



Supporting Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Students

AN ISSUE FOR EVERY TEACHER





Introduction

This guidance provides information and advice to NUT members on supporting pupils who are lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender (LGBT) and on tackling homophobia within the school environment.

Schools should be a place where diversity does not mean discrimination and where the dignity of all individuals is respected.

Teachers have a key role, therefore, in tackling homophobia in schools and creating a positive school environment for all students. Headteachers and school governing bodies have a responsibility to ensure that all young people receive a full and balanced education and are provided with a safe and secure school environment in which to learn.

The lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community is a diverse community. It is made up of people from different religions, ethnic groups, disabled people and people of different ages.

Substantial change in the understanding of and social attitudes towards sexual orientation over the last few decades has led to considerable improvements in the position of LGBT people within society.

Many LGBT students, however, are still bullied or feel alienated because of homophobia. Research has shown that homophobic bullying can lead to educational underachievement, lack of confidence and even suicide.

This guidance provides helpful advice and support for teachers in their work to help all young people become confident learners and prepared for life after school.

A Whole School Approach

Supporting LGBT pupils involves ensuring that LGBT issues are included in all areas of the work of the school from school policies and procedures, to the curriculum and to the training opportunities the school offers to its employees.

All schools should have an equal opportunities policy that includes a section on equality for LGBT students, staff, and parents. Equal opportunities policies are valuable. They clarify the approach of the school for staff, pupils, governors, parents/carers and external agencies and enable staff to manage equal opportunities issues with confidence, competence and consistency.

In order for a whole school equal opportunities policy to be effective, all members of the school community, including pupils, staff, parents and governors, should be involved in its development. It should cover all aspects of school life, including

the curriculum, organisation, staffing and management with the aim of enriching the culture and ethos of the school.

Developing an equal opportunities policy is the start of the process of promoting equality and tackling discrimination and schools should regularly review the policy and monitor its effectiveness in meeting its aims.

New legal responsibilities are now in place which require LEAs and governing bodies, as employers, to protect all employees from discrimination, harassment or victimisation on the grounds of their actual or presumed sexual orientation. This provides a legal impetus for schools to challenge homophobia. The Regulations¹ ban discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation in employment and in vocational training. Schools that fail to challenge homophobic abuse of staff whether from other staff, pupils, parents/carers or other members of the school community, could be liable to challenge and could be required to pay compensation.

Awareness Through the Curriculum

Schools can consider using the curriculum in the following ways:

- The school should be clear about the purpose of adopting a broad curriculum approach. Such an approach can raise awareness of bullying issues amongst pupils. Equally it can challenge and deconstruct the homophobic attitudes that might lead children to bully.
- A review can be conducted of the existing subject curriculum that might support anti-homophobic messages and foster respect for the dignity of individuals.
- Training on homophobic bullying can be included. The resource list at the back of this guidance will help.

It is far better that children are provided with accurate information in the classroom rather than inaccurate information in the playground. Whilst PSHE and Citizenship is the most obvious location in the curriculum, there are links to be made with other subjects. Issues surrounding relationships, stereotypes and prejudice can be explored within Art, English, Drama, History or RE.

It is important for primary schools to provide positive images of lesbian, gay and bisexual people and for the sexual orientation of famous and successful lesbian, gay and bisexual people both past and present to be acknowledged in every subject. This work needs to be placed in a wider context where lesbians, gay men and bisexual people are seen as citizens and participants in a wide range of activities.

Secondary school pupils and college students can discuss the subjects referred to above and also more complex questions such as prejudice, racism, sexism, homophobia and transphobia. A number of schools address these topics as part of PSHE. At Key Stage 4, for example, a requirement within PSHE is 'to challenge offending behaviour, prejudice, bullying, racism and discrimination assertively and take the initiative in giving and receiving support'². This could be developed within the classroom by considering strategies for challenging homophobic bullying, either when directed against oneself or against a friend.

Sex and Relationships Education

Sex education must be provided for all registered pupils in maintained secondary schools. Governing bodies of maintained primary schools are responsible for considering whether, and at what stage, to offer sex education. In all maintained schools, the governing body must keep an up to date written statement of the policy they choose to adopt, which must be available to all parents. DfES Guidance³ makes it clear that issues relating to sexual orientation should be included in sex education programmes. The guidance states:

- *"The Secretary of State for Education and Employment is clear that teachers should be able to deal honestly and sensitively with sexual orientation, answer appropriate questions and offer support."*
- *"It is up to schools to make sure that the needs of all pupils are met in their programmes. Young people, whatever their developing sexuality, need to feel that sex and relationships education is relevant to them and sensitive to their needs."*
- *"Schools need to be able to deal with homophobic bullying."*
- *"The government recognises that there are strong and mutually supportive relationships outside marriage."*
- *"SRE policies should be inclusive of all pupils."*
- *"Having a SRE policy in line with this guidance will be a key part of meeting the criteria for sex and relationship education outlined in the National Healthy School Standard."*

Sex education should challenge the stigmatisation of lesbian and gay families. Many lesbian and gay relationships are stable and long-term.

The NUT believes that the following principles should apply to sex education:

- Sex and relationships education, together with Citizenship and PSHE, can help to educate children and young people against prejudice and discrimination, and enable them to value all forms of stable relationships;

- Schools should adopt an approach to sex education which involves everyone in the school. It is important to consult and involve teachers, health workers, parents, governors, pupils when appropriate, and relevant religious and community groups, particularly in the context of the right of parents to withdraw their children from all or part of the sex education programme. Wide consultation and involvement will reduce the likelihood of parents requesting the withdrawal of their children from sex education;
- School policies on sex education should contain appropriate references to LGB sexuality, and gender identity, recognising that sexual orientation is a central part of an individual's identity; and
- Effective and practical sex education should foster a sense of respect and responsibility. It should encourage the exploration of values and moral issues, consideration of sexuality and personal relationships and the development of communication and decision-making skills.

The NUT advises teachers that, because they are not health professionals, they should not provide individual advice about contraception or abortion beyond that which may be included in a sex education class. A teacher may, however, legitimately give precise information about accessing contraception and pregnancy advisory services from appropriate health professionals.

Similarly teachers can give information about accessing LGBT advisory services and local lesbian and gay groups. School noticeboards should be used so that information about LGBT advisory services is easily accessible alongside other material.

OFSTED's report on sex and relationships education⁴ says that:

- *"In too many secondary schools homophobic attitudes among pupils often go unchallenged. The problem is compounded when derogatory terms about homosexuality are used in everyday language in school and their use passes unchallenged by staff. Where these problems arise, staff have often had insufficient guidance on the interpretation of school values and what constitutes unacceptable language or behaviour."*

The report included the following points among the recommendations to all schools:

- that schools should make sure that values relevant to education about sex and relationships are consistently adhered to within the school so that, for example, homophobic attitudes do not go unchallenged; and

- that teachers should be given further guidance about content and methods in teaching about sexuality.

OFSTED offers the following suggested learning outcomes for SRE for each key stage in seeking to highlight good sex and relationships education:

- awareness of the similarities and differences between people and the impact of our feelings and actions on others (Key Stage 1);
- being able to recognise and challenge stereotypes and respect other's viewpoints (Key Stage 2);
- appreciating the diversity of lifestyles and why being different can provoke bullying and why this is unacceptable (Key Stage 2);
- being tolerant of the diversity of sexual preference in relationships and the importance of respecting difference in relation to gender and sexuality (Key Stage 3);
- the unacceptability of prejudice and homophobic bullying (Key Stage 3);
- having the confidence to assert oneself and challenge offending behaviour (Key Stage 4); and
- feeling confident and comfortable with ones developing sense of sexual identity (Key Stage 4).

OFSTED found that these learning outcomes are only likely to be achieved in schools where different forms of sexual relationships are valued and bullying or discrimination based on sexuality is actively challenged.

Supporting Students

Where pupils seek advice on sexual orientation or gender identity, the role of teachers should be confined to their specific educational responsibilities. Teachers should encourage students to refer to other agencies such as appropriate local lesbian and gay counselling services. It is important that teachers recognise that where they are not trained counsellors they cannot take on this role, regardless of the sexuality or gender identity of the pupil concerned. Teachers should, however, seek to help and provide support to students.

The boundaries of confidentiality should be made clear to pupils. A request by a pupil for confidentiality should be honoured in all circumstances except where the teacher is concerned about the health and safety of the student. Confidential information should only be passed on against the wishes of the pupil in exceptional circumstances. In these situations, the school should inform the pupil first and attempt to explain why their request for confidentiality could not be met.

The school should collate sources of useful information to provide to students such as telephone helpline numbers, useful websites and local lesbian and gay counselling services.

Training for Staff

A commitment to staff training will enforce and reinforce the positive message about challenging homophobic bullying. Lack of staff confidence in dealing with how to support LGBT pupils may contribute to the spread of bullying behaviour within a school. All staff, including support workers and lunchtime supervisors, should have access to training around how to support LGBT pupils and around bullying issues. Every member of the school community needs to play an active role in identifying, reporting and preventing bullying behaviour. Handling homophobic bullying is often a matter of concern to staff who commonly feel ill-equipped or lack the confidence to challenge the prejudices surrounding homophobia. These needs can be met through training.

Schools should consider:

- dedicating whole staff INSET time to issues surrounding homophobic bullying;
- ensuring relevant training is provided for non teaching staff as part of a whole school approach;
- encouraging the member of staff responsible for anti-bullying strategies to disseminate training they have received;
- ensuring that there are measures in place to respond quickly, effectively and supportively to LGBT pupils or others who are perceived to be LGBT who feel they are the victims of bullying, who request information or who wish to discuss concerns or issues relating to their sexual orientation;
- encouraging staff access to policies and ensuring that they understand how to use the support systems in place to protect and support LGBT pupils; and
- ensuring that training to help teachers identify and deal with bullying tackles how to deal with cases where bullying focuses on sexuality.

OFSTED Framework for Inspecting Schools

The OFSTED framework requires inspectors to assess the extent to which the school:

- deals effectively with incidents such as bullying, racism and other forms of harassment;
- does all it can to promote good attendance; and
- is free from all bullying, racism and other forms of harassment.

The inspectors are required to assess the extent to which schools actively enable pupils to understand and respect other people's feelings, values and beliefs and to understand the responsibilities of living in a community. Inspectors are also required to assess the extent to which the school provides effective PSHE, including sex and relationships education and the extent to which the school ensures that pupils work in a healthy and safe environment.

A recent OFSTED report⁵ has shown that schools can reduce incidences of bullying. The main findings include the following:

- Schools with the most successful approaches to bullying canvassed and took full account of pupils' views. They dedicated curriculum and tutorial time to discussing relationships and matters like bullying.
- Features of good practice included the efficient checking of the school site, setting up safe play areas or quiet rooms, and close supervision at the start and finish of the school day.
- Schools need sound procedures for the reporting and the prompt investigation of allegations of bullying so that analysis of patterns could inform policy and practice.
- Follow-up action to ensure that the confidence of bullying victims was restored and that bullying did not re-occur was not comprehensive enough or well enough sustained. Where used, 'circles of friends', peer counselling, learning mentors and outside agencies often proved effective in supporting victims, in modifying the behaviour of bullies and affecting the culture of the school.

The Role of the NUT

The NUT is at the forefront in the campaign for equality of opportunity and fair treatment for all students and staff, regardless of gender identity or sexual orientation. The NUT's work on these issues has been successful and longstanding. The NUT:

- has a working party on Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Equality in Education which provides advice to the National Executive on

the promotion of equality for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender teachers and pupils;

- organises an annual conference on LGBT equality in education;
- was the first teachers' union to hold a seminar on homophobic bullying;
- is actively involved in TUC activities which promote LGBT equality, including the annual TUC LGBT Conference;
- at international level, continues to work with other Commonwealth teachers' unions and Education International to develop policies on lesbian and gay equality;
- persistently campaigned for the repeal of Section 28; and
- is part of a joint campaign developed by Stonewall, FFLAG and LGBT Youth Scotland called Education for All which is working with national government, local authorities and education, voluntary and community sectors to develop and implement a UK wide action plan to ensure that all LGBT young people can fulfil their potential and that the school system can deal appropriately with homophobia.

The NUT welcomed the repeal of Section 28. The clause fuelled homophobia and inhibited valuable anti-discrimination initiatives. The repeal of Section 28 should empower schools to challenge homophobia and homophobic bullying.

Lesbians, gay men, bisexual and transgender people are all represented within school communities as teachers, support staff, students, parents and governors. The NUT will continue working to tackle the discrimination faced by both LGBT students and teachers and to promote equality.

Advice to NUT School Representatives

NUT members should feel confident that concerns and complaints about discrimination or harassment will be treated sensitively and seriously. Such members should be advised to contact their NUT regional office or, in Wales, NUT Cymru.



Further Information

Education and Equal Opportunities Department The National Union of Teachers

Hamilton House
Mabledon Place
London WC1H 9BD
www.teachers.org.uk
Tel:020 7388 6191

Chrysalis

(Working for the rights and perspectives of
lesbians, gay men, bisexual and transgendered
people)

Tel:020 7635 0476
chrysalis03@yahoo.co.uk

Department for Education and Skills (DfES)

School Inclusion Division
Sanctuary Buildings
Great Smith Street
London SW1P 3BT
www.dfes.gov.uk/bullying

Educational Action Challenging Homophobia

Office 24
14 Clifton Down Road
Bristol BS8 4BF
www.eachaction.org.uk
info@eachaction.org.uk
0117 974 3795

FFLAG: Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays

FFLAG
P O Box No. 84
Exeter
EX4 4AN
www.fflag.org.uk
01454 852418

Joint Action Against Homophobic Bullying (JAAHB)

(Lesbian, gay and bisexual support in the South
West)

The Intercom Trust
P O Box 285
Exeter
Devon EX1 2YZ
Email: jaahb@intercom.freemove.co.uk
Bullying helpline: 01392 20 10 18

LAGER

(Lesbian and Gay Employment Rights)
Unit 1G
Leroy House
436 Essex Road
London N1 3QP
info@lageradvice.org.uk
www.lager.dircon.co.uk

Press for Change

(campaigning for respect and equality
for all trans people)

BM Network
London
WC1N 3XX
Email: editor@pfc.org.uk
www.pfc.org.uk

School's Out! National

(Working for LGBT equality in education)

BM School's Out! National
London WC1N 3XX
secretary@schools-out.org.uk
www.schools-out.org.uk

Stonewall

46-48 Grosvenor Gardens
London SW1W 0DH
www.stonewall.org.uk



Further Resources

Safe for All: a best practice guide to preventing homophobic bullying in secondary schools

by Ian Warwick and Nicola Douglas, Education Policy Research Unit, Institute of Education, University of London.

Copies of Stonewall's 'Safe for All' are available from:

Citizenship 21 Project
46 Grosvenor Gardens
London
SW1W 0EB

Email: info@c21project.org
Tel: 020 7881 9440

Bullying: don't suffer in silence

Smith, P. London
<http://www.dfespublications.gov.uk/cgi-bin/dfes>

Sex and Relationship Education Guidance

DfEE 0116/2000, Department for Education and Employment 2000 (DfEE)
now Department for Education and Skills (DfES)
<http://www.dfes.gov.uk/sreguidance>

Circular 10/99 Social Inclusion: Pupil Support

Department for Education and Employment (1999)
<http://www.dfes.gov.uk/circulars/10-99>

The three publications above can be ordered from:

DfES Publications

P O Box 5050
Sherwood Park
Annesley
Nottinghamshire NG15 0DG
Tel: 0845 602 2260
Fax: 0845 603 3360
Email: dfes@prolog.uk.com

Citizenship at Key Stages 3 and 4: Initial Guidance for Schools

DfES and Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (2000)

The QCA publication on citizenship can be ordered from:

QCA Publications

P O Box 99
Sudbury
Suffolk CO10 6SN
Tel: 01787 884 444
<http://www.nc.uk.net>

OFSTED's Report into Sex and Relationships Education in Schools, 2002

OFSTED's Report Bullying: effective action in secondary schools, 2003

OFSTED publications can be ordered from:

OFSTED Publications Centre

Tel: 07002 637 833
Fax: 07002 693 274
Email: freepublications@ofsted.gov.uk

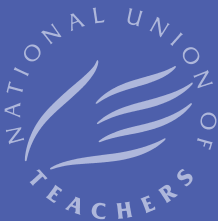
Children, Families & Schools - Guidance and Recommendations on Preventing and Responding to Bullying

Anti-Bullying Project, Policy Working Group, 2002
Brighton & Hove Regeneration Partnership

Footnotes

- ¹ Employment Equality (Sexual Orientation) Regulations, 2003
- ² The National Curriculum, Handbook for Secondary Teachers in England, DfES (1999) P.193
- ³ DfES Sex and Relationship Education Guidance, 2000
- ⁴ Sex and Relationships, OFSTED, 2002
- ⁵ Bullying: effective action in secondary schools, OFSTED, 2003

www.teachers.org.uk



OUR AIM: PROFESSIONAL UNITY