fighting games."

"Affects reading and writing levels: typing slang terms, typing not using pen to paper."

"A social media demand to look good, use of filters, following air-brushed celebs. Contributing to low self-esteem and confidence issues."

Getting through to pupils

Teachers told us that it is difficult to get pupils to understand the implications of online bullying. The longevity of it is a particular issue, trying to explain to young people that the things they post could be available online for ever and could have long term effects. Teachers and youth workers also mentioned a challenge in getting pupils who are exhibiting bullying behaviour to think about their actions and understand the difference between 'banter' and bullying. A few teachers said it was not clear how far to take the scare factor or know where to draw the line when helping pupils to understand the implications of their online actions.

It was also stated that it is sometimes tough getting young people affected by online bullying to discuss their issue. This means that teachers aren't always aware of the effect on them and it's then difficult to ensure they get the right support.

"Some young people just don't seem to understand the effects long term of their actions. Peer pressure is a big force here."

"How far do we take the scare factor?"

Easy access

There is a feeling among teachers that access to apps/games is too easy. They are concerned that pupils are accessing certain apps underage and playing unsuitable games. Some teachers highlight that there is a role for social media companies or the government to play in ensuring that age limits and the law are adhered to.

"When dealing with parents, some are in denial about what their child has done, often making excuses for them, whilst others plead a lack of knowledge about various social media platforms."

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Professionals' Solutions

Despite the fact that our consultation work with children and young people was run separately from our work with professionals, the main solutions from both are similar. There is a great emphasis on talking and sharing, on bringing pupils together to discuss incidents that have caused distress, the hurt they cause and how to avoid them in the future (restorative work), on upskilling adults and on the authorities' role in protecting children and young people.

A number of practices are already in place in many schools. These include:

- Sending courtesy messages home to parents to remind them to monitor their children's use of the internet.
- Involving the school's Police Liaison Officer seems to enforce messages and help pupils to realise the effects and legal implication of online bullying.
- Referring pupils and parents to www.thinkuknow.co.uk, a website and education programme run by CEOP, where they can receive support and know where to report any incidents if necessary.
- Encouraging young people to use 'block' or 'report' buttons on social media sites to try and stop bullying as it happens.
- Training young people to be Wellbeing Ambassadors who help link pupils affected by online bullying with a supportive teacher.

However, teachers identified the need for further solutions, including training for adults and children, action by social media companies and more supportive relationships between home and schools.

Parental engagement

A large number of teachers told us that better engagement between the school and parents could be a solution in tackling online bullying. Teachers feel that parents would be able to reiterate their advice and put similar sanctions in place in the home as at school. Teachers feel that it would also help if parents supervised their children's online activity and ensure joint responsibility in safeguarding and supporting young people who are affected by online bullying.

Education for parents was also discussed as a solution. Teachers felt that this would help parents and carers understand the dangers of the internet and be aware of what apps and games are suitable for the age of their child. Some teachers thought it would be most effective if the education or training was conducted with the police or it was suggested that children and young people themselves could train their parents on what online life is really like. Youth workers also thought that this was a good idea.

Effective school strategies

Teachers would like time to run additional lessons and assemblies in order to help pupils develop positive online behaviour and learn about safe websites and apps. PSE lessons to discuss real-life situations, and restorative practices were mentioned by numerous teachers as methods that work well in schools. They were referenced as ways to open a discussion about why an incident occurred, the roles of the people involved and what the next steps to take. Teachers also saw a role for external agencies such as invited speakers or drama companies to help educate young people about cyberbullying. In particular, they mentioned the effectiveness of having somebody external with a personal experience of bullying visit the school and talk to pupils.

A whole school approach towards tackling bullying was also discussed. Posters and articles giving advice to young people, which could be displayed within the school grounds or on its website, were viewed positively by teachers. They also felt that having the support of other staff and clear and consistent anti-bullying policies in the school created a positive ethos within the school. This in turn allows staff to better support young people and support pupil voice in the school. Furthermore, some teachers would like to see a key member of staff in schools who is available to talk to children and young people affected by bullying.

Youth workers supported what teachers said about an increase in lessons and restorative approaches, however they also felt that schools needed sanctions in place as consequences for those who engage in bullying behaviour.

Police engagement

Similarly to young people, teachers identified a place for the police in helping to tackle online bullying. Not only did teachers feel that the police could engage with pupils, some felt that there would be a benefit in having the police engage with and educate parents. In terms of engagement with pupils, some teachers mentioned that serious cases should be dealt with by the police, and that police liaison officers are often able to better enforce messages around online behaviour. The majority however discussed the police, police school liaison officers and PCSOs more in an educational role. Teachers said that not only are the police able to distinguish between what is a crime and what isn't, but that they can also sometimes deliver hard hitting messages to pupils. A familiar and consistent face within the police was also seen as a positive step towards getting young people to talk about bullying.

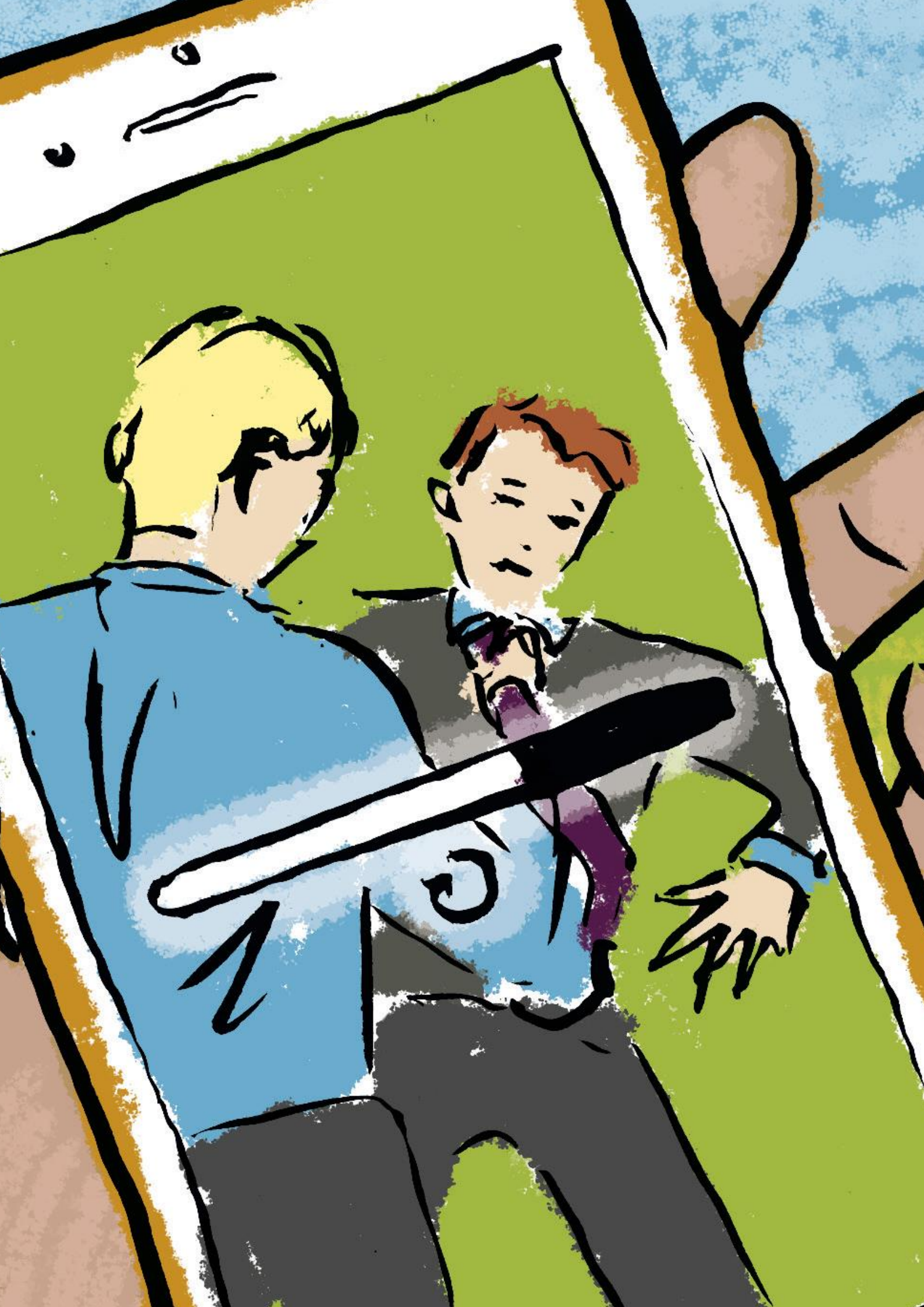
Upskilling teachers

Teachers told us that they need further training on which apps, games and websites children and young people use in addition to the signs of online bullying. It was discussed that children themselves could facilitate the training and show teachers what they use. Teachers said that they would like clearer guidance and information on legislation as well as how to best support a child who is experiencing bullying. Most teachers tell us they would like this information from external agencies and resource packs which they could use in schools. It was stated that this could help ensure a consistency in what is taught across Wales.

Top level

A role for 'top level' involvement, from government in addition to social media companies, was identified by teachers. A small number of teachers felt that there needed to be more UK Government responsibility in tackling online bullying and that there needs to be punishment by law so that pupils get the message. A larger number felt that social media companies had a role in educating children and young people about online bullying and stop targeting them as users. They also stated that there needed to be improvements in getting things removed from social media and also in associated reporting procedures.

Youth workers would also like to see better reporting mechanisms in place in order to try and stop the spread of online bullying. They felt that this could help make it easier for young people to report abuse and also to stop people creating new profiles to allow them to keep bullying.



Conclusion

The fast-moving online worlds of social media and gaming provide unprecedented challenges and opportunities for us as a society. Most teachers trained before social media became ubiquitous and no parents grew up with social media as part of family life. Therefore there are no tried and trusted methods of handling difficult situations online, including bullying.

In the media and society more generally there are often pronouncements about young people's behaviour online being problematic. But this isn't just an issue that affects young people. People of all ages and of all walks of life will have experiences of negative online behaviour, including cyberbullying. It's why it's so important that this issue is tackled collectively and that parents, teachers, and crucially, young people, work together to build safer online communities for our children.

Discussion *about* cyberbullying often does not include young people's views and experiences. It is quite clear from this report that young people want safe spaces to explore their experiences and to receive the support of adults. They do not want to be simply 'taught' about online life in classes and assemblies.

Unusually I am not concluding this report with a list of recommendations for governments or local authorities. This is an international issue that transcends the responsibility of one body or group. It is a whole society issue.

I will be taking a series of actions in response to what children, young people and adults have shared with me, which follow on the next page.

My immediate actions

- Share the findings of this work with those responsible within Welsh Government for its Positive Parenting campaign 'Parenting. Give It Time', national online safety action plan and the re-drafting of the national anti-bullying guidance 'Respecting Others', to ensure the views captured here help share their future work.
- Provide actions packs and resources to enable peer-to-peer support by working with hundreds of schools across Wales who are active members of my Ambassador schemes to establish groups / panels in schools who could lead on peer-to-peer support.
- Explore with Wales' Police and Crime Commissioners what role police forces have in protecting children and young people online and how that can be communicated to children, parents and professionals.
- Explore the key messages about cyberbullying in teacher training delivered by my office, this includes training delivered to my network of Ambassador schools through my programme of annual events.

My medium-term actions

- Continue to influence the development of the new Curriculum in Wales, to ensure human rights and children's rights education is at its heart. In so doing, children and young people will be encouraged to use rights to understand and describe their relationships with others and will encourage them to critically examine their own attitudes and behaviours.
- Continue to influence the development of a whole school approach to wellbeing that includes an anti-bullying policy that the whole school community (pupils, parents and school staff) have ownership over and are signed up to, and that includes a common understanding on how cyber-bullying will be responded to,
- Influence Welsh Government, the National Association for Education Leadership, and the regional education consortia to develop professional learning opportunities for teachers to enhance their understanding of effective anti-bullying approaches.
- Work with my English counterpart to support her efforts in asking UK Government to tackle social media companies on the issue of under 13s regularly using social media platforms designed for older children.
- Support the work of my international counterparts in the development of a new United Nations General Comment on Digital Rights of Children and Young People in 2019. This will provide international guidance on how to protect children's human rights in the digital world.

My long-term ambition

I want to see a Wales which protects children's rights, wherever they are, including online.

I expect the Welsh Government to continue to work with partners in local authorities, regional education consortia, Estyn and my office, in order to take forward action on the strong messages contained within this report. It is clear from children and young people that unless incidences of bullying, including cyber-bullying, are routinely recorded and acted upon, there is unlikely to be a significant change in the experiences of children across Wales.

I look forward to continuing to work alongside these organisation to realise that ambition to protect children's rights wherever they are.