

**Y Pwyllgor Plant, Pobl Ifanc
ac Addysg**

**Children, Young People
and Education Committee**

Jeremy Miles MS
Minister for Education and Welsh Language

28 February 2023

Violence, abuse and sexual harassment towards school staff

Dear Jeremy,

During our inquiry into peer on peer sexual harassment among learners we heard anecdotal evidence that some school staff are sexually harassed by school pupils. However, we were unclear about the scale and nature of that harassment, so on 26 September we wrote to 8 trade unions to ask for their views on the prevalence of sexual harassment of school staff by school pupils. 3 responded: UNISON Cymru, NEU Cymru, and NASUWT Cymru.

The responses we received indicated that violence, abuse and harassment is a significant issue for many school staff. We therefore wrote to the WLGA on 14 December to seek their views on the concerns raised by the trade unions.

The WLGA responded to us on 6 January. In their letter, they stated that:

- Local authorities have generally seen a rise in exclusions and permanent exclusions over the past academic year. A large proportion of those related to incidents of verbal and physical aggression to staff from pupils.
- Tensions from parents about their children's education towards schools appear more prominent in comparison to before the pandemic.
- Although incident reporting seems to have increased, more can be done by school management teams to improve reporting and ensure targeted support is offered to staff.

The WLGA's letter was concerning in its own right. But we subsequently received a further response from UNISON Cymru dated 9 February arguing that the WLGA's findings may, in fact, be underestimating the scale of the problem. UNISON carried out a survey of its members to inform its

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response to our 26 September letter. They argue that the data from that survey does not correlate with the information from local authorities set out in the WLGA's letter. UNISON suggests that some head teachers may be portraying serious incidents as 'part of the job' and not encouraging staff to record them. They point out that 41% of their survey's respondents who had been involved in an incident did not feel adequately supported by their schools.

We are worried about the evidence that we have received to date. We are therefore seeking your views on the following:

- i. The scale and nature of any violence, abuse and harassment towards school staff (by which we mean any members of staff working on the school estate, employed by the school or otherwise, or working on behalf of the school in any other location).
- ii. Whether any groups of staff are particularly at risk, and why.
- iii. The adequacy of the responses of school leadership teams, local authorities and regional consortia (where relevant) to:
 - protect staff from violence, abuse and harassment in the first place;
 - support staff who have experienced violence, abuse and harassment;
 - record incidents; and
 - interrogate data to identify trends and patterns, then to design and implement interventions accordingly.
- iv. What action the Welsh Government is taking, if any, to support school leadership teams and the school workforce to address violence, abuse and harassment towards school staff.

I would be grateful for your response no later than Friday 14 April. As always, if you have any concerns with this deadline please don't hesitate to get in touch with our clerks.

Yours sincerely,



Jayne Bryant MS

Chair

Croesewir gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg neu Saesneg.

We welcome correspondence in Welsh or English.