

Cllr. Cllr Jones
Convener of the Education Scrutiny
Performance Panel

Please ask for: Councillor Robert Smith
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Our Ref: RS/JG
Your Ref:
Date: 29 November 2021

Dear Cllr Jones,

Re: Education Scrutiny Performance Panel 21 October 2021

Thank you for your enquiry dated 4th November 2021.

As previously explained at scrutiny we take safeguarding in schools extremely seriously. You made reference to the Education Child Protection and Safeguarding Officer (ECPSO) providing a newsletter to schools with information relating to harassment in schools as part of the directorate response to the Everyone's Invited website and subsequent concerns raised. I am pleased to confirm that the safeguarding newsletter was not produced specifically in response to this but an initiative developed by the ECPSO to provide regular bulletins and signposting to advice and support which is intended to take place termly. In the autumn newsletter there was a link to the Welsh Government guidance on peer on peer sexual abuse in schools alongside opportunities for training in contextual safeguarding (an approach which allows schools to refer unsafe peer groups), resources on domestic abuse support as well as other updates and information relating to safeguarding.

We know that schools promote safeguarding of their pupils by putting up posters signposting them to support. The posters remind pupils of the opportunities they have in school to talk about sensitive issues. In addition, schools' pastoral and nurture provisions are routinely promoted as safe spaces within a school setting for pupils to be able to raise concerns. The role of the ECPSO includes undertaking safeguarding audits to review how schools promote safeguarding and these include information to pupils about where to report a concern. We know that not all children will be comfortable or willing to speak to staff at school in spite of the efforts made to promote safety and wellbeing and so schools are also advised to display Child Line posters in public and private places around the schools such as toilets.

In respect of responding to sexual harassment/assault in schools we are governed by legislation such as the Sexual Offences Act 2017 and Welsh Government guidance as referred to above. Where possible, where criminal investigations are not required or appropriate, restorative work is undertaken with pupils in order to consider the consequences of their actions. Advice and support to parents is given often signposting to NSPCC and Barnardos advice on sexualised behaviours in children and the school make

determinations about the most proportionate approach and interventions for children in such circumstances. Sexual abuse including peer on peer sexual abuse is clearly included in mandatory safeguarding awareness training and the Designated Safeguarding Persons in school will contact the ECPSO for advice and support in dealing with disclosures if needed.

Harassment amongst staff is a separate issue and may be dealt with in several different ways depending on the type of harassment being alleged. If no children are involved or the alleged harassment is sexual in nature then it is likely that it will be dealt with internally via staff human resource management processes. If any harassment is alleged that impacts on the safeguarding of children including allegations of sexual harassment in the workplace, it would be expected that the school to refer to the ECPSO where a consideration would be made regarding professional concerns under Part 5 Wales Safeguarding Procedures 2019.

If you have any further queries please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely

Robert Smith

Y Cyngorydd / Councillor Robert Smith
Aelod Y Cabinet Dros Wella Addysg, Dysgu A Sgiliau
Cabinet Member for Education Improvement, Learning and Skills