

**Debate on the Children, Young People
and Education Committee's report –
Everybody's affected: Peer on peer
sexual harassment among learners**
MS Briefing – October 2022



Key messages

- Barnardo's services receive reports of concern regarding peer-on-peer sexual harassment **several times per week, every week.**
- These reports come from schools, teachers, and students alike.
- For Barnardo's services, this is not a new issue. Whilst the spotlight shed on this by Everyone's Invited and Estyn's report is welcome, schools, teachers, students, and support services have been grappling with these issues for some time.
- The new curriculum and whole-school approach to mental health is very welcome, but there is still a whole generation of young people who will not benefit from this new curriculum from the beginning of their time in school, and so **a secondary, responsive approach will still be needed and must be invested in.**
- Our Gobaith¹ research found that when the threshold for statutory support is crossed, it is typically the third time that a professional has been concerned about a child, meaning there have been several missed opportunities to support and intervene.
- Many calls that we receive raising concerns are regarding children who are younger than secondary age – **often eight or nine years old.**

Potential questions for the Minister

- Will the Minister for Education and Welsh Language sit on the Ministerial-Partnership Board of the VAWDASV National Strategy to ensure that the needs of learners are reflected in the development of the blueprint for the strategy?
- What action will Welsh Government take to join up the support delivered under the VAWDASV National Action Plan and the National Action Plan: Preventing and Responding to Child Sexual Abuse to ensure that children do not fall into the cracks?

¹ https://www.barnardos.org.uk/sites/default/files/2020-11/21702_Impact%20Report%202019-20_Digital-final.pdf

- What action will Welsh Government take to respond directly to the role that social media and being online has on peer-on-peer sexual harassment?

Barnardo's Cymru priorities for Welsh Government:

- When revisiting the CSA National Action Plan, Welsh Government should prioritise increasing provision for step-up and step-down support for children and young people to ensure that before and after accessing therapeutic support related to harmful sexual behaviour, children are supported.

It is Barnardo's Cymru's experience that often, schools are looking for support on peer-on-peer sexual harassment, but the threshold for a statutory intervention from the police or social services is not met, meaning that schools have few options other than to look to services such as Better Futures. Schools regularly ask for Barnardo's Cymru to provide training to their staff. This is something that we provide as often as possible, although we are not funded as a preventative service and therefore our capacity to respond to the need can be stretched at times.

This means that there is reliance on a piecemeal approach to supporting schools to deal with these issues and given that schools often approach looking for support when there is an emergency or a crisis, there is often therefore a pressing need for support of some kind at the point that contact is made.

- Welsh Government must be alive to the role that the internet plays in peer-on-peer sexual harassment.

School-based counsellors find that incidents often grow in scale and impact due to the repercussions from information shared on social media, gossip and shame/stigma.

In a focus group, young people told Barnardo's that adults *'don't know how to talk to young people about social media and being online'*.

One young person described being on social media as *'A weird feeling that you don't feel in real life unless you are walking down a dark alley at night and knowing someone could jump out at you at any time, the whole time you're on there.'*

How is Barnardo's Cymru supporting families in Wales?

[Barnardo's Better Futures](#) provides assessment and longer-term therapeutic intervention services for children and young people with sexualised histories across Wales, including young people who have been the victims of sexual abuse; young people who display problematic or

Harmful Sexual Behaviour (HSB); and young people who are at risk of or are abused through Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE).

[Vale school and community-based counselling](#) supports young people aged 10-19 who live or go to school in the Vale of Glamorgan.

About Barnardo's Cymru

Barnardo's Cymru has been working with children, young people, and families in Wales for over 100 years and is one of the largest children's charities working in the country. We provide more than 60 diverse services across Wales, working in partnership with local authorities. Last year we worked with over 10,000 children, young people, and family members.

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