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**Response to Estyn thematic review of the effectiveness of  
action taken by schools to address bullying on the grounds  
of pupils' protected characteristics**

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**Report title:**

Action on bullying: A review of the effectiveness of action taken by schools to address bullying on the grounds of pupils' protected characteristics

**Report details:**

The advice was commissioned by the Support for Learners Division within the Department for Education and Skills, as requested in the annual remit letter to Estyn from the Minister for Education and Skills. The review provides the Welsh Government with evidence on how well schools are addressing bullying based on pupils' protected characteristics (age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation), and highlights examples of good practice.

**Summary of main findings:**

Key themes emerging from the report are as follows:

- Pupils with certain protected characteristics are more likely to experience bullying than other pupils and there is a wide variation in pupils' experiences of bullying and the way in which schools deal with it.
- In schools with a strong ethos that promotes equality and diversity, pupils report lower instances of bullying. There is a close link between how well schools communicate expectations about pupil behaviour and how well pupils treat each other.
- A minority of schools consult with pupils so that they know extent and nature of bullying at the school. The best schools consult widely within the school community about bullying.
- In a minority of primary schools, staff are unaware of the extent of verbal bullying or the sort of language that is used as a form of insult. In some secondary schools remarks that cause offence are treated as 'banter'.
- Most schools keep records of behavioural incidents, a minority keep a specific record of bullying incidents. Very few primary schools categorise incidents according to the protected characteristics.
- Most pupils know whom to tell if they witness or experience bullying. Primary school pupils are generally confident that the school will tackle bullying, secondary school pupils less so.
- Most schools hold an 'anti-bullying week' annually. In many schools the curriculum celebrates individual differences, but will not cover issues that staff feel less confident about discussing (e.g. homophobia and gender reassignment). In a minority of schools, diversity issues are seen as contentious.
- In most secondary schools, pupils and staff are concerned about the rise in cyberbullying. In best practice, staff keep up-to-date with the technologies that pupils use and understand that they can be misused.
- Many school strategic equality plans do not pay enough attention to the full range of protected characteristics, and only a few identify 'reducing

bullying on the grounds of protected characteristics' as one of their equality objectives.

- In the best examples, behaviour and anti-bullying policies are well understood, and bullying is seen within a continuum of behaviour.
- When drawing up strategic equality plans, few schools seek the views of groups linked to the protected characteristics, as they are required to do. Many school governing bodies review progress towards meeting the strategic equality plan annually, but the quality of this monitoring and the information provided to governors varies too much, and is generally unsatisfactory.
- Not all local authorities provide schools with ongoing support and advice on equality issues, and many do not provide governors with effective training to enable them to fulfil their responsibilities on monitoring strategic quality plans.
- In a few clusters, when preparing strategic equality plans, schools collaborate to identify possible issues around the protected characteristics, but there are very few cases of feeder and receiving schools working towards joint strategic equality objectives.
- Many schools provide general training to staff on bullying, but this does not relate specifically to the protected characteristics. Staff find it useful to receive specific training. Schools report an absence of high-quality face-to-face training, especially related to transgender issues.
- Many schools are unaware of the Welsh Government's 'Respecting Others' guidance.

#### **Recommendations for schools:**

R1. Raise awareness of bullying on the grounds of protected characteristics with pupils, parents, staff, and governors and take a more proactive approach to preventing and mitigating its effects;

R2. Consult pupils, parents, and others, to identify the extent and nature of bullying in the school and to agree the contents of strategic equality plans;

R3. Plan age-appropriate opportunities in the curriculum to discuss issues related to the protected characteristics and to build pupils' resilience to bullying;

R4. Ensure staff have a clear understanding of the extent and nature of bullying that may take place in school, including cyberbullying,

R5. Make sure that staff know how to deal with and record incidents of bullying;

R6. Record and monitor incidents of bullying in relation to the protected characteristics and use this information to review strategic equality objectives; and

R7. Make sure all policies and procedures meet the requirements of the Equality Act 2010.

**General response to recommendations 1 – 7 addressed to schools:**

We accept these recommendations.

In responding to these recommendations we expect schools to refer to the Welsh Government's guidance 'Respecting Others' on tackling bullying in schools, and specifically our guidance on bullying around race, religion and culture, special educational needs and disabilities, homophobic bullying, sexist, sexual and transphobic bullying and cyberbullying. Schools should also have regard to advice made available by the Equality and Human Rights Commission:

<http://www.equalityhumanrights.com/about-us/devolved-authorities/the-commission-in-wales>

The Welsh Government will publicise the Estyn remit report to schools, through the Dysg newsletter, and will encourage schools to address the recommendations contained within it. We will also make local authorities aware of the recommendations, and ask that they take account of them in their work with schools.

**Recommendations for Local Authorities and Consortia:**

R8. Provide training and support for school staff to improve their understanding of the Equality Act 2010 and its implications;

R9. Provide training and support for school governors to enable them to fulfil their statutory responsibilities to monitor strategic equality plans and objectives; and

R10. Monitor the quality and effectiveness of schools' strategic equality plans more closely.

**General response to recommendations 8 – 9 addressed to local authorities:**

We accept these recommendations.

In responding to these recommendations, we expect local authorities to have regard to the Welsh Government's guidance 'Respecting Others' on tackling bullying in schools and to advice made available by the Equality and Human Rights Commission.

The Welsh Government will write to LAs, and regional consortia, to highlight the Estyn remit report and its recommendations for local authorities.

**Recommendations for Welsh Government:**

R11. Publicise the 'Respecting Others' guidance.

**Response:**

The Welsh Government accepts this recommendation and will communicate and publicise the 'Respecting Others' guidance to schools and local authorities. The Welsh Government will also consider how it might put in place additional communications activity around tackling bullying, to further support this agenda.

**Publication Details:**

The full report will be published on or after 27 June 2014 on the Estyn website: [www.estyn.gov.uk](http://www.estyn.gov.uk)