

The Highland Council

Community Safety, Public Engagement and Equalities Committee – 3 December 2014

Agenda Item	9
Report No	CPE 40/14

Progress Report of Review Policy and Monitoring of Bullying and Prejudice-based Incidents in Schools

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.

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

The specific duties to support the General Duty apply to Education Authorities as “listed bodies” in their own right.

- 1.2 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.
- 1.3 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 It was noted at this Committee on the 4th of December 2013 that the ECS (Now Care and Learning) Equalities Working Group would review the effectiveness and scope of the then current anti-bullying guidance and reporting form and that equalities training will be delivered to all schools commencing February 2014.
- 1.5 As a means to mainstream equality and diversity work Reports have been

submitted to the: Education, Children and Adult Services Committee on the 28th August 2014¹ which detailed the introduction of the School Equality and Diversity Policy/Toolkit Education; and the Children and Adults Services Committee on the 12 November 2014² where Members agreed to the Positive Relationships and Bullying Prevention Policy, Guidance and Toolkit and the Council's participation in the Stonewall Education Champions Programme.

1.6 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.

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

2.1 The Positive Relationships and Bullying Prevention Policy, Guidance and Toolkit (thereafter The Policy) can be found at this [link](#). 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 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.

2.3 The Policy closely aligns bullying prevention with the Equality Act 2010 which provides protection from discrimination, harassment and victimisation based on a range of 'protected characteristics'³. 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

2.4 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.

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http://www.highland.gov.uk/download/meetings/id/66917/item_14_positive_relationships_and_bullying_prevention_policy_guidance_and_toolkit

2 http://www.highland.gov.uk/download/meetings/id/66392/item_20_school_equality_and_diversity_policytoolkit

3 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 The Policy states that Highland schools adopt the national stance on bullying behaviour⁴:

- 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

2.6 The revised document 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.

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

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

Total cohort 7793 (100%), response rate 5161 (66.2%).

3.3 The Survey questions are in the process of being revised for 2015. They still have to undergo consultation but current proposals are:

- Have there been times when you felt bullied in the last year?
- If you did feel bullied, where did this take place?
- When you felt bullied did you tell someone?
- Have any of your friends been bullied?
- If you or your friends have been bullied did anyone help out?

⁴ A National Approach to Anti-Bullying for Scotland's Children and Young People, Crown Copyright, 2010

- If you were bullied would you tell someone?
 - Do you know where you can get help from if you feel bullied?
- 3.2 A total of 8 bullying and 10 racist incidents were formally reported in Highland schools during the same academic year as the Survey (2012/13, Total school cohort 30,919).
- 3.3 There was a slight increase in reporting, particularly in primary schools, during the academic year 2013-14 where there were 16 bullying incidents (15 primary and 1 secondary) and 19 racist incidents (18 primary and 1 secondary) reported.
- 3.4 It should be noted that some incidents have more than one pupil displaying and experiencing bullying behaviours, and that some racist incidents may also be bullying incidents, so there may be some duplication. In addition, schools will have compiled their own information on bullying, but prior to the introduction of the new Policy there was no mechanism to collate this information.
- 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 children and young peoples' self-reported experiences of bullying. Streamlined reporting through SEEMiS has been introduced to ensure that bullying behaviours are recorded in the child's own record and can also provide statistical monitoring data centrally.
- 3.6 The new Policy introduces an optional electronic classroom survey which can be used alongside lessons relating to bullying behaviours. The information captured from this will assist school management teams in gathering reliable information about the levels of bullying in their schools, and contribute to pan-Highland information. In appropriate language it focuses on 3 questions: Have you experienced bullying; If yes, where does the bullying happen; Did it relate to prejudice?

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. Stonewall Scotland published new research in November 2014 '*The Teachers' Report 2014*⁵ which highlighted that 88% of secondary and 39% of primary school staff say that pupils in their school have experienced homophobic bullying, harassment or name calling.
- 4.2 To explore the Highland situation, a survey was carried by the Highland Council Psychological Service in one Highland Secondary School '*A whole-School study of the extent and impact of homophobic bullying*⁶. This study explored pupils' experiences of homophobic bullying aiming to inform whether

⁵ Stonewall Scotland, 2014, The Teachers' Report, http://www.stonewall.org.uk/documents/teachers_report_2014.pdf

⁶ McTaggart, Yavus, Macphee and Shepherd, (2014), *A Whole-School study of the extent and impact of homophobic bullying*. Highland Council Psychological Service. [Link](#).

and how homophobic bullying is an issue for young people in Highland and to provide some assessment of any need for intervention. The survey can be found at this [link](#).

- 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 widespread and complex. 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, therefore indicating that 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. Given these complexities, it is apparent that a simple bullet list of solutions is not likely to be helpful or appropriate. The Care and Learning Equalities Working Group will continue to explore and

develop ways to address the issues highlighted in the research.

- 4.6 As noted at 1.5 it was agreed 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 Council will also engage with LGBT Youth Scotland and other partners to reduce homophobic bullying.

5. Training

- 5.1 All head teachers had an introductory session relating to the Equality and Diversity Policy in May 2014. As noted at 1.6 there is a commitment that all schools will have delivered equality, diversity and children's rights training by 2017. Support will be provided to schools to facilitate this process and ensure that bullying prevention forms an integral part of this.
- 5.2 As participants in the Stonewall Champions Programme we will be able to access training support and Respectme, the national anti-bullying charity has also offered training support. We are also working with local partners, most notably the Police to explore ways that we can work together to develop appropriate training packages.

6. Implications

6.1 Resources

There are no resource or climate change implications arising from the content of this report.

Legal, Risk and Equalities

The implementation of the actions detailed in this report will reduce the risk of legal challenge to the Council and 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.

Recommendation

- Members are asked to note the introduction of the new Positive Relationships and Bullying Prevention Policy, Guidance and Toolkit and improving the mechanisms for monitoring bullying and prejudice-based behaviours in Schools

Designation: Director of Care and Learning

Date: 12th November 2014

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