



ECSWE contribution to the European Commission

Action plan against cyberbullying

As the representative body of over 800 primary and secondary schools in 28 European countries, the European Council for Steiner Waldorf Education (Transparency register number: 256252314853-30) is dedicated to bringing the voice of its schools, students, and teachers to EU institutions. Below, please find the three key considerations when creating an action plan against cyberbullying.

1. Cyberbullying is bullying

The first consideration is to always see and treat cyberbullying as bullying, and apply all measures one would in case of an in-person or any other kind of bullying. Those measures in an educational setting should include valuing socio-emotional learning, prioritising pupils' and teachers' well-being, and nurturing meaningful relationships between teachers and parents.

Socio-emotional learning should be about building healthy relationships among and resilience in students. Education should strive to be inclusive, non-discriminatory, and respectful of differences. It should promote social justice and equity, and have a strong ethic of care and emphasis on healthy relationships both among pupils and between pupils and teachers. Such an environment can serve as a key element of the prevention of bullying.

Pupils' and teachers' well-being must be a priority if we want learning to take place. When faced with cyberbullying, pupils' well-being is disturbed. In 2024, the European Commission published guidelines for policymakers and educators to support well-being at school. These guidelines should be seen as an essential part of the Action plan against cyberbullying.

Bullying does not appear out of nowhere. Understanding where it comes from might give the adults in the child's life better clarity on how to address it effectively. Solutions should involve both home and school environments, and thus it is crucial to bring parents and teachers together to prevent and stop bullying from happening. A meaningful relation and cooperation between these two environments might be what both parents and teachers are missing to be effective in preventing violent and abusive behaviour.

2. Digital media education to address the “cyber”

Cyberbullying is distinguished by its online and digital nature. With the development of digital technology, social media, and AI, the digital environment provides a unique space to create and spread false information, steal personal details, and use it against one another. Online environments enable bullies to hide their identity and it is easier for them to remain unaware and emotionally distanced from the harm they caused. To bridge this gap, schools can play an important role in providing adequate digital media education. An education that not only teaches about digital technology but also shows its relation to the real world.

An example of an educational approach that prioritises well-being and strengthens the environment described in the first consideration is summarised as the [HERMMES approach](#) to digital media education. This approach includes guidelines for educators, educational settings, and parents, and a curriculum for all five DigComp areas adapted to children and young people aged 0-18. In the curriculum areas on *well-being* and *communication, cooperation, and empathy*, one can find learning aims and teaching strategies tailored to this age group to prevent cyberbullying and develop pupils' abilities to “describe and demonstrate how they can use the internet and social media to build positive relationships and how to contribute to positive online communities, including strategies to challenge bullying or inappropriate behaviour”. Curricula in line with this can serve as practical tools to act against cyberbullying in a thorough and long-lasting manner.

3. Support teachers so they can support pupils

Teachers should be trained, empowered, encouraged, and supported to be the first responders to acts of bullying. As cyberbullying often takes place between students of the same class, or at least the same school, their teacher is the closest adult who can take action when required. The teacher should build a trustful relationship with the pupils, so that they can feel safe and are able to confide in the teacher. There should be enough space in the curriculum to allow the teacher to create experiences in which such a relationship can start and grow, rather than constantly aiming for academic achievement targets. There should be a high degree of pedagogical freedom and autonomy guaranteed for the teacher in order to engage their professional capacities in making sure that the atmosphere in their classroom is enabling learning. In a situation where pupils do not feel safe, learning cannot take place.

Teachers should additionally be offered support from other school staff, such as school leadership or other teachers in a collegial circle, as well as social workers, experts in psychology and behaviour, and authorities offering structural support through training, continuous professional development, good working conditions, including wages and working time. Only by adequately supporting teachers can we enable them to support pupils when faced with any form of problematic behaviour in the classroom and around it, including cyberbullying.