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PRESS RELEASE

Chief Commissioner Welcomes Anti-Bullying Week

The Chief Commissioner of the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland today called on parents, teachers, pupils and carers to support Anti-Bullying Week which happens next week across Northern Ireland from 13 to 17 November. The theme for the week, which is being coordinated by the Northern Ireland Anti Bullying Forum, is 'All Equal, All Different, All Together'.

Chief Commissioner, Dr Michael Wardlow said: "Hopefully this dedicated campaign week will help shine a light on bullying, which all too often lurks in the dark. Children and young people have been dealing with the reality of bullying, in school yards and elsewhere, for generations. It is a persistent problem despite the determination of so many to stamp it out.

"In our recent work on key inequalities in education, bullying was identified as one of the six key inequalities experienced by children and young people in Northern Ireland. The form it takes may vary – children are picked on by bullies under all the protected equality grounds – but the impact on the bullied child is the same regardless of the pretext. It's an experience which can have a serious detrimental effect on a child or young person's life, affect their confidence and self-esteem, and in the worst cases can leave long lasting mental scars and trauma which can impact on their life chances.

"The Equality Commission works to support and help people who are trying to eliminate bullying. We participated fully in the legislative process to bring forward Northern Ireland's anti-bullying legislation, are members of the NI Anti Bullying Forum, and offer advice and guidance within our own legal remit. We are currently finalising policy positions based on our work on key inequalities by consulting with a range of people and organisations across the education sector."

"Public policies should work to challenge stereotypes and help eradicate bullying across the education sector, Dr Wardlow concluded. "We must protect children and young people who are being victimised in this way – everyone should be able to make the most of their school years and achieve their full potential without having that opportunity ruined by bullying."