

# Anti-bullying case study: cyberbullying and sexting

Crickhowell High School in the Brecon Beacons uses a data-based approach to tackle the growing problem of online bullying – especially involving sexually explicit content.

This case study highlights how the school:

- runs bullying surveys for students
- uses survey data to produce reports that identify bullying problems and what the school needs to do to tackle them
- uses a variety of approaches to enable students to report bullying, including the use of trained peer mentors
- promotes a culture of inclusion and uses personal and social education (PSE) lessons to teach about bullying, respect and equality

The school's anti-bullying coordinator Carole Phillips is auditing her colleagues' knowledge of cyberbullying – and their experience of it in the school.

The audit will seek to answer two key questions, Carole says: “Do we have a problem? If so, how are we going to deal with it?”

Over the last 12 years, Carole has developed her expertise in anti-bullying strategies, including time spent in the US evaluating the [Olweus Bullying Prevention Program](#).

“The data you accrue informs where your weak areas are – and how you can build on that,” she says.

## Online savvy

---

In both her safeguarding role and as a teacher of PSE at Crickhowell, Carole has seen a marked rise in cyberbullying – particularly sexting – over the last few years.

Her PSE students, for example, are showing ever-increasing levels of knowledge and sophistication about online content.

“You’ve got Year 7s talking about the dark web,” she says. “I’ve had many trying to catch me out. ‘Oh miss, I bet you don’t know about ooVoo’” (an app for making video and voice calls and sending texts, with a minimum age of 13).

She says it’s essential teachers know about the latest apps pupils may be using – and it is this knowledge that Carole’s audit is evaluating.

“If you haven’t got an on-the-ball teacher, cyberbullying can take place right under their nose,” she warns.

Carole will use the results of the audit to recommend specific training. “I’m about to do social media and internet awareness safety”, she says.

Giving parents knowledge is also key. “We do parents evenings once a year. We say: ‘Don’t bring your children, because I’m going to be telling you a few things about how your child can exclude you from what they’re doing without your knowledge.’”

## Pupil surveys

---

Crickhowell also builds a picture of bullying in the school through pupil surveys. The students answer questions, during pastoral time, about their experience of bullying. They can submit their answers anonymously, which encourages them to give open and honest responses.

Carole introduced a pilot survey in 2015/16. “I created a questionnaire using SurveyMonkey,” she explains. “Before we rolled any [anti-bullying measures] out, we wanted to capture what was going on.”

Crickhowell is running the survey again in 2018, this time with specific questions on cyberbullying. To deepen the school’s understanding, “There will also be a lot more questions about whether pupils have witnessed any bullying around identity-based issues,” Carole adds.

## Self-reporting

---

Crickhowell also gathers data continually about bullying incidents through two self-reporting methods.

The first – which allows for anonymity – is a paper form that pupils submit to a postbox in one of the school’s corridors.

The other is a dedicated email address that pupils can use to raise bullying concerns, albeit without anonymity. All pupils are given a pocket-sized card to carry with the email address on it.

“We’ve had more response to the anonymised reporting mechanism,” Carole says.

Where pupils have chosen not to reveal their identity, the school “very carefully crafted an assembly tackling the issues identified”.

One issue the anonymised forms brought to light was pupils being bullied because of their accent. “It’s the Welsh students with English-sounding accents that bully the ones that come from the valleys,” Carole explains. “We are very careful now to monitor that.”

Carole plans to revise the anonymised forms to gather more data. “I’ve included different aspects of bullying: Was it identity based? Was it homophobic, transphobic, biphobic? This will go hand-in-hand with the lessons the pupils have on identity-based bullying. There’s also a section on where in the school did it take place. Did you witness it? Were you a bystander?”

## Mentors

---

Another method of gathering anonymised data to identify problems quickly is through school mentors. These are specially trained sixth-form students, each attached to a tutor group of younger pupils.

Pupils can report bullying concerns to the mentors confidentially. The mentors maintain anonymous logs of issues – “which year group, whether it’s male or female, what type of issues”, Carole says.

## Creating an inclusive culture

---

One thing that struck Carole from her research in the US was how schools promote a culture of inclusion. “They’re big on school climate,” she explains.

Her advice to schools is to audit both staff awareness of the problem – as Crickhowell is doing – but also simply to walk around the building to see whether messages about diversity, respect, rights and responsibilities are visible.

“Take a note of what’s in your school to signpost visitors about how you deal with bullying: where you go for help, and how you tackle other issues such as LGBT.

“If pupils feel comfortable, they’re going to learn well.”

## What and why

---

The school’s approach to tackling cyberbullying is to be explicit and open with pupils about their rights and responsibilities online.

“When you talk to students about sexting – what it means, the Acts under which they could be prosecuted for cyberbullying – it gives them a better understanding. If you also explain why, they will take that message away more strongly.

“We’ve seen a change in the reporting of it,” she adds. “Children will say, ‘Miss, you do know so and so’s doing it, don’t you?’ The children now are much more open.”