

## The Highland Council

Education, Children and Adults Services Committee 12 November  
2014

Agenda Item	14.
Report No	ECAS 53/14

### Positive Relationships and Bullying Prevention Policy, Guidance and Toolkit

#### Report by Director of Care and Learning Service

#### Summary

This report provides information on work undertaken to revise the anti-bullying policy and guidance for Highland Schools and local research on homophobic bullying. Members are asked to agree to the introduction of the new Positive Relationships and Bullying Prevention Policy, Guidance and Toolkit and to the Care and Learning Service participating in the Stonewall Education Champions Programme.

#### 1. Background

- 1.1 The Equality Act 2010 places a General Duty for public bodies in Scotland to give due regard in all their work to the need to:
  - Eliminate unlawful discrimination
  - Advance equality of opportunity, and
  - Promote good relations
- 1.2 The specific duties to support the General Duty apply to Education Authorities as "listed bodies" in their own right.
- 1.3 The legal and policy framework also includes the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child; the national outcomes to tackle significant inequalities and improve the life chances of children, young people and families at risk, GIFREC and Curriculum for Excellence.
- 1.4 The Highland Council's equality priorities during 2012 – 2017 are presented in "A Fairer Highland". Actions relating to bullying in schools are:
  - 5 - Pupils and school staff have a greater understanding of prejudice based bullying and its impact and
  - 6 - Pupils and school staff feel more confident in reporting prejudice based bullying incidents that they have experienced or witnessed
  - 15 - Staff and pupils have a greater awareness of how they can support equality through delivery of curriculum for excellence and wider school approaches following the principles of the Highland Practice Model and SHANNARI.
- 1.4 Work to address bullying behaviours is a significant element of equality and diversity work in Highland schools. A report was submitted to this Committee on the 28th of August 2014 that provided an update on progress on the introduction of a standard Equality and Diversity Policy/Toolkit and associated training to facilitate all Highland Schools development of active Equality and Diversity Policies.
- 1.5 The Education Improvement Plan makes the commitment that all Highland Schools will have an active and revised Equal Opportunities Policy in place based on a new

Promoting Equality and Diversity Policy/Toolkit; and delivered equality, diversity and children's rights training by 2017.

1.6 It was agreed at the Community Safety, Public Engagement and Equalities Committee on the 5<sup>th</sup> of December 2012 that the ECS (Now Care and Learning) Equalities Working Group would review the effectiveness and scope of the current guidance and reporting form. A progress report will be submitted to that Committee in December, however it is an important step in mainstreaming equality work that this Committee also monitors bullying behaviours in schools approves the new Policy.

## **2. Positive Relationships and Bullying Prevention Policy, Guidance and Toolkit**

2.1 Copies of the Positive Relationships and Bullying Prevention Policy, Guidance and Toolkit (thereafter The Policy) are available in the Members' Library. It was developed by the Care and Learning Equalities Working Group and underwent an extensive period of consultation which included teachers, parents, and pupils, the Highland Youth Parliament, LGBT Youth Scotland, Stonewall Scotland and Respectme.

2.2 The Policy adopts the national definition that states that bullying can be understood as behaviour which leaves people feeling helpless, frightened, anxious, depressed or humiliated. Bullying behaviours may include:

- name calling, teasing, putting down or threatening
- ignoring, leaving out or spreading rumours
- pushing, hitting, tripping, kicking
- stealing and damaging belongings
- cyberbullying: sending abusive text, email or instant messages
- intimidation and extortion
- making people feel like they are being bullied or fearful of being bullied
- targeting someone because of who they are or are perceived to be

2.3 Bullying can occur for no apparent reason or it can be based on prejudices. It can be subtle or it can be overt. It can cause short-term suffering for the pupil who experiences bullying behaviour or it can have long-term effects.

2.4 The focus of the new Policy is prevention of bullying behaviours, exploring whole school approaches to reducing incidents of bullying behaviours, whilst streamlining the procedures for dealing with incidents of bullying behaviours. It avoids using language such as bully, victim, perpetrator recognising that bullying includes a range of behaviours and labelling a child as a bully or victim is not helpful.

2.4 The Policy closely aligns bullying prevention with Equality Act 2010 which provides protection from discrimination, harassment and victimisation based on a range of "protected characteristics." These characteristics are defined in the Act as:

- Race
- Sex
- Disability
- Sexual orientation
- Religion or belief
- Age
- Gender reassignment
- Pregnancy and maternity

- Marriage and civil partnership

*\*Age and marriage and civil partnership are not protected characteristics for the schools provision. However, in general, the Act applies across all the protected characteristics in a consistent way.*

2.5 In addition to the *Protected Characteristics* covered by the Act, there is an expectation that other groups will be considered, for example:

- Looked after children;
- Young carers;
- Children and young people living in deprivation;
- Body image issues.

2.6 The Policy states that Highland schools adopt the national stance on bullying behaviour<sup>1</sup>:

- We respect the rights of children as paramount
- We will work together to develop a culture of mutual respect and responsibility amongst all children and young people and adults around them
- We will seek to prevent and tackle bullying, through the development and implementation of effective anti-bullying policies and practices
- We will highlight bullying based on prejudice and perceived differences, and ensure our policies and practices are effective in dealing with these issues
- We will highlight different aspects of prejudice in order to make sure all types of prejudice-based bullying are treated with the same importance
- We will address the needs of children and young people who are bullied as well as those who bully within a framework of respect, responsibility, resolution and support
- We will share information and work jointly to make sure we are co-ordinated and cohesive in all that we do

2.7 The revised document also contains an extensive guidance section and toolkit with useful resources and teaching tools. Teachers also have access to a wide range of information and resources via the Highland GLOW Equality, Diversity and Children's Rights site.

2.8 Training on bullying prevention will be offered to schools alongside the training outlined at 1.5 of this report. The Policy will be reviewed on a three yearly basis.

### **3. Reporting and Levels of Bullying in Highland Schools**

3.1 It should be noted that formally reported incidents of bullying behaviours, even when complete, provide a necessary, but poor, measure of bullying incidents because not all bullying gets to adult attention, and young people often have different ideas as to what effectively constitutes bullying.

3.2 Formal reporting of incidents of bullying and racist incidents for the academic year 2012 – 13 is as follows:

- A total of 8 bullying (0.02%) and 10 racist incidents (0.03%) (Total school cohort 30,919) were formally reported in Highland schools (racist incidents may also be reported as bullying incidents so there may be duplication):
- 7 bullying (0.04%) and 8 racist incidents (0.04%) in primary (total cohort , 16,565);

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<sup>1</sup> A National Approach to Anti-Bullying for Scotland's Children and Young People, Crown Copyright, 2010

- 1 bullying incident (male victim) and 2 racist incidents (1 female and 1 male victim) reported in secondary (total cohort 14,224).

3.3 Schools will compile information on bullying within their own school, but there has been no mechanism to collate this information.

3.4 In response to the 2013 *Highland Lifestyle Survey questionnaire* the number of young people who said that they had felt bullied was:

- P7 – 20.4%
- S2 – 25.1%
- S4 – 17.2%

3.5 The Care and Learning Service is committed in its Equalities Outcomes and *For Highland's Children 4* to decreasing the gap between reporting of bullying through formal mechanisms and self-reported experiences of bullying from children and young people. Streamlined reporting through SEEMiS is being introduced to ensure that bullying behaviours are recorded centrally.

3.6 The new Policy introduces an optional electronic classroom survey which can be used alongside lessons relating to bullying behaviours. In appropriate language it focuses on 3 questions:

1. Have you experienced bullying?
2. If yes, where does the bullying happen?
3. Did it relate to prejudice?

3.7 The information captured from this will assist Head Teacher and school management teams in easily gathering reliable information about the levels of bullying in their schools, and contribute to pan Highland information.

#### **4. Research relating to homophobic bullying in Highland Schools**

4.1 International literature shows that homophobic bullying has universal impact on school ethos and pupil well-being, but there was very little understanding of the extent or impact of this form of prejudice based bullying in Highland schools. To address this, a survey was carried out in one Highland Secondary School that explored pupils' experiences of homophobic bullying aiming to inform whether and how homophobic bullying is an issue for young people in Highland and to provide some assessment of any need for intervention. Copies of the survey are available in the Member's Library.

4.2 The survey questionnaire and methods were developed in consultation with young people and school staff, and in conformity with British Psychological Society guidelines for research with vulnerable groups. Analysis of data suggests the following summary conclusions:

- 13% of the sample said that they were currently affected by homophobic bullying at least monthly
- Young people who identified as being lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender (LGBT) were at least three times more likely than others to experience homophobic bullying
- However, of those young people currently experiencing homophobic bullying, two-thirds are heterosexual, and three-quarters are boys.
- Vulnerable groups include almost anyone, openly LGBT young people and young people who do not behave according to gender stereotypes. Homophobic bullying happens as a result of attitudes about sexual minorities, but also

because it seems to be an effective way of bullying anyone.

- 24% of all young people could identify at least one adverse consequence to themselves as a result of homophobic bullying. This included young people not directly bullied themselves.
- Nearly 7% of the whole school sample reported a major consequence to themselves, such as using alcohol, drugs, or self-harm and suicide attempts, most of these young people were not LGBT, though LGBT young people had a higher risk of major adverse consequences of homophobic bullying.
- 44% of the sample could remember homophobic bullying occurring in Primary School
- Homophobic bullying can occur almost anywhere, with higher frequency in unsupervised locations, but also in classes, suggesting promising scope for intervention.
- There is a complex pattern of attitudes towards using the word “gay” as a negative adjective, suggesting that intervention in this area needs to be carefully thought out.

4.3 This research suggests that, in line with the international literature, homophobic bullying is a widespread and complex phenomenon. It confirms that sexual minority youth often experience bullying, and that this has adverse consequences, however it highlights that most people who suffer from homophobic bullying are heterosexual, and that cumulatively about a quarter of pupils can identify an adverse consequence to themselves. It is therefore not clear how much homophobic bullying is, in fact, homophobic; the motivation is often perhaps more suitably described as being about gender prejudices.

4.4 It is clear that homophobic bullying begins young, and can be remembered from the earliest years of schooling.

4.5 Given these complexities, it will be apparent that a simple bullet list of solutions is not likely to be helpful or appropriate. In addition to the principles relating to all bullying behaviours as outlined in the Policy the following things need to be done to make progress:

- Further, but more sustainable, information gathering work to generalise the Survey findings
- Whole school (including Primary Schools), evidence-based, approaches to addressing homophobic bullying as a specific issue
- Engagement with staff groups to explore these issues for teaching and other staff, and any barriers to addressing homophobic bullying
- Engagement with relevant voluntary and third sector groups and organisations to support work in Highland

## **5. Stonewall Education Champions Programme**

5.1 To address some of the issues identified in section 4 it is recommended that the Council joins the Stonewall Scotland's Education Champions programme which provides bespoke support and guidance to local authorities in tackling homophobia and homophobic bullying in their local schools. The key benefits of being a Stonewall Scotland Education Champion are:

- Use of the Stonewall Scotland's Education Champions logo to publicly demonstrate commitment to tackling homophobic bullying
- Support to develop an action plan and participated in benchmarking
- Access to a named Stonewall Scotland point of contact for support and

- guidance and access to best practice from across Scotland and Britain
- Free and access to two seminars per year and Stonewall Scotland representation at two local events or meetings a year
- Priority access to Stonewall's latest research and publications
- Regular e-bulletin providing information and updates on the work being done by Education Champions Scotland

5.2 As the Highland Council is already a Stonewall Scotland Diversity Champion, membership is at a reduced rate of £1250 per year, based on an initial joining period of two years. Funding for this has been identified from within existing budgets.

## 6. Implications

6.1 **Resources:** There is a cost of £1,250 per year, for a minimum of two years, related to signing up to the Stonewall Education Champions Programme. The implementation of the Policy, Guidance and Toolkit will be resourced from existing budgets.

6.2 **Legal and Risk:** The implementation of the actions detailed in this report will reduce the risk of legal challenge to the Council.

6.3 **Equalities:** The content of this report contributes to the implementation of the Council's Fairer Highland Action Plan. The actions detailed will contribute to the reduction in inequalities across all protected characteristics.

6.4 **Other Implications:** there are no climate change/carbon clever, rural or Gaelic implications arising from the content of this report.

## 7. Recommendation

- 7.1 Members are asked to agree:
- The introduction of the Positive Relationships and Bullying Prevention Policy, Guidance and Toolkit to all Highland Schools;
  - That the Council signs up to participate in the Stonewall Education Champions Programme; and
  - A progress report is submitted to this Committee in November 2015.

Designation: Director of Care and Learning

Date: 3 November 2014

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