

Rise in bullying cases is a “mark of success”

A “startling” rise in the number of bullying incidents at Edinburgh schools, which includes more than 500 race-related incidents, has been described by the council as a “mark of success” of changes to the reporting system.

New figures suggested an increase in reported bullying cases of more than 400 per cent across the capital’s primary and secondary schools since 2019.

The latest data, presented to the education committee on Tuesday showed primary school incidents jumping from 157 in 2019/20 to 912 during the year ending in April.

Meanwhile, a similarly huge increase has also been reported in high schools – rising from 223 cases annually to 1193 over the same period.

Reports of race, sexual orientation and gender-related bullying rose the most according to the statistics.

Across primary and secondary schools there were 537 racism or race-related incidents. In Edinburgh’s primary schools cases jumped from 25 in 2019/20 to 210 in 2021/22, while in secondary schools they went from 51 to 327.

But officials said the figures, despite appearing worrying,

suggest pupils have become more confident in speaking to teachers about bullying since a new reporting system was implemented in 2019.

Senior education manager Stephen Kelly said: "If anything, these incidents and increases is a mark of success and to be honest I still think we are under reporting and I expect these numbers to go up.

"The big push is about improving the quality of our reporting and the quality of our recording.

"What was really important for us is that young people knew how to report incidents, that young people knew what would happen once these incidents were reported, that our staff understood their responsibilities in recording these incidents and closing them off."

Councillor Tim Jones asked how the council can be certain the "rather startling rise" is not simply an increase in school bullying cases.

Mr Kelly said investigations and engagement with young people showed this was not the case, however he added there is an "ongoing piece of work" to determine if the prevalence of bullying rose alongside reported incidents.

A report said: "Whilst there is clearly still work to do to eliminate bullying and prejudice in all its forms, trends in the Pupil Wellbeing survey data would suggest that our work in this area is beginning to have an impact.

"This data is complemented by the new national Health and Wellbeing survey data. We will continue to monitor the data to gain accurate information about children and young people's experiences and to evaluate implementation of measures to address bullying and prejudice."

by Donald Turvill

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