

# Teenagers sickened by 'sexting' are given chance to tell Cameron about their lives

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Teenagers feel amused and repulsed in equal measure by the epidemic of "sexting", according to a study of 13-year-olds' attitudes.

It found that one in four was "disgusted" by the practice of sending provocative, semi-nude or pornographic images by phone, while one in five said they thought it was funny and one in 20 said they would be pleased to get one.

Most parents are horrified by the thought their children are involved, but about half of all 13-year-olds have sent or received a sexually explicit image, and children as young as 10 take part.

The study also examined the most

**'Sexting at such a young age is experienced as sexual harassment'**

**Professor Dominic Abrams**

common prejudices held by 13-year-olds towards one another. It found that overweight children were by far the most vilified group, twice as likely to be bullied than other groups including "nerds, geeks and boffins" or children who appeared to be gay.

The young people themselves said racism was the worst prejudice, with more than half judging it as unacceptable, while less than one in ten thought it wrong to pick on someone because they were overweight.

The study found that despite their young age, 13-year-olds were already agonising over how they would get their first job, saying that unemploy-



Children at Platanos College, in Stockwell, South London, posed in masks to encourage peers to write to David Cameron

ment was their greatest fear for the future.

The study was conducted by the Anne Frank Trust, a charity that works in schools in some of the most divided communities in the country to help young people to face up to and tackle prejudice and discrimination. It marks

the launch of its six-week "Thirteen in 13" project which invites all 13-year-olds to upload a letter to David Cameron telling them about their life and what he can do to improve it. The best 13 letters will be sent to Downing Street, and the Prime Minister will respond in a letter to *The Times* in the

summer. Year 8 and 9 pupils at Platanos College, in Stockwell, South London, posed in David Cameron masks to encourage peers to write a letter to the Prime Minister and have their say.

Anne Frank was 13 when she received the diary in which she gave a

candid account of life as a Jewish teenager hidden away from the Nazis in a secret annex in Amsterdam during the Second World War. The charity hopes the letters will give Mr Cameron an equally forthright account of life today.

Gillian Walnes, executive director of the trust, said she hoped that the project would help to give 13-year-olds a voice. "By encouraging young people to become more politically engaged and have their views and opinions heard at the highest level, we hope that they will have the confidence to challenge prejudice and develop greater respect for others."

Experts see new technology as one of the greatest challenges for this generation of teenagers, as well as one of the greatest assets. Dominic Abrams, professor of social psychology at the University of Kent, said the study suggested a large proportion of children felt genuinely beleaguered by sexting.

"While some young people might find it flattering or entertaining to be sent a sext message, others find it alarming, suggesting that even at such a young age, they experience it as a form of sexual harassment," he said.

Hilary French, president of the Girls' Schools Association, said that girls were particularly vulnerable, with new technology giving boys "the upper hand". "The single biggest cause of unhappiness at school is misuse of technology in private social time, sexting and bullying," she said. "Some of the things that are going on are not right. They are not just part of the new norm, or the way things happen these days."

● To enter the competition and upload your letter to David Cameron visit [www.13in13.org.uk](http://www.13in13.org.uk)