

Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills submission of 10 August 2022

PE1934/C: Develop an educational resource on gender-based violence for all year groups in High School

The Scottish Government recognises the importance of education in tackling gender based-violence in schools as a preventative approach to addressing this issue within communities and society. We have established the [Gender Based Violence in Schools Working Group - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](http://www.gov.scot) and are committed to developing a national framework for schools to help tackle sexual harassment and gender-based violence. This framework, which will be developed with the Working Group, including representatives from Education Scotland, will be supported by appropriate teaching resources to help school staff deliver confident and meaningful learning to combat sexual harassment and gender-based violence in schools. I can confirm that the framework will include content on the causes of gender-based violence.

The Committee has also asked how the Scottish Government and Education Scotland monitor whether children and young people are being consulted on the curriculum and what feedback is provided to show how their views have been taken into account. At a national level, children and young people's views on these matters were sought as part of the Personal and Social Education Review undertaken by Education Scotland. The Personal and Social Education Review recommendations were published and their contribution was recognised as part of that publication. It is for schools and education authorities to engage with children and young people on the delivery of the curriculum locally.

With regard to the Committee request for information on:

- whether the Scottish Government currently monitors data in relation to sexual assault in schools across Scotland;
- whether the planned independent review of sexual harassment and gender-based violence prevention practice will cover the issues raised in this petition; and,

- the membership and remit of the Gender Based Violence in Schools Working Group.

The response to these is set out below.

In relation to the first point, recording and monitoring of incidents is essential and best carried out locally where recurring patterns can be understood and acted upon. A consistent and uniform approach to recording and monitoring of incidents will help identify key measures and actions that can be undertaken to address any issues. The Bullying and Equalities Module on SEEMiS, the schools management information system, was updated to reflect this uniform approach. SEEMiS is local authority owned and is a schools management tool that is in use in all public schools in Scotland. The improvements made to SEEMiS for recording and monitoring incidents of bullying also allow schools to record any instances of sexual harassment that a pupil reports. Guidance published at the time also outlines the responsibilities of local authorities and head teachers to monitor incidents at a local level. A final evaluation will be undertaken in 2022 to assess how successfully the new system has been embedded. Monitoring and recording of incidents of gender-based violence will also feature within the framework which the Gender Based Violence in Schools Working Group is developing.

The planned independent review of sexual harassment and gender-based violence prevention practice will commence on conclusion of the work we have been undertaking with the Gender Based Violence in Schools Working Group and the Gender Equality Taskforce for Education and Learning. This will also complement work being undertaken as part of the PSE Review to provide resources for schools to help them teach confidently about the issue of sexual harassment. Altogether, these actions will cover the issues raised in this petition.

Regarding the membership and remit of the Gender Based Violence in Schools Working Group, this is available on the Scottish Government's website at <https://www.gov.scot/groups/gender-based-violence-in-schools-working-group/>.

In addition to the work outlined above, the Gender Equality Taskforce in Education and Learning was established in response to one of the recommendations made by the First Minister's National Advisory Committee on Women and Girls (NACWG). The NACWG wants every girl and young woman to have a gender competent experience of

education and learning. The Taskforce's overarching ambitions are that all girls and young women:

- Are taught by gender competent educational professionals;
- Do not experience sexism, sexual harassment or gender-based violence in the classroom or other educational setting; and,
- Freely chose subjects and areas of study, including those traditionally dominated by boys and men.

The Taskforce recently worked with The Collective, an intersectional feminist organisation, to develop a theory of change model and a set of recommendations to enable them to take forward their ambitions. This was done with input from the Children's and Youth Parliaments, in order to ensure young people's views were embedded in it. Two of the recommendations highlight the issue of gender-based violence in schools and how it should be addressed. The Taskforce will take these forward, working closely with the Gender Based Violence in Schools Working Group and in the wider context of Equally Safe, which will help inform the Taskforce's work more generally.

In the meantime, the Scottish Government wants all children and young people to develop mutually respectful, responsible and confident relationships. We expect schools to deliver an inclusive and supportive learning environment for children and young people, which is why we are committed to ensuring all children and young people receive high quality relationships, sexual health and parenthood (RSHP) education. RSHP education is an important part of the school's health and wellbeing curriculum and supports pupils to learn about safe and healthy relationships, including online relationships. This backed up by a range of actions being taken forward in schools to address gender based violence and sexual harassment. Our Mentors in Violence Prevention (MVP) Scotland Programme is working to tackle gender stereotyping and attitudes that condone violence against women and girls. MVP is a peer education programme that gives young people the chance to explore and challenge the attitudes, beliefs and cultural norms underpinning gender based violence, bullying and other forms of violence. It can address a range of behaviours including name-calling, sexting, controlling behaviour and harassment.

Our Equally Safe Strategy for preventing and eradicating violence against women and girls emphasises the importance of challenging the

underpinning attitudes which enable gender-based violence. We are implementing the Equally Safe at School project, developed by Rape Crisis Scotland and Zero Tolerance, which applies a whole school approach to inequality and gender based violence in schools. Furthermore, we are funding Rape Crisis Scotland to help deliver programmes which aim to tackle sexual harassment and violence in our schools including their national sexual violence programme which is aimed at local secondary schools across Scotland.

I hope the Committee finds the information in this letter helpful and the Committee is reassured we are taking forward a wide range of actions to address the concerns raised by the petitioners.