

**Cyflwynwyd yr ymateb hwn i'r [Pwyllgor Cydraddoldeb a Chyflawnder Cymdeithasol ar gyfer yr ymchwiliad i Gydlyniant Cymdeithasol](#)**

**This response was submitted to the [Equality and Social justice Committee](#) on the [inquiry into Social Cohesion](#)**

**SC 13**

**Ymateb gan: Pupils to Parliament**

**Response from: Pupils to Parliament**

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**Children's views gathered and submitted on their behalf by  
Dr Roger Morgan OBE, for Pupils 2 Parliament**

## **Introduction**

1. Pupils 2 Parliament is a project, established in 2014 and based on the Welsh borders, working with schools to engage pupils in considering national issues, and submitting their views to Committee and Government consultations.
2. The evidence in this submission was independently gathered for this consultation by Pupils 2 Parliament from 87 pupils aged 9 to 11, separately at four primary schools in village and small town locations.
3. We believe it is important for the Committee to consider evidence of the perspectives of children, as a major part of most communities, on the key issues of social cohesion.

**Children's views of the key issues which impact social cohesion, and whether interventions need to target specific groups of people, geographical areas, or particular key issues**

4. A key issue for the Committee's consideration from our consultations with these children is that **children perceive themselves as significantly less part of their local communities than adults.**
5. Specifically, over twice as many children thought adults feel more part of their local community than do children (46% saw adults as more part of the community, compared with 22% who saw children as more part of the community).

6. A third of the children saw themselves as much or very much part of the local community, another third saw themselves as not much or not at all part of their local community. The remaining third said they felt 'in the middle' on this.
7. Compared with this, twice as many children (63%) saw their parents or carers as much or very much part of the local community, and only 14% saw their parents or carers as not much or not at all part of the local community.
8. The children defined their community in different ways. As one put it, "I've got loads of communities", including those living near to each other, the community of their school, club and activity communities sharing a particular sport or hobby, and communities whose members share some a common interest or focus but do not necessarily meet – "communities can be far away".
9. They also identified some key factors they saw as contributing to the social cohesion of a community. This might be a central provision such as a school, library or pub, where people meet and share, and which if lost can seriously reduce social cohesion in an area. One child spoke strongly of the negative effect on her local community of the closure of their local pub.

10. Another factor was communities coming together to deal with local problems alongside each other – such as dealing with blocked drains, or in one example, sharing a delivery of gravel to fill potholes on their local road.

11. Children also identified communities coming naturally together to face a tragedy or local disaster, such as flooding, or a tragic local death – or, in one case, coping with the fear that followed a local murder. As one child said, "big problems can bring people together".

12. The **children saw the number and physical closeness of local houses as keys to community cohesion.** There needs to be enough housing to enable all generations to have a peer group. Many children cited lack of other children living nearby in a small community as a factor isolating them as children from their local community.

13. **In a community of very few houses, children told us that it only takes one or two households who do not wish to take part, to prevent a cohesive community developing.** And there will always be a few who do not wish to take part in the community in any area – but

the community can survive this as long as there are enough households in the area.

14. **Distance from other houses was seen as a major factor militating against social cohesion** – you often do not realistically have a local community to belong to, especially as a child not able to travel on their own, if you live “in the middle of nowhere”.
15. In more than one group, **the children put forward their view that restrictions on building more houses and extending the nearby community damage community cohesion and opportunities for community links for all generations**. One pupil summed this up: “you’re not allowed to build any more houses in certain communities, which can be bad for the community because it stops it extending”.
16. **Another key factor pupils saw as critical to social cohesion, especially for children, disabled people and older people, was the use and state of local roads.**
17. In relation to community tensions, **one in 6 of the children (16%) stated that the people around where they live do not all get on with each other** (getting on ‘not very well’ or ‘not at all’). **58% said that the people around where they live get on with each other ‘quite well’ or ‘very well indeed’**. As one pupil noted, “all communities can have conflict”.
18. We asked the children what makes them, as children, feel part of their local community. We made no suggestions and gave no leads. The most common factors they told us make them feel part of their local community are (not in any particular order)
  - **People chatting to each other, even just saying “Hi” as they pass – “exchanging hellos” and “smiling is infectious”**
  - **People being kind and friendly, and prepared to help each other out**
  - **Having friends nearby**
  - **Having places and activities in the community to be involved with – such as the local shop or a library, and such as clubs, groups and sports activities**
  - **Occasional community events, such as a community Christmas Party**
  - **Children helping neighbours out**
  - **Meeting people while taking a dog for a walk** (“go on dog walks and lots of people talk to us”)

- **Proximity of houses to each other**
- **Having a parent or carer with a job central to the community**
  - eg working the local school, a local salon, or the village shop, or being the local tree surgeon, or being on the parish council.

19. One child summed up their take on living in a cohesive community  
– “I know everyone and nobody doesn’t like me”

20. **A key factor for many children is whether the community is physically safe for children to go about on their own.** Close houses are seen as enabling this, but long distances along unsafe roads (especially without pavements) as entirely preventing it and so isolating children from effectively being a part of the local community.

21. On this factor, one child told us “I’m part of my community because I’m allowed to go round my village”.

22. The most common factors that children told us make them feel that they are not part of their local community are (not in any particular order, and again without us making any suggestions):

- **Fast and dangerous traffic and long distances limiting children’s mobility around the community**
- **Neighbour disputes and unfriendly neighbours**
- **Living a long way from other houses and community activities**
- **Noise (including, but not only, traffic noise) making the location unpleasant**
- **There being few other children around**
- **Bullying by other, especially older, children and young people in the neighbourhood**
- **Litter and rubbish spoiling the neighbourhood.**

23. **The nature of any welcome, or first contact, with community members made the difference for many children on whether or not they wished to become part of the community, or keep separate from it.** First impressions count. One child described their first, and permanently offputting, encounter with their new local community: “we had just got there. Got out of the car, and someone was rude, said you can’t park there, and gave us a death stare. Unwelcoming”.

24. We asked the children whether they saw particular groups of people as more likely than others to be 'left out' of the local community. Here, in no particular order and without us giving any suggestions or leads, are the groups most identified:

- **Those who do not want to take part in the local community**
- **Those who are not welcomed on arrival in the community**
- **People from other countries**
- **Those living at a distance from the main community area**
- **Homeless people**
- **People from ethnic minorities**
- **Gay people**
- **Any LGBTQ person**
- **Newcomers to the community**
- **Sometimes a particular generation, such as children or older people, depending on the makeup of the community population**
- **Children who can't yet go out of the house on their own**
- **Children who usually get left out of games and activities by other children.**

### **Examples of best practice to support social cohesion and overcome tensions**

25. We asked one of the three groups of children whether they had taken part in events or projects aimed at helping people to get on with each other in their local communities. 13 (42%) of the 31 children asked told us that they had done so.

26. The most frequent activities were sports events, children taking on play leader roles for younger children in the community, community Christmas parties, and school litter picking projects around the community. Other activities mentioned were Remembrance Day gatherings, a school show for elderly people, children growing plants for elderly people, community yoga, and welcoming parties for newcomers.

27. A quarter of the 87 children from whom we gathered evidence for this submission told us that they had taken part in an intergenerational project between children and older people.

28. The most frequent activity was singing carols for old people, followed by children visiting a local old people's home. Also mentioned

were adults involved in visits to schools, and a Cub competition involving all age groups.

29. Many of the children saw some events not as intentionally intergenerational, but as effectively and positively bringing older and younger people in the community together because of a shared interest. Examples were children, with many adults and old people attending an activity together at the Hay Festival, a community raft race involving all age groups in one way or another, and a local veteran car and air show which attracted people of all generations.

**30. Asked what provisions might help members of a community get on better together rather than arguing or fighting, the children's top three proposals were (1) anything that improves relationships in the community, (2) security cameras, and (3) increased local policing.**

31. Asked what schools could do to increase social cohesion, the children proposed the following (not listed in any particular order):

- **Litter picking in the community**
- **Community use of the school out of school hours, and organising activities which involve the community as well as pupils**
- **Raising money for the community (including contributions to cohesion improvements to the locality such as provision of pavements)**
- **Measures to improve pupil behaviour inside and outside school – including measures to stop pupils being 'silly in the area' on the way to and from school**
- **Countering bullying**
- **Encouraging all pupils to make friends and join in things**
- **More focus on community cohesion within school.**

32. The three changes the children most cited as likely to bring members of a community together were **improved relationships between people, reducing litter and rubbish around the community, and – something up to the individual wishing to belong, rather than something to be provided by government or others – yourself simply getting out more** ("I would probably tell myself to get out more, and talk to some more people about life in general").

33. Finally, we asked pupils what measures they would take to establish social cohesion if they were responsible for the development of a new town. Their proposals (without us making any suggestions, and in no particular order) were:

- **Build more rather than fewer houses, close enough for easy access around the neighbourhood for all ages**
- **Have a large park area in the middle as an outdoor gathering and activity area for the neighbourhood**
- **Have other park areas close at hand, where people can spend time and meet others**
- **Have a good indoor place for people to meet as a focus for the community**
- **Have a school in the neighbourhood to encourage families to move in and stay**
- **Provide sports pitches and activity equipment**
- **Organise plenty of social events**
- **Establish a wide range of clubs and societies for doing a wide variety of interests and hobbies together**
- **Have as much as possible of the neighbourhood free of dangerous and noisy traffic**
- **Organise welcomes and provision of local information for newcomers.**

### **The Welsh language**

34. We asked the 28 children in one of our groups about the relevance of speaking Welsh to social cohesion in their local communities. **Just under a third of the children thought that speaking Welsh does help to bring people together in their communities.**