

## **The schools responsibility to stop offensive treatment**

### **Caroline Dyrefors Grufman**

Caroline Dyrefors Grufman begins by thanking for the invitation and says that she sees this as an opportunity to talk about the practice of the Ombudsman for Children and Pupils (BEO) and present her views on the Education Act. BEO was founded 2006, and is an independent organisation employed by the school inspection. It is appointed for six years. BEO has a helpline for parents, pupils and schools.

**What BEO does.** BEO is commissioned to among other things do this: 1) Receive and investigate reports of abusive treatment according to the Education Act. 2) Inform the public about the Education Act's demand for a zero tolerance policy against abusive treatment in schools and give schools advise on the uses of the law. 3) Sue for damages from schools on account of pupils.

The overarching aim of the work of BEO is that schools and pre-schools should be a place free from abusive treatment and bullying. They have a zero tolerance policy against abusive treatment since it is forbidden according to law. Abusive treatment is defined as treatment that abuses a child's or a pupil's dignity without being discrimination. Discrimination is the responsibility of the Discrimination Ombudsman. The difference between abusive treatment and bullying is that bullying should occur repeatedly and intentionally. It is nevertheless a technical difference; the legislation on abusive behaviour concerns bullying. A connection to school is required for the abusive treatment to fall within the responsibility of the school. The abuse could for example begin in the school and continue on the internet.

**How children are affected.** Caroline Dyrefors Grufman knowledge of how children are affected by abusive behaviour and bullying in the school stems mainly from the stories of parents. Several pupils who have been abused feel very bad. Many children, who have been submitted to abusive treatment, lag behind in their school work. We will therefore not be able to have an equal school as long as bullying and abusive behaviour continues to occur. She has noticed that cyberbullying has increased during the two years she has been in office. The children say that they find it tough that they can be reached everywhere and that everyone can see it. She also says that pupils are telling her that they are not being taken seriously by their school or by their parents when they tell them about cyberbullying. It is pivotal to take what pupils say seriously since something infinitely worse, which they dare not talk about, has most often occurred.

**Legal requirements.** According to the sixth chapter of the Education Act schools are among other things required to: 1) Work purposefully against abusive treatment of children and pupils. 2) Do whatever they can to prevent children and pupils from being exposed to abusive treatment. She emphasizes that it means that the schools have a responsibility to investigate in detail where and how the abusive treatment is carried out, for example in which chatrooms, and to, in cooperation with the pupils, concretely decide on how to counteract it. Cooperative action is the only effective action. 3) All employees of the schools are obliged to report suspicions of abusive treatments to the headmaster and the principal. The principal has the responsibility to investigate.

**Statistics.** The BEO receives about 1200 reports of abusive treatment every year. She thinks that it is only the tip of an iceberg. 80% of the reports concerns primary education and 40% concerns abusive treatment carried out by staff. 80% of the cases concern verbal abuse and 60% physical. Cyber abuse usually occur connected to other forms of abusive treatment

**The vision of BEO.** The vision of the BEO is that you can stop abusive treatment as long as you do not give up the zero tolerance policy. We will not reach the target as long as we allow ourselves to think that abusive treatment can be a good thing or a normal part of life. We need to create a common understanding of abusive behaviour, systematically work preemptively involving parents and students, and listen to and take our children seriously if we are to reach the goal.