

Sadly the result of the by-election in the neighbouring constituency will be in after this paper has gone to press so I shall save my thoughts on that until next week. In the meantime it gives me the opportunity to talk about an issue that is dear to my heart – bullying.

This week has celebrated Anti-Bullying Week. It is the 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary of this extremely important awareness week that aims to try and stop bullying, particularly of children. This year's Anti-Bullying Week has been especially designated to highlight the issue of targeted bullying against those with disabilities and/or special education needs.

I was not bullied at school so I do not come to this issue from personal experience but I do recognise that how bullies conduct their practices has changed enormously since my days at school. Cyber bullying is making it difficult for schools, who ultimately have responsibility for the welfare of their pupils, to control bullies given that much of it takes place beyond the school gate.

Much work is being undertaken to educate youngsters about bullying. There are some fantastic roadshows touring schools and the packs that are given to teachers have helped open up discussions about the issue. However more needs to be done in my view to try and work with the perpetrators as much as the victims. The latter should be given all the support they deserve to ensure that they can deal with the bully (and indeed not let it affect their later life decisions) but at the same time early intervention with the perpetrator, and sometimes their family, can change their behaviours too.

This is an important week that aims to give victims of bullying the support they need. Bullying is inexcusable. It always has been but it is perhaps harder to police these days. Education and awareness is therefore essential.