



# SAM'S STORY

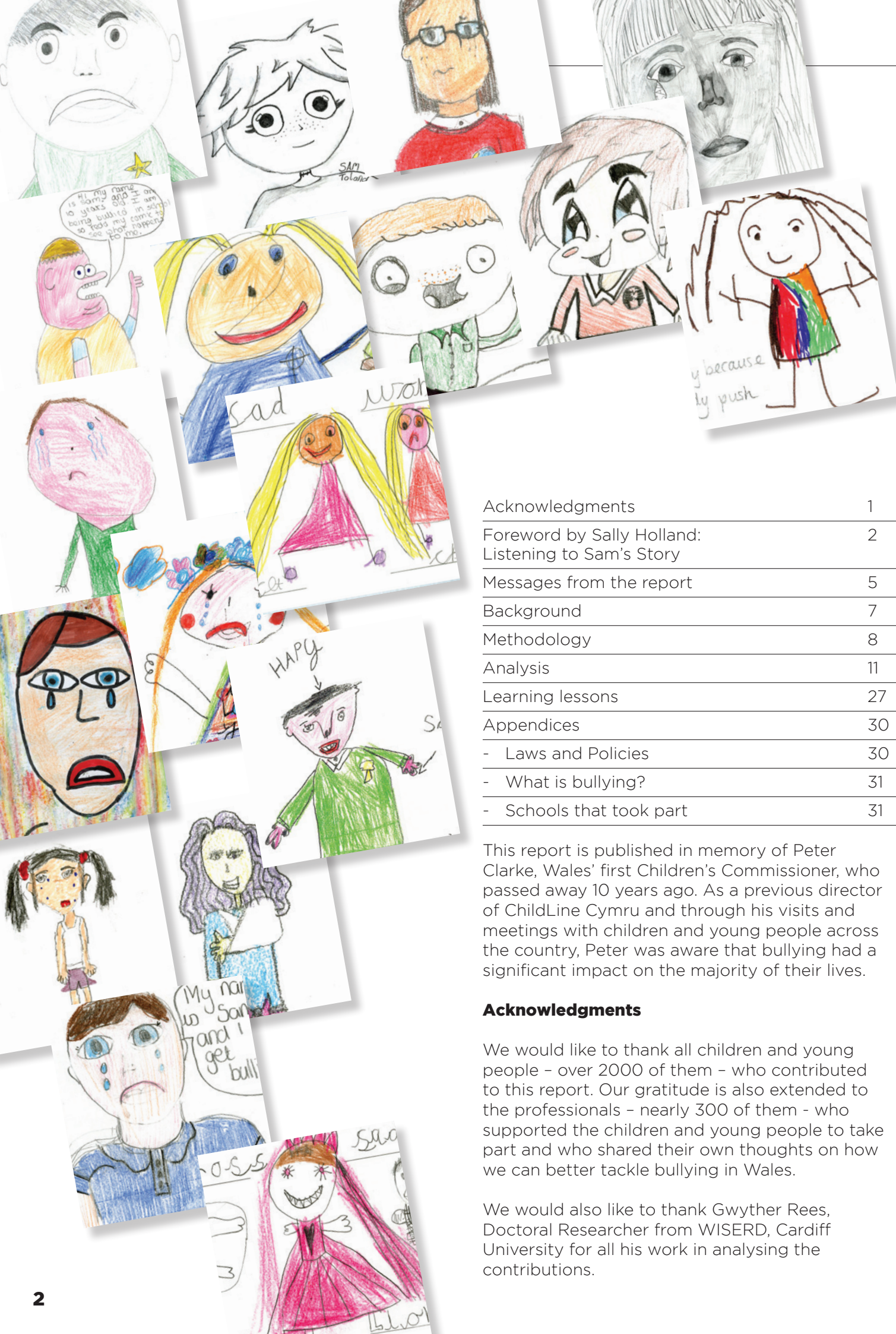
## Listening to children and young people's experiences of bullying in Wales

“It will get better. There is always someone to talk to. Whether that’s your mum, sister, teacher or peer. There is someone who wants to help; and you have to let them.”

Secondary School Pupil



Sam by Sophie



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This report is published in memory of Peter Clarke, Wales' first Children's Commissioner, who passed away 10 years ago. As a previous director of ChildLine Cymru and through his visits and meetings with children and young people across the country, Peter was aware that bullying had a significant impact on the majority of their lives.

## Acknowledgments

We would like to thank all children and young people – over 2000 of them – who contributed to this report. Our gratitude is also extended to the professionals – nearly 300 of them – who supported the children and young people to take part and who shared their own thoughts on how we can better tackle bullying in Wales.

We would also like to thank Gwyther Rees, Doctoral Researcher from WISERD, Cardiff University for all his work in analysing the contributions.



# SAM'S STORY

**Foreword by Sally Holland,  
Children's Commissioner for Wales**

**It was 2003 when the first Children's Commissioner,** Peter Clarke, spoke in his Annual Report and Accounts about how 'bullying is a subject that almost always comes up during my conversations with children and young people'. That year, the then Welsh Assembly Government introduced 'Respecting Others', guidance which aimed to provide information on tackling bullying in schools.

Fourteen years on, as the current post holder, thousands of children and young people have identified bullying as their top priority for me (What Next', 2016'). This autumn, the Welsh Government is due to review its 'Respecting Others' guidance, for the first time. To help inform that process, and to help deliver on my commitment from my three year plan for children and young people to ensure contemporary experiences of bullying are better understood and more schools are tackling and preventing bullying more effectively, I decided to undertake a large scale consultation of children's experiences of bullying in 2016. This work involved young people in primary and secondary schools and in community settings across the country, exploring with over two thousand of them their feelings and experiences of bullying.

The results are all too familiar. Being different and being isolated are major factors behind why children are being bullied. Children told us how bystanders and witnesses to the bullying are often portrayed as being unsure what to do or as being pulled in different directions. By far the most common positive resolution to bullying was to tell a trusted adult, mainly teachers – strong direct action by schools is seen by children as very important. Unsurprisingly, cyberbullying is a big issue, particularly in secondary schools, and is seen as a highly invasive form of bullying.

It is clear that there are continuing themes and some changes since my predecessor surveyed children and parents in 2005. Children still express strong concerns about the impact of bullying and still state that they wish to tell a trusted adult to try to resolve the situation. Children still identify the role of the witness or bystander as being crucial. It is now commonplace for schools to have anti-bullying policies.

*Continued overleaf >>*





*<< Foreword by Sally Holland continued*

In 2005, the majority of respondents said their school did not have an anti-bullying policy. While we heard about and witnessed some excellent practices in contemporary schools, it is clear that bullying is still a widespread concern for children in 2017. Children, their parents, teachers and other school staff need the skills to prevent and tackle bullying when it occurs in every school in Wales.

We are at a critical time in relation to education in Wales, with the reform of the curriculum well underway and the long-standing guidance on bullying finally under review. The purpose of this report is to highlight the real impact that being bullied is still having on children's lives in 21st century Wales. All schools should be enabled to have in place a preventative whole-school approach that teaches children good relationship and conflict resolution skills from an early age, plus clear strategies for recognising and tackling bullying when it occurs, and to ensure that these strong messages play a part in shaping the new curriculum, teacher training and the reform of anti-bullying guidance.

From what children have shared with me, there is absolutely no doubt that bullying can have a devastating impact on a child's life. Under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), children have human rights to be safe, to survive and thrive, to receive an education, be listened to and fulfil their potential. Bullying is an age-old problem but I believe that we have the means and the motivation to prevent and tackle it in 21st century Wales. We have a real opportunity now to listen and to act on these powerful experiences, and I hope that all who read this report will feel motivated to do so.



# MESSAGES

Here are the main messages from our work with children, young people and professionals. Children and young people were asked to share their feelings and experiences through an imaginary character called 'Sam'. Our suggested priorities for improvement can be seen on pages 27-29.

1. **'Difference' is seen by children as a key issue in bullying.** This includes issues such as ethnicity, poverty, disability and gender stereotyping. It can also mean other things such as physical appearance or preferred activities. It is important therefore to recognise that, in terms of vulnerability to bullying, 'difference' can mean a very wide range of things.
2. **A second major factor is isolation.** Sam is often portrayed as having no friends and sometimes also as being new to the school. Thus one of the key underlying messages from the material is the protective role that strong friendship networks can play in terms of reducing the risk of being bullied as well as supporting children who are being bullied.
3. **Other children who are bystanders** or witnesses to the bullying are often portrayed as being unsure what to do or as being pulled in different directions. This highlights a potential need for further work relating to bystanders, equipping children with the confidence to act when they become aware of bullying.
4. **By far the most common positive resolution of Sam's situation** was for Sam or someone else to tell a teacher and then the teacher would resolve the issue. This is a really positive message about how children view teachers. It also may indicate how powerless children feel in the face of bullying and that often (particularly in primary school) they just want an adult to sort out the problem for them. Thus, while peer

support schemes (there were generally positive comments about these) and developing children's capacities to cope are part of the solution, strong direct action by schools staff is also seen by children as very important.

5. **Parents are often portrayed as unresponsive** or ineffective and this may indicate an area for further educational and awareness-raising initiatives.
6. **In terms of who Sam could go to for help, a recurring theme was 'trust'.** Having a trusted person to talk to seems to be a key pathway to deal with bullying. This has a range of implications for schools in terms of how to try to create these kind of trusted relationships.

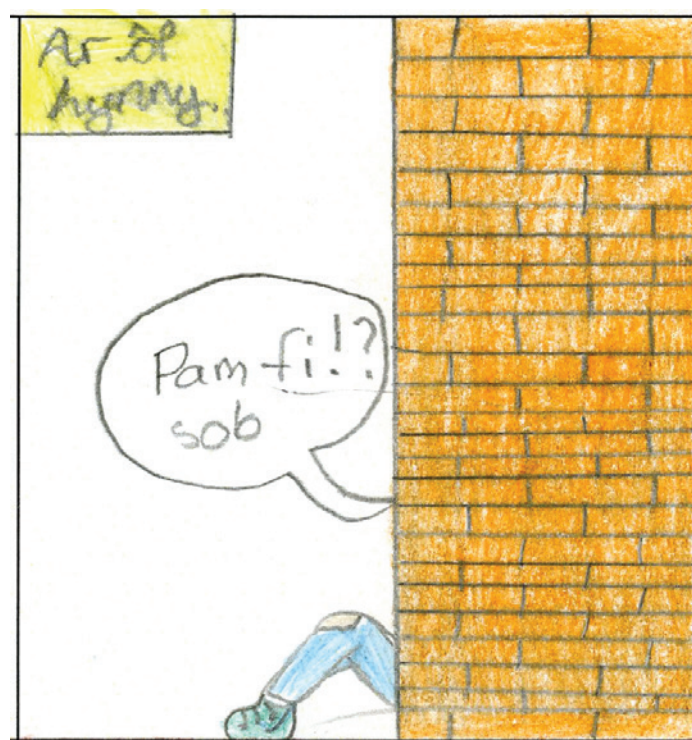


Image from a cartoon by a primary school pupil.

7. **Cyberbullying is a big issue**, particularly in secondary schools, and is a highly invasive form of bullying. It is important also not to view this as a completely separate issue as it often is portrayed as co-existing with physical and verbal bullying, which are much more commonly depicted forms of bullying in the narrative and visual material. It was not that common for children to describe socially excluding behaviour in the narratives, even though this is a common component of definitions of bullying and can have a major negative impact on children. This raises questions about how bullying is defined and understood by children.
8. **It may be useful to do further work** from the perspective of children who bully, both in terms of meeting their needs and also as another route to tackling bullying.
9. **Young people in secondary school** talked a lot of about diversity and respect. They seemed to see the overall culture within the school as an important factor in levels of bullying. There were quite a lot of suggestions about educational initiatives and campaigns not only specifically about bullying but also more generally about diversity and challenging stereotypes.
10. **Prevention and effective tackling of bullying** is taking place in some schools across the country, some examples of which are included in this report as interesting practice.

Finally, an overarching message is the strength of the negative emotions in the pictorial and narrative data which reinforce how destructive bullying can feel for children. This backs up research evidence on the strong link between being bullied and having low well-being in childhood and also much later into adulthood. An example of this point is that some children viewed approaching the police as a viable option in terms of being bullied. The material highlights again how seriously adults should take childhood bullying.



*'Petrifying. Don't want to live any longer.'*

*'I think life hates me for something. I want to jump off a bridge and get away.'*

*'I don't want to live like this'*

# BACKGROUND

**In my first year as Commissioner** I wanted to find out what mattered most to children and young people across Wales. To do this, I launched a Wales-wide consultation called Beth Nesa'/?/What Next? to hear children and young people's views on many aspects of day-to-day life; the services they use, the schools they attend and the communities they live in. I also asked them to set their own priorities: the things they thought I should be focusing on as Children's Commissioner, to inform my work plan.

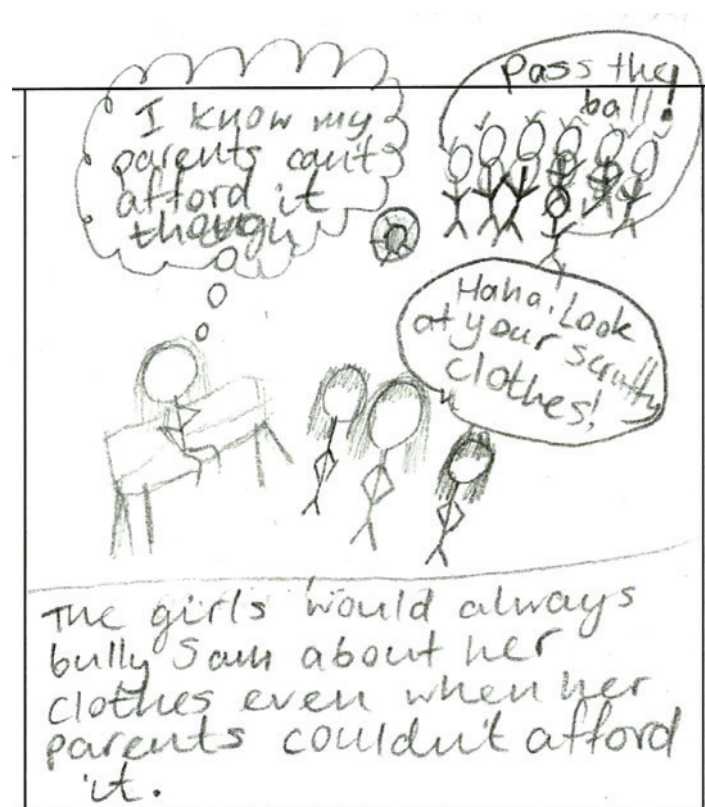
Over 7000 children, young people and adults took part. Overwhelmingly, children and young people chose tackling bullying as their top priority.

Whilst most children and young people reported that they felt safe in school and their communities, I was disappointed to learn from the work that a substantial minority of children and young people reported that they did not. They told me that bullying, risks from 'other people' and feeling alone were important matters that were affecting them. This was particularly true for children and young people from less affluent backgrounds.

Experiences of being hit, socially excluded and called names by other children and young people at school were relatively common experiences, particular for primary school children. We know that children who experience bullying are less likely to cope in school and are more likely to disengage<sup>2</sup>. Although the results from Beth Nesa' do not represent a direct causal link, young people who had been bullied tended to have lower levels of emotional well-being.

In my 'Plan for all Children and Young People 2016-19'<sup>3</sup>, I outlined my intentions for Welsh Government and public services to make significant progress on ensuring that by 2019:

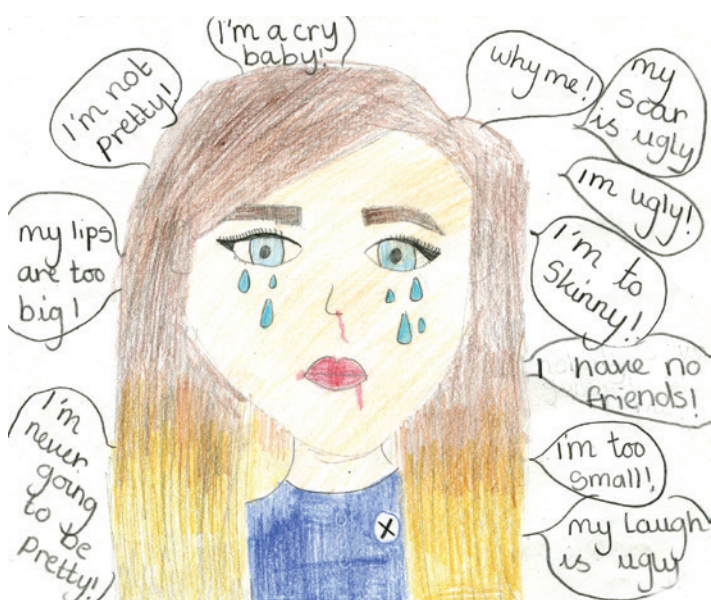
- **Children's contemporary experiences** of bullying are better understood and schools prevent and tackle bullying more effectively;
- **Children and young people** have access to the mental health services they need in a timely manner; and
- **Stronger programmes** are put in place to promote emotional health and wellbeing and support join-up between our health and social services, schools and youth services.



*Image from a cartoon by a primary school pupil.*

# METHODOLOGY

**My Ambassador schemes** for schools and community groups enable children and young people to inform my work through completing 'missions'. Ambassadors are children and young people in primary and secondary schools and in community groups who inform other children and adults about children's human rights and inform the Children's Commissioner about issues that are important to children in their community.



To explore children's perceptions of bullying, we engaged children in a projective exercise that allowed children and young people to express their feelings and experiences through an imaginary character called 'Sam'. We asked children to tell Sam's Story, specifying that Sam was their age, from their community and was experiencing bullying. Sam's gender was not specified.

Differentiating the task by age range, secondary-aged pupils were invited to create a blog or vlog to show Sam's experiences. For primary aged children a range of simple templates were provided to support them to create a picture, cartoon or narrative. Alongside both of these templates were scaffolding questions that could be used to help children structure their responses.

We also developed a workshop using drama and discussion techniques, which could be adapted for different requirements. The imaginary character of Sam was introduced in the workshop and participants were invited to work in small groups and create a still scene to convey Sam's experience. Each scene was then viewed by the other participants, to discuss what could be happening. Inviting the children to create situations based around an imaginary character created a safe environment in which no child nor young person needed to recount personal experience yet at the same time the technique enabled participant-led discussion, which was guided by the priorities and ideas of the young people.

*'Sad; lonely; in her own world' -  
Primary school pupil*

*'Worried that this will  
happen forever'  
Primary school pupil*

*'Distraught, heartbroken'*

*Primary school pupil*

*'She deprives herself of nutrients'*

*Youth Justice Group*

The children that had created the scene were also invited to reflect on the thoughts, motivations and responses of the character they represented, using a 'thought-tracking' technique. This section often gave very valuable information as to what children and young people perceived as the causes and effects of bullying.

To conclude the workshop, children and young people discussed what could be done to help 'Sam', and during this were able to share many of their ideas about effective approaches to preventing and tackling bullying.

## Who took part?

In addition to the 1510 children who submitted creative work, 757 children and young people took part in 33 Sam's Story workshops. 434 children were aged under 11 and 323 children and young people were aged between 11 and 18. The majority of the primary school-aged groups were accessed through our Super Ambassadors Network. Within the older age group of 323 young people, we took a proactive approach to ensure that we consulted with a diverse group of children and young people. Represented in this group are children and young people from Welsh medium education, a Safeguarding Group, children and young people with disabilities, Care Leavers, Young Carers, a Youth Council, Young People in Alternative Curriculum, a family support group, young people in the criminal justice system, LGBT+ groups and children and young people from Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) communities. 14 workshops were delivered bilingually in Welsh and English.



# ANALYSIS

## OF MATERIAL FROM CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE



Image from a cartoon by a primary school pupil.

■ **The material** gathered from children and young people consisted of 1510 items – drawing, cartoon strips and pieces of writing – and notes from workshops run with groups of children and young people. The visual material was gathered mainly from primary school-aged children while the writing and workshops covered both primary and secondary age groups.

■ **Both the visual and written material** were very rich in terms of details and insights into how children view bullying. The workshops generated valuable information about typical bullying scenarios and children's and young people's ideas of solutions to bullying.

■ **A framework was developed** to analyse the material, based initially on ideas generated through a meeting with staff at the Children's Commissioner's office and then developed further through pilot analysis. The framework focused and organised the material in terms of nine key themes:

1. **Sam** (the child experiencing bullying)
2. **The bully or bullies**
3. **The bullying**
4. **Sam's feelings** and immediate reactions to being bullied
5. **Sam's actions** in relation to the bullying
6. **Other people involved**
7. **Other people's actions**
8. **The outcomes of the bullying**
9. **Children's and young people's ideas** about solutions to bullying



Image from a cartoon by a primary school pupil.

Image from a cartoon by a primary school pupil.



## 1. Sam

■ **The two key features** of children's descriptions of Sam related to isolation and difference.

■ **Isolation.** Sam was often described as having no friends and she/he was also portrayed as a child who had just started a new school and therefore did not have friendship networks. It appears that children viewed not having friends as an important vulnerability factor in terms of likelihood of being bullied.

*'I enjoy knitting and as a result I am bullied and they say I "do the same things as their 90 year old grandma". They think that ten year old kids shouldn't do it and it is often the source of me being bullied.'*

*Primary school pupil*

*Mae pobl yn chwerthin ar sut mae Sam yn gwisgo dillad wahanol (People are laughing at how Sam wears different clothes)*

*Primary school pupil*



Image from a cartoon by a primary school pupil.



■ **Difference.** Sam was often portrayed as being different to other children in some way and this was implicitly or explicitly linked to being bullied. Differences included issues such as physical appearance, disabilities, poverty, ethnicity, religion and not fitting gender stereotypes. Additionally a range of other issues were described including being particularly good at academic work or sporting activities and liking to do different things to other children. This emphasised that the kinds of 'difference' associated with risk of being bullied are not always obvious ones.



Sam is a boy on stage dancing  
– he's not a stereotypical boy  
'He's not where you think  
he would be'

'There is a pressure to be a lad'  
Being bullied because he doesn't  
conform to the stereotype of boy.

2 boys in the scene  
– behaving like 'lads'

Sam is judged because he isn't in  
the right place, there is no respect  
for him.

Group mentioned 'Judging'  
– they are 'judging' him.

• Notes from workshop with secondary school pupils

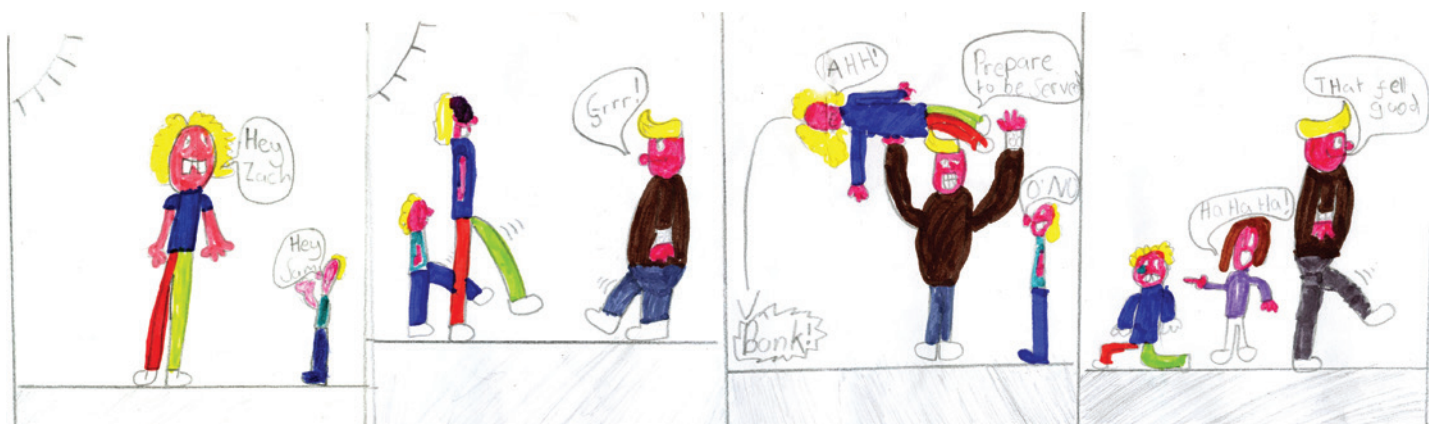


Image from a cartoon by a primary school pupil.

## 2. The bully or bullies

- **The descriptions of the bullies** in the material had less detail than those of Sam. The bully or bullies were variously portrayed as single individuals, pairs or groups. Their characteristics and motivations were not that often discussed. This is perhaps to be expected because this project focused on Sam's Story as a child experiencing bullying.

*'Invisible and not visible. Worried, terrible, small, sad, frightened, scared, embarrassed and like he's going to be useless. What is she going to do the next day?'*

*Primary school pupil*

## 3. The bullying

- **'Reasons' for the bullying.** As a result of the above, the explanations for why bullying was taking place tended to focus more on the themes of Sam's difference and isolation than on the motivations of the bully/ies.
- **Types of bullying.** Physical and verbal abuse were most common in the visual and narrative material which was mainly gathered from primary school children. Cyber bullying was much more often mentioned in the material gathered from secondary school children and was regarded by them as a major issue. Other forms of bullying less commonly mentioned were social exclusion, coercive acts such as taking a child's dinner money, and instances of specifically racist bullying. It was very common for several forms of bullying to be present in the same stories.



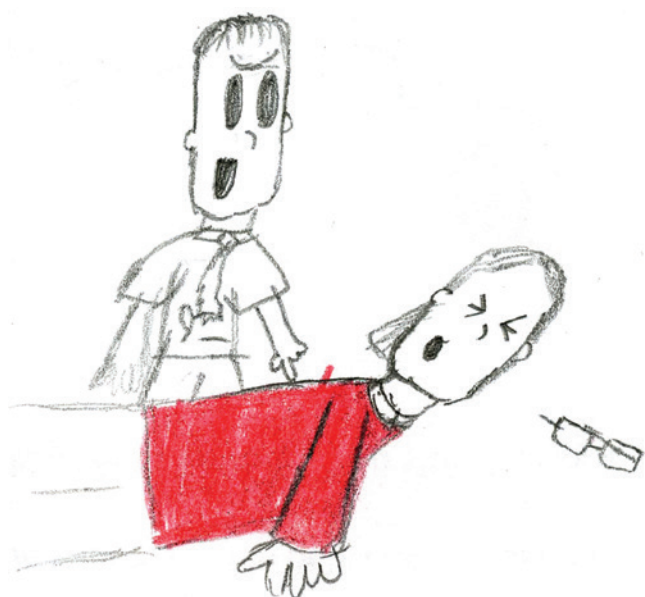


Image from a cartoon by a primary school pupil.

■ **Location.** The bullying described mostly took place in the school setting, and particularly in playgrounds and other outdoor areas. This may be partly a result of the Sam's Story activities mostly being undertaken within schools.

■ **Bystanders or witnesses to the bullying** were not commonly portrayed in the visual and narrative material which tended to focus on Sam and the bullies. However the freeze frame activities in the workshops provided an opportunity to explore this issue. It would seem that children who are bystanders often feel pulled in different directions (either towards helping Sam, colluding with the bully or ignoring the situation) and are unsure what to do. Teachers are occasionally included as bystanders, sometimes actively intervening and other times appearing to be unaware of, or possibly ignoring, the situation.

■ **The bullying scenarios** described ranged from one-off incidents to ongoing situations over several years, sometimes occurring every day. It is clear, though, that even isolated incidents of bullying are perceived by children as having potentially significant negative consequences.

*A boy kicked Sam every time he did good work*

*Primary school pupil*

*[The bully's] gang would push Sam in the road when cars were coming.*

*Primary school pupil*

*Discussion: the group felt that cyber bullying is the form of bullying that needs to be tackled and the form of bullying they are most fearful/aware of. They feel it's hidden, hard to see and difficult to prove or report. It's easy to see the physical effect to of a black eye from but you can't see a psychological effect. Described as 'mental bullying'*

*'Bullies are living in your pocket'*

*• Notes from workshop with secondary school pupils*





Image from a cartoon by a primary school pupil.

#### 4. Sam's feelings and reactions

- **The way that Sam feels** about and reacts to the bullying is very fully explored in the material.
- **Emotionally**, there is a lot of very strong and evocative language and imagery used to describe the impact of bullying on Sam. It is clear how damaging children perceive bullying to be.
- **Children also describe** some of Sam's potential reactions and behaviours as a result of being bullied. Sleep problems and social withdrawal are mentioned, and there is quite a strong emphasis on Sam not wanting to go to school. This highlights the possibility that attendance problems may be an indicator of possible bullying experiences.



Image from a cartoon by a primary school pupil.

#### 5. Sam's actions

- **Sam is often portrayed** as passive and not taking any independent action as a result of being bullied. Fear of the consequences (particularly more bullying) is commonly cited as a reason for this. Attempts to ignore or avoid the bullying are also sometimes described.
- **When Sam is shown as taking action**, by far the most common response is to tell someone, and teachers are much the most likely person to tell, with friends, parents and helping agencies also being regularly mentioned.
- **Confronting the bullies** seems generally to be perceived as risky and not a viable option.

## 6. Other people

- **There are broadly four groups** of other people identified in the material. In rough descending order of frequency these are teachers and other school staff, friends, parents and other family members, and other agencies. In some cases specific schemes within schools are mentioned.



Image from a cartoon by a primary school pupil.

## 7. Other people's actions

- **Other people are portrayed** in both active and responsive roles in the narratives. Friends and other children, for example, are often shown as noticing Sam being upset and offering support. Teachers and parents are also sometimes depicted in the same way.

*Hello, my name is Ben and I am 14 years. I have just begun a new school year; I am now in year 10. I have enjoyed the first three years off my life at this school and have made many new friends. However, I have recently noticed that an old friend has been acting different. Sam, is also 14 years old, we have known each other for years but have drifted apart over the years and have made new and different friends. I am worried about Sam. I have noticed a change in him as he looks seriously sad and depressed, I am aware he is struggling at home but there is definitely something else wrong. He is not his normal happy and loud self, he has slowly become more upset and reserved. I am unsure on what I can do to help; we hardly even speak anymore but I think I am the only one who has noticed this change. I don't know what is wrong and I don't know what to do ...*

*'Sam's Story' by a secondary school pupil*



■ **Teachers are predominantly** portrayed very actively and positively, usually being effective in resolving and stopping the bullying. Specific actions including telling off the bully, asking them to apologise and taking various other actions excluding or expelling them from school. Some less direct forms of action such as use of circle time or general group discussions with children about the impact of bullying are also sometimes represented as effective.

■ **Friends and other children take on a key**, and generally positive, role in many stories, offering support and comfort to Sam, acting on their behalf (e.g. telling a teacher) or sometimes enabling them to resolve the situation themselves by 'standing up' to the bully.

■ **Parents and other family members** are portrayed in a much more mixed way. There are a number of instances of parents appearing uninterested or unsympathetic to Sam, or of them suggesting that Sam should ignore, avoid or confront the bully. There are also regular instances where parents do take more positive action to support Sam or act on their behalf.

■ **The most common** other agency mentioned was Childline. Generally other agencies are seen as being helpful although children often seemed a little unsure about exactly how they might help.

■ **There were quite a few positive** mentions of specific schemes within school such as buddying schemes. These were sometimes depicted within the narratives, but more commonly were mentioned as a positive example of the resources that would be available to Sam in the school which the children attended.

*Sam was getting bullied by D, the school bully. It would not stop. He was getting physically abused, cyber bullied and was feeling sad. Sam is worried because he thinks this will carry on forever, in and out of school. Sam thought that he should tell someone, but he thought they would laugh and tell his friends. He told his mum and his mum phoned ChildLine (0800 1111) and told them about D. They said "We've had problems before with him" and they gave Sam some advice, to get away from D and to stay away, no matter what. He never got bullied again.*

*Image from a cartoon by a primary school pupil.*



## 8. Outcomes

- **The large majority of the narratives** had a positive ending. Mostly the bullying was described as having stopped or been resolved. Often the bullies apologised to Sam and it was common for the outcome of the scenario to be that Sam made friends with the bullies or with other children. It is interesting to note the connection between this outcome and the regular depictions of Sam's lack of friends and isolation at the start of the stories.
- **There were some more negative or inconclusive outcomes** which serve to illustrate children's views of the potential long-term negative impact of bullying.

## 9. Solutions

- In terms of children's and young people's ideas of how to tackle bullying there was quite a strong focus on **responding to individual incidents**. Many children were inclined to see adults as capable of resolving instances of bullying. There was a common emphasis on the issue of 'trust' in terms of having someone to talk to.
- One theme in children's ideas for more strategic and preventative responses was about **education and awareness-raising** – either specifically about bullying or about related issues such as respect for diversity.



Image from a cartoon by a primary school pupil.

*This made Sam feel like he was always going to be a victim. It also made him feel unwanted and like nobody cares about him. It made him feel claustrophobic. He was scared that if he told the teacher/an adult that C would get her gang on him. But most of all it made him feel sad.*

*Primary school pupil*

*he finally .. had the courage to tell a teacher because of the threat.*

*Primary school pupil*

*I would get a buddy bench or get big people to look after the small ones. People telling kids if they want to play with you and make friends*

*Primary school pupil*

*It would really help if they put a few friendship stops where I could go if I was feeling sad or lonely, where people would come and play with me. Or, by having a school anti-bullying policy or a school anti-bullying month to raise awareness.*

*Primary school pupil*

- Children and young people also mentioned a range of other **preventative and peer-related schemes** which they perceived could help with bullying.

### Ideas for educational and awareness-raising initiatives

- All students should do anti-bullying weeks to make everyone think about this
- Challenging stereotypes / Diversity
- Campaign to raise awareness
- Educating on why people are different
- Lectures for pupils on how important it is
- Parents should be informed about how important it is
- Make sure everyone knows what bullying is (as opposed to childish behaviour)
- Raise awareness of cyber bullying
- Ask police to talk to school about bullying
- PSE lessons about respect
- Addysu am fwlio (educate about bullying)
- Addysu disgyblion y gwahaniaeth rhwng ffraeo a bwlio (Educate pupils on the difference between an argument/quarrel and bullying)
- Cael mwy o bobl i ddod i fewn i siarad yn yr ysgolion (Have more people come in to talk in schools)
- Educate yourselves about bullying - KiVa<sup>4</sup>
- Llyfrau straeon bwlio yn y llyfrgell (books with stories about bullying in the library)
- 'Role models' - pobl enwog - i hyrwyddo gwrth-fwlio, ymddygiad bositif ac hapusrwydd ein hunain ac eraill (role models - famous people - to promote anti-bullying, positive behaviour and happiness within our selves and others)
- Pobl gwrth-fwlio yn dod i fewn (anti-bullying people come in)
- Siarad am bod yn saff ar y we/ar-lein (talk about being safe on the internet/online)
- Siarad hefo bob athro (speak with every teacher)
- Educate people about religion and races
- Show consequences of being involved and telling the teacher
- Show videos of bullying - what would you do?



- **There was some recognition of the issues** and needs of bullies also and seeing actions in this respect as one of the solutions to bullying.

*Make bullies understand.*

*Bullies don't know the impact.*

*Find out the background of the bully so that they can be helped to change their behaviour.*

*Make sure bully understands consequences of actions - e.g. getting told off.*

*Social skills - bullies go there at lunch*

*Talk to the bully and find out why.*

*Find out why children are bullying - support for the bullies as well.*

*Sorting out the bully's domestic issues.*

*Ask the bully why? Maybe they wouldn't know the answer.*

*Involve parents of the bullied child and the child who is bullying.*

# KEY FINDINGS

## FROM PROFESSIONALS WORKING WITH CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

**These findings** are based on notes taken from external meetings, evidence exchanges, teachers' workshops and from case studies supplied by nearly 300 professionals who took part, representing every local authority in Wales.

### The National Picture: Consistency

A number of participants expressed a wish for more consistency across schools within local authority areas and across Wales as a whole. The material as a whole suggests a very diverse and uneven picture.

Professionals expressed a desire for Welsh Government to provide leadership on this issue. However the 'Respecting Others' guidance produced by Welsh Government did not seem to be universally known, and the Welsh Government had received feedback from local authorities that it could be improved. At the time of publication, revision and expansion of this guidance is underway.



### Monitoring

There was some focus on the importance of schools keeping a **record of incidents of bullying**. This was seen as an important mechanism for understanding the scale of the issue and monitoring progress. However, there were concerns about accuracy, consistency and honesty in reporting. There were indications of **disincentives** for schools to monitor accurately, for example it was reported that there had been negative media coverage of a school that had done so. There are risks also of a 'league table' approach to this issue.

Participants noted that there was no standard or consistent national system for monitoring. An anti-racism organisation also noted the importance of recording bullying related to protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010, such as race, faith, gender and sexuality. There was less acknowledgement that monitoring recorded incidents would only present a partial picture of the scale of the issue; and of the potential value of self-report surveys of children and young people.

### The nature of bullying

Professionals recognised that, although there were certain typical characteristics that made a child more vulnerable to being bullied, there were also a very wide range of possible factors and that this was a complex issue. For instance in one group discussion it was noted that although socially isolated children might be more likely to be bullied, it was also possible that a very popular child would be bullied. Equally, issues such as being particularly



good at school, parental separation, privileged background, and so on, were all possible reasons for bullying. So this issue extends well beyond particular disadvantaged groups.

There was concern about various forms of bullying including socially excluding behaviour as well as physical and verbal bullying. This is a concern clearly reflected in children's feedback too. Professionals discussed cyber bullying as a particular challenge. One of the important additional issues about this was the fact that children's experience of this form of bullying could extend beyond school and could become relentless - "it doesn't stop at the school gate".

## Definitions of bullying

A recurring theme from professionals was the importance of clarity about what bullying is. This makes sense but there were suggestions that this could have negative consequences also.

A number of participants talked about the need to ensure that children and parents understood what bullying was and what it was not. The potential issue with this is that it implies that professionals are the ones who know what bullying is. There is a risk that children who feel bullied will be told that they are wrong. There were also some indications that this could become a way of schools controlling the extent of the problem.

Professionals appeared to indicate that there is a need for clarity about also flexibility on this issue.

## Consequences of bullying

Many participants recognised the range of negative consequences for children of bullying – including mental health issues, school attendance, and so on. However there were several comments that the issue still wasn't being taken seriously by some professionals.

## Interesting practice

Overall, many specific examples of interesting practice were mentioned by participants. These included local authority initiatives, initiatives in particular schools, work with specific target groups (e.g. children with a parent in prison), and work to tackle bullying affecting a specific groups, such as LGBT+ young people.

The implementation of KIVA is clearly an important development for Wales (see Case Study 5). It is also clear that student involvement in developing, implementing and sometimes leading initiatives is highly valued by those citing successful initiatives.



#### Case study 1:

### Cardiff Against bullying

*Cardiff Against Bullying* is a dedicated anti-bullying service sitting within the Local Education Authority. It provides advice, information, training and support about bullying to schools and other professionals and provides support to families and individual children affected by bullying. The team consists of:

- Two part-time project officers with responsibility for hate crime and respectful relationship projects who work with schools and other settings to deliver bespoke projects to address bullying behaviours and develop respectful relationships. Examples of work include group sessions with boys or girls to explore friendship issues, self esteem and confidence; and peer mentoring training for primary and secondary pupils.
- One casework officer who responds to referrals for one-to-one work with individuals affected

by bullying behaviours. This person is also developing a toolkit and training to assist schools to address low-level bullying.

- One training and development officer who is responsible for delivering training to professionals working with children and young people and organising network events.

This service was also mentioned in a case study from a school in Cardiff (Bishop's Childs CiW Primary) who mentioned the development of a Key Stage 2 playground bullying rota to support the school's 'Learn, Share and Care' motto:

*'We have had support from CAB in Cardiff - Cardiff's anti bullying team. Our Year 6 pupils have had training on what makes a good playground buddy before we launched our playground buddy system.'*

## Case study 2:

**Conwy**

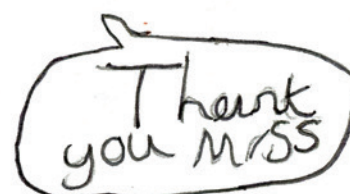
Conwy Education Services Healthy Schools Scheme have run anti-bullying conferences for primary and secondary schools which train teachers alongside members of schools councils. These take place prior to Anti-Bullying Week in November. The aim is to encourage children, young people and teachers to run school campaigns during that week. The scheme has also provided a model anti-bullying policy, including a version for children and young people which can be adapted to suit each school.

*'The fact that we train pupils alongside their teachers is the key component. Teachers often comment that the children and young people start planning their activities on the journey back to school following the conference and it is often the children's /young people's energy which ensures activities take place. Children's versions of the policies are also key in that they give pupils an understanding of their role and responsibilities in helping to tackle bullying and promoting a culture of openness'*

Conwy Youth Service also work with young people on bullying issues. This has included:

- Internet Safety sessions in schools that cover cyber bullying and bullying in general. These include a peer education element with young people creating videos or posters that are then shared with other pupils
- Working with a specific school council (Ysgol Bryn Elian) to create a video about homophobia, which young people had identified as an issue.

*'The resulting DVD is very simple but highly effective. The young people are very proud of the result which they presented to the Head of Ysgol Bryn Elian. This DVD was used in our nomination for the Youth Work in Wales Excellence awards and contributed to us being awarded Outstanding Schools-based Youth Work Project 2015.'*



### Case study 3:

## Schools in South West Wales

Several primary schools in Carmarthenshire (Prendergast CP, Tenby VC CiW Primary, Ysgol Gymunedol Peniel and Ysgol yr Hendy) submitted case studies. A common theme from several of these schools was about the underlying ethos of the school:

*We are a Values school. This helps to provide a framework for us all to work within. The children are taught about the Values; we have a whole school approach. The language is common for all stakeholders. The children thus check in/out effectively to communicate how they are feeling ... Values education gives us all a common language around which any issues can be discussed.*

The use of Restorative Practice was also mentioned as a key element by two of the schools:

*Restorative practice: try to act immediately to resolve issues rather than leave it to the next day, where possible.*

And a third component was the participation and empowerment of children:

*Plant yn cytuno a chreu polisiâu e.e. polisi bwlio a'r plant i gyd i'w lofnodi. Meithrin y plant i wneud penderfyniadau rhwng beth sy'n iawn a'r hyn sy' ddim yn dderbyniol. Gwaith y Cyngor Ysgol. [Children agree and create policies e.g. bullying policy for all children to sign. Encourage the children to make decisions between what is right and what is unacceptable. The Work of the School Council]*

## Restorative Approach

Schools taking a Restorative Approach deploy a number of methods including circle time for children struggling with attendance and regular opportunities to share feelings. They train children in primary and secondary schools to work in pairs as peer mediators. They learn to ask 5 simple questions:

1. What happened?
2. What were you thinking and how were you feeling?
3. Who's been affected and how?
4. What do you need?
5. How are we going to move forward?

Peer mediators check in with adults after sessions and are aware of the need to report safeguarding incidents, but they can provide early intervention and prevention.

## Case study 4:

**Ysgol Bryn Gwalia**

A submission from Ysgol Bryn Gwalia – a primary school in Mold, Flintshire – focused on a Home/School Liaison Officer:

*We have many [anti-bullying] strategies in place but undoubtedly the most effective has been the appointment of our 'Home / School Liaison Officer'. She is always available and is the known contact for both children in school time and parents who wish to discuss any issue including bullying. She runs courses for parents and also helps them with any issues they may have both school related and personal. She attempts to signpost them to other services they may find helpful, therefore has the role of a professional friend. From a staff point of view, she saves a lot of teaching time by investigating issues, speaking to both children and adults and putting monitoring and plans in place to resolve issues which usually are not classroom based. Since her appointment incidents in school have reduced and others failed to escalate as had happened in the past.*

## Case study 5:

**Safer Wales Inclusive Service**

A distinctive aspect of this submission was discussion of the needs of perpetrators of bullying. Safer Wales Street Life does group work with young people who are 'chronic non-school attendees'. Safer Wales Inclusive Service does one-to-one and group work with young females aged 12 to 16 years old who are at risk of sexual exploitation. The focus is on encouraging positive lifestyle choices. The submission commented that there is a need for:

*More focus and understanding of the needs of those who are exhibiting bullying behaviours requires exploration. Very often, these vulnerable children are seen as perpetrators with little thought and consideration given as to why they are exhibiting the need for power and control over others. The person experiencing the bullying needs to be 'listened' to - sometimes young people do not verbalise that they are experiencing bullying and therefore professionals need to use observational skills to understand the behaviours that they are exhibiting. Contingency plans need to be put in place for continued confidence to report further episodes of bullying. Young people who are not 'heard' in the first instance very quickly lose confidence in those adults and professionals who have a duty and responsibility to safeguard. A multi agency response by professionals involved with the care and development of these children could identify risk indicators such as neglect which impact on the young person's emotional and physical welfare affecting their behaviour; self esteem and confidence.*



## Case study 6:

**KIVA, Bangor University**

The KiVa antibullying programme was developed by Professor Christina Salmivalli at the Turku University, funded by the Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture. KiVa is an acronym for “Kiusaamista Vastaan”, or “Against bullying”. The Finnish word kiva also means being nice, kind, or friendly. KiVa was evaluated in Finland, between 2007–2009 in a randomised control trial with 30,000 students and their teachers. The trial showed significant reductions in all types of bullying, including cyber, racist, social exclusion, verbal, and physical. Since 2009 the programme was disseminated across Finland and 90% of all Finnish comprehensive schools now use the programme (Salmivalli & Poskiparta, 2012) and it has demonstrated year-on-year reductions in child reported bullying and victimisation.

KiVa is based on the evidence that bullying is a group phenomenon and the way that bystanders,

who are neither bullies nor victims, behave is crucial in maintaining or ending to bullying. Bullies gain status in the peer group. If bystanders do not reward bullies, for example by laughing when a child gets bullied, they do not get the social rewards that they desire so influencing bystanders helps to preventing and reducing school bullying. KiVa has universal, school-wide, and indicated actions for when bullying occurs. Universal actions target all pupils, to raise awareness of bullying and how the peer group might be maintaining it, enhance anti-bullying attitudes, and provide safe strategies to support and defend victims. There are lessons for all Key Stage 2 (KS2) classes and on-line games linked to the lessons that children can play at home and at school. The on-line games rehearse the knowledge and skills children have learned in the lessons. The indicated actions are used when a bullying case occurs. A trained anti-bullying KiVa team address cases using structured guidelines.

**KiVa in the UK**

In 2012, a pilot trial in KS2 classes in 17 UK schools, run from Bangor University, showed significant reductions in bullying and victimisation. The KiVa lessons were mapped on to the Welsh and English Personal Social curricula and found to cover over 50%, including promoting teamwork, friendship skills, and empathy. Teachers reported that lessons were age-appropriate and well-scripted, and the definition of bullying was helpful both in school and when talking with parents. The success of the pilot led to the Bangor Centre becoming the registered hub for UK dissemination and further trials are taking place in the UK. Over 100 primary schools, mainly in Wales, are now trained and registered with the programme and KiVa is spreading across England with support from a team of local trainers coordinated from Bangor University. By 2017, 500 teachers have been trained and are delivering the programme to over 12,000 7-11 year old pupils. KiVa has been receiving excellent school inspection reports and recent results from 41 early-implementer schools, that have delivered the programme for over a year, demonstrate significant reductions of approximately 14% in both victimisation and bullying. KiVa is a whole school programme, involving all school staff, and a case study from one highly successful school has helped to identify factors that make KiVa implementation successful that have been incorporated into the training for new schools.



Image of 'Sam' by primary school pupil

# LEARNING

## THE LESSONS FROM SAM'S STORY PRIORITIES FOR IMPROVEMENT

**Sam feels that there ought to be a shared understanding that bullying can take many forms. Sam would feel supported by a respectful culture within the school that celebrates diversity and challenges stereotypes.**

■ **Welsh Government** should place a statutory duty on schools to record all incidences and types of reported bullying. This will require a clear definition of bullying, formed following full consultation with children and young people. This will enable schools to better perform the Public Sector Equality Duty under the Equality Act 2010 by recording and disaggregating incidents of bullying in relation to each protected characteristic and use this information when reviewing their equality objectives and monitoring the impact of their anti-bullying policies.

■ **Schools in Wales** should adopt a Child Rights Based Approach to Education and promote a culture that supports children to learn about rights and respect the rights of others. Estyn's report 'Action on Bullying' in 2014 found evidence that in schools which had a strong commitment to children's rights and an ethos of respecting rights, valuing equality and promoting diversity, pupils reported lower instances of bullying. The Children's Commissioner for Wales' 'The Right Way to Education'<sup>5</sup> is a practical guide for schools to embed a child's rights approach.

■ **Schools should also** complete regular pupil-led surveys or research into the experiences of bullying in their school and use this to inform and evaluate their approach. This would ensure teachers and leaders are aware of the prevalence of bullying and particular types of behaviour within the school but also create the shared understanding and ownership of any actions that are then taken to address the concerns raised. Survey results can be used to create new behaviour strategies or agree school values or rules linked to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and measure the effectiveness of new strategies.

■ **Welsh Government** should make children's human rights education a compulsory aspect of the curriculum. The Curriculum Reform programme should embed learning about the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child across all parts of the new curriculum. This should include linking the Digital Competency Framework to children's rights and support children and young people to understand they have the same rights online as they do offline.

**Trusted relationships with friends and adults are key to preventing bullying but also in allowing Sam the freedom and strength to tell, should it happen. These would also avoid isolation and promote togetherness and positive wellbeing.**

■ **Estyn's 2017 report** 'A review of healthy relationships education' found that schools that create an ethos where pupils understand the importance of equality and respect the rights of others are most effective in delivering healthy relationships education. This ethos enables pupils to build resilience and grow in self-esteem and confidence. Welsh Government, local authorities and schools should implement all recommendations contained within Estyn's report.

■ **Welsh Government's** curriculum reform team should ensure that as part of establishing a rights-based curriculum, children should be supported to learn about healthy relationships and how to positively resolve conflict. In 2016, the Children's Commissioner for Wales collaborated with Welsh Government, NSPCC, Cardiff University, Welsh Women's Aid and young people to produce 'AGENDA: A young people's guide to making positive relationships matter'<sup>6</sup>. This resource provides a range of creative ideas, tried and tested in schools in Wales, that enable young people to lead healthy relationships education to prevent and combat bullying related to sexism and homophobia.

■ **Welsh Government,** through the working group and pioneer schools developing the Health and Wellbeing Area of Learning Experience should consider how the whole school environment can be adapted to support learners' needs to prevent or tackle mental ill-health and improve wellbeing. This includes exploring how educational settings can be the primary sites for evidence-based prevention and early-intervention programmes. The T4CYP programme has broad aims to improve access to clinical services when required but also to develop and implement programmes for prevention and early intervention. By working in conjunction with the T4CYP programme, robust mechanisms can be developed to plan and develop pathways for prevention, early help and support for children and young people in educational settings. There is also the potential for early help to be provided in school sites by suitably trained health, youth work or education staff including psychological therapies to individuals and groups and this should also be considered by Welsh Government in order to promote strength and resilience within pupils.



*Image from a cartoon by a primary school pupil*

**Sam would appreciate clarity on what to do if you're a bystander or a witness**

■ **Children benefit from opportunities** like circle time and other fora in which they can reflect and discuss peer relationships and behaviour. This should be enabled beyond Foundation Phase and children and young people should have facilitated pastoral sessions to continue these discussions throughout their education.

■ **Welsh Government's 'Respecting Others'** guidance should require schools to establish robust anti-bullying strategies based on approaches supported by research evidence and that draw on the views and experiences of the whole school community (students, parents, staff and governors). They should widely publicise information about these to pupils in a language and format that is accessible to children.

**Sam wants his teachers to be supported in their role so that their positive contribution to resolution can be guaranteed.**

■ **Welsh Government** should ensure the review of its 'Respecting Others' Guidance addresses the recommendations within Estyn's Action on Bullying (2014) Report, which highlighted a general lack of common understanding about bullying, by providing clarity about a baseline definition but also flexibility to recognise that children and young people are affected differently by bullying behaviours. The guidance should also ensure that the views and opinions of children and young people should be taken into account in tackling bullying in their school.

■ **Welsh Government**, along with the education consortia, need to ensure there is a strategic and long-term plan to developing and sharing a consistent approach to tackling bullying across Wales, and that the guidance is reviewed regularly based on the evidence-based practice and feedback from stakeholders including children and young people.

■ **Initial Teacher Education** and ongoing training should ensure that teachers recognise the importance of the protected characteristics, the importance of children feeling positive about their identity, and to know how to recognise and respond to incidents of bullying in a timely and positive manner.

■ **Along with the Equality and Human Rights Commission**, we will explore opportunities to work in collaboration to raise awareness of the public sector equality duty in schools.

**Sam may also benefit from parental engagement and awareness of bullying.**

■ **Schools should** widely publicise and widely communicate their anti-bullying policies with parents and include information about parents' role within it.

■ **Welsh Government** should ensure the review of 'Respecting Others' guidance requests schools to proactively ask parents / carers to inform them if any absence is due to bullying, and record this.

■ **Local authorities** should review training on bullying provided to the whole school community, including school governors.

**Sam also wants to identify the needs of the bully too, so that these can be met as another route to tackle bullying.**

■ **Schools should** establish a preventative approach and enable children to recognise and identify bullying behaviour at the earliest point. This includes supporting children to identify their own behaviour as bullying. Taking a Children's Rights Approach to Education supports pupils to understand the impact of their actions in relation to others and encourages schools to recognise where children are experiencing difficulties that are causing them to act in particular ways. Embedding the principle of equality and non-discrimination in particular will assist in seeing the needs of all children in the school.

■ **A prompt response** to bullying should include action to support children that are bullying to reflect on their behaviour and explore the underlying motivations to it.



*Image from a cartoon by a primary school pupil*

# APPENDICES

# LAWS AND POLICIES

## Children's Rights

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) is an international agreement that protects the human rights of children under the age of 18. The Rights of Children and Young Persons (Wales) Measure 2011 was passed at the National Assembly for Wales in 2011. It places a duty on Welsh Ministers to have due regard to the rights and obligations within the UNCRC and its optional protocols. In this regard, Sam's Story brings a special attention to the impacts of bullying and is particularly relevant to:

**Article 2:** The Convention applies to all children, whatever their race, religion or abilities; whatever they think or say, whatever type of family they come from. It doesn't matter where children live, what language they speak, what their parents do, whether they are boys or girls, what their culture is, whether they have a disability or whether they are rich or poor. No child should be treated unfairly on any basis.

**Article 4:** Governments have a responsibility to take all available measures to make sure children's rights are respected, protected and fulfilled.

**Article 5:** Governments should respect the rights and responsibilities of families to direct and guide their children so that, as they grow, they learn to use their rights properly.

**Article 6:** Children have the right to live. Governments should ensure that children survive and develop healthily.

**Article 8:** Children have the right to an identity.

**Article 12:** When adults are making decisions that affect children, children have the right to say what they think should happen and have their opinions taken into account.

**Article 15:** Children have the right to meet together and to join groups and organisations,

as long as it does not stop other people from enjoying their rights. In exercising their rights, children should respect the rights, freedoms and reputations of others.

**Article 19:** Children have the right to be protected from being hurt and mistreated, physically or mentally.

**Article 29:** Children's education should develop each child's personality, talents and abilities to the fullest. It should encourage children to respect others, human rights and their own and other cultures.

## Respecting Others Guidance:

This Welsh Government Guidance, revised in 2012, is a suite of anti-bullying materials predominantly aimed at maintained primary, secondary and special schools, and pupil referral units. Again, whilst this is a non-statutory document, it provides school governors, head teachers, teachers and other staff with information on how to prevent and respond to bullying on a range of issues, including:

- Bullying around race, religion and culture;
- Bullying around special educational needs and disabilities;
- Cyberbullying;
- Homophobic bullying; and
- Sexist, sexual and transphobic bullying.

# WHAT IS BULLYING

## Equality Act 2010

Equality Act 2010 - brought together various pieces of equality and anti-discrimination legislation into one single Act. In doing so, it created nine 'protected characteristics' and prohibited the unfair treatment of individuals on the basis of their:

- age;
- disability;
- gender reassignment;
- marriage and civil partnership;
- pregnancy and maternity;
- race;
- religion or belief;
- sex;
- sexual orientation.

The Act requires local authorities and other public bodies, including schools, to have due regard for the need to:

- eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct that is prohibited by the Act;
- advance equality of opportunity between people who share a relevant protected characteristic and those who do not; and
- foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not. “

There is no one single agreed definition as to what bullying is and a number of differing aspects are included or excluded within the many definitions available.

For the purpose of this work, we have worked with the definitions of bullying outlined in the Welsh Government's 'Respecting Others' Guidance. They state that most people consider that bullying is:

- Deliberately hurtful (including aggression)
- Repeated often over a period of time (whilst recognising that even a one-off incident can leave a pupil traumatised and nervous of future recurrence)
- Difficult for victims to defend themselves against.

The guidance also identified that although there are many forms of bullying, there are three main types, which are:

- Physical
- Verbal
- Indirect

**Children's Commissioner for Wales**

**Oystermouth House**

**Phoenix Way**

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**[@childcomwales \(twitter\)](https://twitter.com/childcomwales)**

**[YouTube: commissionerwales](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC0W0W0W0W0W0W0W0W0W0W0W)**

## **SCHOOLS THAT TOOK PART BY SUBMITTING ARTWORK**

Below is a list of all the schools who took part in our consultation by submitting artwork, which is displayed across this report. There is a list of all the other organisations who took part through various means, on our website.

Ysgol Penyffordd  
High Cross Primary  
Ysgol yr Hafod, Johnstown  
Spittal VC School  
Ysgol y Cribarth  
Ysgol Bryn Coch  
Whitestone Primary  
Mountain Lane Primary  
STAR Communities First  
Ysgol Penbarras  
St Roberts Catholic Primary  
Coed Eva Primary  
Roath Park Primary  
Abermorddu Primary  
Ysgol Llandudoch  
Radnor Primary  
Cradoc CP School  
Ysgol Caer Drewyn  
Penygawsi Primary School  
Caerphilly Junior Forum  
Parkland Primary  
Ysgol Llywelyn  
Creunant Primary  
Blenheim Road Community Primary School  
Olchfa  
Millbank Primary  
Bishop Childs CIW Primary  
YGG Login Fach  
Oak Field Primary - Barry  
Crwys Primary  
Ysgol Maes y Gwendraeth  
Newport High School  
Pillgwenlly Primary  
Bishopston Primary  
Ysgol Bodafon  
Lliswerry High School  
Birchgrove Comprehensive  
Ysgol y Creuddyn  
Maendy Primary  
Blaenymaes Primary

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1. What Next? 2016 [www.childcomwales.org.uk/publications/what-next](http://www.childcomwales.org.uk/publications/what-next)
2. 'The Right to Learn, 2014' [www.childcomwales.org.uk/publications/](http://www.childcomwales.org.uk/publications/)
3. 'A Plan for all Children and Young People 2016-19' [www.childcomwales.org.uk/publications/](http://www.childcomwales.org.uk/publications/)
4. KiVa: Anti-Bullying programme, see page 26 for details
5. 'The Right Way', 2017 [www.childcomwales.org.uk/publications/](http://www.childcomwales.org.uk/publications/)
6. Agenda, 2016: [www.agenda.wales](http://www.agenda.wales)