



**Report of the Health & Wellbeing
Overview & Scrutiny Panel**

June 2014

Scrutiny Panel on Bullying in Schools

Panel Members

**Councillors Ruth Buckley (Chair)
Vanessa Brown
Penny Gilbey**

**Professor Robin Banerjee
Sam Watling, Youth Council**

Bullying in Schools: Scrutiny Panel Report

Chair's Foreword

I was very glad to be able to chair the scrutiny panel into bullying in Brighton and Hove schools. As a parent of a child who has recently started school in the city, and on behalf of all other parents, carers and children in Brighton and Hove, I was very keen to find out what was happening for our children locally and how bullying is being addressed by our education system.

I was joined on the panel by fellow councillors Vanessa Brown and Penny Gilbey and also by Sam Watling from the Brighton & Hove Youth Council. Robin Banerjee, Professor of Developmental Psychology at the University of Sussex, agreed to act as an informal advisor to the panel. I would like to thank everyone who took part for their time and commitment to this important panel.

Bullying takes different shapes and forms, including physical and verbal assault; there is now a depressing increase in the incidents of cyber-bullying and trolling. Whatever shape it takes, it can have a hugely negative impact on the victim which can last for years. It is everyone's social duty to address negative behaviour and the reasons behind bullying where we can.

We heard that when it comes to dealing with bullying within the education system, each school is responsible for its own anti-bullying policy – the council is not in a position to dictate what the school should do. However as a panel we were pleased to note that the council hosts the Anti-Bullying & Equalities Strategy Group which brings local schools together to discuss and develop best practice. We hope that this continues into the future as a key mechanism in sharing knowledge and lessons learnt.

It was clear from our panel meetings that there is a lot of good practice going on in individual schools in the city, including taking collective responsibility, involving students in developing the work and ensuring that there is a shared anti-bullying ethos throughout the school. It is never too early to begin learning that there is no place for bullying in our schools. We hope that these positive lessons will be shared across Brighton and Hove to eradicate bullying in our schools as far as possible.

As ever, there is still more that can needs to be done, in particular with regard to cyber-bullying and in tackling bullying for protected groups. I hope that Brighton and Hove schools are heading in the right direction to deal with these issues in an appropriate but assertive manner.

On behalf of the panel I would like to thank all of the young people, parents and carers who took part in the panel's investigation, either by attending one of our meetings or providing evidence in other ways. We are also very grateful for the help and support given to us by

council officers and colleagues from partner organisations. I sincerely hope that the recommendations the panel has made will help to shape a shared city-wide approach to anti-bullying policies in Brighton and Hove.



A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Ruth Buckley". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Councillor Ruth Buckley

May 2014

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Glossary - Acronyms

ABESG	Anti Bullying & Equality Strategy Group
BME	Black and Minority Ethnic
BMEYPP	Black and Minority Ethnic Young People's Project
BMS	Blatchington Mill School
CAMHS	Children & Adolescent Mental Health Services
EPS	Educational Psychology Service
ICT	Information and Communications Technology
LEA	Local Education Authority
LGBT	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender
OSC	Overview & Scrutiny Committee
SAWSSS	Safe & Well at School Survey
SEN	Special Educational Needs
SNAP	Safety Net Assertiveness Project

List of Recommendations

RECOMMENDATION 1 – that the ABESG should be supported and funded appropriately to allow it to undertake the key task of supporting anti-bullying initiatives across the city

RECOMMENDATION 2 – that the ABESG develops a best practice forum to celebrate and spread anti-bullying best practice across city schools

Recommendation 3 – that council officers continue to champion the SAWSS via the ABESG and other school partnerships including the Public Health Schools Programme

RECOMMENDATION 4 – ABESG should produce a leaflet (or a template for individual schools to adapt) for parents and young people explaining school commitments to tackling bullying. This leaflet should:

- **Detail parents' rights to complain**
- **Explain to whom parents can appeal if they are unhappy with the school's response to reports of bullying**
- **Make clear the role of school governors in dealing with parents who are unsatisfied with staff responses**
- **Provide contact details for independent advice**
- **Provide contact details for a parent-advocate and for the range of advocates available for particular groups (e.g. for the families of children with SEN)**
- **Explain to young people what options they have if they feel they are being bullied**

RECOMMENDATION 5 – we need a more systematic approach to identifying and learning from families who have opted out of the local state education system because they feel it has let them down – for example via an 'exit interview' of all those who permanently take their children out of local schools. This should build on the work already undertaken to track school moves within the LEA.

Recommendation 6 – ABESG should identify best practice in terms of BME anti-bullying work and encourage the best performing schools to share their learning with their peers across the city.

RECOMMENDATION 7 –that the ABESG includes student involvement in the development of school anti-bullying strategies as one of the elements of its best practice work.

RECOMMENDATION 8 – that ABESG invites the city Youth Council to become a co-opted member of the partnership (ideally with two Youth Council members co-opted)

RECOMMENDATION 9 – the views and experiences of parents are key to developing effective bullying strategies, and schools should actively involve parents in this work.

RECOMMENDATION 10 – ABESG best practice in terms of anti-bullying should include how to communicate with parents whose children are involved in bullying incidents

RECOMMENDATION 11 – ABESG best practice guidance should explicitly encourage schools to offer young people a range of ways in which they can report bullying

RECOMMENDATION 12 – that the ABESG anti-bullying best practice work explicitly includes how best to provide support for school staff

RECOMMENDATION 13 – the ABESG should ensure that planning effective primary to secondary transition forms part of its best practice work

RECOMMENDATION 14 – that the ABESG includes cyber-bullying in its best practice anti-bullying work.

This should explicitly include work on:

- **engaging directly with young people**
- **training for parents**
- **encouraging young people to think about on-line safety and who they share personal information with**
- **working with young people to improve their understanding that being kind and courteous in on-line interaction is as important as in face-to-face interaction**
- **recognising how quickly the on-line landscape is changing – and the need for teachers and trainers to constantly update their knowledge**
- **what can be done to utilise local digital media resources to make the Brighton & Hove approach to cyber-bullying as innovative as it can be**

RECOMMENDATION 15 – that CAMHS and EPS develop better systems for recording bullying. This should specifically include a system where service-users' experiences of bullying are actively solicited where it is therapeutically appropriate to do so.

RECOMMENDATION 16 – that the implementation of agreed panel recommendations should be monitored by OSC via an annual report co-ordinated and produced by Children's Services.

RECOMMENDATION 17 – that officers from the council's Children's Services directorate share the panel report with all city schools.

Executive Summary

Bullying in schools is by no means a new problem – it has probably been an issue for as long as there have been schools. However, there have been major developments in recent years.

In the first place, there has been a sea-change in notions of what constitutes bullying, with a wider acceptance that it is not just about direct physical or verbal assault but also about excluding and ostracising people.

Secondly, there is increasing recognition of the damage that bullying causes – its effects can be life-long, including poor educational attainment and emotional and mental health problems.

Thirdly, society has grown to recognise that discriminating against groups of people is wrong, whether it's in terms of race, sex, disability, age, faith, gender identity or sexual orientation. Coupled with this increased recognition of equalities has been the development of a more overtly diverse society. As people, including young people, become more open about their sexual orientation or gender identity, and as Brighton & Hove becomes more inclusive and multi-ethnic, we have to ensure that our school environments are safe places for all groups.

Fourthly, the growth of computer technology, and particularly mobile phones and social media, is changing the way that people interact with (and in some instances harass) each other. This development has been so rapid that it has left some adults at a loss to understand how their children are using social media and what the risks might be.

Fifthly, changes to the way in which state schools are funded and controlled have seen individual schools become much more autonomous and thus responsible for their own anti-bullying work. In the new system it is not necessarily clear how schools will work with and compare themselves against their peers to ensure that good practice is spread. Neither is it immediately obvious what role local authorities have to play in anti-bullying work – although councils remain accountable for educational performance and school attendance across the local area and are therefore bound to have a continuing interest in anything that impacts upon performance against these standards.

All of these factors mean that the issue of bullying is a topical one, even if, as seems to be the case, incidents of bullying may actually be falling and services are generally doing a good job.

The Bullying in Schools scrutiny panel was established following a request by Cllr Andrew Wealls. Panel members were: Cllr Ruth Buckley (Chair), Cllr Vanessa Brown and Cllr Penny Gilbey. Sam Watling of the Brighton & Hove Youth Council agreed to join the panel as a co-opted member, and Professor Robin Banerjee of Sussex University agreed to act as an advisor to the panel. Panel members would like to thank Sam and Robin for so generously giving up their time for this project.

The panel talked to a range of witnesses, including representatives from city schools, council school support services, the police, health services, and local voluntary and community sector organisations. The panel also spoke directly to parents and carers, and

vitality, to young people themselves.¹ A list of the witnesses who gave evidence is included in Part 2 of this report. Panel members would like to thank all those who contributed.

After reviewing the evidence, the scrutiny panel has made a number of recommendations. Many of these seek to build on the anti-bullying work already taking place across the city. While there is always the potential to improve services across such a complex area of work, it should be recognised that there is lots of good practice out there. Rather than reinventing the wheel, the core of what needs to be done is to ensure that everyone learns from the work of the best practitioners.

The recommendations which follow range across a number of areas, including data collection, involving young people and families, supporting schools, cyber-bullying, and how bullying impacts upon particular groups of people. Preceding the recommendations is a brief introduction to the subject of bullying.

¹ The panel would particularly like to thank the Brighton & Hove Youth Council who held a facilitated session where members of the Youth Council, the Children in Care Council, the Younger Children in Care Council and the Disabled Young People's Council all had the opportunity to share their experiences of bullying.

Introduction

What is Bullying?

Bullying is defined as

“behaviour by an individual or group, repeated over time, that intentionally hurts another individual or group either physically or emotionally.”²

Bullying can take many forms, from verbal insult through property damage to physical assault. It can also be indirect, for instance where people are excluded from conversations and activities or where rumours are spread about them.

The growth of social media in recent years has seen increasing incidents of ‘cyber-bullying’ – bullying via text message or comments on social media sites. This poses particular problems for schools, young people and their parents and carers, because new and emerging technologies are often difficult to understand and hence regulate; because social media is very good at disseminating both innocuous and malicious messages widely; because cyber-bullying does not necessarily take place in school; and because people seem far less inclined to self-censor their comments on social media than they would in face-to-face encounters.

Although bullying can take many forms and can be defined in a number of ways, a key constant factor is that it involves repeated behaviour – one-off incidents, while they may be very serious, are not typically classified as bullying. This is important for a couple of reasons: because the impact of bullying on its victims needs to be understood as cumulative, as something that builds over time (and hence a seemingly minor incident may not be so when viewed in context); and also because the perpetrators of bullying are engaged in an activity that is habitual and intentional – their behaviour cannot be dismissed as being ‘out of character’, and may not be easily changed.

Who is Bullied?

Anyone could be bullied, but the victims of bullying are typically children or young people who are isolated from their peer group. Isolated children and young people who aren’t part of social networks are at risk of others bullying them. Children and young people who are bullied will typically be seen as in some way ‘different’ – perhaps because of actual or perceived ethnicity, faith, sexual orientation, gender identity, disability or sex, their appearance, their academic or athletic abilities, because they have a physical or mental health condition, or because they are in care. However, isolation rather than ‘difference’ is the key factor here – and young people who are ‘different’ but who are not isolated from their peers are much less likely to be the targets of bullying.

Roughly the same proportions of boys as girls report being bullied, although boys seem rather more likely to be the victims of physical aggression and girls the victims of social exclusion. Girls are also more likely to be bullied by a group of their peers. Since it often

² Adapted from: Preventing and Tackling Bullying: Advice for Head Teachers, Staff and Governing Bodies, DfE 2011.

manifests in less obvious ways, the bullying of girls can be more difficult to spot and deal with.³

Locally, slightly more BME young people report being bullied than their white British counterparts.

Young lesbian, gay or bisexual (LGB) people are very likely to experience bullying, as are people who identify as Trans or are unsure of their gender. In addition many people who are not LGBT but who may be perceived as such are the targets of bullying.

Young people with special educational needs (SEN), and especially people with autistic spectrum conditions, may be particularly likely to experience bullying.⁴

Amaze reports that young people in the east of Brighton tend to report more bullying relating to disability than the rest of city. This may be because there are higher numbers of children with disabilities in east Brighton schools (as recorded on the Amaze Compass database), or it may be linked to higher levels of deprivation or family breakdown in the east of the city.⁵

Who bullies?

Anyone can potentially be a bully, although young people who bully will often have also experienced problems at school or at home. Bullies will not necessarily be socially isolated, though they may have difficulties with social relationships. There is also a significant cross-over between the group of young people who have been bullied and the group that bullies, with some people being both the perpetrators and the victims of bullying. It is generally accepted that young people who show bullying behaviours require support as well as sanction.

Prevalence

Recent years have seen a consistent reduction locally in young people in secondary schools who report that they have been bullied – from 22% in 2008 down to 12% in 2013, as reported in the Safe & Well at School Survey (SAWSSS).⁶ Reported bullying in primary schools has also reduced between 2008 and 2013, with rates falling from 22% to 19%. This does appear to be good news, although the SAWSSS collects data from children and young people at school so may not pick up people who have moved area or are home-educating as the result of serious bullying.⁷

Local Authority Responsibilities

Local Authorities are no longer responsible for day-to-day decision-making around schools, with almost all powers devolved to individual schools. Whilst many local authorities still have teams providing a wide range of school support services, schools are generally not obliged to source this support from their council.

³ Evidence from Nick Wergan, Deputy Head Teacher, Blatchington Mill School: 13.06.13, point 3.29

⁴ See 13.06.13, point 3.45

⁵ See evidence from Janet Poole, Amaze: 04.09.13, points 16.74 and 16.75

⁶ Evidence from Sam Beal: 13.06.13, point 3.19.

⁷ Evidence from Professor Ian Cunningham: 13.06.13, point 3.55.

However, local authorities still retain some very significant strategic and legal responsibilities in relation to young people. These include being responsible for educational attainment across the local area, for the general wellbeing and safeguarding of young people, and for school attendance.

While local authorities are not directly responsible for bullying in school, bullied children are likely than other children to struggle academically, to be absent from school, and generally to have diminished wellbeing. It is therefore clear that councils have a significant interest in bullying in local schools as it is a factor in several of the key outcomes against which local authorities are measured. It is also the case, of course, that councils are elected by and represent local families, and have a duty to address local people's concerns even where they are not directly responsible for providing services. Of course, different local areas will interpret this duty in different ways.

Findings and Recommendations

Data

Traditionally, many councils collated statistics about the schools they were responsible for in order to manage performance across the local state education system. In terms of bullying, the most relevant source of data is probably the annual Safe and Well at School Survey (SAWSS) which asks KS2, KS3 and KS4 students a series of questions about their general wellbeing and their experience of school. The SAWSS has been running since 2005 and therefore provides a vital longitudinal resource.

With recent moves towards greater autonomy for individual schools, the requirements for local authorities to collect and analyse data have been relaxed, but some areas including Brighton & Hove still choose to continue to collate statistics. In some instances, individual schools may decline to respond to data requests from local authorities – the SAWSS is voluntary for instance. However locally the great majority of schools are committed to participating in the SAWSS and the sample size is high.

The SAWSS provides a publicly available annual city-wide overview of young people's wellbeing across a number of domains. The SAWSS data is also broken down into school-specific reports and these are shared with individual schools. These reports are not publicly available, in part because of data confidentiality: it might be possible to identify individual respondents to the survey at this scale – for example, someone who reported being bullied because of their BME status at a school with very few BME children.

In addition to the SAWSS, schools also record and collate their own internal data on bullying and prejudiced based incidents by type. Schools are then asked to return their bullying by type data to the local authority on a termly basis. The City Wide figures are subsequently analysed to support commissioning and support for schools. Schools are encouraged to monitor, analyse and report their SAWSS and school-based data sets including with governors and other interested parties.

Although the local authority still conducts and analyses the SAWSS and disseminates its findings to schools across the city, the council is not in a position to direct or dictate actions to individual schools, nor would it wish to do so. Even if a council wanted to direct local schools there are few remaining powers to do so. This is very much an intended aspect of recent education reforms: moving away from a system in which councils were sometimes seen as imposing blanket 'one size fits all' policies on schools to one in which each individual school is free to develop its own plans and strategies. This means that schools are able to take account of their unique circumstances and of the particular staff skills and resources they can draw on to design bespoke policies that truly meet local need.

Whilst there are obvious opportunities in freeing schools to be innovative in this way there are also obvious risks. Firstly, there's the risk that schools which develop really good practice will do so in isolation and that neighbouring schools will not benefit from these new approaches. It is therefore important that there is some means of sharing information about best practice across local schools.

Secondly, in any system that enables individual organisations to develop their own policies rather than operating a centrally-determined model, one would expect some to do much better than average, but also some to perform relatively poorly. It is therefore important that there is some way to flag systems that aren't delivering as well as they should and to support less successful schools.

Anti Bullying & Equality Strategy Group

The panel believes that the partnership Anti Bullying & Equality Strategy Group (ABESG) which brings together the local authority, local voluntary and community sector groups and city schools is the ideal place to develop a best practice bullying forum which disseminates successful anti-bullying approaches and supports any schools which may be struggling, relatively speaking, in terms of their anti-bullying work. The panel wholeheartedly supports the ABESG and believes that it must be appropriately funded and supported.

As the ABESG is chaired by council officers, our recommendation is that these officers be tasked with developing a best practice forum as part of the ABESG. The forum should seek to identify and spread good practice across the city. The relevant council officers should report back to the Overview & Scrutiny Committee (OSC) on the success of this initiative as part of the 12 monthly monitoring of the implementation of panel recommendations.

RECOMMENDATION 1 – that the ABESG should be supported and funded appropriately to allow it to undertake the key task of supporting anti-bullying initiatives across the city

RECOMMENDATION 2 – that the ABESG develops a best practice forum to celebrate and spread anti-bullying best practice across city schools

It has been very reassuring to learn that the SAWSS is still being undertaken, with the majority of city schools engaging enthusiastically. It is really important that schools have a robust means of measuring the success of their anti-bullying work, and crucial that they have the means not only of comparing themselves against neighbouring schools but of measuring their own performance over time. Therefore, whilst it is quite proper that schools develop their own methods of measuring performance, the SAWSS remains an essential part of performance monitoring across the local area.

The panel commends schools and the local authority for investing their time in ensuring that the SAWSS continues to be widely used. Having a robust and objective longitudinal measure of performance is key to continuing to improve anti-bullying services, and schools should be encouraged and supported to engage with the SAWSS. The aim should be that every eligible school in the city undertakes the annual survey.

Recommendation 3 – that council officers continue to champion the SAWSS via the ABESG and other school partnerships including the Public Health Schools Programme

School Performance

The SAWSS currently shows a citywide rate of reported bullying at around 12%. There has been a steady fall in the percentage of young people who report being bullied over the past few years, suggesting that services are effective.

Across secondary schools the rate at which students report being bullied shows a relatively low degree of variation. This suggests that there are no real 'outlier' schools with much more or much less effective approaches to bullying.

Across primary schools the rate of variation is much larger – with between 8 and 40% of children reporting bullying. This may appear worrying, but as primaries are typically much smaller than secondary schools, relatively small numbers of survey responses can result in big percentage swings. It is also likely that schools with higher numbers reporting bullying have provided less support to pupils to understand what bullying is.⁸

Approaches to Bullying

Two schools came to speak to the panel about their approaches to bullying: Blatchington Mill and Carlton Hill. We recognise that many more schools might have been happy to come and talk about what they do, but there simply wasn't the time to hear from everyone. In any case, the panel wanted to get a sense of how individual schools typically tackled bullying rather than to judge schools against one another.

Nick Wergan, Deputy Headteacher at Blatchington Mill (BMS), told the panel that his school's approach to preventing bullying is multi-faceted. It includes:

- Ensuring that an anti-bullying ethos is central to the school, and that it is owned by all staff and students, not just a top-down initiative
- Taking a zero tolerance attitude to bullying – every reported incident is treated seriously
- Taking every opportunity to talk about bullying – the message needs to be constantly re-stated
- Being pro-active around equalities – not just reacting to equalities based incidents when they occur
- Taking collective responsibility – recognising that bullying can be a group action in which bystanders as well as perpetrators are implicated
- Ensuring that students recognise that bullying requires adult involvement – BMS is proud to be a 'telling' school
- Involving students in shaping anti-bullying work
- Recognising that bullying can take many forms, including cyber-bullying and social exclusion
- Having a consistent approach to bullying throughout the school.⁹

⁸ Evidence from Sam Beal, Chair of the ABESG: 13.06.13, point 3.19.

⁹ See 13.06.13, point 3.22

While individual schools may legitimately have different emphases, the panel views this list as a good model of a best practice policy, one which treats bullying holistically, involves students in anti-bullying work, stresses consistency in approaches, takes every incident seriously, and constantly reinforces the need for everyone in the school community to practice mutual respect.

For the panel, dealing effectively with bullying requires two kinds of approaches from schools. Firstly, there should be a robust and systemic approach to identifying and dealing with bullying incidents, with schools explaining to the victims of bullying and their families what steps have been taken in response to an incident and why. Secondly, schools need to develop and foster a caring environment which works to stop students becoming isolated from their peers in the first place. Successful anti-bullying work is a combination of these reactive and preventative approaches.

Supporting Young People

However good a school's policies around fostering an inclusive and supportive environment are, some young people will inevitably become socially isolated and therefore more susceptible to bullying. Vulnerable young people need targeted support, particularly in terms of helping with assertiveness or low self-esteem issues.

Witnesses stressed the importance of working with vulnerable young people to build their resilience and develop their assertiveness, so that they are less likely to be targeted - and if they are harassed - that isolated incidents are less likely to develop into bullying.¹⁰

For example, the Safety Net Assertiveness Project (SNAP) for 8-16 year olds teaches assertiveness techniques and life-skills to children with low self-esteem who have been the targets of bullying.¹¹

An allied project is the Playground Buddying Programme which is a low-level preventative scheme designed to encourage inclusivity in primary school playgrounds by teaching children to recognise when they feel unsafe, how to deal with friendship disputes, and to report bullying to appropriate adults.¹²

Similar approaches can be directed at young people involved in bullying – working with them to help them become more aware of their behaviour and to understand how to act differently.

Some young people, particularly those with additional needs/SEN, may need targeted support above and beyond that generally on offer. It is important that schools recognise that there is a range of vulnerabilities and do not simply offer one-size-fits-all to young people who are bullied.¹³

We are fortunate in Brighton & Hove to have a number of excellent community and voluntary sector organisations such as Allsorts, BMEYPP and Amaze providing a wide

¹⁰ See Paul Myszor: 13.06.13, point 3.45

¹¹ See evidence from Den McCartney, Manager Safety Net Children & Young People Team: 04.09.13, point 16.41

¹² See evidence from Den McCartney: 04.09.13, point 16.42

¹³ See evidence from Janet Poole, Amaze: 04.09.13, point 16.81

range of support services to young people experiencing bullying and to their parents and carers. It is important that young people and their families are made aware of the full range of support services available.

Persistent Problems

The panel heard about a range of approaches designed to create a school environment in which bullying is minimised, to provide effective interventions when bullying does occur, and to support and develop the resilience of victims of bullying (and to help the perpetrators of bullying understand and curtail their behaviour).

All this work is to be commended, but schools and other agencies also need to plan for what happens when this support does not work. For several witnesses the problem was not only that anti-bullying policies had not worked for them, but that it had proved very difficult to get senior managers in schools to acknowledge that things had gone wrong and to act accordingly.

It is particularly important that parents and carers know where to go for help if their school is not providing the assistance they need. This requires schools to have a clear system in place for the escalation of complaints, and to commit to making thorough and timely responses when complaints are made. This is particularly the case for secondary schools which are seen as being more remote from parents than primaries, particularly in terms of being able to contact senior managers.¹⁴

There may also be a potential clash of interests here in terms of school managers investigating the actions of their own organisations with regard to bullying, perhaps particularly where parents believe that the school has consistently failed to act appropriately. The fear is obviously that managers will be protective of their school's reputation even in instances where the school has behaved poorly. The Parents' Forum suggested that a solution to this problem might be for secondary schools to commission an independent guide to bullying, with information for parents on how to progress complaints and an independent contact for help and advice. Contact details for parent-advocates who had personal experience of dealing with entrenched bullying would also be invaluable.¹⁵

School governors have an obvious role to play in instances where parents are unhappy with a school's response to issues. However, it is not necessarily the case that all parents understand what the role of school governors is or how they can get in contact with them.

RECOMMENDATION 4 – ABESG should produce a leaflet (or a template for individual schools to adapt) for parents and young people explaining school commitments to tackling bullying. This leaflet should:

- **Detail parents' rights to complain**
- **Explain to whom parents can appeal if they are unhappy with the school's response to reports of bullying**
- **Make clear the role of school governors in dealing with parents who are unsatisfied with staff responses**
- **Provide contact details for independent advice**

¹⁴ See evidence from the Parents' Forum: 04.09.13, point 16.67

¹⁵ See evidence from the Parents' Forum: 04.09.13, point 16.69 and 16.70

- **Provide contact details for a parent-advocate and for the range of advocates available for particular groups (e.g. for the families of children with SEN)**
- **Explain to young people what options they have if they feel they are being bullied**

It is also important that those in charge of the education system recognise that some parents of bullied children may eventually become so frustrated by the response of schools and other support services that they opt to exit the local state education system entirely – by home-schooling, or moving out of area, or opting for an independent sector school. People who adopt these extreme measures (and of course not all parents are in a position to do so) will not necessarily communicate their decisions to the relevant authorities – people who ‘exit’ organisations because they feel that they have not been listened to may well consider it a waste of time to ‘voice’ yet more dissatisfaction.

However, it is clearly important that these voices are captured. If they are not, then the local education system is failing to recognise its most disgruntled customers, which is likely to skew any understanding of how prevalent and serious bullying can be.

It does not appear that there is currently any systematic attempt to collect data from families who opt to leave the local state school system, although there is work undertaken with families who move from one local school to another. This does seem to be a flaw in the system which threatens to undermine claims that anti-bullying policies are effective.

Of course, families may leave local schools for any number of reasons. Perhaps schools should be encouraged to conduct an ‘exit interview’ or survey with parents who take their children off the school roll, asking why they have done this and whether it reflects dissatisfaction with school performance, including in terms of bullying.

RECOMMENDATION 5 – we need a more systematic approach to identifying and learning from families who have opted out of the local state education system because they feel it has let them down – for example via an ‘exit interview’ of all those who permanently take their children out of local schools. This should build on the work already undertaken to track school moves within the LEA.

Equality/Protected Groups

As noted above, young people with particular ‘protected characteristics’¹⁶ in terms of their ethnicity, sexual orientation, disability etc. may be especially vulnerable to bullying – or at any rate, vulnerable to becoming socially isolated and therefore more likely to be the target of bullying behaviour.

The panel simply did not have the capacity to look at bullying in terms of every protected characteristic, but did hear evidence about three particular issues: race, sexual orientation/gender identification, and SEN/disability. Whilst some of the points below may be relevant only to a specific issue, others are likely to apply to all young people who risk isolation from their peers because they could be perceived as different.

¹⁶ See The Equality Act (2010) which defines ‘protected characteristics’.

BME

Schools data suggests that BME students are bullied slightly only more often than their white peers.¹⁷ However, the panel did hear from witnesses who felt that some schools were not doing enough to prevent bullying or prejudice related to ethnicity, or when it happened to deal with it effectively.

For example, the panel heard from parent 'A' whose children had been subjected to racial harassment from Year 7 through to Year 11, which did not stop despite being reported to school managers. Whilst teachers were aware of some of this bullying the parent felt that they neglected to intervene effectively, and tended to under-play or dismiss the concerns raised.¹⁸

Vanessa Crawford, from the Black & Minority Ethnic Young People's Project (BMEYPP) told the panel experienced that BME young people attending the project reported that racist bullying, including name-calling, racist jokes, mimicking and making race-based assumptions. Sometimes the racism was quite subtle and therefore harder to report.¹⁹

Panel members were also told that some school staff lacked confidence and skill in identifying and challenging racism including a lack of clarity about appropriate terms to use to refer to ethnicity. There were cases of where the victims of racist bullying felt they were blamed or ignored.^{20, 21} Some students reported that if they were a child that sometimes got into trouble in school they were less likely to be believed or taken seriously if they reported bullying.

The evidence that the panel heard accords with the findings of a recent independent report commissioned by the council: *The Changing Ethnic Demography in Brighton & Hove: How Prepared Are Brighton & Hove Schools?* (GHPO Report Feb 14)

Brighton & Hove has traditionally been a predominantly 'white' city, but in recent years has become much more ethnically diverse, with the number of non-'White British' residents increasing by 80% over the past decade.²² It seems evident to the Panel that schools and council services need to work harder to prevent address issues related to racism in their communities.

In the context of schools however, it seems likely that there are a mixture of experiences, with some schools quite used to dealing successfully with the challenges and exploiting the opportunities of a multi-ethnic intake, whilst others have much less experience of anything

¹⁷ The most recent SAWSS data shows a small increase in primary school students reporting racist bullying. It is currently unclear whether this indicates an actual increase in racist bullying or is a statistical blip or perhaps the consequence of improved awareness of racist bullying (there has been recent work with primary schools in this respect). Things should be clearer here when we have the next set of SAWSS data to compare against. See evidence from Sam Beal, 13.06.13: point 3.20.

¹⁸ See 04.09.13 points 16.61 and 16.62

¹⁹ See evidence from Vanessa Crawford: 04.09.13, point 16.87

²⁰ See evidence from Vanessa Crawford, BMETPP, 04.09.13: point 16.87 – 16.104.

²¹ 04.09.13, point 16.96

²² <http://www.bhlis.org/resource/view?resourceId=1415> (It should be noted that much of this increase in diversity is due to an influx of people from Eastern Europe, so although there has been a significant increase in the city's non- British' population, this does not necessarily equate to a significant increase in the non-white population.)

other than a predominantly white British student body. There is an obvious opportunity here to spread best practice – and indeed it may be that our best performing schools have lessons to teach not only other schools, but the public sector across the city.

Teachers may also benefit from training in identifying and tackling racist bullying. It is important that schools support staff in challenging discriminatory language and behaviour, perhaps particularly with an issue as sensitive as racism. Teachers may be well intentioned, but nonetheless struggle to support BME students and counter racism because they miss nuances, or they feel so nervous about tackling perceived racism.

Recommendation 6 – ABESG should identify best practice in terms of BME anti-bullying work and encourage the best performing schools to share their learning with their peers across the city.

LGBT

Young people who are, or who may be perceived as being, lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender are particularly likely to experience bullying in school.

This is something that has been recognised in Brighton & Hove for a number of years, and many city schools have made considerable efforts to counter homophobic bullying with the active support of the BHCC schools support service and expert voluntary and community sector organisations like Allsorts Youth Project.

Given this work and Brighton & Hove’s reputation as an LGBT friendly city, it seems likely that we are doing more than most areas to tackle homophobic, biphobic and transphobic bullying, and schools and council services should be commended for this. In particular the Panel recognise the ground-breaking work being done to prevent and challenge transphobia and build understanding of the needs of Trans children and young people.

It may be the case that the level of understanding of LGBT issues is not uniform across the city. However, this is currently being addressed, with Allsorts expanding its work with primary and secondary schools. Allsorts also trains teachers, other school staff, CAMHS (Child & Adolescent Mental Health), educational psychologists etc. in LGBT issues.²³

Tackling homophobic, biphobic and transphobic bullying involves dealing firmly with offenders and supporting victims. It also means fostering a whole-school environment in which LGBT identities are considered normative.²⁴ For example, as well as confronting direct bullying, it is important that schools challenge discriminatory language, even when it is not directed at an individual (e.g. people using the term ‘gay’ as a synonym for useless).

Support at home may be particularly crucial for young LGBT people: young people who are trying to conceal their sexual identities from their families are unlikely to report that they are experiencing homophobic bullying, whereas LGBT people with supportive families tend to be much more resilient.²⁵

²³ Evidence from Marianne Lemond and Elliot Klimek, Allsorts: 13.06.13, point 3.41.

²⁴ See 13.06.13, point 3.37

²⁵ See 13.06.13, point 3.38

Whereas practice in relation to lesbian, gay or bisexual young people is probably generally pretty good across the city, more needs to be done to support Trans children and young people using the newly published Trans Inclusion Schools Toolkit.

Trans issues are often very different from issues of sexual orientation, and may require approaches that are distinct from a generalist LGB-friendly policy, so it may well be that best practice schools will be those that plan discretely for Trans students. Such planning will need to include training teachers to understand and be confident in supporting Trans issues – this is a complex area and one which requires expert support.²⁶

While there is obviously still work to do on LGBT issues, it is clear that there are really expert resources in place and a city-wide commitment to LGBT equalities.

SEN/Disability

Young people with special educational needs (SEN) or disabilities are disproportionately affected by bullying. The panel heard from parents of children with disabilities, and from voluntary sector groups that support families with disabled children, and some of the points made to the panel are presented elsewhere in this report – for example in the section on primary/secondary transition.

In general disabilities can function to make young people isolated from their peers and hence more likely to be bullied. This needs to be countered by schools actively promoting an inclusive school ethos in which difference is celebrated.

Schools also need to be alert to the way in which particular disabilities may influence young people's behaviour. For example, some young people with autism may interpret well-intentioned 'banter' as bullying because they have a different understanding of social interaction to their peers.²⁷

Similarly, autistic young people who are genuinely being bullied may struggle to express their feelings and may bottle things up until the point where they can't take it any longer and they 'explode' – perhaps by reacting violently to the latest in a long line of provocations. If schools do not take the young person's disability into account when reacting to such an incident they may misread the situation and end up punishing the victim rather than the perpetrators or applying generic standards of behaviour which are inappropriate for people who face particular challenges.

To counter this, schools need to be generally aware of how bullying can impact upon children with SEN or disabilities, and to factor this in when dealing with specific children who have special needs.

Involving Young People

The panel heard a good deal about the work that schools do to make sure that students understand what bullying is and how to report it. Members also learnt that some schools stress that countering bullying is the job of everyone in the school, and that there is no such thing as a 'bystander' when it comes to bullying – everyone present is to some degree involved in a bullying incident, either as participants or because they have or have not

²⁶ See 13.06.13, point 3.39

²⁷ See 13.06.13, point 3.45

intervened. This is clearly an important message and it is heartening to know that schools are taking such a holistic view of bullying.

Whilst there does seem to be lots of good practice in terms of schools engaging students around their anti-bullying work, it doesn't seem to be the case, at least from the evidence the panel heard, that all schools engage directly with their pupils and students in developing anti-bullying policies.²⁸ Feedback from the Youth Council also made the point that young people have a unique understanding of what happens in schools, and it is important that this knowledge is captured.²⁹

The panel suggests that a network of young people from a variety of backgrounds could be established (or an existing network used) and charged to develop child-friendly definitions of bullying which could then be used as a resource by city schools. This would ensure that a representative group of young people were actively involved in co-producing anti-bullying materials without requiring every school to engage directly.³⁰

Similarly, it might be useful to involve a young people's representative organisation, such as the city Youth Council, at a strategic level in terms developing and co-ordinating anti-bullying work – for instance as a member of the ABESG. Youth Council members have successfully represented young people as co-optees on several city council committees for some years now, so we know that this approach can work.³¹

The panel suggests that, as part of its best practice work, ABESG identifies schools which have effectively involved students in the development of anti-bullying policies. Learning from this successful work should be made available for other local schools to benefit from if they so choose. Panel members do understand that schools may have different approaches in this and many other areas and are not seeking to suggest that a 'one size fits all' anti-bullying approach is appropriate, but panel members do think that all schools should have the opportunity to share the best practice experiences of their neighbours.

RECOMMENDATION 7 –that the ABESG includes student involvement in the development of school anti-bullying strategies as one of the elements of its best practice work.

RECOMMENDATION 8 – that ABESG invites the city Youth Council to become a co-opted member of the partnership (ideally with two Youth Council members co-opted)

Involving Families

Families have an important role to play in helping their children develop resilience skills, supporting young people who are being bullied, and stopping children from becoming bullies. The Parents Forum was able to report back that several parents and carers were

²⁸ Evidence from Ruth Hilton, Aiming High Advisory Group (AHA) for SEN Children and Young People, 01.07.13: point 9.57

²⁹ Informal feedback from Youth Council (June 14)

³⁰ Suggested recommendation from Safety Net: 04.09.13, point 16.54

³¹ Youth Council members would warmly welcome an invitation to be a member of ABESG. Experience suggests that YC co-option works best when two young people are co-opted, since they can then support each other in their work. It is also important that YC co-optees are able to attend meetings (which they cannot do if the meetings are in the day during term time). (Informal Youth Council feedback June 14.)

very positive about how their child's school had managed an incident of bullying. The panel also learnt about one piece of work, coordinated by Safety Net, where parents produced a booklet called "Safe and Happy" which outlined a school's approach to bullying.³²

However, parents and carers did express concern about how effectively schools communicated with them. Some parents and carers felt judged by the school staff they met with the implication that they were failing as a parent if their child was a bully or being bullied. Other parents and carers reported that the school did take action to stop bullying, but they were not informed about what this was. Parents and carers were also not clear about the schools' complaints procedures if things did not improve.

To support their children effectively some parents and carers may need to be supported to understand bullying, school policies, and effective ways to engage with schools if they are concerned about their child. Additionally, parents who have had to deal with their children being bullied are potentially a very valuable resource for other parents – as these are people who have been through the system and understand what works and what doesn't. Persuading some of these parents to volunteer as parent-advocates for other families would really help embed parent experience in school anti-bullying work.

The panel was fortunate to hear from the city Parents' Forum in regard to bullying – and was particularly fortunate that Forum members had kindly agreed to carry out both an online and face-to-face survey of parents to inform the panel's work. Panel members would like to express their thanks to the Parents' Forum for all their work.

Janet Poole of Amaze stressed to the panel the importance of schools listening to parents, taking them seriously, believing parents' accounts, and treating issues around bullying with sensitivity.³³

RECOMMENDATION 9 – the views and experiences of parents are key to developing effective bullying strategies, and schools should actively involve parents in this work.

RECOMMENDATION 10 – ABESG best practice in terms of anti-bullying should include how to communicate with parents whose children are involved in bullying incidents

Young People Reporting Bullying

When the panel asked young people for their views on bullying, one of the issues that several people raised as a problem was reporting bullying to an adult. Some students told the panel that they'd reported bullying but had been made to feel that they were in the wrong rather than the bully.³⁴ Other students said that it was not necessarily easy to contact a teacher they trusted at short notice.³⁵ Still other students were reluctant to report bullying because they feared that this would make the bullying worse.³⁶ Some people noted that it

³² Suggested recommendation from Safety Net: 04.09.13, point 16.54

³³ See 04.09.13, point 16.80

³⁴ Evidence from the Youth Council, 01.07.13: point 9.19. See also testimonies from individual YC members.

³⁵ Evidence from Ruth Hilton, AHA, 01.07.13: point 9.54.

³⁶ Evidence from PC Vicky Jones, 04.09.13, point 16.5

could be easier to talk to a counsellor, a Teaching Assistant or Family/Student liaison officer rather than to a teacher.³⁷

Both young people and parents told the panel that schools needed to respond seriously to reports of bullying, and to do so in a timely fashion. It is clear that some people feel that this does not always happen, and in particular that parents do not always feel that schools communicate enough with them.³⁸ This is an important issue, as it may well be the case that the school has responded to an issue swiftly and appropriately, but if the victims of bullying and their families are not kept in the loop, the impression given will be that the matter is not being taken seriously.³⁹

RECOMMENDATION 11 – ABESG best practice guidance should explicitly encourage schools to offer young people a range of ways in which they can report bullying

Supporting Teaching Staff

School staff have a key role to play in developing an anti-bullying ethos and in tackling bullying when it does occur. If staff are not properly trained in how to deal with bullying, are unclear about a school's bullying policies, or are too busy with other work to deal properly with bullying incidents, then they will not be able to implement a school's anti-bullying policy effectively.

All teachers need general skills to deal with bullying, ideally including being able to deliver 'restorative justice' programmes for relatively minor incidents. This should be augmented by more specialist support, either internal or external, and class-room teachers need to know how to access this support.⁴⁰ Teachers also obviously need to have an up to date understanding of their school's anti-bullying policies.

Teachers should also be aware that some young people are very concerned about reporting bullying, fearing they will be disbelieved or 'blamed' for the bullying, that nothing will happen, or that their bullying will escalate because they have reported it. In consequence teachers need to be trained to deal sensitively with reports of bullying, to act promptly to avoid escalation, and to ensure that they clearly explain the actions they have taken to the victim of the bullying incident and to their family.⁴¹

Teachers also need to be supported to respond to environmental and societal change, whether in terms of increasing ethnic diversity, more open expression of different sexual and gender identities, or of the impact that social media is having on young people. Society is not standing still, and responses that may have been adequate a few years ago may now be out of date, so all schools need to ensure that anti-bullying forms a core part of their teacher-training programme.

³⁷ 01.07.13 points 9.60 and 9.63. Some respondents suggested that all schools should consider employing a specialist Student/Family Liaison officer to deal with the most serious cases of bullying (point 9.76). Youth Council members also reported having experienced confusion about who to report bullying incidents to, stressing that the reporting system needed to be unambiguous

³⁸ Evidence from the Parents' Forum: 04.09.13, point 16.60

³⁹ See testimonies from Youth Council members

⁴⁰ Evidence from Paul Myszor, Senior Educational Psychologist, BHCC: 13.06.13, point 3.52.

⁴¹ See evidence from AHA: 01.07.13, point 9.75.

A point several respondents to the panel made was that schools needed to spend time understanding bullying incidents rather than rushing to judgement, which could result in students being punished for reacting to bullying rather than taking action against the bullies themselves.⁴²

It is therefore important that schools ensure that their teachers and other staff are properly trained to recognise and deal with bullying.⁴³ It is equally important that teachers have the time and space to deal properly with bullying and to share information and experiences with colleagues as part of 'reflective practice'. Schools that are serious about tackling bullying have to find ways to ensure that their staff have time to deal with bullying and that teachers are properly supported by their peers and by managers. This is bound to be challenging given the many demands on teachers' time, and to require schools to think creatively about how best to support their staff.

Schools may also need to think closely about how children should report bullying. Some witnesses to the panel believed that anonymous incident reporting or the use of a 'Virtual Learning Environment' could be beneficial.⁴⁴

Panel members are sure that the majority of local schools already work really hard to support their staff to deal effectively with bullying – but the panel still believes that there is potential value in disseminating some of the innovative best practice being developed across city schools.

RECOMMENDATION 12 – that the ABESG anti-bullying best practice work explicitly includes how best to provide support for school staff

Primary/Secondary Transition

The transition from primary to secondary education at Year 7 can be a challenging time for many young people. This may be particularly so for the most vulnerable children, who are faced with changing schools, with new staff who don't necessarily appreciate their needs, and typically with a move from a relatively homely primary environment to an environment which is much bigger and more impersonal.⁴⁵

Since it is largely isolated and vulnerable young people who are bullied (and to a degree who bully), anything that increases isolation and vulnerability is likely to lead to increased bullying, and the step-up to secondary school presents particularly obvious challenges. Amaze told the panel that for families supporting SEN children, the move to secondary school was often "crunch time".⁴⁶ Youth Council members also commented that in their experience the primary/secondary transition was a time of increased vulnerability.⁴⁷

⁴² See evidence from AHA and the Youth Council 01.07.13 points 9.58 and 9.85.

⁴³ See 13.06.13, point 3.31

⁴⁴ Evidence from AHA: 01.07.13, points 9.70 and 9.72.

⁴⁵ In a local 2013 survey asking Year 6 pupils to identify their worries about moving to secondary school, the main concern expressed was around bullying (37%), with friendship issues (12.5%) and getting lost (12%) the next highest ranking concerns. See evidence from Den McCartney, Manager Safety Net Children & Young People Team: 04.09.13, point 16.44

⁴⁶ See evidence from Janet Poole: 04.09.13, point 16.76

⁴⁷ Informal feedback from Youth Council June 14.

It is clearly important that schools do all they can to manage the transition sensitively. This needs to include proper information sharing on vulnerable students, and this in turn requires primary schools to relay all the necessary information to secondary schools. Where students have well-documented support needs, for example in terms of children with a SEN 'statement', this may be relatively straightforward. However, for children who receive more informal support, there is a risk that key information about vulnerabilities will be lost. Primary schools need therefore to be methodological in recording and sharing information about their students' support needs.

For their part, secondary schools need to ensure that they act on information about vulnerabilities. They also need to do all they can to make the transition to secondary school as easy as possible. This is challenging, as moving from a small to a much larger school may be inherently stressful, but this does not mean that nothing can be done. For example, the panel heard from Professor Ian Cunningham who noted that some schools dealt with transition problems by keeping the Y7 intake partially separate from the rest of the secondary school to allow transitioning children time and space to settle themselves.⁴⁸

The Parents' Forum reported that some responses to their survey on bullying has noted a difference in approaches between primary and secondary schools, with relatively small and homely primaries able to foster a close relationship between students and school staff (and between staff and parents) which meant that bullying was recognised at an early stage and could be 'nipped in the bud'. In the much larger, more impersonal environment of secondary schools this one-to-one relationship does not necessarily exist, particularly in terms of children having a dedicated classroom teacher, which may make identifying and countering bullying much harder.⁴⁹ Given this, it is obviously important that secondary schools plan their anti-bullying work carefully and have clear and consistent procedures for tackling bullying. It certainly seems to be the case that Brighton & Hove secondary schools demonstrate good practice in this regard.

Other support can include providing extensive orientation for students coming into Year 7, and ensuring that there is effective supervision of students at all times, particularly outside class (break-times, moving from one class to another, PE changing etc).⁵⁰ The latter point is clearly relevant beyond Year 7.

RECOMMENDATION 13 – the ABESG should ensure that planning effective primary to secondary transition forms part of its best practice work.

Cyber-bullying

Cyber-bullying is the term commonly used to describe bullying that uses information technology: computers, mobile phones, and social media. Cyber-bullying is an emerging issue, given the rapid expansion in recent years of social networking sites, smart phone ownership and the increasing ubiquity of computer-based learning in schools.

Although some aspects of cyber-bullying are shared with other forms of bullying, other elements present unique challenges.

⁴⁸ Evidence from Professor Ian Cunningham, 13.06.13, point 3.63.

⁴⁹ Evidence from Parents' Forum: 04.09.13, point 16.57

⁵⁰ Evidence from Brighton & Hove Youth Council, 01.07.13, point 9.84.

- Social media is a rapidly evolving environment, and one where growth is often driven principally by young people rather than adults. This makes it potentially very difficult for parents and teachers to understand and monitor young people's use of media – we may understand the risks involved in facebook and twitter, but this may not be all that useful when young people have moved on to communicating via snapchat, tumblr and Instagram.⁵¹
- ICT and social media allow information to be disseminated very rapidly and very broadly, which can obviously cause problems in terms of offensive messages or images. It can also be very difficult to get information removed once it has been posted online.
- Online communication does not respect physical boundaries: children in school may receive abuse from outside the school or may be harassed by classmates outside school hours. This raises questions of whose responsibility it is to police cyberbullying.
- People generally appear to be much less inhibited online than they would be in person. This may mean that people are more likely to harass or bully others.⁵²

The most recent SAWSS responses indicate that cyber-bullying is not the most common type of bullying. However when it happens it is likely to be particularly devastating. It may also be the case that young people are not recognising and identifying cyber-bullying when it happens.⁵³

Unsurprisingly, the prevalence of reported cyber-bullying rises with age, and currently it doesn't appear to be a significant issue at primary school. However, younger and younger people are using social media so it is likely that the problem will spread.⁵⁴

It should also be stressed that cyber-bullying is not necessarily discrete from other types of bullying: young people who are bullied at school may also be bullied via social media and vice versa. Indeed young people themselves made the point to the panel that they did not necessarily see their 'real-life' social interactions as distinct from their on-line interactions – they are different aspects of socialising rather than separate things.⁵⁵

It is possible for schools to use technological fixes to counter cyber-bullying that takes place using school ICT systems. For example, Blatchington Mill has invested in a software system that alerts staff when school systems are being used inappropriately.⁵⁶ However, because cyber-bullying does not just take place in school or via school ICT systems, such solutions will only ever be partial. It is therefore important that young people are encouraged to think about safe and responsible use of ICT and social media. Ultimately it will primarily be young people themselves who police their social media use, and they need to be 'trained' to do so.

⁵¹ See evidence from Paul Platts, ICT safety trainer: 01.07.13, point 9.42

⁵² See evidence from Paul Platts, ICT safety trainer: 01.07.13, point 9.40, 9.41. Also PC Vicky Jones: 04.09.13, point 16.2

⁵³ See Sam Beal, 13.06.13, point 3.14

⁵⁴ Evidence from Louise Willard, Headteacher, Carlton Hill Primary School: 01.07.13, point 9.12

⁵⁵ Informal feedback from Youth Council, June 14.

⁵⁶ See 13.06.13, point 3.27

The panel commends the high-quality training that a number of city schools are already providing in this respect, as reflected in recent Ofsted reports.

The rapid evolution of social media is an obvious problem in terms of tackling bullying. It is clear that any training for teachers, students or families will need to be regularly updated. Given that Brighton & Hove is one of the UK centres of digital technology there does seem to be the potential to harness some of the digital expertise we have in the city in order to deliver some really up to date in-reach into schools.

Parents also need to learn much more about cyber-bullying⁵⁷, but when training has been offered the take-up has typically been disappointing.⁵⁸ It needs to be remembered that most adults' understanding of ICT issues is probably fairly limited. Schools need to be careful that they do not assume a level of competence that many parents simply do not have. Involving parents directly in the design of cyber-bullying and cyber-safety training is important here.

The panel heard that there may be value in encouraging young people to view their on-line interactions as they would face-to-face interactions. It does seem evident that people act very differently when communicating virtually, perhaps because on-line communication does not readily provide the multitude of subtle visual and verbal indications that we instinctively rely upon to judge face-to-face communication.⁵⁹

On a similar tack, young people need to be aware that not everyone on-line is who they say they are, and that not everyone has good motives. Training in cyber-safety needs to encourage young people to think carefully about who they are communicating with, whether they can feel confident about their intentions, and the types of information they are sharing.⁶⁰

Other moves which might help to tackle cyber-bullying would need to be driven at a national level. For example, the panel heard that requiring people to register with social media sites using verifiable contact details (e.g. by giving debit card details) might help reduce bullying, or at least mean that bullies could be held to account.⁶¹

It is clear that Cyber-bullying is a growing problem, even if it is not yet a major issue for young people locally. It is therefore important that schools are aware of the issues involved and communicate them to students and their families – particularly as this may well be an area in which few parents are experts.

RECOMMENDATION 14 – that the ABESG includes cyber-bullying in its best practice anti-bullying work.

This should explicitly include work on:

- **engaging directly with young people**
- **training for parents**

⁵⁷ See evidence from Parents' Forum: 04.09.13, point 16.58: almost half of the parents surveyed feel that they do not have enough information about cyber-bullying

⁵⁸ See 13.06.13, point 9.42

⁵⁹ See evidence from Den McCartney: 04.09.13, point 16.48

⁶⁰ Suggested recommendation from Safety Net: 04.09.13, point 16.54

⁶¹ See evidence from PC Vicky Jones: 04.09.13, point 16.6

- encouraging young people to think about on-line safety and who they share personal information with
- working with young people to improve their understanding that being kind and courteous in on-line interaction is as important as in face-to-face interaction
- recognising how quickly the on-line landscape is changing – and the need for teachers and trainers to constantly update their knowledge
- what can be done to utilise local digital media resources to make the Brighton & Hove approach to cyber-bullying as innovative as it can be

Mental Health and Wellbeing

The scrutiny panel heard that bullying can significantly impact on young people's emotional wellbeing and in some instances may contribute to mental health problems – although this is a complex issue as other factors are also bound to contribute to a person's wellbeing.⁶²

Young people with mental health problems may receive support from a number of sources, most obviously from local Child & Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS), but also from the Educational Psychology Service (EPS).

It is currently impossible to know what proportion of young people referred to CAMHS have experienced bullying that has had a detrimental impact on their mental wellbeing: this information is not currently solicited by CAMHS.⁶³

Whilst CAMHS will record bullying if it is raised as an issue by service users or their families, it does not feature very prominently. In addition, data from counselling services shows that bullying is fairly low on the list of reasons that service users give for accessing counselling.⁶⁴ However, without services specifically asking whether bullying has been an issue, it is very difficult to have any real confidence in how big a factor it is in young people's mental health problems.

The majority (55%) of referrals to CAMHS are via GPs, with only around 10% of referrals obviously relating to a schools-based issue such as attendance.⁶⁵ Referring GPs would obviously only be aware of bullying if it had been mentioned to them, and this may not be the case when bullying has occurred as young people can be ashamed to mention bullying even to their own families.⁶⁶

Other than where there are very specific safeguarding concerns, CAMHS does not have the right to inform schools that it is engaged with particular young people without written consent from parents or carers. However CAMHS does advise parents whose children have serious wellbeing problems to speak to schools about these issues.⁶⁷ CAMHS also has an excellent record of referring children with SEN support needs to specialist organisations like Amaze.⁶⁸

⁶² See evidence from Alison Nuttall, Children & Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS)

Commissioner: 04.09.13, point 16.16

⁶³ See Alison Nuttall: 04.09.13, point 16.22

⁶⁴ See 04.09.13, point 16.20

⁶⁵ See 04.09.13, points 16.17 and 16.22

⁶⁶ See 04.09.13, point 16.29

⁶⁷ See 04.09.13, point 16.23

⁶⁸ See evidence from Janet Poole: 04.09.13, point 16.78

Panel members are concerned that CAMHS may not always be aware whether the young people under its care have experienced or are experiencing bullying – unless specifically informed about this by the service-users themselves. It may well be that bullying is not a major contributory factor to young people’s mental health problems, but without better data this is just speculation.

In order to plan services effectively it is clearly important that commissioners have the best and most up to date information. Panel members believe that this should include information about the degree to which bullying impacts on young people’s health and mental wellbeing. To this end, it is suggested that CAMHS (and the Educational Psychology Service which potentially also holds valuable information about incidents of bullying) makes a point of actively soliciting information about bullying from service-users where it is therapeutically appropriate to do so.

RECOMMENDATION 15 – that CAMHS and EPS develop better systems for recording bullying. This should specifically include a system where service-users’ experiences of bullying are actively solicited where it is therapeutically appropriate to do so.

Monitoring

Once the recommendations of this report have been considered by the relevant bodies, the implementation of agreed recommendations will be regularly monitored by the Overview & Scrutiny Committee (OSC). For ease of management, a senior officer from the council’s Children’s Services directorate should be charged with co-ordinating and producing an annual implementation report to OSC.

RECOMMENDATION 16 – that the implementation of agreed panel recommendations should be monitored by OSC via an annual report co-ordinated and produced by Children’s Services.

Reporting to Schools

The panel would like their report to be shared with all city schools.

RECOMMENDATION 17 – that officers from the council’s Children’s Services directorate share the panel report with all city schools.

Conclusion

Bullying can have a terrible impact on the lives of young people and it is important that schools and school support services recognise this and work hard to tackle the problem.

Whilst bullying will never be eliminated, there is much that can be done to combat it. In essence the panel believes that a two-pronged approach is required.

Firstly, schools need to have really robust systems for identifying bullying and tackling it – supporting victims, punishing perpetrators, and keeping families informed about the steps being taken. Schools also need to ensure that they record bullying incidents and are actively involved in comparing their anti-bullying work with that of their peers. Schools should be eager to emulate local and national best practice in terms of dealing firmly and effectively with bullying – and it has been heartening to learn that local schools are.

Secondly, schools need to ensure that their learning environment is one in which all students are encouraged and supported to be part of social networks – bullying typically occurs when young people are isolated from their peers, so by minimising isolation the hope is that incidents of bullying will be reduced.

Effective approaches to anti-bullying are bound to employ a combination of these reactive and preventative approaches.

Whilst schools have a key role to play in this work, it is not for schools alone to tackle bullying – parents need to be involved, as of course do young people themselves. There is also an important role for the expertise of community and voluntary sector organisations, and for specialist schools support such as that provided by local authorities.

It is also crucial that, in an increasingly atomised schools system, individual schools are encouraged and enabled to share best practice with their peers. In local terms, the panel believes that the ABESG is fundamental to achieving this – hence many of the report recommendations focus on supporting the ABESG or are directed to the partnership.

Whilst the ABESG has an important role to play in co-ordinating anti-bullying work, there may be instances where the move to autonomous schools has left a gap, for example in terms of central, specialist advice and training, which individual schools cannot themselves feasibly provide or commission. In practical terms this might include expert advice on cyberbullying or on how best to support teachers in tackling bullying. This type of support might previously have been provided by the local education authority, and panel members believe that there is an argument still for the council to offer key specialist support services, although in the current financial climate this is obviously far from easy.

Finally, whilst this report inevitably focuses on bullying, and while bullying remains a problem for too many young people, it is important to stress that city schools provide a generally positive and supportive environment. While it is vital that schools take bullying seriously, it is also important that a focus on bullying does not itself perpetuate the idea that bullying is all pervasive. We need to focus on the positive message of respecting and being kind to each other as well as being determined not to tolerate unkind behaviour.