

Information submitted by NASUWT in response to the letter sent on the 26 September about sexual harassment of school staff.

**NASUWT**

**Undeb Yr Athrawon**



**CYMRU**

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17 October, 2022

Re: Sexual harassment of female school staff

Dear Ms Bryant,

Thank-you for your letter of 26 September requesting views on the prevalence of sexual harassment of school staff by pupils.

A survey carried out by the NASUWT in 2018 found that more than eight in ten (81%) teachers believe they have suffered sexual harassment or bullying in the workplace. One in five said they had been sexually harassed at school by a colleague, manager, parent or pupil since becoming a teacher. Nearly a third (30%) of those who had been sexually harassed have been subjected to unwanted touching, while two thirds (67%) had experienced inappropriate comments about their appearance or body. Over half (51%) had been subjected to inappropriate comments about sex, and 21% sexually propositioned. 3% said they had suffered upskirting or down blousing (photos taken up their skirts or down their tops).

In an online NASUWT survey conducted in 2016 over 7 days over 1300 teachers responded. Over half reported that they had had negative comments or information posted on social networks about them related to their role as a teacher in the last twelve months. 55% of comments were from pupils and 51% from parents. 80% of comments were insulting remarks and some included threatening behaviour. 60% of teachers received comments on Facebook,

**NASUWT**

***The largest teachers' union in Wales  
Yr undeb athrawon mwyaf yng Nghymru***

26% on Ratemyteacher and 16% on Twitter. Of incidents involving pupils, the majority were from pupils aged 13 and over, although there were comments from children as young as 7.

The teachers responding were asked to provide details of the abuse in an open field entry. Comments from pupils of a sexualised nature against women teachers included the following:

- A Facebook group set up to mock me and my appearance a couple of months after I started at the school.
- Threats of sexual violence and rape towards me
- Fake account set up where a group of boys spoke about me suggestively
- They started a site called "teachers we want to f\*\*k and found photos of female staff to put up where people left comments.
- A 6th former took a photo of me when I was riding home from work in my lycra kit then shared it on a Whatsapp group.

This survey was used as part of the evidence given to the Westminster, Women and Equalities Select Committee. I copy of the full evidence is attached to the email I sent with this letter,

Yours sincerely



Neil Butler  
NASUWT National Official Wales

**Inquiry into  
Sexual harassment and sexual violence in schools  
May 2016**

**NASUWT evidence  
to the Women and Equalities Select Committee**

The NASUWT welcomes the opportunity to comment on the Women and **Equalities Committee inquiry into the scale and impact of sexual harassment** and sexual violence in schools.

The NASUWT's submission sets out the Union's views on the key issues identified by the Committee in the terms of reference for the Inquiry. The NASUWT's evidence is informed directly by serving teacher and headteacher members and by the Union's individual and collective casework.

The NASUWT is the largest union representing teachers and headteachers in the UK.

**For further information, parliamentarians may contact:**

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## Executive Summary

1. Effective strategies to tackle violence against women and girls require concerted action across all spheres of society. Schools can make a vital contribution, alongside wider children's services, in relation to identifying needs, safeguarding and creating a climate in which difference and diversity are recognised and in which women and girls are treated with respect.
2. Children, young people and staff in schools have a right to learn and work in a safe and secure environment that is free from intimidation, harassment, abuse and violence and where they feel valued and respected. A school that fails to tackle effectively sexual and other forms of harassment and bullying of its employees will find it more difficult to develop an effective and credible response to safeguarding pupils.
3. The growing sexualisation of young people and its links to sexual harassment and violence against women not only shatters the lives of girls and women but also prevents boys and young men from relating to girls and women as human beings and peers and from forming healthy relationships. This requires whole school strategies for educating school pupils about gender equality and the impact of violence against women and girls within a fully funded and consistent equalities framework.
4. The NASUWT is the only teachers' union that undertakes an annual survey of teachers on the abuse of technology to determine the extent of the problem. The latest report 'NASUWT Survey of Abuse of Technology 2016'<sup>1</sup> shows that this continues to be a problem blighting the lives of teachers across the UK.
5. Teachers' lives continue to be blighted by regular incidents of sexual harassment and violence, predominantly through the use of abuse social media by pupils and parents. This is having a deleterious impact on the mental health of many teachers and their ability to carry out their work, particularly where the incidents are not taken seriously by employers or are considered as "banter" or "jokes". Teachers and pupils need to feel that their concerns are taken seriously and processes adopted for recording and monitoring all incidents of sexual harassment and violence in schools for staff and pupils.
6. Effective training for teachers on dealing with the sensitive issues of girls' sexualised behaviour and acts of sexual harassment is urgently required within all initial teacher training routes and continuing professional development

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<sup>1</sup> Survey of abuse of technology (2016) NASUWT, Birmingham.

7. An intersectional approach to strategies for tackling sexual harassment is required in order to establish an inclusive response to this problem and one that recognises the multiple identities of women and girls along the lines of ethnicity, religion or belief, gender identity, age, disability and sexual orientation. The NASUWT asserts that there must be an intersectional lens to strategies for tackling sexual harassment and violence in order to have a truly inclusive approach to addressing this form of abuse.
8. Children can benefit enormously from good PSHE and SRE education so that they are safe and make informed choices. However, there is a disparity in the provision and quality of PSHE and SRE education across schools partly as a result of the Government's education reforms, cuts to public sector funding and Academisation with the extensive freedoms and flexibilities. A consistent approach to educating young people regardless of type of school is urgently required.
9. There are opportunities for Ofsted to inspect for effective policies and strategies that address sexual harassment and violence, however inspectorates need to be knowledgeable and fully trained on identifying good practices and gaps in provision. Moreover, schools should be encouraged to record and monitor incidents against teachers and pupils of a sexualised nature, alongside other discriminatory areas.
10. Government should send a clear message that those who seek to abuse, harass and threaten staff and pupils through the use of social media and mobile phones will face serious sanctions. A zero tolerance approach should be adopted. Schools require robust and effective advice on tackling the abuse of technology. The current Government advice on addressing this issue is woefully inadequate.
11. The voice and expertise of the teaching profession is essential for the development and delivery of strategies for addressing sexual harassment and violence in schools. Government programmes of work will be futile and ineffective if teachers and other staff are not considered to be key stakeholders within this work. The NASUWT requests to be involved fully in the development of resources and advice for schools on tackling sexual harassment and abuse against women and girls.

## **Introduction**

1. The NASUWT's submission focuses on the four key Committee remit themes highlighted within the Inquiry:
  - establishing the scale of the problem;
  - understanding the impact of sexual harassment in schools;
  - what can be done to reduce levels of sexual harassment and sexual violence in schools?;
  - what can schools do to support students to deal better with the online elements of this problem.
2. The NASUWT agrees with the comments from the Chair of the Women and Equalities Committee that sexual harassment and sexual violence in schools is having a profound impact on the day to day lives of children and young people. The NASUWT therefore welcomes the launch of this inquiry as a step forward in considering what needs to be done to ensure that no child's education or teachers' working life is blighted by this abuse.
3. The NASUWT believes that all children, young people and staff in schools have a right to learn and work in a safe and secure environment that is free from intimidation, harassment, abuse and violence and where they feel valued and respected. It is, therefore, welcome to see the remit will also explore the extent to which teachers are victims of sexual harassment and sexual violence in schools.
4. Tackling sexual harassment and sexual violence in schools has been of growing concern to the NASUWT for many years. These issues have been part of our anti bullying/harassment work for over a decade of which the NASUWT has lobbied numerous Governments – working alongside organisations such as the Anti-Bullying Alliance, Childnet International, Stonewall and other organisations. The NASUWT was the first union to launch a programme of work on prejudice-related bullying, which included work on gender-based harassment and violence and challenging the sexualisation of women and young girls.
5. The NASUWT believes that sexual bullying and its link to violence against women must be recognised, understood and taken seriously in schools. Bullying is too often dismissed as 'part of growing up' or just 'teasing and joking'. The latter, 'it was just a joke', has been used since time immemorial by perpetrators of bullying, victimisation and harassment to excuse and justify their behaviour.

6. The Fixers report<sup>2</sup> commissioned by the Women and Equalities Committee to inform this inquiry confirms that sexualised behaviour has become normalised in schools. The reports from the young people taking part in the survey that they 'were under massive pressure to have sex and behave in a sexualised way' from as young as 12 years of age is of great concern to the NASUWT, however they are issues raised by the Union with successive Governments.
7. In a response to the Bailey review on the Commercialisation and Sexualisation of Childhood in 2011, the NASUWT expressed concern at the growing sexualisation of young people and its links to violence against women and provided evidence that sexual harassment of girls is taking place at an increasingly early age. The Union's submission noted that sexualisation of girls is not just shattering the lives of girls and women but that it is also preventing boys and young men from relating to girls and women as human beings and peers and from forming healthy relationships. The NASUWT called on the Government for effective whole school strategies for educating school pupils about gender equality and the impact of violence against women and girls within a consistent equalities framework.

### **Establishing the scale of the problem**

8. Regrettably, there have been a number of factors that have impeded the much needed support and resources required in addressing the growing sexual harassment and violent incidents in schools.
9. Since 2010, the UK education landscape has undergone excessive reforms, including a radical fragmentation of its schools system and de regulation process. Curriculum reform has been introduced at a breathtaking pace with insufficient time and support for teachers. Cuts to public sector budgets and local services, academisation and the serious reduction in the role of Local Authorities have all been part of the landscape. The NASUWT believes that collectively these factors have hindered significantly the ability to provide and to ensure schools have the necessary support, training and funding required to address the growing problem of sexual harassment and violence in schools and to ensure that there is a consistency of approach.
10. The findings of the Fixers Report and corresponding case studies showed that sexualised behaviour is the new social norm in young people's daily lives and are of serious concern.

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<sup>2</sup> Fixers Investigates: The trouble with sex in schools (2015)

11. A BBC Freedom of Information request in September 2015<sup>3</sup> found that more than 5,500 sexual offences in schools were reported to the police over a three year period. The figure includes incidents of children being raped on school premises. In some cases the victims and suspects of sexual offences were as young as five years old.
12. These stark reports strongly resonate with NASUWT surveys and casework reports from teachers who have witnessed young girls being pressured into sexualised behaviour, particularly through the use of social media and mobile phones. Teachers regularly hear girls referred to as 'sluts' or 'slags' or witness unwanted sexual touching and when they attempt to tackle and report these incidents they are often faced with disbelief or find their concerns trivialised as pupil to pupil 'banter'. These teachers then find themselves isolated and unsupported by management.
13. The NASUWT works collaboratively with a number of organisations in tackling these issues in schools, including End Violence Against Women, (EVAW) which is the largest coalition of UK women's organisations established to eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls. The NASUWT has contributed to the many EVAW campaigns and various programmes of work that have developed coherent and effective policies and challenged Government policies that mitigate against these aims.
14. A YouGov survey commissioned by EVAW in 2010 showed that almost a third of 16-18 year olds had been subjected to unwanted sexual touching at school. In addition, 71% of all 16-18 year olds had heard sexual name calling towards girls at school at least a few times a week.
15. In addition, a more recent YouGov survey again commissioned by EVAW which reported in March 2016 further demonstrates that women experience unwanted sexual attention in public places. 85% of women aged 18-24 had experienced such sexual assaults by men. 64% had experienced sexual harassment and 35% of all women has been touched sexually. Sadly only 11% of these women reported that someone had intervened when they had experienced unwanted sexual touching.
16. The NASUWT recognises that the problem of sexual harassment and violence is a societal problem and schools cannot be left to tackle this problem alone. However, the Union strongly believes that schools can make a vital contribution, alongside wider children's services, in relation to identifying needs, safeguarding and child protection, and in providing for children's health, safety and wellbeing.

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<sup>3</sup> BBC Freedom of Information request to UK forces on the number of reported sexual offences in schools (September 2015)



## **Teachers experience of sexual harassment and sexual violence in schools**

17. Sexual harassment and violence is not confined to pupils. *The Safe to Teach?* report of the NASUWT<sup>4</sup> survey of 5,000 teachers on health and safety in schools showed that more than one in six (17%) female teachers have suffered from sexist abuse at school or college in the last two years compared to one in 17 (6%) male teachers. Overall 67% of teachers had suffered some form of prejudice-related bullying themselves whilst at work over a two year period. 52% of incidents were committed by pupils. The most common form of bullying reported by respondents was general abuse in 36% of the cases, 16% reported abuse on the basis of body image, 13% sexism, 6% racism, 5% homophobia, 4% faith and 2% disability. Over 73% of the incidents were reported; however, 45% of the respondents said that no appropriate action was taken following the incidents that took place.
18. Whilst teachers and other school staff should be protected by Health and Safety laws the NASUWT research demonstrates that employers fail to take their responsibilities seriously.
19. The NASUWT has been campaigning about the growing problem of cyber harassment/bullying for almost a decade. Reports to successive governments have demonstrated that pupils and parents are routinely using social media and mobile phones to abuse and harass teachers and other school staff. Evidence from case studies and surveys of teachers demonstrating the extent of the problem has been provided to Ministers and for the last three years the Union has conducted an annual survey.
20. The NASUWT is the only teachers' union that undertakes an annual survey of teachers on the abuse of technology to determine the extent of the problem. The latest report 'NASUWT Survey of Abuse of Technology 2016'<sup>5</sup> shows that this continues to be a problem blighting the lives of teachers across the UK.
21. In an online NASUWT survey conducted over 7 days over 1300 teachers responded. Over half reported that they had had negative comments or information posted on social networks about them related to their role as a teacher in the last twelve months. 55% of comments were from pupils and 51% from parents. 80% of comments were insulting remarks and some included threatening behaviour. 60% of teachers received comments on Facebook, 26%

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<sup>4</sup> NASUWT (2011) *Safe to Teach*. Birmingham.

<sup>5</sup> Survey of abuse of technology (2016) NASUWT, Birmingham.

on Ratemyteacher and 16% on Twitter. Of incidents involving pupils, the majority were from pupils aged 13 and over, although there were comments from children as young as 7.

22. The teachers responding were asked to provide details of the abuse in an open field entry. Comments from pupils of a sexualised nature against women teachers include the following:

- *A Facebook group set up to mock me and my appearance a couple of months after I started at the school.*
- *Threats of sexual violence and rape towards me*
- *Fake account set up where a group of boys spoke about me suggestively*
- *They started a site called "teachers we want to f\*\*k and found photos of female staff to put up where people left comments.*
- *A 6<sup>th</sup> former took a photo of me when I was riding home from work in my lycra kit then shared it on a Whatsapp group.*

23. Comments from parents of a sexualised nature against women teachers include:

- *I want to slap her (the teacher's) bitch face;*
- *Parents threatened to come in and 'sort that bitch out'*
- *Accusing the school staff of 'sucking the head's titties'*

24. The survey also revealed many incidents of false accusations against teachers alleging that the teacher had punched or kicked the pupils or 'pushed them down the stairs' and inciting acts of violence from other parents. One teacher reported that it was a 'regular thing' for parents to post derogatory and false claims about teachers on public Facebook pages. 34% of respondents said that they did not report the incident. Reasons for non reporting ranged from teachers being told they are being over sensitive to lack of confidence in employers taking action.

25. For the first time, the 2016 NASUWT survey also asked teachers about sexualised incidents and bullying between pupils. Teachers reported:

- pupils filming themselves masturbating and sharing images.
- girls taking nude pictures of themselves in sexy poses and sending them to older boys;
- regular incidents of girls sending nude pictures to their boyfriends who then forward the images on to their friends;
- insults about gay people, misogynistic comments directed at girls, derogatory sexist comments and racist and Islamophobic comments.

26. The teachers report that the issues of sexualised behaviour and abuse is so rife in schools that its prevalence is dismissed as "banter" and senior management sometimes choosing to turn a blind eye with accusations of overreaction against

teachers who report it. Some teachers admitted in the survey that the downward pressures, excessive workload and other demands on teachers are often, regrettably, barriers to challenging and reporting incidents of sexual harassment and sexualised behaviour. Many had not received any training on dealing with the sensitive issues of girls' sexualised behaviour within either initial teacher training programmes or on-going professional development.

27. The NASUWT believes that the manner in which a school responds to the incidents of sexual harassment and bullying of its staff will be indicative of how seriously and also how effectively the bullying and harassment of pupils is tackled. A school that fails to tackle effectively sexual and other forms of harassment and bullying of its employees will find it more difficult to develop an effective and credible response to safeguarding pupils.

### **Intersectionality and sexual harassment**

28. The NASUWT notes that many strategies for tackling sexual harassment and violence against women and girls are developed within an homogenous context where all women's experiences are considered to be the same. An intersectional approach to tackling sexual harassment is essential, as it recognises that one form of oppression can be shaped by and inform other forms. For example, racism can be sexualised, or women's oppression can be racialised. The sexist behaviour that black (BME) women face is often shaped by their ethnicity and the racism they face can be shaped by their gender – thus the two are intimately connected. Similarly a lesbian, bisexual or trans woman or girl cannot disconnect from a particular identity when experiencing sexualised abuse that is of a homophobic or transphobic nature.
29. The NASUWT hosts annually the largest gatherings of Women, BME, Disabled and LGBT teachers across the country on an annual basis. The women teachers attending these events often describe their experiences of discrimination that intersect across a number of identities that are often overlooked.
30. The NASUWT asserts that there must be an intersectional lens to strategies for tackling sexual harassment and violence in order to have a truly inclusive approach to addressing this form of abuse.

### **What can be done to reduce levels of sexual harassment and sexual violence in schools?**

31. There is evidence to show that children express fixed views about women and men's roles at a very early age. Gender divisions are observed in attitudes

adopted to play and to learning activities and in addition it is perceived that girls and boys are guided towards atypical subject choices that impact negatively on their learning and career choices. Boys are conditioned to behave in particular ways, leading to violence, disruption or bullying. Hyper-masculine behaviour in the playground is driven by the need to be the dominant male as determined by wider cultural experiences. There is a need to eliminate this damaging gender stereotyping which adversely affects the life chances of girls as well as boys.

32. The curriculum has a critical role in ensuring that the education system plays its full role in building an equitable and just society, in challenging and countering discrimination through the promotion of equality and diversity, and by being structured in a way that allows all pupils to achieve and succeed to the fullest possible extent. The curriculum should, in this context, be seen not only as a means by which all learners can acquire skills, knowledge and experience but also as a mechanism for the transmission of positive values to children and young people that can encourage and sustain efforts to develop positive and inclusive attitudes and beliefs.
33. Educating school pupils about gender equality and violence against women will be futile if the issue is not seen as a whole school responsibility. If behaviour in the playground and whole school environment is inconsistent with the messages in the classroom, school pupils may become confused and not take the issue seriously. All stakeholders - school staff, parents, governors, students - need to develop shared values and operate within a consistent equalities framework.
34. The NASUWT believes that good Personal, Social, Health and Economics (PSHE) Education can support young people in making safe and informed choices. There needs to be room in the life of the school for an exploration of wider social issues that contribute to the wellbeing and engagement of all pupils. PSHE education has been the subject of many reviews on which the NASUWT has commented on. In January of this year, the Chair of four key House of Commons committee's wrote to the Secretary of State for Education, Nicky Morgan, asking for PSHE to be a statutory element of the national curriculum. In a letter from the education, health, home affairs and business committees the Chair argues that 'PSHE is a crucial part of preparing young people for life' and that it could 'help protect young people from abuse in many forms'. The Secretary of State has responded that schools are expected to make provision for PSHE and to provide a wide range of curricular and extra-curricular opportunities for pupils to develop their character, but making it statutory "would do little to tackle the most pressing problems with the subject". However, this response ignores that fact that not all schools are required to deliver PSHE education – academies are not required to deliver the national curriculum and they now make up the majority of Secondary

school education in England. There is therefore a disparity in the provision, inspection and quality of PSHE education.

35. PSHE and Sex and Relationships Education (SRE) are useful tools for issues of sexual harassment and violence to be addressed within the context of a coherent National Curriculum that allows for important links between different subjects to be drawn.
36. The NASUWT has campaigned for PSHE and SRE to be key elements within all initial teacher training routes and the provision of high quality continuing professional development. Teachers are committed to protecting children and young people from sexualised behaviour, harassment and violence but there is an urgent need to ensure that early and on-going training is provided. The NASUWT believes that such provision will help to counter the growing problem of sexual harassment and violence in schools.
37. The Government has pledged £80 million in funding to tackle violence against women and girls within its Ending Violence against Women and Girls strategy document 2016-2020<sup>6</sup>. The NASUWT welcomes this commitment but it is notable that the aim to fund critical local services, such as refuges, have diminished as a result of deep austerity cuts.
38. The Strategy document rightly acknowledges the importance of working in partnership with stakeholders to provide an effective response to violence and abuse, particular on prevention strategies in schools. However, it is extremely disappointing to note that once again the Government has not acknowledged the important role that teachers play in this regard. The NASUWT asserts that Government prevention strategies on educating and challenging sexual harassment and abuse in schools will be unproductive if the voice and expertise of the education workforce is overlooked. The NASUWT has a key role to play in the development and delivery of this programme of work and requests to be involved fully in the planned update of the Government guidance for schools on SRE education

### **The role of Inspection**

39. Ofsted has made substantial changes to the frameworks and processes for the inspection of schools which includes a much reduced single common inspection framework, Ofsted inspectors are now required to make judgements on the personal development, behaviour and welfare of pupils by evaluating the extent to which the school is successfully promoting and supporting their commitment to learning. In addition, inspectors will assess the extent to which the school

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<sup>6</sup> HM Government: Ending Violence against Women and Girls Strategy 2016-2020. March 2016

promotes and supports pupils on how to keep themselves safe from risks such as abuse, sexual exploitation and extremism, including when using the internet and social media. This provides an opportunity for inspectors to make judgements about what a school is doing to prevent sexual harassment and sexual violence. However, the NASUWT is not confident that inspectors are either sufficiently knowledgeable or trained to ensure that children and young people are being educated against these practices. Moreover, schools are not required to explicitly monitor and record sexualised bullying and harassment incidents and so it is difficult to identify what data could be made available.

40. Safeguarding and keeping pupils safe is a key area in which schools should evaluate how well they are fulfilling their statutory responsibilities for protecting children from sexual abuse and all forms of gender-based violence as well as other forms such as racist, homophobic or transphobic behaviour. School leaders and governors are required to create an effective safeguarding culture and Ofsted inspectors could play a key role in ensuring that immediate action is taken if there are concerns about a pupil either displaying adverse sexualised behaviour or a victim of sexual abuse.
41. The NASUWT has produced guidance for school leaders on the new Common Inspection Framework which includes advice on the inspection process and how inspectors should be examining and inspecting a school's work on preventing and tackling sexual harassment and sexual violence. The guidance reminds school leaders of their responsibilities under the Equality Act 2010 and Public Sector Equality duties to eliminate discrimination, advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between groups who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
42. The NASUWT believes that inspection reports should be monitored to ensure that inspectors examine and report on a school's effectiveness in tackling and preventing sexual harassment and sexual violence.

**What can schools do to support students to deal better with the online elements of this problem?**

43. The NASUWT works collaboratively with organisations that support schools with online safety provisions and policies. For example, the Union has jointly produced guidance with Childnet on protecting staff from cyber bullying and harassment. The Union is also represented on the UK Child Internet Safety Board that promotes and advises on the use of safe internet use in schools.
44. The provision of high quality training for school staff on dealing with cyber bullying and harassment is an essential requirement for tackling sexual

harassment and violence in schools. This issue affecting women is too often ignored and needs to be privileged to underline its importance. Time and space needs to be identified during the normal working day for such training.

45. All schools, regardless of type, should be required to have whole school policies on preventing sexual harassment and violence. It is essential that such policies include the prevention of sexual harassment against school staff as well as pupils.
46. Ofsted inspectors should receive explicit training on inspecting for effective strategies in schools, in particular on how schools are monitoring and recording incident of sexual harassment and abuse.