

It slightly scares me to think that I had left school before the internet was invented, mobile phones were the preserve of the rich and a tweet was something birds did. I was at an all girls school where we all mastered the “look” but never physically fought. If I had a row with a friend at school, I’d send a note to apologise along desks while the teacher was writing something on the blackboard. Instant communication was not in fact very instant.

Today’s school children have very different challenges to those I faced, and one of them is the increasing level and ease of bullying. No longer is it confined to within the school gates because the proliferation of social media, text messaging and other forms of electronic communication means that over a million children per week are the victims of bullying. Traditionally dealing with bullies has been the responsibility of the school but now many feel powerless because so much takes place beyond the gate.

The impact can sometimes be tragic and sadly over 20 children commit suicide each year because of persistent bullying. The UK appears to do little to prevent this from happening and is far behind the US, Sweden, South Africa and New Zealand – all of whom have strict anti-bullying legislation.

This is why I have introduced an amendment to the Anti-Social Behaviour Bill currently progressing through Parliament. The Bill changes all types of ASB to a civil offence rather than a criminal one so I have piggy-backed on this so that we can once and for all try to highlight bullying as unacceptable in a civilised society, without giving youngsters a criminal record and instead forcing them into behaviour changing courses.

Bullying is not a victimless crime and can have devastating and long term consequences. It is the duty of politicians to help look after the vulnerable and in this case our children deserve to be protected.