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28th November 2011
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WLGA • CLILC

Ms Ann Jones AM
Chair
Communities, Equality and Local Government Committee
National Assembly for Wales
Cardiff Bay
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Dear Ms Jones

Committee Inquiry into Disability Related Harassment

Thank you for the opportunity to present evidence to members of the Communities, Equality and Local Government Committee as part of their Inquiry into Disability Related Harassment. I am sorry this additional information is so late – I thought I had already replied and then discovered I had not so please accept my apologies for any inconvenience this late response may have been caused.

I was asked to provide a supplementary note for the Committee on two issues which arose from our discussions, namely:

- The protocol in place for sharing information regarding vulnerable adults
- Work within schools about disability related harassment.

Please find attached a short note which aims to provide additional information on the information sharing protocol and a briefing on the situation with schools which I hope is of use to the Committee in their deliberations however if you require further information please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely

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Supplementary Note - Communities, Equality and Local Government Committee

The protocol in place for sharing information regarding vulnerable adults

The current position is that interim policies and procedures guidance for sharing information on vulnerable people has been issued (and mirrors that which exists for child protection) and can be downloaded from the Social Services Improvement Agency website at:

<http://www.ssiacymru.org.uk/7200>

This work has recently been subject to a Ministerial task group where 'In Safe Hands' (the relevant guidance) was reviewed with a view to updating it. It is expected that will be done via legislation in the Social Services Bill which will place the protection of vulnerable adults on a statutory footing via mechanisms similar to LSCBs. The WLGA were involved in this work and support the proposals for legislation, which we expect to be announced in a Ministerial Statement and consultation to commence early 2012.

Issues of this nature would be picked up by the safeguarding agenda of local authorities and their Adult Protection Committees locally. These groups include all the necessary partners so that if partners were aware of any serious cases/issues these could be highlighted and actions would be passed onto relevant agencies or partnerships to address issues highlighted. In terms of information sharing we have to ensure an individual has mental capacity in the first instance and if they have they make the choice regarding any of their information being shared.

There are some particular concerns among local authorities in relation to GPs not sharing information however the experience in one authority is that some people have specifically asked not to have their details shared but generally cases are discussed in multidisciplinary teams which act as a good process for information sharing and this is being refined locally. Sharing information on vulnerable people is a challenging and complex area and one where issues are being resolved locally.

In addition to the above, the view from the ADSS Cymru is:

"A fundamental dilemma exists with regard to the sharing of information. On the one hand, organisations wish to address individual rights as determined by legislation and yet a broader view about sharing information can also be extremely positive. This will continue to be a matter that is carefully considered by Social Services and other organisations. There is no doubt that the understanding for the need to share information between organisations has improved. The practicalities to achieve the desired aim to share appropriate information are not always straightforward."



Communities, Equality and Local
Government Committee

Disability Related Harassment
Additional Note

21st October 2011



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Work within Schools addressing disability related harassment

1. The new Respecting Others: anti bullying guidance 2011 was published on 10th October 2011 and provides new guidance and practical solutions on preventing and responding to incidents of bullying in schools.

There are five new guidance documents:

- bullying around race, religion and culture
- bullying around special educational needs and disabilities
- cyberbullying
- homophobic bullying
- sexist, sexual and transphobic bullying.

2. This new guidance supplements Respecting Others: Anti-Bullying Guidance issues in September 2003 and sets out solutions for tackling certain types of bullying and harassment.
3. The new guidance on bullying around special educational needs (SEN) and disabilities is welcomed by the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) and local authorities as it sets out how to manage and monitor bullying. The guidance also contains a section on examples of school approaches and activities, which have been informed by children, young people and schools.
4. Schools are currently implementing the bullying guidance from 2003 and have been active in producing anti bullying strategies whilst also having activities through out the year and in anti – bullying week to raise awareness and address specific issues and needs. However, this new guidance will provide a new, enhanced set of solutions for preventing and responding to incidents of bullying, specifically in this case around disability, and is to be welcomed. It is obviously too early to see how schools are responding to this new guidance as it has only just been issued. However, they will continue to work on the good practice that has already been seen and to further enhance the school experience for all children and young people.

5. Under the Welsh Government (WG) policy agenda 'We are on the way: A Policy Agenda to Transform the Lives of Disabled Children and Young People' the WG set out a number of actions for improving the lives of disabled children and young people. Of these a sum of over £9 million was made available for four years up to 2009/10 for 'Unlocking the Potential of Special Schools' in order to enhance provision, promote inclusion and identify and disseminate best practice. This is an important element of ensuring that disabled children and young people feel a part of the school setting and that they are valued. Improving the inclusion of disabled children and young people can help to reduce incidences of bullying and harassment.
6. The WG also issued 'Promoting Disability Equality in Schools: Guidance for Head teachers and teachers in Wales'. This sets out, amongst other things, information for training and development. Training and development of school staff is important in further enhancing inclusion and a whole school approach to addressing bullying and harassment. Staff need to be aware that disabled children and young people are vulnerable to bullying and that they need to reassure them that their concerns will be taken seriously.
7. Although these documents are now a number of years old they have contributed to creating school settings which are inclusive and respectful of a child or young persons need.

Examples of schools addressing disability issues:

8. A number of schools across Wales implement a 'Buddy System' for pupils. This system uses a mentor approach to promote inclusion. In these schools an able bodied pupil is a mentor for a pupil with a disability or SEN and they are paired together for a period of time to encourage integration into the whole school. This approach has been very successful at breaking down barriers and promoting a whole school approach. This type of approach has been used in a number of ways and creates an ethos of an integrated school which in term can help to significantly reduce the incidents of disability related bullying.

9. Schools across Wales also promote the 'respect' agenda where every child or young person in the school is respected irrespective of race, sexuality, disability etc. Once again this approach encourages an integrated whole school approach and encourages pupils to see each other as equal.

10. The WLGA is in the process of developing a set of guides for schools on the new equality duties under the Equality Act 2010. These guides will set out best practice and policy in relation to equality issues including disability. They will raise potential areas of concern and indicate how schools and local authority Equality Officers can address them.

Conclusion

11. The WLGA recognises that there are a number of different practices across schools and settings in Wales which promotes inclusion of all children and young people. This integrated school approach is at the forefront of tackling disability related harassment and ensuring that every child or young person irrespective of their abilities feels a valued member of the school or setting. Approaches such as the 'Buddy System' ensure that this integration is a whole school approach.

12. The WLGA welcomes the new guidance and hopes that it will help to continue to imbed the good practice that is already seen across Wales, from training for staff, work with parents and promoting a respect agenda.

For further information please contact:

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