Division(s):

EDUCATION SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 13TH DECEMBER 2017

HOW DOES OXFORDSHIRE ADDRESS BULLYING IN SCHOOLS AND ONLINE? WHAT ACTION IS BEING TAKEN TO ADDRESS PREJUDICE-RELATED BULLYING AND TO REDUCE THE IMPACT ON VULNERABLE GROUPS?

Report by Lara Patel, Deputy Director, Safeguarding, Children's Social Care

Introduction

This paper provides information about the current local evidence and action being taken to prevent and reduce bullying in Oxfordshire. The paper includes information about the local authority's legal obligations and how current work to address bullying meets the local vision and priorities for Children's Services. It includes a brief overview of work being carried out as part of the current Anti-Bullying Strategy. The paper aims inform members about work to address both online and prejudice-related bullying and the specific focus on work to mitigate the impact on vulnerable groups.

Legal context

The Education Act 2002 Section 175 placed a legal duty on maintained schools and Local Authorities to safeguard and promote the welfare of children. Oxfordshire's work to prevent and reduce bullying therefore falls within this general welfare principle. It is also supports the local authority's obligations in relation to The Equality Act 2010, which places a duty on all public bodies to eliminate discrimination, advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations. This has relevance to the work to address prejudice-related bullying and to mitigate the impact on vulnerable groups.

Local evidence and vision

Oxfordshire's Anti-Bullying Strategy has a detailed action plan which is refreshed annually at the start of each school year. There is wealth of both national and local evidence that indicates a link between bullying and not feeling "safe to learn" in school. There is also clear evidence of a link between bullying and reduced school attendance and attainment and evidence that bullying can impact on mental health and well-being.

Oxfordshire has a free online bullying survey that school can access all year round. Schools who participate are provided with a unique link to in order that they can identify and address issues locally. Last year 6,457 children (from 9 secondary and 15 primary schools) took part. Participating schools have used results to develop effective Anti-Bullying practice and thus create greater safety for students. Results are then analysed centrally in depth to inform the Anti-Bullying strategy action plan and ensure that it is evidence-based.

Results from last year's survey showed that, in line with national trends and previous local results, those young people who are "different" from the majority in terms of

experience of a long-term illness or disability, race, religion, or sexuality are likely to experience increased frequency of bullying and "feeling unsafe". Of this group, secondary age young people who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender (LGBT) appear to be very vulnerable with 10% never feeling safe in the classroom (compared to 1% of those identifying as heterosexual). These results have been consistent over several years and, whilst showing some improvement, action to address prejudice-related bullying has remained a high-priority within the strategy. Work of the Anti-Bullying strategy therefore supports the local vision for Children's Services to ensure the children within Oxfordshire are healthy, safe, supported and successful. It also contributes to the current Children's Services obsessions specifically increasing school attendance – leading to improved attainment.

Some brief details of how this is being done will be outlined below.

National guidance for schools
Oxfordshire promotes and recommends that all schools follow the current government guidance on preventing and tackling bullying which includes guidance on cyberbullying. https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/preventing-and-tackling-bullying

Local guidance, policy and support for schools
Oxfordshire County Council has a dedicated Anti-Bullying Officer who is responsible for managing the overall strategy to prevent and reduce bullying for all children in Oxfordshire 0-19 including those at maintained, free and independent schools and academies. This 0.8 post is based in the LADO and Schools Safeguarding Team within Children's Services.

The Anti-Bullying Co-ordinator sits on the Oxfordshire Safeguarding Children Board (OSCB) Safeguarding in Education sub-group and the Child Sexual Exploitation sub-group and works in close partnership with the OSCB. The Anti-Bullying Co-ordinator is also jointly responsible for writing and co-ordinating the OSCB E-Safety Action plan. This reflects a growing use of technology by children and young people and an increasing prevalence in cyberbullying.

The following provides a brief overview and some of the highlights of work done as part of the Anti-Bullying Strategy. Further detail of work planned for the coming year can be found in the current Anti-Bullying Strategy and E-safety action plans.

- Updated and circulated a range of Anti-Bullying guidance, toolkits and templates for schools including a cyberbullying and online safety toolkit; a toolkit for managing youth produced sexual imagery(sexting); a toolkit for preventing and managing homophobic, biphobic and transphobic bullying; guidance for managing bullying and prejudice related incidents and a suite of templates to support schools to manage bullying effectively.

- Provided schools with a regular newsletter and updates with a range of web-based information to ensure they are equipped with the latest guidance and information to support effective Anti-Bullying practice.

- Provided individual advice and support to schools to manage bullying incidents causing concern to support early resolution. Provided individual advice and support to schools to review both their e-safety and Anti-Bullying policy and practice.

- Secured funding for Oxfordshire to be an "All Together" Local Authority with the provision of face to face training for both schools and children's workforce professionals. This Department for Education programme has ensured that schools have free access to online resources and a well-being questionnaire to improve all aspects of Anti-Bullying practice with a focus on the children with Special Educational needs and disabilities. This training has been attended by more than 80 schools and 50 children's workforce professionals.

- Achieved 3rd place in the national Stonewall Equality Index (2017) which measures local authority management of prejudice-related bullying with a focus on young people who are Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual or Transgender. Support for this vulnerable group has been a major focus of work and has been supported by successful multi-agency partnership work. A successful youth conference focussing on addressing this area of bullying was held during Anti-Bullying Week in November 2017 attended by more than 50 young people and 35 adults.

- Over the past year trained more than 120 young people from 36 schools to lead Anti-Bullying Ambassador programmes in their schools with their active involvement in a plan to address bullying alongside school staff

- As part of the e-safety plan, secured funding for a Cybercrime Project from the Police and Crime Commissioner that will involve the delivery of a theatre piece and workshop with 40 performances in Oxfordshire primary schools (aimed at Year 6) with a focus on education young people about healthy online relationships, online grooming and cyberbullying to prepare them for their transition to secondary school.

- Provided a range of central and inset training for schools and professionals including training on prejudice-related bullying, online safety and cyberbullying and restorative approaches. This includes running the OSCB Digital Safeguarding training for children's workforce professionals.

Equalities Implications

1.	These are discussed within the main body of the report

RECOMMENDATION

2.	This report is for information only with no recommendation at this stage

LARA PATEL
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Annex 2

Background papers: none apended

Contact Officer: Jo Brown, Anti-Bullying Co-ordinator
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