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Mencap in Northern Ireland Response to Addressing Bullying in School, Committee Stage.

Mencap is the leading learning disability charity in Northern Ireland and works alongside children, young people and adults with a learning disability and their families to ensure their voice is heard. We provide a range of services including information and advocacy, employment, housing and personal support information, to people with a learning disability and their families at key times of their life.

It is estimated that 2% of the population – around 33,000 people in Northern Ireland have a learning disability. The Bamford Review highlighted the myriad inequalities experienced by people with a learning disability and their families in accessing and benefiting from the same opportunities as others in their community.¹

Our studies have shown that a concerning 8/10 children and young people with learning disabilities are bullied at school, on public transport, in the park and in their youth clubs because of their learning disability. 4/10 children noted it did not improve when they reported the bullying to an adult. Bullying can affect all areas of a person's life in a variety of different forms including: physical, mental and cyber. It is worth noting bullying is not only experienced by a child or young person with a learning disability, it can also be experienced by their siblings and family.²

Mencap in Northern Ireland would find it helpful if the Bill or its associated regulations and guidance specifically identified children and young people with a learning disability as at greater risk of bullying. It would also be helpful if schools' policies and procedures were required to specifically address instances of bullying linked to learning disability and programmes for addressing these.

We note that the Bill does not specifically consider preventative strategies for building better understanding and relationships for children who are more at risk of bullying. Mencap has run a very effective self-esteem and anti-bullying programme with a number of schools in Northern Ireland called "Super Me", [as part of our Young People Together project](#).³ This programme is suitable for use with all children and seeks to build self-esteem in the broadest sense while also addressing specific differences that may be linked to bullying. It also builds an appreciation of diversity among children and communities and in doing so addresses many of the root causes of bullying. We have delivered this programme in 20 [schools](#) across Northern Ireland to over 1,300 pupils.

¹ *Equal Lives Review of Mental Health and Learning Disability DHSSPS 2005*

² Mencap: [Stop It Don't Stick It](#) [Stop It](#) (2007)

³ *Super Me: External Evaluation of [Early Years Programme Young People Together project](#) (2016) Unpublished*

| This programme has included both primary and post primary ~~and~~ mainstream and special schools. It has had very positive feedback from both Principals and teachers. It is important that the Department of Education makes available resources associated with the Bill which will allow schools to effectively address bullying by availing of such programmes. Mencap would be delighted to share our experience of the “Super Me” preventative programme with them if it would assist in their consideration of the Bill.

| Mencap can also provide expertise, particularly in informing policies and in creating guidance for Schools and Boards s of Governors in Northern Ireland.

Mencap in Northern Ireland welcomes the opportunity to comment on the above Bill and looks forward to the outcome of the Committee Stage.

If you require any further comments or information, please do not hesitate to contact us.

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