

Women and Equalities Committee

Oral evidence: [Sexual Harassment and Sexual Violence in Schools](#), HC 91

Tuesday 12 July 2016

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Members present: Mrs Maria Miller (Chair); Ruth Cadbury; Mrs Flick Drummond; Gill Furniss; Ben Howlett; Jess Phillips.

Questions 238-275

Witnesses

[I](#): Karen Bradley MP, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Home Office, Caroline Dinenage MP, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Women and Equalities and Family Justice, Department for Education, and Edward Timpson MP, Minister for Children and Families, Department for Education.

Written evidence from witnesses:

- [Department for Education](#)

Examination of Witnesses

Witnesses: Karen Bradley, Caroline Dinenage and Edward Timpson.

Chair: Good morning, Ministers. Thank you for taking the time to be with us today. I know these sessions involve a great deal of preparation and that you are all busy in your own Departments. We really do value the opportunity to bring you in front of the Committee and question you on another report that we feel is important and requires your consideration: sexual harassment and sexual violence in schools. Thank you for being with us. You know the form. Each of us has got a set of questions that we are very keen to talk to you about and we will be doing that over the next hour and a half. Thank you for your time. Flick Drummond is going to start our questioning today.

Q238 **Mrs Drummond:** Could you tell me how widespread you think sexual harassment is in schools?

Edward Timpson: The truthful answer is that we do not have a full picture. It would be remiss of me to suggest that I have conclusive evidence. We have better evidence than we have had in the past but it is still emerging. One of the benefits of this inquiry is that it will help increase our knowledge and understanding of the issue of prevalence but also the impact, because what is most important here is that any child, irrespective of prevalence, which we obviously want to reduce to an absolute minimum, is being seen as individual within those figures and that we have a response that puts them at the heart of it as opposed to statistics that we hope to move in one direction or the other.

We know through looking at some of the data that we collected through the Department for Education, from teacher surveys, parent surveys, pupil surveys and also from the exclusion data, that there are other forms of harassment, cyber bullying being one of the ones most exponentially on the rise, which also play a part in this whole context of the culture that is going on in schools and where sexual harassment and abuse is being allowed to become more prevalent unless we do more about it.

On exclusions, in 2013-14 we had 60 children who were permanently excluded for sexual misconduct and 2,140 who had a fixed period of exclusion. That does not tell us behind those figures some of the details as to why that happened. What we need to do is enrich our knowledge, not just in the Department for Education but right across Government, so that they can have a response that goes to the heart of why children are telling us that they are both aware that this is going on but even worse are becoming victims of that type of behaviour.

Q239 **Mrs Drummond:** I am pleased you have said that, because one report was saying that the Government came up with 5% and then it went up to 15%, whereas we are finding from our evidence that it is significantly more than that. Nearly three quarters—71%—of 16 to 18-year-olds hear



HOUSE OF COMMONS

sexual name calling on a daily basis. It is the same from Girlguiding: for ages 11 to 21, 60% of them said they had comments on their appearance and that sort of thing. According to all the evidence we have got from teachers, it is very widespread.

Edward Timpson: As I said earlier, the best evidence comes from children. They are going to reflect their experience, so we should take seriously both the breadth of that evidence and also, as I said before, the impact that it is having on them individually. Just to clarify, the figure of 15% is in relation to homophobic, biphobic and transphobic bullying, but that again is only a snapshot. We have done a lot of work across Government to try to tackle that type of bullying in recent years, working with a number of different charities finding a lot of funding. That is only part of the solution. What we want to see is a culture that breeds across every school, and we know in many schools it already does feature, but one which respects the fact that this is a problem that could be in any school. No school should shy away from that responsibility to do something about it.

Q240 **Mrs Drummond:** The evidence suggests that it is in every school, actually. We are seeing that a lot of schools are working really hard to deal with it.

Caroline Dinanage: Can I first of all apologise? I have got very little voice today and it is annoying me so I am sure it annoys everybody else to listen to it.

I agree. Often it may not even be seen as sexual harassment, because it is everyday sexism that often kids and teachers may hear around the school. My concern is that what is seen as potentially low-level language or behaviour has a massive cumulative effect on those that are its target, and that also ignoring it, or putting it down to banter or playful behaviour or somehow saying that it is justified by humour, almost legitimises it in the eyes of the perpetrators. The concern is that that draws another line in the sand and they may go on to worse forms of behaviour, and then it breeds a culture in which people do not feel safe.

I was interested in hearing one of your previous evidence sessions where somebody spoke about girls wearing their games shorts under their skirts. Obviously it was 100 years ago, but we used to do this when I was at school because other kids would lift up our skirts. In those days, it was seen as a uniform problem. That is not a uniform problem; that is a sexism problem and a harassment problem. I know some schools are tackling it by having a much more gender-neutral uniform where girls can wear trousers if they want to but actually they should only wear trousers if they want to, not to prevent people seeing their knickers when their skirts are raised. It is not just a school issue. If it were just a school issue then it would be somehow, although inexcusable, slightly easier to tackle. It is a cultural issue, because the language that kids are using is language that they are seeing on television, that they are finding on the internet, that they may be hearing at home, that they are hearing in the



HOUSE OF COMMONS

playground or in the park with their mates. That is something that is more cultural and much harder to tackle.

Q241 **Chair:** Minister, can I just pick you up on that? If it were a cultural issue then in the Houses of Parliament we might see people having their skirts lifted here and that does not happen in this place, at least not to my knowledge. Surely it is contextual within schools that this is happening. Are you not worried about that? Are you worried that action is not being taken?

Caroline Dinenage: Of course I am worried about it, and I take your point that we do not end up with our skirts being pulled up around our ears in Parliament, but we do hear sexist language on an almost daily basis, I would suggest, particularly on social media. I do not think there is a single female MP that has not been subjected to some form of that kind of email or social media interaction on quite a regular basis, so I would suggest that it is a cultural thing. If kids are hearing that sort of language at home, online or on telly, then it seeps into their consciousness. That is why in schools teachers need to pull it up. It is not okay. What might be viewed as low-level language needs to be pulled up because who knows to where it leads? Actually, for those who are the target of it, as I have said already, it may have a cumulative and very upsetting impact.

Karen Bradley: From the point of view of the Home Office and the crime aspect, it is so similar to so many other of what we sometimes call hidden crimes. These are the crimes that actually society has always said are acceptable. Domestic violence used to just be a domestic issue where others should never get involved. Actually, we have changed society. We have changed culture and made it so that it is now clear that domestic violence is not acceptable, but we still see the under-reporting of domestic violence. We still see victims not willing to come forward.

This is an issue that feels very similar to that. This is an under-reported, probably under-understood issue, where there is a level of tolerance that there simply should not be for behaviour that would not be acceptable in the Houses of Parliament or in a workplace or on the streets or anywhere else. It has become almost normalised because it has been tolerated. From a Home Office point of view, I want to see more reporting of it and I want to see zero tolerance.

Q242 **Jess Phillips:** Moving us on slightly from the idea of the level of this that is banter, some of the evidence that we heard includes, for example, one victim saying, "I have been experiencing this kind of harassment my whole life. As a child, I learnt to equate aggression and cruelty with affection." A mother told us, "My daughter told me that the boys were circulating a video to pupils at their school took of her having oral sex with them and she felt that she had to do it." I myself worked in a school once where 47 young women had been abused by one of their peers." What we are talking about here is not just the reporting or recording of people saying "slag" in the playground. We are also talking about very



HOUSE OF COMMONS

serious violence and very serious child abuse.

In response to that, in the written evidence that the Government provided to the Committee they refer to “Keeping children safe in education” guidance as being one of the tools of addressing the concerns around sexual harassment and violence in our schools. This guidance has been described by the End Violence Against Women Coalition as a key failing in current policy and by the NUT as not being able to provide schools or colleges with sufficient guidance about what to do. How adequate do you think this guidance is?

Edward Timpson: The “Keeping children safe in education” guidance is statutory. It is not something that schools can choose to follow. It is something that sets out very clearly what is expected of them. In the same way that we have revised the “Working together to safeguard children” statutory guidance, which is for all other agencies and how they respond to child protection and child safeguarding, to make it absolutely clear where responsibility lies and what action they should take, we have done the same with “Keeping children safe in education” in updating it, and we are further updating it and will have another revised version in September, which this Committee may have an opportunity to feed into.

It is setting out for the first time, where there are new challenges facing schools, and teachers in particular, around things like sexting, cyber bullying, violence against women and girls, very clear advice and guidance on those specific subjects. They then know in their school, when fulfilling their responsibilities around behaviour policy, if that is a problem that is emerging in that environment. They have very clear advice and guidance that they can turn to in order to hopefully successfully combat the problems that they have seen emerging within their school.

Of course, what is clear, certainly in the four years since I have been doing this job, is how quickly things have moved forward and how much more we are having to catch up with some of the societal norms that we thought were there but actually are very different, and schools are part of that response. The reason we are reviewing this again is because it cannot be a static document. Yes, its basis is very strong and very clear, but of course with those different emerging threats that there are, we need to be keeping pace with them. That is what we have, both in the recent version and the one that will be coming out in September.

Q243 **Jess Phillips:** So you are committing to revising the “Keeping children safe in education” guidance.

Edward Timpson: We have done so and we have consulted. The current plan is for that revised version to come out in September.

Q244 **Jess Phillips:** The evidence that we have received is that the revised version is still potentially inadequate and has only simply added in one paragraph. I hear you committing to the idea of it being a moving feast and something that has to develop but at the moment, from the scale



HOUSE OF COMMONS

that we have seen, it does appear that the guidance in its old format and its currently consulted revised form is still inadequate. What we are looking for is some commitment from the Government about revising it further based on some of the evidence that we have heard.

Edward Timpson: I have already indicated that there is an opportunity for the Committee to make their views known on the back of the recommendations out of this inquiry. I would always recommend that, although the Committee will receive evidence from interested parties, you read the guidance yourself and form your own view as to whether you feel it is adequate or not. That would be a good starting point for discussions as to whether there needs to be any clarity to certain aspects of it and also any additionality in areas where there is emerging evidence.

Q245 **Jess Phillips:** It might be my past, but I tend to agree with the End Violence Against Women Coalition in their assessments. If the other two Ministers have anything that they would wish to add, please do; I realise that that was a specifically schools-based question. Also, could we hear an answer as to what exactly it is that the Government action is going to be? What exactly are you going to do to keep children safer in schools? Currently, for example, there is no reference in the Government action to sexual harassment of girls and women in school.

Edward Timpson: First of all, this is not something that anyone in Government is wanting to shy away from. This has serious consequences for children right now, as well as ones that have already been affected by the consequences of being sexually harassed or abused, whether that is in a school environment or elsewhere. There is no attempt or desire to do anything other than have the fullest and most comprehensive response that works. That is an important aspect of this: what is actually going to make sure that children, when they are at school, are going to be able to build up that resilience and that culture of respect that is going to give them the best prospect of both not becoming a victim or a perpetrator of this type of behaviour? That is why the changes to the behavioural policy that every school has to have, so it talking about personal development, behaviour and welfare, which came in in December last year and which schools are judged against by Ofsted, is a better approach to ensuring that that is exactly what schools have instilled within that environment.

Q246 **Chair:** We are going to come on to Ofsted a little bit later. If I could intervene, is Minister Bradley not right that sexual harassment is a hidden crime and is currently not dealt with in the rules? Why can we not just come clean on that?

Edward Timpson: I am coming clean on the fact that this is a serious problem and there are children who, I have no doubt, have been the victims of a crime in school that has not ever come to the fore. We have to accept that. It is about how we start to unravel what it is that has caused that to happen.



It goes back to what Minister Dinenage was saying around where the earliest kernel of behaviour starts to allow this to grow within that school and within that environment. Some children do have that resilience in order to withstand it, although they should never have to be in that position. There are others who end up being isolated, lacking in self-esteem and becoming ever more vulnerable to that type of attack that they either have online or face-to-face. Absolutely, we should never work on the basis that what we have in front of us is the full picture. It clearly is not. That is why we want to use this inquiry as a way of improving our understanding and our response.

Q247 Jess Phillips: I wonder whether the other two Ministers could comment on whether, as it has been outlined that this potentially is not being picked up in schools, there is a need for this to be better integrated into the national strategy around domestic violence and violence against women, making sure that it is seen in terms of being a cross-party thing.

Karen Bradley: It was interesting. When I was going through the briefing for this, from a Home Office point of view there are actually three pieces of work that we are doing that this falls into. There is the violence against women and girls strategy; we released the new strategy in March of this year. We have also got the ending gang violence and exploitation work we are doing. In that, we have our "Ending gang and youth violence" programme, which ran from 2011. It was actually supposed to finish in 2015, but we ran it for an extra year because we were developing this knowledge and intelligence about exploitation and the way that gangs were exploiting vulnerable young people. That might be the county lines phenomenon, where vulnerable young people run drugs or fire arms for the gangs. It is also the exploitation of women and girls, and we have a specific priority within the ending gang violence and exploitation strategy about how we build resilience locally to understand the problem.

Jess, I have heard those kinds of stories that you were talking about, of extreme crimes, where girls in a line up are forced to perform sex acts on seven or eight boys and then they get expelled from school. This is before. This is not now; this is what used to happen. We have got a lot more understanding of it but there is an awfully long way to go. The work the Committee is doing will be incredibly helpful on that.

The other area where this has implications is our counter-extremism strategy. People think counter-extremism is just about activity that could lead to somebody being radicalised and becoming a terrorist. It is not. It is about that public promotion of an ideology that could lead somebody into committing a hate crime or that could lead somebody into committing violence against women and girls. I would cite FGM as an example of exactly the kind of subject matter that we would define as extremism. Somebody saying that it is the right thing to go and cut a girl or girls should be cut is not a criminal activity, but that public encouragement of it that could then lead to someone committing FGM on



HOUSE OF COMMONS

a girl—committing that crime—is the kind of activity we are talking about in our counter-extremism strategy.

There are lots of threads to what we are doing. Perhaps what this inquiry will be really good for is pulling all this together, with particular reference to what is going on in schools.

Q248 Jess Phillips: Do you think that the current national strategy accounts for sexual harassment in schools?

Karen Bradley: It probably does not have enough emphasis on it. It is there; there is no doubt about it. You have had evidence from Chief Constable Simon Bailey and others. It is very clear that we do understand that as part of the work we are doing.

Q249 Ruth Cadbury: This follows on well. We have the Home Office violence against women and girls strategy, we have got “Keeping children safe in education” guidance, but we have had extensive evidence from a number of organisations that a national strategy is needed to tackle the issue of sexual harassment in schools. I thank Ministers for their interest in this issue and in our inquiry. It is not just the teachers calling for national guidance; it is Girlguiding UK, Rape Crisis and the Everyday Sexism Project. What are your views on the importance of having a national strategy to tackle sexual harassment and sexual violence in schools?

Edward Timpson: First of all, it is important to recognise, as we have tried to set out, all the work that has been going on in a number of different areas of Government, as well as through associated organisations like CEOP, UKCCIS, the PSHE Association, the NSPCC, the Anti-Bullying Alliance, the Diana Award and others, who are all playing their part in trying to understand better where this is happening, why it is happening and what we can do about it.

What I am interested in, as I said before, is what will actually work. Although there is always an attraction in having a national strategy, what I would want to think about is what the value of doing that would be based on the activity we already have underway and the impact that that is having. There has got to be a purpose to it other than simply just having a document that we can call a national strategy. I would be interested to see from this Committee how they would, having taken evidence, formulate something that would have the necessary direction and impact to allow it to bring about progress and be able to monitor it in a coherent way.

Karen Bradley: If I can compare a specific strategy around this issue with the strategy on violence against women and girls, we took a lot of time to try to understand why people were frustrated and concerned about the delivery of services to support women and girls experiencing sexual violence or other forms of violence. We looked very carefully at whether there should be national minimum standards, but the problem with any national minimum standard is that sometimes it just hits the



HOUSE OF COMMONS

minimum and never goes above that. We wanted to make sure we did not stifle really good, innovative work going on around the country by almost dumbing it down to a minimum standard.

That is why in the VAWG strategy we have a national statement of expectations, which is how we can work with local commissioners and local authorities and service delivery providers to say, "This is what we expect you to do but we want you to go beyond that wherever possible. This is not a minimum. This is what we are expecting; we would like you to go beyond it." It is quite difficult to know the best way to achieve it. We all want to achieve the same thing. The evidence from this inquiry will be very, very helpful to Government in terms of how we best address the issue.

Q250 Ruth Cadbury: The Government are willing to mandate that schools teach young people about British values as part of the Prevent strategy. Is the problem with sexual harassment and sexual violence in schools, with all the harm that it causes to people in society, not as deserving of a similar response?

Edward Timpson: When we look at the issue of sexual harassment in schools, there are various parts of the responsibilities on schools that already exist which that falls within. That could be in relation to the formulation of their behaviour policy. At the moment, we are going through a process of review of the initial teacher training, which ensures that every teacher who comes into a school has a working knowledge and understanding of these issues. Andrew Carter is leading that. Stephen Munday is looking at what the ICT framework should be. We have also got Tom Bennett who is specifically looking at behaviour. That obviously encapsulates quite a large variety of activity within a school. It is no coincidence that a good school is built around good behaviour.

Instances of escalation of sexual misconduct offences within schools tend to be in schools where there is not that underlying zero tolerance to bad behaviour. What we are seeking to do, by ensuring that there is a good grounding for all teachers in personal development, in behaviour, in the welfare of children, which includes making sure that they are both resilient to advances around sexual harassment and are alive to that but also that they are not going to be ones who would consider it to be acceptable, is to help provide the backdrop that we want in every school, where it would not have an opportunity to flourish.

It is already in the initial teacher training, which is going through a period of review. It is written in the behaviour policy, which Ofsted have given evidence about—I know we are coming on to that—that sexual violence falls within that category that they specifically look at. We have the statutory guidance that every school has to follow; the updated version is in part trying to address this issue around the new and emerging threats within schools, whether it is around online abuse or sexual harassment.

Q251 Chair: Forgive me for intervening; the problem, Minister, is that sexual



HOUSE OF COMMONS

harassment is not seen as bad behaviour. That is the problem. The evidence we have been given is that many teachers are simply putting it down to “boys will be boys” and trying to sweep it under the carpet. The evidence we have received—I am sure you have been briefed on it—is that sexual harassment is falling between the gaps of the strategies that you have got in place. It is simply being taken as a normal part of everyday behaviour. Would you accept that?

Edward Timpson: What is absolutely clear is that there are some schools that get that and they appropriately deal with it and are successful, but there are schools that do not. That is the problem. There are too many instances, which have been described in the evidence that you have received in this Committee, where children are not being protected in the way that they should be. Part of that is built around attitudinal issues where, as Minister Dinenage was talking about earlier in the evidence, some of the social norms within the school environment from years gone by are still being allowed to continue, despite the fact that we have worked hard to change the rules around acceptability within schools. There is still work to do.

This provides us with an opportunity to really crack down on what is an area that has not surfaced as much as other issues, but one that it is now clear is one that we cannot shy away from. We need to make sure that every school and every teacher understands what their responsibilities are and what to look for because they need to feel confident that what they are doing is right and that they act in a way that is in the best interests of that child in that situation.

Part of this, which we have not talked about but may do later, is about how we then involve parents, because a child spends a third of their time at school. A lot of their time is away from the protective and safe environment of the school. We know there is no escape from things like cyber bullying and sexting. It is all very well to just say, “Switch off your mobile phone or device,” but that is not the world they live in. We are all playing catch-up with that, both as parents and as professionals who are there to look after children. We have to acknowledge that in the UK we have actually led the way in many respects in waking up to this. We are nowhere near where we need to be. That is why the work that we have set out is important, but it needs to be a continued priority taking into account these new emerging areas where we are becoming more aware of what is happening and why we need to have more of a focus on it.

Q252 **Ruth Cadbury:** Can I come back to the inconsistency of approach between schools? You seem to be suggesting that teacher education is a key part of that. Would you not accept that if you do not want inconsistency of approach on an issue as important as this, it would make sense to have a national strategy and a national approach?

Edward Timpson: The reason we are reviewing initial teacher training is that we want to make sure that every teacher that comes into the profession is armed with the knowledge and skills that they need to



provide, obviously, a good education but also a nurturing and safe environment for every child. We have the teachers' standards, which every teacher has to meet. In terms of each individual school, what we do not do is micromanage and mandate every single aspect of how they fulfil their responsibilities, because no school is the same. If you take a school in Birmingham, it would be very different from a school in Basingstoke.

Q253 Ruth Cadbury: But we do for British values. Is this not a British value?

Edward Timpson: British values underpin a lot of the core elements of what we are trying to create in a school. That is around respect for others and around understanding that this is a culture where everybody has an equal part to play, so yes, it is right that that underpins it. What we also need to do is enable head teachers to craft the right environment for them and their staff to support those particular pupils so that they can ensure that they are protected. There is not necessarily a script that you just follow. It is right that you have very clear boundaries that you have to set on what is expected of schools but then there is also an important element of allowing schools to make sure that they fulfil it—although they are held to account for it, quite rightly—in a way that best meets the needs of those pupils.

Q254 Jess Phillips: You are quite right to say that different schools are different everywhere and what is good for one is not necessarily good for all, except, as Ruth has pointed, in British values. Obviously schools where I live are going to be different to the ones in places that other people represent. It is interesting to note that none of the British values identify anything about gender equality, incidentally.

I just want to once again ask you if you think that this is an adequate response. I am reading from the KCSIE document provided by the DfE, and in a 67-page document this is the only thing that even nods towards sexual harassment: "Staff should recognise that children are capable of abusing their peers. Governing bodies and proprietors should ensure their overarching safeguarding policy and child protection policy includes procedures to minimise the risk of peer on peer abuse and sets out how allegations of peer on peer abuse will be investigated and dealt with. These policies should reflect the different forms peer on peer abuse can take and in particular reflect the different gender issues that are often prevalent when dealing with peer on peer abuse." It does not even outline sexual harassment. It does not outline sexual violence, yet every single person who came in front of us outlined that exact thing. Do you think that is adequate?

Edward Timpson: Two things: first of all, this is the first time that peer-on-peer abuse has formed part of statutory guidance from Government in relation to schools; secondly, when we talk about abuse we are talking about all forms of abuse: physical abuse, mental abuse, emotional abuse or sexual abuse. As ever when you say you are going to say two things, I have now got a third, which is that what is included in parts of that



HOUSE OF COMMONS

guidance that I alluded to before are the specific issues for which there is specific guidance, with the likes of sexting and cyber bullying being amongst them. This is in recognition of the fact that what a lot of teachers are looking for is, yes, that overarching understanding of their responsibilities and how they should respond to them, but also guidance on those areas in which they do not have such granular knowledge; they want more advice and guidance as to what to do if they come across a child that has pictures of another child in a sexually compromising position on their phone. If I were in that position, I would want to know what to do and how I should respond. That is why that is included as part of the guidance.

We have made this mistake before: guidance is there to guide; it is not there to tell a teacher what to do every second of every single day. If you prescribe it right down to that very small level of detail, then actually what you are doing is making it less likely that they will respond in that particular situation with what is best for that child.

Q255 Jess Phillips: With the greatest respect, Minister, there is a broad brush of sexual harassment. It is not a granular issue. It is an enormous issues that covers an enormous amount of things. As a parent, I would be delighted if my children's teachers were told, and guided by the Government, that it would never be tolerated in their schools and that they must have a policy of action, recording if it were ever seen in my children's school. That is what I want as a parent to make me feel safe when my children leave me at the school gates. I just want a simple answer. Do you think that paragraph is adequate?

Edward Timpson: That fulfils what we set out, which is to make it clear what is acceptable, what is not acceptable and what is the responsibility of teachers in every school.

Jess Phillips: It is clearly not working.

Edward Timpson: There is a danger here that we are trying to suggest that there is a different level of commitment. I am as committed as you to dealing with this. As I said earlier, there is no attempt to try to shy away from this. This is serious stuff. The last thing I am in the business of doing is trying to brush it off as a slight irritation or something that is granular.

Jess Phillips: I do not doubt that.

Edward Timpson: The point I was making is that abuse comes in lots of different forms. It is a big challenge for schools at the moment to try to understand the whole plethora of those potential threats to children in their school. What we are talking about here is one that is a manifestation of a wider problem around behaviour and social norms and what it is that children are starting to grow up believing is acceptable and what is not. We still have a problem in our society where masculinity and that dominance of the belief that sexual conquest is something that men can do without any say from the women involved, which is made worse



HOUSE OF COMMONS

by what far too many children from far too young an age are seeing online, is making it more difficult for us to really both come to terms with the problem and actually do something about it. What we are attempting to do is push us forward so that we are making this more mainstream as an issue, we are trying to give parents confidence that we take this seriously, and we are starting to provide teachers with the tools and guidance that they need so they feel confident in how they then respond. I do not want you to get any impression at all that the Government have any agenda apart from trying to do exactly what you said, which is keep children safe; give parents confidence and make sure that teachers know exactly what works.

Jess Phillips: I do not have any impression that you do not care; I think that you do.

Chair: Minister, thank you for that. When we assess the effectiveness of schools, Ofsted has a critical role to play and Ben wants to pick up on some of the evidence we were given by Ofsted and others.

Q256 **Ben Howlett:** One of the interesting pieces of written evidence that came through from the Children's Society said: "Our practitioners also suggest that there is a culture of fear amongst staff in schools related to Ofsted inspections and the handling of sexual harassment and violent cases. This may result in the underreporting of cases and an avoidance of proceeding with a fixed term or permanent exclusion of a child or young person for fear of a poor Ofsted rating." This is pretty worrying in many ways. Given that, what role do you think Ofsted should be playing in ensuring that schools are addressing the issue of sexual harassment and sexual violence appropriately?

Edward Timpson: It is important we have Ofsted. We need to know what is going on in schools. It goes back to the point that we were just discussing about making sure parents feel confident that the care that they are handing over is not exposing their children to some of those concerns. In doing that, it is also right, as I have seen in children's social care as well, that the impact of Ofsted is not to make teachers risk-averse and closes the schools around themselves rather than it being very open and transparent about what is going on. The change to the behaviour policy, starting to look at personal development and the welfare of children as well as behaviour, helps address that. What we do not get to see are those interactions between Ofsted inspectors and head teachers and how that can lead to some of the responses that you have just described. The last thing we want is for there to be even less reporting than what we already believe to be under-reporting because of that reticence to respond to the requests from Ofsted through an inspection in order to form a judgment.

Although I am not Schools Minister and I am not the Secretary of State, what we do need to do, particularly with the new HMCI coming in, is look at when schools are being inspected, and also what happens afterwards and whether there is a different way of engaging with schools that will



HOUSE OF COMMONS

help bring out some of the issues that there are in that school. We should also look at other ways in which that can be done.

We have talked a little bit about data, which I suspect we might come on to again later. It does not have to always be through Ofsted. What we are discovering through children's social care is that there are other ways that we can, through different types of peer-to-peer support—looking at schools helping each other and challenging each other—have better data, through the surveys we discussed earlier, through teacher, parent and pupil surveys. Is there a way we can use that to get a better understanding that does not have the sword of Damocles of Ofsted hanging over schools when they are deciding what knowledge to impart and what information to give?

Again, this is an area in which the Committee could be helpful. We need to think about what other ways we can encourage schools to engage with this, rather than it always just being through an inspection, which, for some schools, does not come that often anyway.

Q257 Ben Howlett: Looking at what Ofsted specifically says in relation to its handbook—I am sure you have read the handbook—at the moment it specifically refers to racist, disability and homophobic bullying but not sexist bullying, or sexual harassment for that matter. We have been told, "This sends out a harmful message that tackling sexual harassment is not a key priority." Do you agree?

Edward Timpson: I do not agree that it is not a priority. I do not know specifically of any undertakings Ofsted may have given to you as a consequence of your inquiry, but there may be a case for seeing whether there is a more explicit need for that. Obviously, the handbook is what the inspectors use in order to carry out their inspection but there is also the criteria on which they then form their inspection judgments. It is making sure there is consistency on that and also the training of Ofsted inspectors. There is an independence issue here; I cannot tell Ofsted what to do—they are the inspectorate—but there is a conversation to be had about whether we have got the balance right and how confident they are that the inspectors going to schools right now are able to ask the right questions so that we can start to unpick some of the issues that we know this inquiry are particularly interested in.

Q258 Ben Howlett: Given the fact that we have not had anything from Ofsted as such yet, after this ministerial evidence session will you commit to speaking to Ofsted to ensure this is actually enshrined in their handbook later?

Edward Timpson: As I say, it is something we need to discuss further with Ofsted. We have got a new HMCI coming in. That provides an opportunity, particularly with the new initial teacher training also that we will be seeing later in the year, to have quite a cohesive response so that teachers get a consistent message about what they should be doing and why it is important. It is something that they should not be frightened



HOUSE OF COMMONS

of. There is a danger here that they instinctively retract away from it, and that, because they do not know a lot about it and it is quite scary, it is better to just not get too involved in it. Actually, we need the opposite response. It is incumbent probably on us to give them the licence to do that and not be concerned about any consequences that follow.

Q259 Chair: If I am hearing you right, Minister, you are saying there is an opportunity for Ofsted to look again potentially at their inspection handbook to see whether including sexist bullying and harassment might actually provide more clarity to teachers about the Government's priorities.

Edward Timpson: Yes, that is certainly one option that is available. We also, as I say, need to look at the training that they undertake with their inspectors. Also, although we have had a change to the behaviour policy and what it is that schools are being judged against, we should just reflect on whether that encapsulates fully what it is that we are asking inspectors to look for when they go and visit schools.

Q260 Gill Furniss: I really want to talk about data collection. I would like to read a bit out from the evidence that we have been given from a teacher who said, "I have reported incidents that have been quietly dealt with by the pastoral team but I have never seen disciplinary consequences issued as a result of reporting such incidents", and something else from the EVAW Coalition notes that the guidance has "no framework for monitoring equality issues and instructs schools to 'exercise their own judgment' with regards to the recording of bullying incidents (even acknowledging that some schools 'do not want to keep written records')". I am quite amazed by that, to be honest. It does seem, like where we came from at the beginning, that this is a hidden crime. They do not even want to write it down in some schools. I just feel we really have got to legitimise this. I want to tell you that there is currently a lack of robust data on the number of incidents of sexual harassment and sexual violence in schools. Do you agree that better reporting and monitoring by schools, DfE and the police is needed?

Edward Timpson: I do not want to dominate proceedings but, in short, we do need better reporting. We do need to be clear that, when schools keep a record, it is part of what Ofsted will be looking at to see whether they are fulfilling their behaviour policy. Also, in relation to Home Office data, there is a relevance here about understanding more widely the prevalence from a criminal point of view. If there is under-reporting, we are getting a false sense of whether there are victims to these crimes, particularly as more and more of them are happening online, so our response needs to be different too. Therefore, how we report it and how we manage that data is going to have a role in what response we then have to follow. It is maybe something for Minister Bradley to pick up on.

Karen Bradley: I was going to come on to talk about the "Tackling child sexual exploitation" report, which was launched in March 2015 and which we have been working on. Myself and Minister Timpson are both active



HOUSE OF COMMONS

members of the inter-ministerial group that is the tackling child exploitation taskforce. Part of that work is looking very carefully at what the failings were that had caused those scandals in Rotherham, in Rochdale and in Oxford, and how they had been allowed to happen. There were some fundamental underlying problems, such as victims not being listened to or believed, and victims not realising they were victims. I went up to Rotherham recently and met some victims of what we call historic abuse, although there is nothing historic about it; it is very real and current for those people who have been through it. They told me, "I was 12 and I just thought I was a bad girl, and that is what bad girls got up to". We really have to address and challenge those responses. I have met children in Staffordshire, where my own constituency is, who have said that the police attitude when they have gone to report the crime had been, "Are you sure you want to go through with this? You know it is not going to be very good for you. Would it not be better just to let it go?" and these are very brave young people who took this forward. I dread to think how many others in the past have not taken this forward.

There were various things from the "Tackling Child Sexual Exploitation" report that we are doing. We have instigated multi-agency inspections, which leads on from the Ofsted inspection point, including HMRC, the Care Quality Commission and Ofsted, to go into children's services and really drill down as to what is going on in these areas. It was clear from the report that it was too easy for one inspection agency to look at what they were looking at and miss all the other bits, and things were falling through the gaps. It is very important that we have those.

In terms of prevalence, I cannot say too many times that crime must be reported. I would rather we over-reported than crimes were allowed to just fall by the wayside. On your point about, "We would rather it was dealt with in a pastoral capacity", or something like that, if a crime has been committed we need to know about it, it needs to be properly investigated, and the police need to have the training and skills. I know under Simon Bailey's leadership that is changing across the country, but they need to be ready and able to listen and believe the victim and take action.

The other thing I would say is about whistle-blowers. We have launched a whistle-blower helpline for precisely the kind of anecdotal story you have just given about people reporting things and nobody taking action. That has been a problem when we have looked through the findings from the reports of the big scandals. Do not get me wrong: any of this is a scandal, but where we have seen the very big scandals people reported it but then no action was taken. It was as if there was no ownership or accountability: "I have done my bit and then it moves to somebody else and they do not take action so I will not do anything about it," and that is why we have the whistle-blowing helpline that the NSPCC runs for the Government. I would encourage any professional from any agency, any teacher or any health worker who comes across what they believe to be inappropriate sexual activity with a child, to report that to the



HOUSE OF COMMONS

whistle-blowing helpline if they do not feel that their concerns are being listened to. The NSPCC have trained staff there who can make sure that, even if that is not the right place for you, they can triage your call to take you to the right agency to help and support. We do need to take this seriously; it is incredibly important.

Q261 Gill Furniss: I would just move on to say that the thing is if you report something and nothing happens, there can be 20, 30, 40 or 50 girls in that school who will say, "It is not worth reporting it because nothing ever happens. It must be okay. It is just okay for that to happen." That is wrong, obviously. We touched on resilience and parental engagement. I do not want to criminalise children for low-level activities but there are other sanctions one can take. Talking to parents about their child's behaviour is absolutely crucial if we are to get it into the communities as well that this is not acceptable. It is that link with reporting it and having a structure in place to deal with that, how you talk to a parent and how you talk to a child, and how you may want to involve other agencies, like social services, because a lot of this can lead to severe mental health issues, as we all know. Maybe the Ministers are saying we are pushing at a bit of an open door but I really would like to see very much more structure from Government and also, if you could tell me, if I am pushing at an open door, when we would be likely to see anything in writing in legislation to deal with the issues we brought up today.

Karen Bradley: If I can kick off on reporting, we need people to understand that they are victims and to understand what is acceptable and appropriate. That is why we ran the This is Abuse campaign, the new version of which is the Disrespect NoBody campaign, which is very much aimed at young people and teenagers, so that they can understand what is acceptable behaviour. It is not just sexual harassment and abuse; it is domestic abuse, violence and what is not acceptable. We do know that there is too much correlation between somebody growing up in a household with domestic abuse and then becoming a victim or a perpetrator of domestic abuse in later life. Likewise, if you see sexual violence at home your attitudes to what is acceptable and what is the norm need to be challenged. That is why the Disrespect NoBody campaign is running. We know This is Abuse did reach a large number of young people and did have an impact.

It is about making sure people recognise they are victims. With just about every crime in my portfolio, one of the biggest challenges is to get the victim to recognise they are a victim. Until we get them to recognise they are a victim we cannot take action because they think that they are the girl who can change the boy and he is not going to beat her anymore, or that they are the girl who, if she sleeps with him it will be fine and he will love her. We need to get them to recognise that this is not acceptable behaviour.

Caroline Dinanage: From the point of view of the Government Equalities Office, I completely agree with Minister Bradley. It is getting



young people to identify what abuse looks like, particularly in the form of controlling and coercive behaviour, which we have not spoken about so much, and also getting parents to identify what it looks like as well. As Jess said, you expect, when you deliver your children at the school gates, the school is going to take good care of them but sometimes a lot of the activity that is going on is happening in a cyber capacity; your children are being bullied or sexually harassed online or on their mobile phones, which is something that is happening in your own home as parents. People need to be able to identify that and equip adults or parents with the tools. With that in mind, we have given some money to CEOP to support a national rollout of parent information, which is a free service for parents that helps them show their children how to use things like the internet and mobile devices safely and appropriately. Also it is about giving the professionals the tools to recognise and identify it. Exactly as Minister Bradley said, often the victims do not necessarily recognise that they are.

Edward Timpson: I want to add one important element to this, which we have not touched on a huge amount so far but which has to be part of this solution that we are trying to all come up with. As much as we take a zero-tolerance attitude and we do not want any child to ever be on the receiving end of harassment or abuse of any nature, the sad truth is that there will always be children that that happens to. The question is how we support them so that they do not end up on that spiral downwards towards what can often be quite devastating for them. The work we are doing around mental health in schools, putting mental health professionals into schools to support children who need it, is an important part of making sure that we do not forget about those who would otherwise be left to their own devices.

Chair: The support that we give to young people is exactly the sort of questioning that Flick wants to go on to here.

Q262 **Mrs Drummond:** Given all your comments and all the evidence that we have had over the course of this inquiry about how positive an effect good quality SRE—sex and relationship education—can have on reducing instances of sexual harassment and sexual violence in schools, and possibly outside as well, will you commit to making it compulsory in schools, preferably from primary or even nursery all the way through school?

Edward Timpson: You will know that the Education Select Committee looked at this in an inquiry last year, and the Government gave a response to that. As things stand today, that is still the Government's position in as much as the PSHE offer to children has to be predominantly about the quality of it. We know that 20% of schools provide outstanding PSHE and there are 40% that require improvement and are inadequate. How do we get those schools where it is underperforming to the level that is needed? That is why we have been working very closely with the PSHE Association to ensure that we provide the material, the toolkits and the support to schools to get them up to the level that they need to be at.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Having said all of that, it is no secret that the Secretary of State is very passionate about this area of policy and wants to see further progress. I hope that we can do that in the coming weeks and months and demonstrate the real commitment that the Government have to this.

Q263 Mrs Drummond: At the moment, it is mostly about the physiological and biological aspects of it. They are not actually looking at the relationship angle, and that is the area that we have been discussing most in our inquiry, so can that be put into PSHE in a better way?

Edward Timpson: I have two responses to that. First, we are genuinely actively reviewing PSHE and SRE. I hope we can make some significant progress in the next few weeks and months and be able to say something rather more profound than I am able to say today.

The second thing is that we have not just left things as they are. We have worked hard to try to build up the quality of PSHE around online safety and the PSHE support around 21st century SRE advice and guidance to schools. We have had the work they have done on consent, which is a key problem around the areas where girls in particular, and also some boys, really do not know what to do and feel extremely vulnerable and make the wrong decision. How can we prevent that from happening? There is a role for schools to play in that. We are alive to all of these issues, and the most I can reassure you with is that we want to make some really profound progress on this. The involvement of this Committee in this will be a helpful catalyst in us reaching that point.

Q264 Mrs Drummond: It should be quite simple, really. It is not a big request to make sure that it is compulsory and that there is a really well-structured programme—as we talked about earlier on—that schools can follow through with, obviously, training, which we will come on to in a minute. It is not a difficult ask, really, and could make a tremendous difference not only in schools but throughout their life, if they have discussed this and understood what impact they are having.

Edward Timpson: I am in no doubt, and I am sure my ministerial colleagues would agree with me, without necessarily speaking for their Departments, that this has to be a core part of what schools do. That is why in the national curriculum it is clear that that is what the expectation of schools is: to have quality PSHE at the heart of the school offer. We also have to answer the question about why it is that 20% of them are excellent at doing it and why 40% are falling short. We need to come up with the answers to that, and part of that is the work that we are doing to raise the quality and the ability for schools to do that themselves.

I recognise that there is still work to do to try to really embed this into school life, because it is about life skills; it is about equipping children for the huge demands that adulthood now places upon them at a much earlier age than ever before. The last thing we want to do is put children out into that world knowing that they are going to fall short of what they are capable of doing because we have not provided them with that



HOUSE OF COMMONS

bedrock of resilience and character that will give them the best chance of succeeding.

Q265 **Mrs Drummond:** One of the issues is the variability, because there is not a standard programme. As we have heard all the way through, it is up to each school to devise its own programme and to deliver it. If it were made compulsory and there was a good structured programme, which was recognised throughout the country, surely that would be an improvement.

Caroline Dinanage: From the point of view of the Government Equalities Office, there are some very compelling arguments. We have heard the arguments and your Committee's review on this will, I am sure, only strengthen and add to this. As Minister Timpson has said, this is something that is being kept under review and looked at very seriously. I would say that we do continually add to the PSHE guidance that goes out to schools. We are just about to publish a PSHE toolkit to help schools deliver sessions about cyber bullying, peer pressure and sexting from the GEO.

I take your point that if something were statutory it might be delivered better, but what I would like to see is something embedded in the whole school ethos of respect for others and tolerance and understanding right the way through. I would not want any schools to feel that, by tackling something for half an hour on a Tuesday afternoon, they have ticked the PSHE box. It has got to be actually embedded as part of everything they do every single day.

Q266 **Mrs Drummond:** Why is it not statutory? Where is the block coming from? Is it from the schools and teachers themselves or from the Department for Education? Who is putting that barrier up to making it statutory and widespread?

Edward Timpson: Any significant change in Government policy requires the whole of Government to agree it.

Q267 **Chair:** So who does not agree?

Edward Timpson: We are in the process of moving from one Government to another, so it may be that the blockages that were there before are no longer in the way. The truth is that this is taken very seriously. Everybody has an interest in making sure children have a great education and leave school equipped for modern Britain. Everyone has a different view about how you achieve that, but there is no disagreement that, in order to do that, yes, they have to have a fantastic education and they have to leave school with the academic capability to achieve what they are capable of, but also there is another part to it, which is the character and the resilience that sits behind it. You can be the cleverest person in your class and walk into an exam, but if you are in a bad place and have other things going on in your life that are troubling you, you are not going to perform. That is a good reason to make sure that when children leave school they do so with all of those



HOUSE OF COMMONS

faculties at their disposal and the life skills that make sure that they are the best that they can be.

Q268 Jess Phillips: We have touched on this a little bit already, so I will just say briefly that it is around teacher training. All of the evidence that came in front of us around teachers was that they actually want more training in how to deal with both the teaching of PSHE that they might or might not have to do in the future, and also just dealing with cases as and when they occur. In light of this, do you think that the current levels of teacher training are adequate in this area?

Edward Timpson: As I have said before, the teachers' standards make it clear that every teacher needs to have the knowledge and skills, and PSHE forms a clear part of that. It goes back to the question as to why it is that in some schools it is excellent and in some schools it is inadequate. If that is to do with the quality of the training of the teachers, clearly we need to look at that quality. One of the things that Andrew Carter, through his review into initial teacher training, and also particularly Tom Bennett, who is looking at the behavioural framework around initial teacher training, are doing is making sure that in developing that we do provide teachers with the whole set of skills that they need to fulfil their responsibilities within their own schools. I have seen a lot of the material that is available to schools; some of it is absolutely excellent.

Jess Phillips: I wrote some of it, so thanks.

Edward Timpson: Be careful; we might second you into the Department for Education. It is not that there is not an opportunity for teachers to access that really good training that is on offer, but what we need to be sure of is that every teacher has that accessibility.

Q269 Jess Phillips: What we saw from the evidence, specifically from the young people who came in to speak to us, was the marked difference between the young people who had had the good SRE, who were so knowledgeable, and those that had not. They were knowledgeable; they were confident; they understood the ideas of consent, for example. What was evident from that and many other evidence sessions is the partnership of teachers working with specialist sector providers in those areas. I wonder if that is something that you would look at.

Edward Timpson: It would be good to understand more of how that has helped improve schools' understanding and performance around SRE and where they could be made more aware a) that it is available, and b) how that could be utilised. That is potentially something the Committee could be of assistance with.

Q270 Ben Howlett: I do not know whether this is the case or not; this is a genuine question. It used to be the case back in the 1980s that they had specific SRE or PSHE teachers. I do not know whether the Department for Education is looking at recruiting specifically PSHE or SRE teachers and sharing them, maybe, across a number of different schools. Is that a



thought that the Department for Education is looking at at the moment?

Edward Timpson: I am not aware of a specific strand of work that is looking at that. I will need to refer back to my ministerial colleague, Nick Gibb, who has responsibility for teacher recruitment. Certainly I know, as the Minister for school sport, for example—and this is an area where you can help tackle some of these issues, if it is done well—more and more schools, particularly primary schools, are looking for specialist teachers who can not only improve the quality of PE and sport but who can also be equipped to deal with some of those underlying issues we are talking about where girls sometimes do not want to get changed in communal areas and whether they are thinking about that. There may be a case to look at this but I will certainly go back to my ministerial colleague and get some more information to share with the Committee.

Ben Howlett: If you could write back to us, that would be great.

Q271 **Ruth Cadbury:** How concerned are you about the impact of pornography on young people's perceptions of sex, relationships, gender equality and consent?

Karen Bradley: Extremely concerned. It is very clear that the use of pornography by young people distorts their impression and image of what a normal, healthy sexual relationship should be. I know the NSPCC are treating children as young as seven for addiction to pornography and that is why we are going to legislate to make all pornographic websites in the UK have to have age verification on them. That age verification is not simply a "Tick the box to say you are over 18"; this has to be proper appropriate proof that you are aged over 18 in order to access this. This includes free sites. This is not just those paid-for sites; it is free sites, because we can restrict their ability to receive advertising revenue if they fail to do this. It is something that we have been working on. Minister Timpson, myself and Baroness Shields co-chair the UKCCIS board and we have had a team of experts looking at that, from the internet industry and academics, as to how we can actually have appropriate age verification so we can bring this legislation in. We now are going to do that in this session of Parliament.

Caroline Dinenage: I want to very much reiterate what Minister Bradley has said. It is of enormous concern because the data shows that by the age of 14 so many young teenagers will have already accessed online pornography. It has a devastating impact upon their views of what normal, healthy relationships look like, and what a normal, healthy sexual relationship looks like. Therefore, there is additional pressure on us to educate youngsters about issues around consent, issues around what normal, healthy relationships are, and issues around what abuse looks like, which takes me back to the Disrespect NoBody campaign that the GEO and Home Office have been jointly funding, trying to get young people to be very smart around this sort of issue.



Edward Timpson: One of the problems is that this has been such a fast-moving problem. We can all pick up a Sunday newspaper and read another section telling us what we should do to keep our children safe, but it is a bit like trying to understand, like trying to find the right recipe in order to make the best possible cake, that every single one is different. It is very hard as a parent to know exactly what to do and therefore it is very hard for teachers as well to know what the best response is to this.

The UKCCIS board has been a real driver in making sure that parental controls are available and that public WiFi is now filtered. Through the "Keeping children safe in education" guidance, we are now bringing in, for the first time, the need for every school to have filtering and monitoring systems on their own IT systems. There is still a lot of confusion about what is the best way to tackle it both at home and in schools, which is why we have got revised guides coming out from CEOP; we are doing a lot of work with the NSPCC and with Parent Zone. We need to have a very clear pathway for schools to follow and also for parents, so they have confidence that what they are doing is actually going to be helpful and will protect their children, rather than it being cosmetic.

I worry, as a parent, that every time my child goes online there is a risk. There is an opportunity for them; 99 times out of 100 when they go online it is a positive experience but I worry about that 1%, and how I am making sure and how the school is making sure that they are being safe in that situation. Part of it is actually having good systems in place, which is why we have made the change to the guidance, but part of it is about knowledge and us having a clear understanding of how we can protect children with an ever-changing technological world we live in.

Q272 **Ruth Cadbury:** We had a lot of evidence about the age verification restrictions but we all know that children are pretty tech-savvy and can get around it. As our Chair said in her speech last week in the Chamber, actually stuff pops up on your computer if it is in any way related to something that has previously been searched for on that computer without you even having to try.

Age verification restrictions are only part of the solution around protecting children. What young people have told us is that, apart from the fact they can get around restrictions, they would like to see good education and information about pornography and also what healthy sexual relationships are. Therefore, Ministers, do you support better teaching about pornography in schools, so that young people can understand how it differs from healthy and consensual relationships?

Edward Timpson: Clearly we want to see the best possible response from schools to what we know is a wide problem. To deny that would be to do children a disservice. What we need to do is make sure that teachers are armed with what they know will, where it is age-appropriate as well, ensure that those children will start to build up their own understanding of what is right and what is wrong. CEOP have done another factsheet for schools in that regard. I know the NSPCC and a lot



HOUSE OF COMMONS

of schools in my constituency and elsewhere do work with both teachers and with children from Key Stage 1 upwards to talk about some of these issues, so yes, but we need to do more. There is a clear role for schools to play particularly in the early stages. I would not necessarily say it should start at secondary school but we know that where it is a particular problem is between the ages of 11 and 14. It does, as Minister Bradley said, happen at a much earlier age, which should trouble us all. We know that those first few years of secondary school is when children are particularly vulnerable to the darker side of the internet and the interaction that they have with other pupils and people who they do not know can lead them down the wrong path. Yes, schools have a very clear role to play in making sure we tackle that.

Q273 Chair: The internet is not new, Ministers. It has been with us for about 18 years. Do you not think we need to be more nimble to identify these things? The idea that children viewing pornography through the internet, and indeed the increased rate of people of all ages viewing pornography through the internet, is not something that has just happened. Why is it taking us so long to respond to these problems? How can we make sure that we can respond to the next set of problems in a more nimble way? For instance, virtual reality is the next issue we are going to have to deal with in the online world. That has clear implications for your work, Minister Bradley, but also Minister Timpson. How are you going to be more nimble in the future?

Caroline Dinanage: I would start by saying we do have to be nimble and pre-emptive and do everything we can to protect children from what they might see on the internet. There are already some opportunities that we are missing as parents. Children are so much more media and internet-savvy than we are. My children are much more whizzy on their devices than we are. I went to a really good Internet Legends event at a local school. It was an assembly run by Parents Zone with Google, and it teaches it through the language of superheroes, teaching kids to be really savvy about what happens online. It was for Key Stage 2 children. From what I saw in the room, not all parents, for example, have their iPads set with parental controls on. Not all parents are encouraging their children, if they go on to things like Instagram, to make sure that they cannot be seen by everybody.

As a mother of a teenager, it is potentially terrifying to know that my teenager could be speaking to somebody who he thinks is a 13-year-old girl from Cheltenham but is actually a 60-year-old bloke from somewhere else. These are things that as parents we need to properly educate ourselves in to be aware of. There are wider implications for the wider internet but there are some really obvious, tangible, immediate things that we can all do as parents to protect our kids.

Karen Bradley: It is worth saying that we cannot do this as a Government alone. I want to pay tribute, Madam Chair, to the work you did when you were Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport,



HOUSE OF COMMONS

because it was quite clear that was the time when, as Government, we were grasping the nettle here and realising what we could achieve but we had to work together. I am very proud of what the UKCCIS board has achieved in terms of things like age verification. 18 months ago, people would say it would not be possible for you to have appropriate age verification applied on websites. It just simply could not be done. It would just be a case of ticking a box and going past it. It would not be possible for automatic filtering to be put in place, which it is now. It is now the case that if you buy a new device the filtering is there by default. You have to actively switch it off. By working with industry, the professionals and the academics in this area, Government have been able to move this significantly.

We are always up against the fact, as Minister Dinenage has said, that we are the generation of parents who know a lot less about what our children are doing online than they know, because they are a generation who have grown up knowing nothing but the internet. The internet arrived in our lives at some point probably through work or something else when we realised we could email people and it saved us having to make a phone call, whereas for young people it is something that is part of their everyday life. That is something that we do have to address.

Edward Timpson: I preface this by saying that across Europe the UK is recognised as being a leader in this area, which may tell us more about Europe than it does about us—I do not know—because we still have a long way to go. The answer to your question about why there has been such a lag between the emerging threats and the response is that there are so many different layers to this. Think about the manufacturers, the internet service providers, the retailers and the consumers. Think also about the global context as well and the control that we have over what happens on these shores; it is much more physically difficult to achieve when huge numbers of companies that solicit this material are coming from the United States, the Far East and elsewhere. In order to pull all of that together and come up with a comprehensive response that starts to scythe away at some of the areas that are allowing this material to work its way all the way through to the end point, which is a child looking at it in front of their screen, is a big challenge.

The one thing that UKCCIS has done, without the need for heavy-handed regulation, albeit with the threat of doing so if they cannot get their act together, is for the first time getting all of those players together in the same room and saying, "Listen, we actually have a responsibility here as a society to not just sit back and let this happen because it is good for our business. There is a moral responsibility to do something."

The one thing that has started to change is that where businesses used to see having parental controls on their devices and spending a lot of money on campaigns to try to tackle online abuse as not being good for their business, now they are starting to see that it is. It is what parents want, it is what Government want to see, and therefore they are more



willing to play their part. As you say quite rightly, however, we are still quite a few steps behind. As another six months goes by, we see another form of technology, virtual reality sounding like the next one we will have to contend with, and we have to be thinking about that not today, not tomorrow, but yesterday. There is a really tough job for Government, and by that I mean Government across the whole of the UK, as to how we do this collectively and also outside of the UK, because it is not just inside the UK where we are going to solve this.

Q274 **Jess Phillips:** I want to expand a tiny bit on the issue of pornography but also around how we are teaching young people in schools to respect one another. I am sure that Minister Timpson did not intend to state that we need to teach girls around consent, and I wonder if you could comment on how potentially SRE—it certainly was the case from the evidence that we heard—needs to be focused on boys’ attitudes, not girls’ attitudes.

Karen Bradley: That is why the Disrespect NoBody campaign actually did focus on male attitudes. It was aimed at all young people aged 11 to 18 but really did focus on male attitudes because you are absolutely right: the evidence shows that it is changing male attitudes towards women that has the biggest impact in terms of healthy relationships.

Edward Timpson: It is clear that the reason we had the work done on consent by the PSHE Association is because, whichever way you look at it, there is still a strong naivety about what is acceptable among children, who get to the point of being sexually active and still have a wrong-headed view as to what is acceptable. It is just as much an issue for boys as it is for girls, and it is important, therefore, that it is reflected in the guidance that we make sure there are clear parameters in which any child is working within when they come across that issue in, hopefully, later life.

Caroline Dinanage: It is a really interesting point that you make about boys. It is really important because often we talk about boys as the perpetrators but there is the opportunity for boys to be the champions to the solution. I know that Minister Bradley and I met with the White Ribbon Campaign, which basically talks about men as agents of change, as you will be aware. That is something that I would love to see filtering down more and more into schools from a very early age, so that boys do not see themselves as stuck in some narrow gap that they have to fit in, between being some sort of sexual predator and something else. There is enormous power in their hands to be the solution to this rather than the problem.

Karen Bradley: It is a tragedy when you do hear the stories and you have a perpetrator and victim. That perpetrator is a young boy and is as much a victim in many ways. If someone could have intervened and helped them to understand that this was not acceptable, the girl would never have gone through that crime and the boy would have understood what a healthy relationship was like and would not have put himself in a



HOUSE OF COMMONS

position where he now potentially has a criminal record. We should be looking at this. The prevention side is so important for both protecting the victims and also preventing people from becoming perpetrators.

Caroline Dinenage: Boys can be victims too.

Ruth Cadbury: That was my speech last week.

Karen Bradley: We must have heard it.

Q275 **Chair:** Before we end, can I get a very clear commitment that sexual harassment in schools is a real priority, not just for the Department for Education but for the Home Office and the GEO as well?

Edward Timpson: Absolutely. This session has shown that we are all engaged in it. We do want to make more progress. I am sure this Committee will help us do that.

Karen Bradley: We look forward to receiving your report and seeing what your recommendations are.

Chair: Ministers, thank you very much for your time today. I know you are incredibly busy. We really are grateful for you giving us an hour and a half of your time and for giving us such candid and informative answers. We are very grateful. Thank you.