Main findings

Pupils

1. Around half of all pupils say they have personal experience of peer-on-peer sexual harassment and three quarters of all pupils report seeing other pupils experiencing this. Nearly all pupils understand how peer-on-peer sexual harassment can have a negative impact on young people's emotional and mental health.

2. A majority of female pupils (61%) report having personal experience of peer-on-peer harassment and many (82%) report seeing others experience it. This compares with a lower proportion of male pupils (29% and 71% respectively).

3. Peer-on-peer sexual harassment is more prevalent online and outside school than in school. Young people have substantial experience of harassment by their peers via the mobile phone, social media and gaming sites. This includes:

- online bullying

- posting hurtful comments especially about appearance

- asking for, sending and sharing nude or semi-nude photographs

- 'catfishing'

- unsolicited friend requests or demands for nude photos by strangers or those with a fake social media profile

- negative attitudes towards girls in digital games

4. The most common forms of peer-on-peer sexual harassment during the school day are pupils catcalling and making hurtful comments, making homophobic comments (mainly towards boys), and comments about appearance.

5. Generally, pupils do not tell teachers when they experience sexual harassment. This is because it happens so regularly, they often either only tell a friend or keep it to themselves. They feel that it has become

normalised behaviour and say that teachers are not aware of the extent of the problem. In addition, pupils say teachers often dismiss incidences as trivial or encourage pupils to ignore them. Nearly half of pupils who said they had experienced sexual harassment from their peers report that they kept sexual harassment to themselves.

6. LGBTQ+ pupils have substantial personal experiences of verbal homophobic harassment, with many saying that homophobic bullying is happening all the time and that this is the most common type of harassment in their school.

7. Many pupils experience the negative impact of peer pressure around expectations of the way they should look and the consequent body shaming and bullying if their bodies do not conform with a certain image of beauty or fitness. Pupils report particular issues around the length and fit of the school skirt where girls are bullied by other girls if their skirts are too long and sexually harassed by boys if they are too short.

8. A minority of boys speak about being personally involved in sexually harassing their peers, including pressurising girls to send nude photographs. Although they acknowledge that it is wrong, many boys say that sharing nude photographs of girls amongst their friends and boasting about the number of nude photographs they have in their possession is commonplace.

9. Many pupils across the whole age range say they have not had enough sex and relationships education. Older pupils in many schools report that they have had no sex education at all and are very keen for more advice and guidance and opportunities to discuss sex and relationships in a safe and comfortable environment. Many pupils value well-delivered personal and social education lessons but they say that they do not have enough opportunities to discuss important issues such as respect, healthy relationships, harmful sexual behaviours and LGBTQ+ rights. Many say that they want to see more time given to discuss 'real life issues' in school.

10. Pupils speak highly about presentations by external speakers and experts about sex education and healthy relationships. They value having lessons from 'real life people who talk about real life problems' and want to see more of this type of learning.

Schools

1. In the most effective schools, leaders promote a strong ethos of respect in all areas of their work. They prioritise wellbeing and adopt a whole-school, proactive approach to promoting and celebrating diversity. In these schools, leaders employ high quality pastoral staff and set high expectations. Policies, procedures and guidance for staff and pupils link clearly to aims and objectives which ensure that wellbeing is at the forefront of the school's work.

2. In many schools, there is a strong team approach to safeguarding. Staff have regular and appropriate training, understand their responsibility with regard to safeguarding children and discharge their safeguarding duties well. Normally, leaders respond suitably to formal complaints by parents or pupils about peer-on-peer sexual harassment and make appropriate referrals to external agencies such as social services or the police. The majority of schools use a restorative approach to poor behaviour, bullying and known cases of harassment and use external agencies well to support their work. This usually includes providing suitable support such as counselling for victims.

3. There is a general inconsistency across school staff about their understanding of what constitutes peer-on-peer sexual harassment including wider issues relating to equality and diversity and how they impact on pupils.

4. Even within schools, there is inconsistency in the way in which teachers respond to incidences of sexual harassment. In the worst cases, teachers dismiss or ignore incidences of verbal sexual harassment by pupils towards their peers.

5. In most schools, leaders, teachers and support staff are unaware of the high prevalence of peer-on-peer sexual harassment amongst young people because pupils do not systematically tell them about it. There is sharp polarisation between what pupils say is happening and what staff know. Sexual harassment is a societal problem that is not exclusive to education settings and schools often deal with problems that originate from outside of school. Generally, schools respond suitably when reacting to reported peer-on-peer sexual harassment but are not proactive enough in their approach to prevent it from taking place. Overall, schools do not provide enough opportunities for pupils to talk about peer-on-peer sexual harassment openly.

6. In most schools, there are suitable systems and processes for staff to record concerns and actions. Generally, staff use such systems regularly, and leaders respond swiftly to new information. Overall, schools use digital and

online systems well to log incidences of bullying and harassment. Records generally outline the nature of the incident and a narrative of how these issues have developed and are resolved.

7. Despite the fact that schools generally record behaviour and bullying incidents, they do not make productive use of the data and information available to them to categorise and analyse incidences of peer-on-peer bullying and harassment well enough or identify trends. This hinders schools from having an accurate picture of the extent of different types of bullying and harassment, such as sexual harassment. In many cases, schools do not systematically log incidences of sexual harassment and, often, their classification of 'bullying' is too broad and does not enable the school to record and evaluate instances of homophobic, sexist or racially motivated bullying.

8. Because of the issues detailed above, many leaders do not use information about trends in pupil behaviour and the impact of subsequent actions to deal with them to evaluate the effectiveness of their work. In addition, in many schools, leaders do not make enough use of the findings of the biennial 'Student Health and Wellbeing Report' (Page *et al.,* 2021) produced by School Health Research Network (SHRN) to plan provision.

9. In around half of schools, leaders have begun to develop suitable provision for the Health and Wellbeing Area of Learning Experience (AOLE) (Welsh Government, 2020a) of the Curriculum for Wales for one year group, usually Year 7 or Year 8 Overall, there is adequate inclusion of topics covering healthy relationships for these year groups. In a few schools, leaders ensure appropriate provision for personal and social education (PSE) across the whole age range, including for pupils in the sixth form. This provision is a blend of dedicated PSE lessons, assemblies, workshops and some coverage in other subject lessons.

10. There is too much variation in the time allocated for PSE across schools in Wales and not enough consideration of the breadth and depth to which PSE topics are covered as pupils progress through the school. In most schools, largely due to the pressures of the current curriculum, there are no regular PSE lessons for pupils at key stage 4 or those in the sixth form. The pandemic and remote learning have impacted disproportionately on the provision for PSE and provision from external partners temporarily stopped during the lockdown periods.

11. In a small minority of schools, leaders actively elicit pupils' views on personal and social issues, including peer sexual harassment, and respond well to issues as they emerge or when they are shared by pupils and staff.

Examples of strong practice include 'concerns' boxes placed in discreet areas, a 'PSE Suggestions Box' in classrooms, older pupil mentors on duty at breaks and a pupil LGBTQ+ reference group which provides advice and support for school leaders on diversity matters.

12. All schools value the support and collaboration of external agencies, such as the school police officer and youth workers, to supplement their PSE provision. However, schools report that there is now limited external specialist support for sex education which has a negative impact on the wellbeing of many pupils.

13. All schools say they need more training and support to deliver relationships and sexuality education. This includes whole-school professional learning in how to proactively engage in conversations with pupils about gender issues and sexual harassment. They also require training on LGBTQ+ issues, for example on how to support transitioning or transgender pupils, including through the appropriate use of language or personal pronouns by which they prefer to be addressed.

14. School staff voice strongly the need for collaboration with parents and for their co-operation in dealing with incidences of peer-on-peer sexual harassment. Often, these incidences happen online in the evenings and during weekends, but impact pupils' wellbeing and behaviour during the school day. This collaboration includes regular parental monitoring of children's use of social media and chat facilities.

Local authorities

1. Under the Welsh Government's (2019b) Rights, respect, equality: Statutory guidance, there is a responsibility on local authorities to monitor the termly bullying and equality data that schools share with them and advise schools on local trends. Schools report few instances of bullying to local authorities and rarely report on peer-on-peer sexual harassment. There is a lack of consistency in how local authorities collect, analyse and use school bullying and harassment data, for example to plan interventions or staff training.