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[Blog article](#) by Aisha O'Reilly, Policy Officer, Equality Commission NI

Anti-Bullying Week 2022

Addressing prejudice-based bullying and challenging stereotypes

It's Anti-Bullying Week 2022 and this year's theme is 'Reach Out'. Addressing prejudice-based bullying and challenging stereotypes in education is a priority for the Commission because education plays a key role in determining an individual's life chances. In the spirit of this year's theme, find out what we're calling for to address bullying that is motivated by someone's membership of an equality group. This includes, for example, gender; ethnicity; and sexual orientation.

Prejudice-based bullying can have wide ranging effects on young people, which may continue into adulthood. It can affect their quality of education and their attainment, and it can have long lasting impacts on their life chances. Our [2017 Statement on Key Inequalities in Education](#) highlighted that prejudice-based bullying is a persistent problem for young people from certain equality groups. That includes for trans young people, minority ethnic young people including Travellers, those with Special Educational Needs and disabilities, and LGB young people.

Since we did this study, COVID has had a huge impact on young people and their quality of life in education. School closures meant restricted opportunities for interaction, increased isolation and dependence on social media to keep in contact with peers, or to be targeted or excluded by them.

What we know is that there is much that we don't know about prejudice-based bullying. Although there has been some limited research more recently, the last significant research undertaken by the Department of Education is from 2011 ([The Nature and Extent of Pupil Bullying In Schools in the North of Ireland](#)).

The [Addressing Bullying in Schools Act](#) which came into force last year gives an opportunity to find out more about bullying. It's vital that we know how bullying affects different equality groups, and that we are able to track it over time, so we know what works in tackling bullying, and what the tricky issues might be in how to adequately address it.

Without meaningful and effective tackling of the type of bullying that is motivated by someone's membership of an equality group, prejudice and stereotypes will continue to perpetuate harm on young people.

What needs to happen?

Our goal is to address prejudice-based bullying and to challenge stereotypes in education, and action is needed from the Department of Education, the Education Authority, staff and Boards of Governors in schools, and others. We've laid out below what we think needs to happen to achieve this:

- Comprehensive research to establish, and track over time, the prevalence and nature of prejudice-based bullying, and to assess school compliance with the Addressing Bullying in Schools Act.
- Guidance for schools on how to respond to and preventing incidents of bullying behaviour, and on how to comply with the Addressing Bullying in Schools Act.
- Guidance for schools on how to deal with unintentional acts of bullying – the type of acts that, while they may not be intentional, can still cause harm, fear or distress to young people.
- Strong and visible leadership from the school principal, senior management team and board of governors to promote an anti-bullying culture within every school.
- Support materials and opportunities in the curriculum to comprehensively address prejudice-based bullying.
- Measures to tackle bullying to also include the challenging of gender roles which will work towards preventing gender-based violence;
- Legislative protection from disability-based harassment extended to schools.

As you think about 'reaching out' this Anti-Bullying week, have a look at our priorities for [Tackling Bullying and Challenging Stereotypes](#), to inform your own work on addressing prejudice-based bullying. Use them to reach out to your networks and elected representatives and call for action to tackle bullying. Reach out to us at the Commission to learn more about how you can help us secure change.

Further information – Equality Commission's education priorities and recommendations: www.equalityni.org/Education/Policy

Aisha O'Reilly
Policy Officer