



**Equalities and Human Rights Committee**

**Scottish Parliament**

**Inquiry into bullying and harassment in schools**

**Children's and Young People's Voices and  
Experiences of Bullying and Harassment in Schools**

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## 1. Introduction

Children in Scotland was asked to provide a report to the Equalities and Human Rights Committee as part of its inquiry into bullying and harassment of children and young people. The report aims to bring together children's and young people's voices and experiences of bullying and harassment in school settings.

A considerable amount of engagement work with children and young people has been undertaken on this topic over recent years, highlighting the prominence of this issue in the lives of children and young people. This study aims to bring findings together from key sources in a short accessible summary to inform the work of the Equalities and Human Rights Committee, exploring contexts, barriers to change and perspectives on what would help address concerns.

## 2. Methods

In order to meet the tight timescale for the Committee meeting, we have limited the data collection method to a rapid review of good quality published grey literature and reports.

Children in Scotland's policy team identified what we believe to be the most relevant high-quality reports that would give the committee an understanding of the key issues facing children and young people in Scotland in relation to bullying and harassment. We focused on identifying evidence that was Scottish in its origin, and published within the last three years, to ensure its relevance. We recognise that other helpful sources of evidence could have been included, but it was not possible to extend the reach during the timescale.

The list of reports can be found in table 1.1.

*Table 1.1.*

<b>Organisation</b>	<b>Title</b>
NSPCC	What are Children Telling us About Bullying 2015-16
Children in Scotland	Leaders of Learning
Children in Scotland	Mental Health Strategy consultation response
Children's Parliament	Children's Parliament Investigates Bullying
Enable	Included in the Main
Stonewall	The Teachers Report
Respect Me	Bullying in Scotland 2014
Enquire	Enquire Helpline stats
TIE Campaign	Attitudes Towards LGBT in Scottish Education

## Data Analysis

Evidence from reports was extracted and coded according to five key thematic areas to provide the basis for our recommendations:

- Why are children and young people being bullied, i.e protected characteristics
- What form is bullying taken
- Impact on wellbeing
- Mechanisms of support, including both positive examples and a lack of support
- Children and young people-led solutions

Prominence was given to the voices of children, young people and adult practitioners over a discussion about the other findings from the reports. The findings from these themes were synthesised in the discussion section to identify the variety of impacts of bullying and why this is occurring and also, importantly, how young people can be better supported to deal with bullying and harassment.

## 3. Findings

### 3.1 About the participants

All the reports aside from the NSPCC's *What Are Children Telling Us About Bullying 2015-16* focused directly on Scotland; the NSPCC report considered the UK as a whole including counselling sessions in Scotland. The findings have a direct correlation with those in the Scotland-only studies and as such are extremely relevant.

The reports identified had all been conducted within the last three years and utilised a range of methods from surveys/interviews, focus groups, workshops and interviews. Several also used creative participative methods to support younger children to discuss a difficult topic.

Many of the studies did not include full demographic data. Children in Scotland accessed this information where possible by contacting those involved in developing the reports, and we were able to get some level of demographic data for six of the nine reports. As a result, we can state that this report takes into account the views of at least 9,019 children and young people in Scotland, some with direct experience of bullying and others without. The children and young people ranged from primary to secondary school age, and there was also a mix of genders and ethnicities within the reports. Additionally the reports that provided data on the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) indicated a mixture of socio-economic backgrounds. Enable's *Included in the Main* also involved young people with an additional support need in a variety of educational settings. The information was not available for enough of these reports for a full breakdown to be given.

In addition this report includes the perspective of teachers and adult practitioners who work directly with children and young people, where this was available.

### 3.2 Why are children and young people being bullied?

Several key themes emerge when looking at why children and young people experience bullying and harassment.

**Physical appearance** is an important issue; young people expressed that they are bullied about the shape and size of their bodies. This also appears to have had a negative impact on wellbeing and body image as the NSPCC administered 2,618 counselling sessions (from approx. 25,000 related to bullying<sup>1</sup>) in 2015-16 in relation to body image issues (NSPCC, 2016).

*“They call me fatty and chubby, and push and pull me around. I have not eaten much since it started a few weeks ago. I feel like I need to change so I have put myself on a diet. I want to lose weight so they stop bullying me.”*

– (Girl aged 7) (NSPCC, 2016)

**Sexualised bullying** also plays a big part in the lives of young people. This ranges from sexualised name-calling, uninvited touching, encouragement to send inappropriate and sexualised photos and also bullying in relation to the onset of puberty. Girls also raised issues about attending new schools and feeling under pressure from young men in relation to sex, leading to name-calling, threats and rumours being spread about them<sup>i</sup>.

*“I was playing dares with a boy from my school then he dared me to send nudes and I did. I feel ashamed and embarrassed and I don’t know why I did it.”*

– (Girl aged 12) (NSPCC, 2016)

The presence of an **additional support need or a learning disability** is also a contributing factor in the bullying of young people. However, while there was often a correlation made between the two, causal proof or evidence was not forthcoming in the work carried out by the NSPCC, Enable and Enquire (Scotland’s helpline for additional support for learning) (NSPCC, 2016, Enable, 2016, Enquire). It is also worth noting that bullying was identified by Enquire as contributing to a child or young person’s additional support need in 87 out of the 171 calls on the subject. Furthermore, Enable (2016) found that two thirds of young people with a learning disability or Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) they engaged with had experienced bullying. This is a significant number and points to a need for appropriate and timely support for children to help them flourish and to support healthy relationships.

*“These two boys are meant to be my friends but they keep telling me to hit this other girl. I have done it once but they keep telling me to do it again. I don’t want to hurt her again but feel I have to in case they won’t be friends with me anymore.*

*I am autistic and have ADHD and I don’t really know what it means, but I think that is why I think I have to do what they say. They have messaged her telling her I am going to get her.”*

– (Girl aged 16) (NSPCC, 2016)

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<sup>1</sup> Numbers of counselling sessions are based on UK-wide figures

**Sexual identity** was also found to be a factor in the bullying of children and young people. The NSPCC (2016) gave 450 counselling sessions in 2015-16 where this was raised as an issue while Enquire noted it as a factor in three out of 171 calls to the helpline. Teachers regularly hear about this sort of bullying in school; Stonewall Scotland (2014) found that 39% of primary teachers in Scotland have heard homophobic bullying, while around 88% of secondary teachers say young people in their school are bullied for being or being suspected to be lesbian, gay, bisexual or trans, with 71% of teaching staff reporting hearing language like 'poof'.

*“In my first few years at secondary, I was bullied for not fitting the stereotypes of masculinity, with my peers questioning my sexuality before I even had a chance to do it myself.” – (TIE, 2016)*

Ninety per cent of LGBT respondents who took part in the research carried out by the Time for Inclusive Education (TIE) campaign (2016) reported experiencing homophobia, bi-phobia and transphobia while at school and 64% reported being bullied because of their gender identity or sexual orientation.

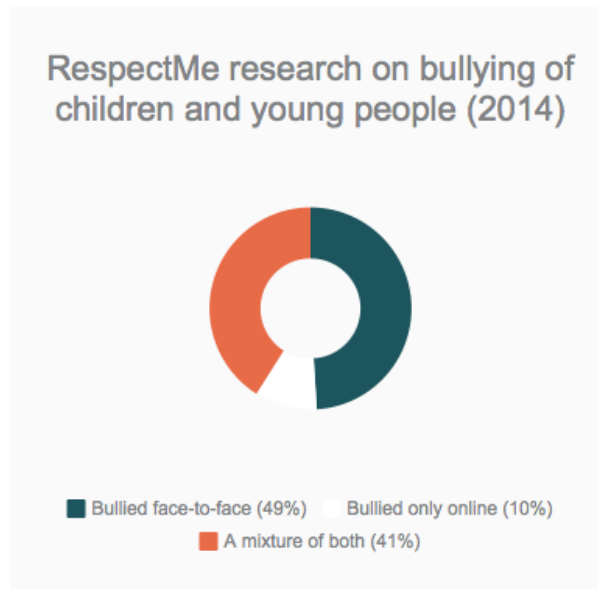
Another factor in bullying appears to be **race and faith**. Enquire noted this as the primary factor in seven calls to their helpline between 2015-17 (out of 171 calls regarding bullying) and the NSPCC (2016) delivered 981 counselling sessions on the topic. A lack of support within schools was raised in the NSPCC (2016) report, similar to homophobic, bi-phobic and transphobic bullying. However, the relative lack of qualitative work with young people exploring the correlation between race, faith and bullying means that there is little to draw on in terms of analysis for the impact of these areas on young people's experiences. We would direct the committee toward the upcoming findings of Young Scot's youth investigation into race equality in Scotland, entitled *Fairer Future*, due to be published in summer 2017.

*“Ever since the Paris attacks, I have been getting bullied really badly at school. I wear a headscarf and the bullies think that just because I am Muslim that I support ISIS. It's gotten so bad that I have started to miss school, which I never do.”  
– (Girl aged 15) (NSPCC, 2016)*

Other issues we identified as reasons for children and young people experiencing bullying were around the transition from primary to secondary school and also about the identification of a talent which others didn't know about, both of which came up in the work carried out by Children in Scotland (Leaders of Learning Phase 3 Report, 2017) around child participation in education.

### 3.3 How are children and young people being bullied?

Both face-to-face bullying and cyber bullying have been identified as central to the bullying and harassment experienced by children and young people in Scotland. RespectMe (2014) identified that 49% of children and young people had been bullied face-to-face, with 41% experiencing a mixture and 10% online only.



**Face-to-face bullying** involves both physical and verbal bullying and harassment and the NSPCC (2016), Enable (2016) and Children in Scotland's (2016) reports identify specific actions such as punching, hitting or making threats.

Peer pressure is also a common form of bullying and is often linked to pressure to have sex but also pressure to fight, drink or take drugs (NSPCC, 2016). Some young people also identify being peer pressured into bullying other people (NSPCC, 2016). Exclusion from friendship groups and isolation is also seen as a mechanism for bullying (Children in Scotland 2016, NSPCC, 2016).

Children and young people with a disability or additional support need express a particular issue with face-to-face bullying. Many in the reports we studied identify being called offensive names by other young people. For children and young people with ASD this is particularly difficult, as often they cannot read facial expressions, so do not always necessarily understand that they are being bullied (NSPCC, 2016).

*“School wasn't easy for me, I didn't have any friends and some of the children bullied me and called me names, or just ignored me. I felt invisible.”*  
– (Enable, 2016)

Children and young people with a disability also report that they are bullied by being put in situations that highlight, mimic or accentuate their disability (NSPCC, 2016).

**Online bullying** drastically increased in 2015-16, with the NSPCC (2016) delivering 13% more counselling sessions for online bullying than 2014-15. There has been a 34% increase in counselling sessions for social media and gaming sites. The work carried out by the NSPCC (2016) across the UK identified children as young as eight seeking counselling for online bullying.

Online bullying through social media has also been reported as a mechanism for continued bullying and harassment outwith school hours (NSPCC, 2016). On gaming sites young people are often excluded, ganged up on and verbally abused. There is also an issue with account hacking and games being ruined, a practice called 'griefing' (NSPCC, 2016).

*"It might sound like not much of a problem but there's this group of people I play with online and they told me to kill myself. I won't kill myself but it upsets me. My parents don't realise how upset it's making me and they tell me to stand up for myself or just not play anymore but they don't know how hard that is! They don't understand why I want to play with people who are not friends, but to me they are. I don't know why they have just suddenly started picking on me but it hurts so much."* – (Girl aged 12) (NSPCC, 2016)

The impact of the internet and cyber-bullying has also contributed to sexual bullying with images being shared online. This is both in relation to bullying that comes from images young people have shared and also exposure to images with which they are not comfortable. (NSPCC, 2016).

While there is often an adult fear that the online world will open children and young people up to bullying by people they don't know, in 2014 RespectMe (2014) found that 92% of young people said they knew their online bully, so this concern is not demonstrably borne out.

### 3.4 What is the impact on child wellbeing?

When we consider TIE's (2016) research, it found that 27% of LGBT respondents had attempted suicide at least once as a result of bullying, while a further 15% had attempted this more than once<sup>ii</sup>. Self-harm was also a significant problem, with 45% reporting this was how they regularly coped with being bullied. Crucially, 95% of respondents believed that being bullied had had long-lasting negative effects on their lives. Young people in the NSPCC (2016) report also indicated that experiences of bullying had contributed to **suicidal behaviour**.

*"I attempted suicide because I had been bullied since I started high school, because I am gay and more feminine than other boys."* – (TIE, 2016)

Children and young people identify that bullying contributes to them feeling sad and unsafe. There would appear to be a strong link between bullying and **poor mental health**, with young people identifying that bullying has a whole host of negative impacts such as low self-esteem, social isolation, sadness, depression or anxiety (NSPCC, 2016, Children's Parliament, 2016). Furthermore, bullying about weight was also noted to have the effect of causing eating disorders, in some instances, and contributing to poor body image (NSPCC, 2016).

*"The bullying I received has severely damaged my self-esteem. I currently suffer from an anxiety disorder... and in the past I have self-harmed."*  
– (Gay young person, left school in 2000s) (TIE, 2016)

The children and young people who carried out the investigation work by the Children's Parliament (2016) capture the impact of bullying as something that erodes

children and young people's confidence, making them feel sad, scared and abandoned. These feelings impact on their ability to seek and accept help and support. The children told them how these feelings are heightened and internalised if their concerns are trivialised or dismissed by those they ask for help (Children's Parliament, 2016). We learned that the impact of bullying is exacerbated if help is not forthcoming once someone has plucked up the courage to ask for it (Children's Parliament, 2016).

*“Confidence which may already be fragile can be further eroded if we do not listen to or take children's concerns seriously.” – (Children's Parliament, 2016)*

*“Bullying makes children feel horrible, abandoned and left alone. You feel like no one ever cares about you.” – (Children's Parliament, 2017)*

Work carried out by the NSPCC (2016) found that **non-attendance at school** among those who experience bullying is also an issue, with many identifying that they had skipped school due to bullying, with particular reference to this in relation to their gender identity.

*“Every day I wake up scared to go to school, scared about the comments people will make and scared about walking home. Then I get in and log onto my social networking site and there are horrible messages everywhere. It's like there's no escaping the bullies. I'm struggling to cope with how upset I feel so sometimes I cut myself just to have a release but it's not enough. I can't go on like this.”*  
– (Girl aged 13) (NSPCC, 2016)

The role of the bystander is significant in terms of bullying and harassment of children and young people (NSPCC, 2016, Children's Parliament, 2016). Bullying was also identified as having an **impact on the wellbeing of bystanders**, with young people feeling frustrated and unable to help (NSPCC, 2016). Often those who had tried to intervene had made things worse:

*“My friend is being physically bullied and I feel like I can't do anything. I get laughed at for hanging round with her and some of my friends have stopped talking to me. So I don't know how to stand up for her without getting hurt myself. It must hurt her inside and I'm really worried about her, but how can I help?”*  
– (Girl aged 11) (NSPCC, 2016)

*“I am being bullied at school and need someone to talk to. It's been going on for a year now and it's making me sad and depressed. My friend sticks up for me and now he gets bullied as well. Is this my fault?” – (Boy, aged 11) (NSPCC, 2016)*

The NSPCC (2016) provided 853 counselling sessions in 2015-16 for children and young people on how to support *others* being bullied. Some young people feel they cannot stand up for friends due to the effect it might have on them. There are also issues about friends being put in an awkward position about whether to report bullying when the victim's wishes are to avoid telling someone (NSPCC, 2016).



Enable (2016) found a significant connection between children and young people with learning disabilities and the number of friendships they enjoy, particularly outwith school. Sixteen per cent of young people who took part felt that they did not have any friends and almost 40% of those who did, did not see their friends outside of school. While this is not bullying, lack of friendships also contributed significantly to poor mental health, wellbeing, attendance and attainment (Enable, 2016).

### 3.5 What kind of support is available or missing?

**Personal relationships** were seen as vitally important in supporting young people to deal with bullying, as they could provide important emotional support. RespectMe (2014) identified that almost half of young people tell a parent about experiences of being bullied. This finding was shared across the work carried out by Children in Scotland (2016).

Young people also identified various support services in their school as supportive in helping them deal with the issues that can arise from bullying, including the chance to speak to someone trusted in private and to enjoy activities and pastimes that provide emotional support in order to deal with some of the mental health issues that can stem from bullying (Children in Scotland, Leaders of Learning, 2017).

Support for bystanders was also felt to be important, as children faced issues such as not knowing what to do, fearing ridicule from adults, and retribution from bullies. Children's Parliament (2016) and the NSPCC (2016) identified that being able to trust adults and adults trusting them was vital here, so again we see the critical importance of relationship-based practice.

Unfortunately however, **lack of support** from those that children and young people looked to for help with bullying was not uncommon (Children's Parliament, 2016, Children's Parliament, 2017, NSPCC, 2016). This included **parents** not accepting young people 'coming out' for example, but also **teachers** not dealing appropriately with the issue and leaving young people feeling abandoned (NSPCC, 2016, Children's Parliament, 2016,). Children's Parliament (2016) noted that this can cause a particular issue as it may erode their desire to disclose information in the future.

Children can find it difficult to report bullying because they fear it will be their word against the bully's, and the NSPCC (2016) found that children are often reluctant to report something even when there is video evidence.

*“Sometimes when you tell an adult that you are being bullied, sometimes it makes you feel silly because they are not doing anything about it. You want something to happen about it because you are worried inside.”*

– (Children's Parliament, 2017)

The importance of support mechanisms was highlighted in Enable's (2016) *Included in the Main* report in their example where a girl with additional support needs identified how a lack of support had put her off attending school. While this is not explicitly linked to bullying, it shows how appropriate support is vital for children and young people to deal with, and anticipate, issues at school to prevent bullying.

**School culture** was found to be vitally important in ensuring that young people are supported to deal with bullying. Successful prevention is happening in schools where anti-bullying practice is embedded within school culture (Children’s Parliament, 2016). This was echoed in RespectMe’s (2014) work, which found that the most successful anti-bullying interventions are embedded within a positive ethos and culture and do not focus on individual incidents.

*“I just want to have someone to help me. Mummy goes to meetings to try to get me more help but they don’t do anything. It is making me sad and I feel like I am bad at school. I am good at home though so it makes me sad. I am in P2 now and I don’t want to go to school anymore.”*

– (Child attending mainstream school, age 6) (Enable, 2016)

Children’s Parliament (2016) stresses the need to place our emphasis on **preventing bullying within schools**. There are lots of things schools can do such as buddying and peer mentoring for children and creating a safe place where children can go early to seek help. Prevention is underpinned by a commitment to forming relationships and a school ethos where bullying or other negative behaviours have little chance to grow. As duty bearers, we adults must understand that children place their trust in us. The realisation of children’s human rights depends on our actions, our behaviours, our expressions of respect and our belief in the human dignity of every child (Children’s Parliament, 2016).

Positive culture needs to be built from the top but, despite this, only 30% of primary school teachers felt their head showed clear leadership on this topic (Stonewall, 2014). However, this also must be backed up by teachers having positive attitudes, which also appear to be lacking; Stonewall (2014) found 31% of Scottish teachers have heard colleagues make derogatory comments about LGBT people, for example. This was noted to be a particular issue in faith schools where teachers reported feeling unable to broach the subject.

Various reports highlight a **lack of support for staff to confidently challenge homophobia, bi-phobia and transphobia** in school settings (Stonewall, 2014; TIE, 2016). Teaching staff and pupils identified this as a large factor in the prevalence of the bullying behaviour (TIE, 2016). Damaging language and negative attitudes are often not adequately addressed. A lack of **teacher training** was highlighted as being a key issue, with many respondents outlining that they have not received any specific training on LGBT issues (Stonewall, 2014). While there are training courses available, the financial cost attached to some courses was felt to be a barrier for schools that did not have the budget to spend on this bullying prevention work. Of those who had received training, many still felt that they were not adequately trained (TIE, 2016).

TIE (2016) found that only 5% of young people they spoke to believed their teachers were adequately equipped to discuss LGBT issues in the classroom and 72% found that teachers did not challenge homophobic and other forms of bullying.

*“The majority of homophobic comments actually came from teachers at school, with one saying to an entire 6<sup>th</sup> year class, ‘in my day you were either normal or a poof, not all of these new things’, upon hearing about, and me explaining, my bisexuality.”* – (Bisexual, left school in 2010s) (TIE, 2016)

Stonewall Scotland (2014) reported how difficult many schools find it to challenge 'habits' in high schools around derogatory language toward the LGBT community:

*“Comments now almost seem socially accepted by pupils and some adults which makes it very difficult to break these ‘habits’ by secondary school age. Just like swearing.” – (Stonewall, 2014)*

The **message board and phone services** such as those employed by Childline were seen as hugely important for young people, with children and young people identifying that the phone service encouraged them to access support such as teachers and that this had been hugely positive (NSPCC, 2016).

*“I just wanted to say thank you Childline. You gave me the confidence I needed to speak to a teacher at school about being bullied and they're helping to resolve the issue now. I feel so much better!” – (Girl aged 13) (NSPCC, 2016)*

Message boards also provided a vital mechanism for peer support by other young people; these offer solutions and even something as simple as a common experience. Again, this highlights the importance of relationships (NSPCC, 2016).

The NSPCC study found however that there is a lack of **support for the bullies** themselves and that often they do not want to be displaying bullying behaviour:

*“I am worried that if I stop bullying, my friends will turn on me. I mainly call people names and push them about but I don't want to hurt people's feelings anymore. I can't talk to anyone at school as I have such a bad reputation but I really want advice on how to stop.” – (Boy aged 16) (NSPCC, 2016)*

Often the perpetrator is acting out of fear. Adults need to understand this, spot the signs and put support in place (NSPCC, 2016). Children talked about having to join a gang to avoid being bullied themselves:

*“Some of the things other gang members do have started to really bother me. They say really offensive things to people and steal stuff. I don't know who I can talk to about all this. I'm worried. I want to get out.”  
– (Girl aged 17) (NSPCC, 2016)*

### 3.6 What do children and young people recommend as solutions?

We know from Children in Scotland's Leaders of Learning project (2017) that children identify certain **protective factors** for their wellbeing; people, places and things that make them feel happy and safe. These simple things include having kind friends, time with family, and time and space to play and spend time outside. Children want us to prioritise these things to support their wellbeing (Children in Scotland, Leaders of Learning, 2017).

Children and young people repeatedly expressed in the reports that **relationships** are the most important factor for them (Children in Scotland, 2016, Children's Parliament, 2016). Children place great emphasis on trust and relationships when raising concerns. Relationships are vital to children and the Children's Parliament (2016) investigators identified family and friends – “those that they know and trust”

– as the people they would talk to if being bullied. The children also identified teachers and learning assistants, but again this was largely dependent on the relationship they had with individuals (Children’s Parliament, 2016).

This was echoed in our Leaders of Learning work in schools where children identified close relationships with both family and friends as key for supporting their emotional wellbeing. Other supports included teddy bears, having a house, pets, emergency services, dentists and having enough money:

*“There are lots of people and places we can rely on in our circles of support.”  
– (Children in Scotland, Leaders of Learning, 2017).*

Children also identified the importance of so-called ‘special teachers’ or counsellors that they trusted and knew well to support them to deal with mental health issues (Children in Scotland, Mental Health Strategy Report, 2016). We are hearing from children and young people consistently that support in this area must capitalise on the positive and healthy relationships in their lives.

Taking **control** of their situation and speaking out in front of the school allowed one young person with support needs to feel more accepted, be more understood and have other young people feel able to talk to her:

*“It has made me stand up for who I am. Since I gave the presentation, school has got a lot better for me. People know who I am and talk to me now. Mr Brown [her headteacher] says younger children look up to me as a role model.”  
– (Enable, 2016)*

**Peer support** was also seen as important for young people in terms of tackling bullying and building resilience during Leaders of Learning (Children in Scotland, 2017).

**Listening to children and young people** is vital to tackling bullying and harassment in schools (Children’s Parliament, 2016, Children’s Parliament, 2017). We know that being heard, understood and empathised with is an empowering and effective mechanism by which change can be realised in schools and communities. This should go hand in hand with a commitment from adults to collaborate with children and young people on solutions:

*“We can help bullies together.” – (Children’s Parliament, 2017)*

Young people and practitioners talked about the need for **discussion of LGBT identities** at school, inclusive education and safe spaces to reduce the feelings of isolation within learning settings:

*“I would certainly welcome both LGBT+ training and legislation here, as it would mean that all teachers would find common ground in working together to eradicate this problem.” – (Primary teacher) (TIE, 2016)*

TIE (2016) research identified key areas to make the improvements needed that they had identified, including: cost-free and CPD-accredited teacher training; curricular inclusion of LGBT identities; new and updated guidance regarding child and teacher rights in this area; an obligation to record specific incidents of homophobic,

bi-phobic and transphobic bullying; monitoring of the steps that are taken within Scottish education to improve LGBT inclusivity; and a legislative requirement for all schools to deliver LGBT inclusive education. Based on findings across the board in this area, we echo these sentiments.

Children also talked about the need for **anonymous reporting** so that children can feel safe and supported if they are worried about bullying behaviour and want to tell an adult. It was felt that this would help them to come forwards and be heard, they told the Children's Parliament Investigators:

*“Keep it anonymous, be your own superhero, listen to us and take action!”*  
– (Children's Parliament, 2016)

Teachers identify information for pupils as key, along with positive LGBT role models:

*“The more informed the pupils are, the more comfortable they are. Popular openly gay staff make a lot of difference to their perception of gay and lesbian people.”*  
– (Stonewall, 2014)

In addition to this, children and young people we spoke to during Leaders of Learning identified a variety of locally relevant solutions that would make life at school easier and could support them to tackle bullying or increase their resilience, including a worry wall, a better buddy system and more fun clubs (Children in Scotland, 2017).

### 3.7 Conclusions and recommendations

Bullying and harassment is clearly a huge issue for children and young people in Scotland, with far-reaching and often devastating impacts. Concerted effort is required within families, schools, communities and at societal level to improve the support mechanisms that are already available to children and young people. We must ensure we are listening to and collaborating with children to identify and enact those mechanisms that would help but are not yet in place.

Based on the findings from this report, we make the following recommendations:

- We need **more information** about how children and young people are experiencing bullying rooted in racism, xenophobia and gender in order to provide a more accurate picture of all forms of bullying in Scotland and to ensure that we can make evidence-based recommendations.
- We must take some encouragement from the fact that children and young people do have access to some effective support measures including Childline's phone line and message boards and **opportunities to speak to people they trust** within their circles of support, and ensure these are widely available to *all* children and young people.
- Scotland needs to make a concerted effort to **prevent bullying as opposed to tackling it**. This begins by embedding a child rights approach across the board, throughout education, health and all our public services. Child rights should

frame our anti-bullying strategies. Being bullied is an infringement of the rights of the child and must be redressed, involving appropriate, timely, youth-led support for children and young people. This should form part of our work to embed the United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) in all aspects of public life in Scotland.

- We would argue that a key factor in the prevention of bullying and harassment within schools is an **environment where young people feel empowered** to discuss issues openly. This environment must be free from judgement, with staff who understand the issues facing children and young people in 2017 and who possess the skills to enable their participation in promoting a safe environment for all. We advocate that strong and nurturing intergenerational relationships, a rights-based approach to service design, and the empowerment of children and young people lie at the heart of this. Strategic leadership from schools and youth workers is required to make tackling bullying a priority and ensure that staff and pupils are able to discuss it. Safe spaces must be set up to support this.
- **Support for the workforce** is very important in preventing bullying and building confidence to robustly challenge it when it arises. High quality, rights-based, accessible and ongoing training and support for all practitioners working with children and young people – shaped by the experiences and voices of children and young people – is a much-needed and wise investment for the health and wellbeing of our youngest citizens. We call for this to be addressed urgently.
- The online world and gaming in particular present an interesting and complex dichotomy around rights, one that has been explored recently by the 5Rights team at Young Scot. We call for the recommendations and findings of this youth commission to be widely shared across Scotland to enable a **better understanding of the digital age across generations**. It is essential that adults understand how children and young people interact and conceptualise the online world – one that is not distinct from their ‘real world’ in terms of friendships etc – in order to progress effective bullying prevention work.
- We found that **gaming is often a pathway for young people to be bullied but also is seen as a key support mechanism**. Therefore, an understanding of 5Rights and digital citizenship is critical from a young age. Children and young people do not currently tend to report online gaming bullying due to parental lack of understanding and a more general sense that the online world is poorly understood. The NSPCC (2016) found that there were sometimes worries among young people about the reaction from adults, the potential to be blamed and parents over-reacting or making a scene, or concerns that sharing examples of online gaming bullying made no difference. This needs to be addressed.
- The issue of the **bystander** was raised regularly by children and young people. Much more needs to be done to support children and young people to disclose information and feel confident to tackle bullying in a way that is safe for them. This is clearly linked to the lack of trust some young people feel towards adults in terms of disclosure: they do not always feel it will be taken seriously or fear bullied themselves as a consequence. We would support the call by Children’s Parliament (2016) for **bullying disclosures to be kept anonymous** and also to

ensure that children and young people know they have been **listened to** and that their problem has been **dealt with effectively**.

- The Children's Parliament Investigators discovered that developing empathy encourages **positive bystander behaviour**. We must not expect children to step in or put themselves at risk in a dangerous situation (Children's Parliament, 2016). Rather, children need to understand that they can help by being aware of deteriorating relationships and how others feel, and understanding that they have the power to act on behalf of others and seek help (Children's Parliament, 2016, 2017).
- Dealing with bullying has to take on a different emphasis than simply aiming to tackle it as an individual issue. Instead it must focus on **child rights and trust**. Children have the right to be safe from bullying and children should know adults will listen to them and act in solidarity with them. However, dealing with bullying must also focus on **building and rebuilding relationships** between children, young people and adults. **Friendships** were seen as key in giving children and young people the resilience to deal with bullying. But positive intergenerational relationships, built on a foundation of human rights, will also promote the prevention of bullying and harassment (Children in Scotland, 2016, Children's Parliament, 2016, Children's Parliament, 2017).
- Particular work is required to support children and young people with **additional support needs**. Educators and children themselves have consistently identified that often they do not have the friendships, and subsequent resilience, required to prevent and tackle issues of bullying and harassment. Budgets within school settings must be protected to support children in response to their individual needs.

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