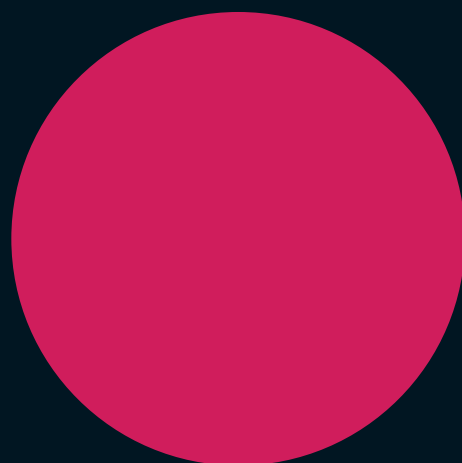
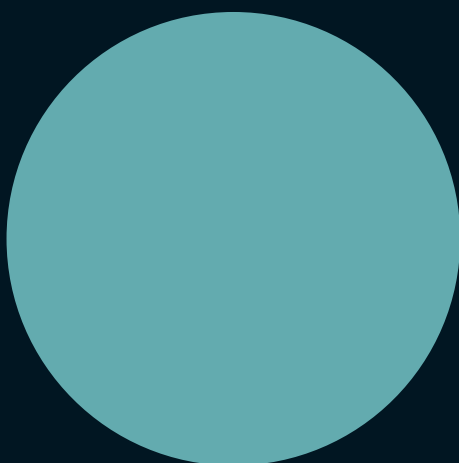


The experiences  
of young gay  
people in  
Britain's schools



# THE SCHOOL REPORT





# The experiences of young gay people in Britain's schools

by Ruth Hunt and Johan Jensen

Survey hosted and results collated by Schools Health Education Unit



# Introduction

Stonewall was founded in response to the introduction of Section 28 of the Local Government Act 1988, which outlawed the so-called “promotion” of homosexuality. This pernicious piece of legislation had a devastating effect on young people. Even though it did not apply directly to schools, more than four in five teachers thought it did. This impacted on teachers’ ability to teach about lesbian and gay issues in class and even to challenge homophobic bullying.

Section 28 was finally repealed in 2003 after many years of campaigning by Stonewall and others. Last year, Stonewall decided to find out what school is actually like for young lesbian, gay and bisexual people in 21st century Britain. We conducted a survey of more than 1100 of those young people, the largest poll of its kind ever carried out in this country.

The results are alarming. Almost two thirds of young gay people at secondary school, 150,000 pupils, have experienced homophobic bullying. In faith schools, that figure rises to three in four. Homophobic language is endemic in schools, and more often than not teachers turn a blind eye to it. Seven out of ten of these young people say the bullying affects their school work. And half have skipped school to avoid the bullying. All this in spite of schools’ clear legal obligations to ensure that all

children are protected from harm when at school.

We hope this report will be a wake-up call to everyone working in education. We know at Stonewall that many teachers want to do the right thing by their lesbian and gay young people, but feel they lack the tools to do it, or worry that they won’t get the support of senior colleagues if they try.

This report shows that it’s not difficult to make a difference. At those schools where children are explicitly taught that homophobic bullying is wrong, rates of such bullying are reduced dramatically. Through Stonewall’s flagship Education for All campaign we know that some schools and local authorities are starting to make a real difference.

It’s critical that everyone in education, from the Department for Education and Skills to individual schools, gets it right. Because ultimately this is about hundreds of thousands of young people’s life chances.

At Stonewall we have a vision of a Britain where one day



every single young person is given the opportunity to develop every single ounce of their potential. This research demonstrates how much needs to be done before that day arrives.

**Ben Summerskill** Chief Executive

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# 1 Summary

Homophobic bullying is almost epidemic in Britain's schools. Almost **two thirds** (65 per cent) of young lesbian, gay and bisexual pupils have experienced direct bullying. **Seventy five per cent** of young gay people attending faith schools have experienced homophobic bullying.

Even if gay pupils are not directly experiencing bullying, they are learning in an environment where homophobic language and comments are commonplace. **Ninety eight per cent** of young gay people hear the phrases "that's so gay" or "you're so gay" in school, and over **four fifths** hear such comments often or frequently.

**Ninety seven per cent** of pupils hear other insulting homophobic remarks, such as "poof", "dyke", "rug-muncher", "queer" and "bender". Over **seven in ten** gay pupils hear those phrases used often or frequently.

Less than a **quarter** (23 per cent) of young gay people have been told that homophobic bullying is wrong in their school. In schools that have said homophobic bullying is wrong, gay young people are **60 per cent** more likely not to have been bullied.

Over **half** of lesbian and gay pupils don't feel able to be themselves at school. **Thirty five per cent** of gay pupils do not feel safe or accepted at school.

# 2 Key Findings

## 2.1 Bullying:

- Almost **two thirds** (65 per cent) of young lesbian, gay and bisexual people experience homophobic bullying in Britain's schools.
- **Ninety seven per cent** of gay pupils hear derogatory phrases such as "dyke" or "poof" used in school.
- **Ninety eight per cent** of gay pupils hear "that's so gay" or "you're so gay" at school.
- **Seventy five per cent** of young gay people in faith schools experience homophobic bullying and are less likely than pupils in other schools to report it.
- Only a **quarter** of schools say that homophobic bullying is wrong in their school. In schools that have said homophobic bullying is wrong, gay young people are 60 per cent more likely not to have been bullied.
- **Thirty per cent** of lesbian and gay pupils report that adults are responsible for homophobic incidents in their schools.
- Of those who have been bullied, **92 per cent** have experienced verbal homophobic bullying, **41 per cent** physical bullying and **17 per cent** death threats.

## 2.2 How schools respond:

- Almost **three in five** (58 per cent) lesbian and gay pupils who experience bullying never report it. If they tell a teacher, 62 per cent of the time nothing is done.
- **Half** of teachers fail to respond to homophobic language when they hear it.
- **Three in five** pupils fail to intervene and become bystanders to bullying.
- Just **seven per cent** of teachers are reported to respond every time they hear homophobic language.
- Lesbian and gay pupils are **three times** more likely to feel that their school is an accepting, tolerant school if it responds to incidents.

## 2.3 The consequences of bullying for lesbian and gay pupils:

- **Seven out of ten** gay pupils who experience homophobic bullying state that this has had an impact on their school work.
- **Half** of those who have experienced homophobic bullying have skipped school at some point because of it and **one in five** has skipped school more than six times.
- **Seven in ten** gay pupils have never been taught about lesbian and gay people or issues in class.
- Over **60 per cent** of young lesbian and gay people feel that there is neither an adult at home nor at school who they can talk to about being gay.
- **Four in five** young gay people have no access in school to resources that can help them.
- Only **15 per cent** attend a local gay youth group but nearly **two in five** have attended a gay club or a pub. Young gay people are **two and a half times** more likely to go to a pub rather than a youth group.
- Only **three in ten** young gay people know of a teacher who is openly gay.

## 2.4 What works well?

- Only a **quarter** of schools say that homophobic bullying is wrong in their school. In schools that have said homophobic bullying is wrong, gay young people are **60 per cent** more likely not to have been bullied.
- Lesbian and gay pupils who go to schools that state homophobic bullying is wrong are nearly **70 per cent** more likely to feel safe at school.
- Pupils who go to schools where teachers respond to homophobic incidents are more than **three times** as likely to feel that their school is an accepting, tolerant place where they feel welcome.
- Pupils who are taught positively about lesbian and gay issues are **60 per cent** more likely to be happy at school and **40 per cent** are more likely to feel respected.

**The study** In 2006, Stonewall asked young people from Great Britain who are lesbian, gay, bisexual (or think they might be) to complete a survey about their experiences at school. The survey received 1145 responses from young people at secondary school. The survey was conducted by the Schools Health Education Unit on behalf of Stonewall. Just under half the respondents are girls (48 per cent). Fourteen per cent are from black and minority ethnic backgrounds and 12 per cent are disabled. Forty six per cent stated that they have a religious belief. Over half of these (29 per cent) are Christian. The majority of respondents (79 per cent) attend a state school, and 12 per cent attend private schools. One in ten respondents (110) attends a faith school. This report presents the results of the survey.

# 3 What does homophobic bullying look like?

Lesbian, gay and bisexual pupils can experience homophobic bullying ranging from verbal abuse to death threats. Those who are bullied experience the following:

Type of bullying	Percentage of young gay and lesbian people
Verbal abuse	92%
Malicious gossip	76%
Intimidating looks	62%
Ignored and isolated	58%
Cyberbullying	41%
Physical abuse	41%
Vandalism and theft of property	30%
Death threats	17%
Threatened with a weapon	13%
Sexual assault	12%

Ninety four per cent of gay boys and 90 per cent of gay girls who have experienced homophobic bullying have faced verbal abuse.

**“Name calling, especially in the changing rooms.”**

Ben, 18, comprehensive school (North West)

**“Blackmail and just general ‘Don’t come near me queer’ remarks.”**

Joseph, 13, single sex Catholic school (Greater London)

Even if gay pupils are not directly experiencing bullying, they are learning in an environment where homophobic language and comments are commonplace, as are their heterosexual peers. **Ninety eight per cent** of young gay people hear the phrases “that’s so gay” or “you’re so gay” in school, and over **four fifths** hear such comments often or frequently. **Ninety seven per cent** hear other insulting homophobic remarks, such as “poof”, “dyke”, “rug-muncher”, “queer” and “bender”. Over **seven in ten** gay pupils hear the phrases used often, or frequently.

**“People call me ‘gay’ everyday, sometimes people kick me or push me, they shut me out of games during school gym and they steal my belongings.”**

James, 17, secondary school (South West)

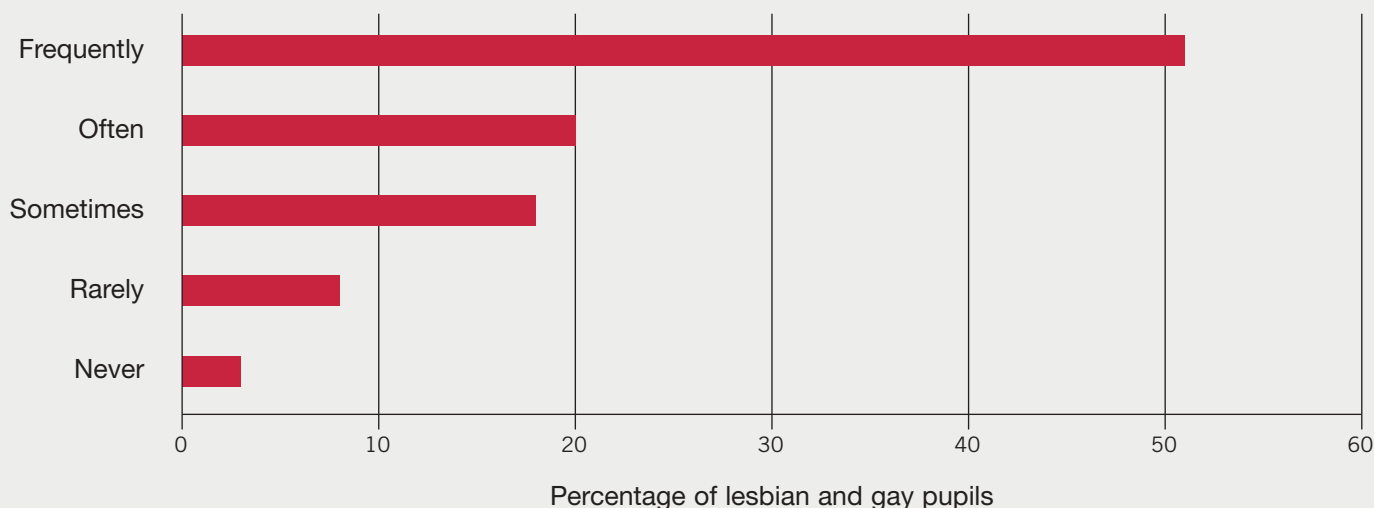
Gay girls are more likely to be bullied by being ignored and isolated by other people. **Sixty five per cent** of girls experience isolation, compared to **53 per cent** of boys. Girls report that they are excluded by other girls.

**“Girls stay away from me.”** Mary, 13, single sex grammar school (South East)

**“Nasty notes passed in class. The other girls wouldn’t let me change for PE in the same room as them.”**

Kirsty, 17, single sex independent school (Greater London)

## How often have you heard anti-gay remarks used in school?





**“... females who were in the year above (year 13) wouldn’t touch me or would cover up their lowcut tops if I was walking past them.”** Hannah, 16, secondary school (Greater London)

In general, three in four gay pupils have been gossiped about, and over three fifths of gay boys and girls have been subjected to intimidating looks.

**“I have experienced bullying because of the way I look – other pupils asking if I’m a boy or a girl. This bullying occurred more than once a week and was verbal and intimidating looks.”** Helen, 17, comprehensive school (North West)

**“Someone found out about my sexuality and spread it round school. Everyone knows and looks at me and threatens me and no one helps. They push me in corridors and teachers have seen but they act as if they haven’t seen anything. People say ‘errrgh don’t touch the lezzy/dyke/minger/muff muncher/bean-flicker’ and I’m upset.”** Sarah, 14, city technology college (South West)

Gay boys are more likely to have had their property vandalised or stolen. A third of boys compared to a quarter of girls have experienced this form of bullying.

**“I get called names all the time at school, especially poof and faggot. My stuff is always being ripped up or drawn on or stolen.”** Alan, 13, secondary school (Scotland)

**“Throwing books out of a window at me and my girlfriend. Only reason the school did anything was ‘damage to school property’.”** Laura, 13, independent single sex Catholic school (Greater London)

Over two in five young gay people have experienced cyberbullying, and one in five experienced bullying via text message. Cyberbullying is bullying that takes place remotely over the internet. For example, bullying can occur on messageboards, via instant message between two people, on internet social sites such as Bebo, Faceparty and Myspace, and via blogs. The internet is relatively unregulated and bullying via this medium can take place out of school. This means that a young person can be bullied even if they are at home on their own. Text messages can also be sent at any time.

**“Some people have posted things on their bebo blogs about people they think are gay or know are gay.”** Simon, 16, secondary school (Scotland)

**“Mainly MSN Messenger when people threatened me then denied it at school.”** Steve, 13, comprehensive school (North East)

Forty one per cent of young lesbian and gay people have experienced physical homophobic bullying. This can include hitting, punching and kicking as well as throwing objects. Boys are more likely to experience this form of bullying: over two fifths of boys, and over a third of girls have suffered physical homophobic bullying. This reflects the general statistics around bullying that indicate boys are more likely to experience physical bullying than girls (Tackling Bullying: Listening to the views of children and young people *ChildLine* 2003).

**“I’ve been stabbed because of my sexuality.”** Joe, now 19, comprehensive school (West Midlands)

**“On three occasions I have been assaulted and had to go to hospital to be examined and get the police involved.”** Ali, 17, secondary school (Greater London)

**“Beaten up, unable to walk for nearly a year, only recovering after an operation.”** Jamelia, 18, grammar school (South East)

**“I have experienced bullying such as being verbally assaulted frequently, had scissors thrown at me, occasionally punched – sometimes directly in front of teachers.”** Kevin, 16, comprehensive school (Greater London)

One in eight (13 per cent) gay pupils has been threatened with a weapon and one in six (17 per cent) has been subjected to death threats.

**“Once a girl in my year pulled a knife on me and said all dykes should be shot. They didn’t even know [I was bisexual] they were only guessing.”** Nat, 15, grammar school (South East)

**“I was once threatened by a friend’s brother over an instant message that he would beat me to death on the streets if he saw me or torch my house whilst I’m sleeping in it. He also told me not to go down to a local event as he worked there and if he saw me he would get his friends to help him.”** Sean, 16, secondary school (Wales)

**“One girl came up to me and said that she would kill me if I did not do as she said.”** Craig, 17, independent school (South East)

One in eight (12 per cent) gay pupils has also faced sexual assault. This can be from heterosexual people of the same sex who want to harass lesbian and gay pupils but gay girls also experience sexual harassment from boys.

**“Sexual assault in the arse or balls were grabbed, followed by ‘Queer you enjoy that poofy bastard’ and suchlike.”** Neil, 15, Comprehensive school (Scotland)

**“One girl came up to me and tried to lick my vagina.”** Elizabeth, 17, secondary school (East of England)

**“The worst experience I had was a straight lad coming to sit next to me and touching my leg to wind me up. It was an invasion of personal space and very intimidating.”** Alex, 18, beacon school (Yorkshire and Humber)

cent) by younger boys at school. Over one in three experience bullying from pupils who attend other schools.

**“There was no single bully to be targeted. The school I was in for GCSEs is quite a conservative, traditional school so it was more or less ignored as much as possible and I was told to make my sexuality less obvious.”** Simon, 17, independent school (South East)

Over half (52 per cent) have heard homophobic remarks from teachers or other school staff. Thirty per cent of lesbian and gay pupils report that adults have been responsible for incidents of homophobic bullying in their schools.

**“The teacher was laughing at the fact that there are homosexual people and all the other pupils were taking the mick and my twitch started up and I had to leave.”** Sue, 14, city technology college (South West)

**“In RE the teacher avoided the question as best she could, but spoke to me after (assuming from my opinion and some of class members comments that I was gay) about good and bad life choices, and that I shouldn’t make a decision now that I should resist going along with things that are bad life choices and will ‘damage’ me.”** May, 16, secondary school (South West)

**“The teachers join in on the joke.”** Catherine, 13, single sex independent school (South East)

**“I was not aware of my sexuality at the time and girls called me lesbian and bullied me severely and made me depressed and suicidal.”** Saffron, 19, Comprehensive school (South East)

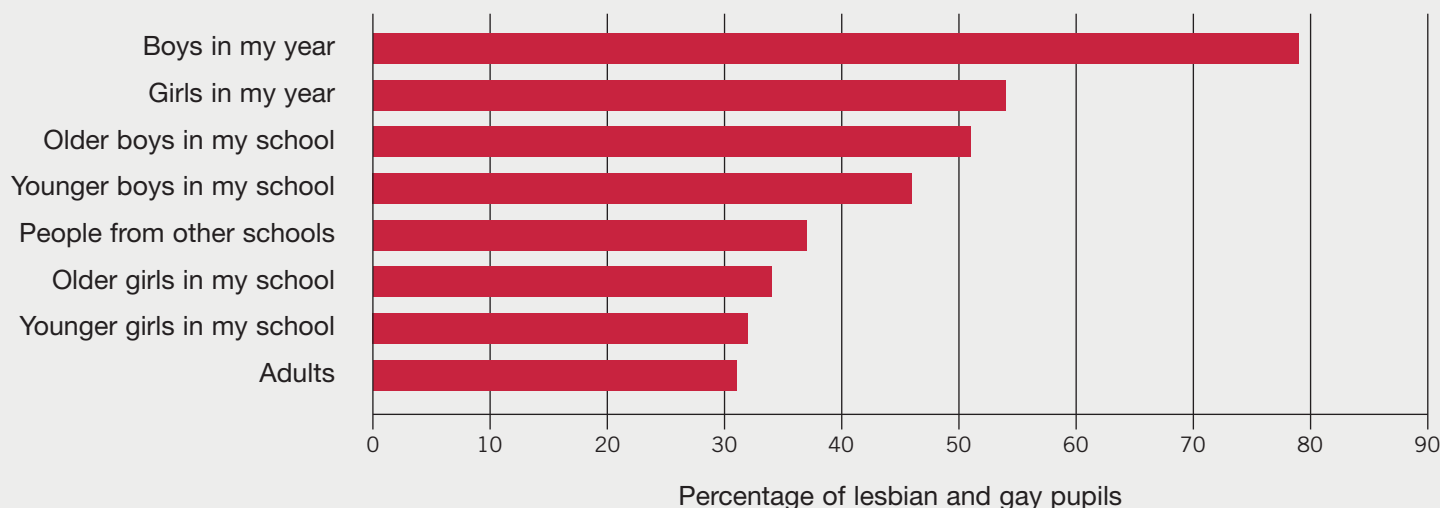
## 4 Who’s doing the bullying?

Lesbian and gay pupils report that they experience bullying from all members of their school community, including adults and younger pupils.

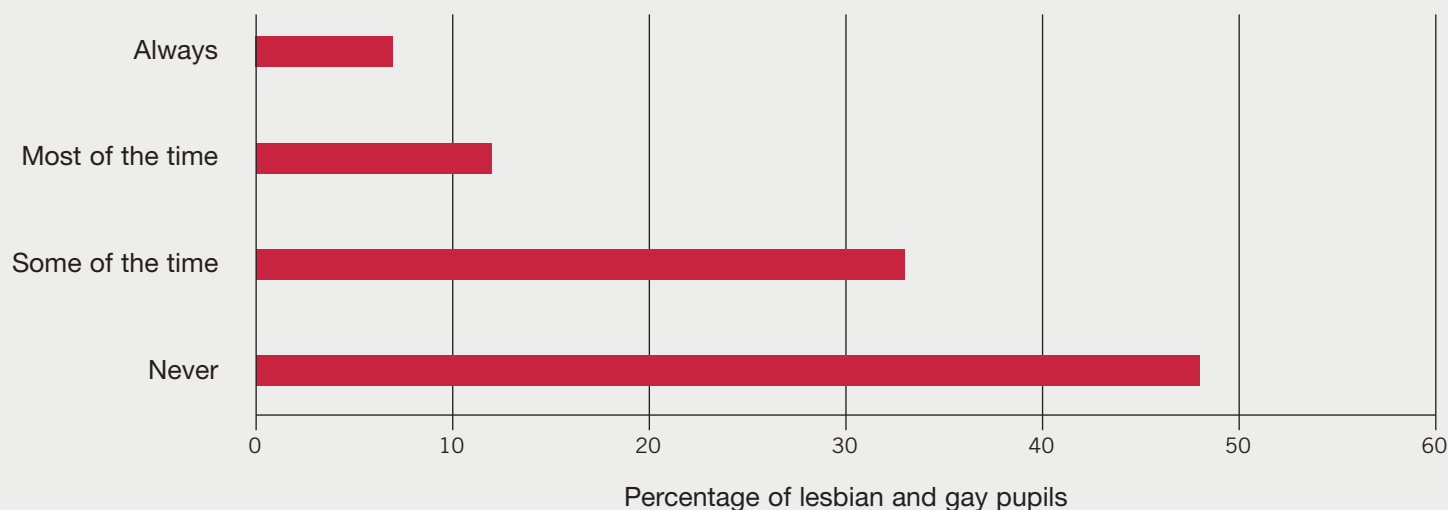
Nearly four in five (79 per cent) gay pupils experience bullying from boys in their year, and over half experience bullying from girls in their year.

Lesbian and gay pupils also experience bullying from people older and younger than them. Over half of incidents have been instigated by older boys in school and just under half (46 per

### Who was bullying you?



## How often do staff intervene when they hear homophobic language?



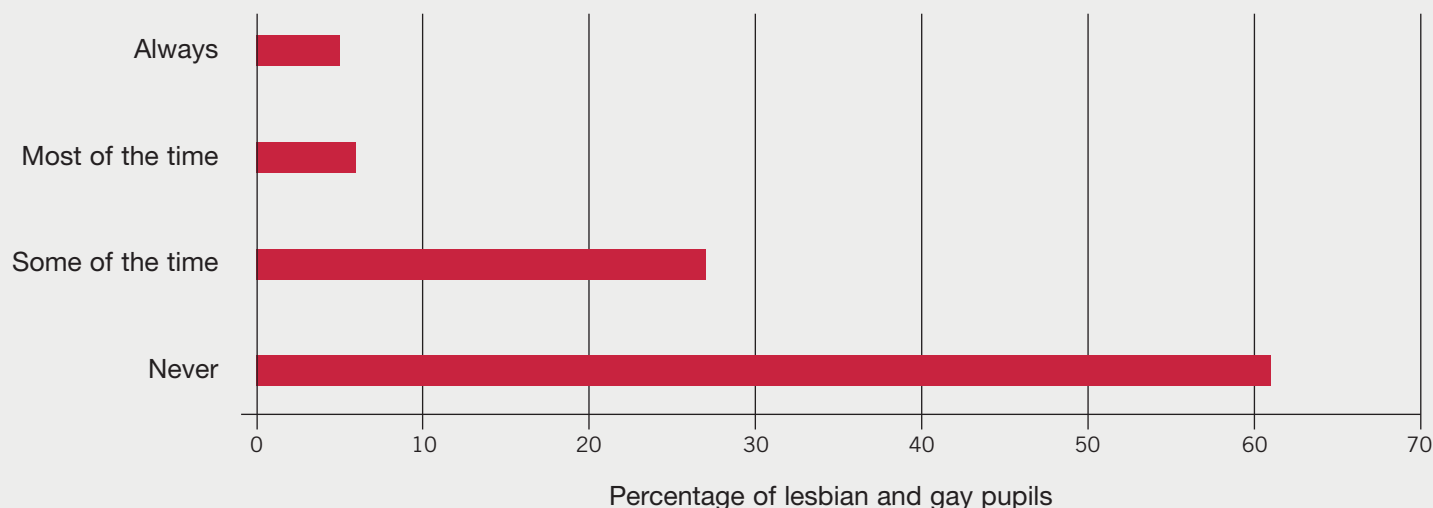
## 5 Responses to homophobic bullying

Three in five (58 per cent) of gay pupils never tell anyone if they are experiencing homophobic bullying. 62 per cent of girls and 56 per cent of boys do not tell anyone. Over 60 per cent of young lesbian and gay people feel there is neither an adult at home nor school who they can talk to about being gay. This can be because young people do not want anyone at home or school to know that they are gay. Reporting bullying may feel like coming out.

**“We were told by a teacher that if a boy came out as gay, it would have to be reported. Hence, I was scared to actually admit to anything.”** Tom, 18, beacon secondary school (Yorkshire and Humberside)

**“I can’t tell anyone because, basically, no-one knows that I am gay... I got punched in the corridor today for example, and I can’t tell the teacher because it will involve coming out.”** Nick, 14, secondary school (Wales)

## How often do pupils intervene when they hear homophobic language?



Lesbian and gay pupils who attend faith schools are significantly less likely (23 per cent) to tell someone than lesbian and gay pupils who attend non-faith schools. Only four per cent of gay pupils felt able to tell their local religious leaders about bullying.

**“I go to a Catholic school. I would more likely get told off for being a lesbian.”** Susan, 16, single sex catholic school (South East)

Lesbian, gay and bisexual pupils report that half of teachers never respond to homophobic language when they witness it. Only seven per cent of teachers are reported to respond every time they hear homophobic language.

Three in five of all pupils never intervene when they hear homophobic language, but instead become bystanders.

**“I feel anxious that I couldn’t intervene because she was sat away from me but also (as it was known that I was gay/bi at the time) it could have worsened matters having a ‘lezzo’ come to her aid.”** Anna, 16, single sex grammar school (South East)

Of those who did tell someone about homophobic bullying, the majority of lesbian and gay pupils told a friend at school.

**“I confronted them with my friends. And the bullies realised I wouldn’t stand for it.”** Charlie, 16, FE college (Wales)

**“The response from friends was supportive, but the school teachers did absolutely nothing about it.”** Paul, 16, Catholic secondary school (North West)

Half of those who told someone about bullying told a teacher, and 37 per cent told a parent or carer. Young lesbian and gay pupils are more likely to talk to a teacher if they knew they were lesbian or gay. Three in ten know of an openly-gay teacher and, if so, are 72 per cent more likely to talk to an adult in school about being gay.

Sixty two per cent of lesbian and gay pupils reported that nothing happened to the bully after telling someone. Only one in four cases resulted in the bully being told off, with one in ten given detention.

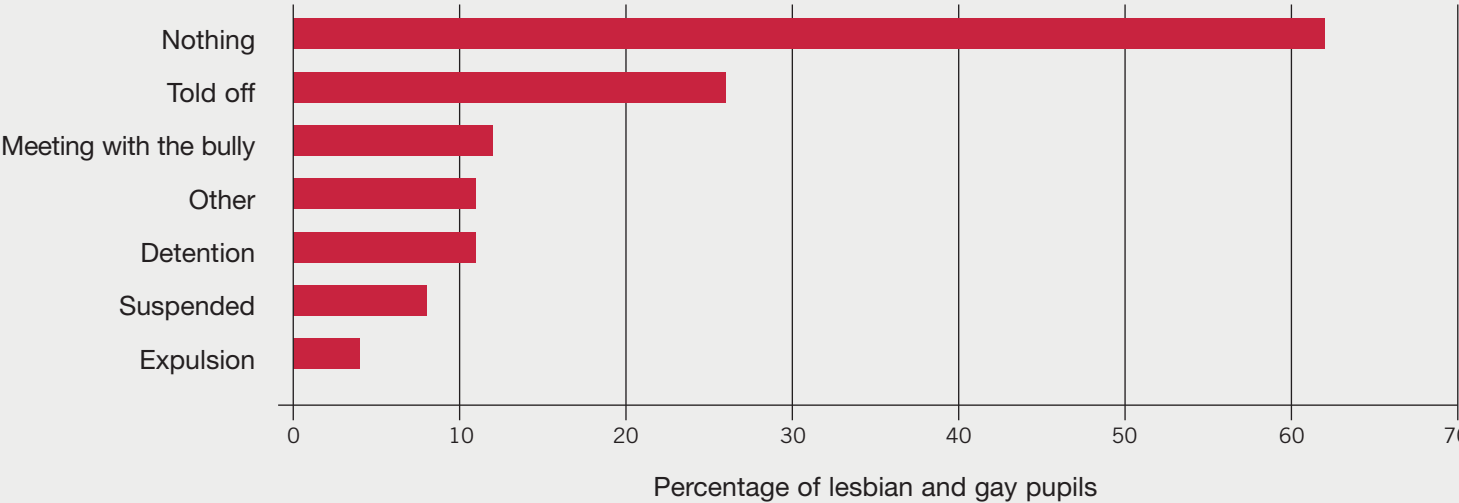
**“I reported it and teachers said they couldn’t do anything, and when they saw verbal bullying happen they’d just stand and watch then walk away. On the few times they saw physical bullying they’d either pretend not to notice or tell them off.”** Ian, 17, secondary school (East Midlands)

**“Teacher said it was my fault for being open.”** Jessa, 18, single sex independent school (Greater London)

**“I told the librarian about it, she told me it was my fault for admitting to being bisexual. I pointed out she wouldn’t tolerate racism or religious bullying and she said it was ‘totally different’.”** Fi, 16, comprehensive school (Yorkshire and Humber)

**“The last person I told about homophobic behaviour was my drama teacher who was as much help as a chocolate fireguard.”** Stuart, 18, FE College (Yorkshire and Humber)

### What happened to the bully?



“I told the librarian about it, she told me it was my fault for admitting to being bisexual. I pointed out she wouldn’t tolerate racism or religious bullying and she said it was ‘totally different’.”

Fi, 16, comprehensive school (Yorkshire and Humber)

# 6 The consequences for lesbian and gay pupils

Homophobic bullying has wide-reaching consequences.

## 6.1 Homophobic bullying policies

Fewer than a **quarter** of schools have said that homophobic bullying is wrong. In schools that have said homophobic bullying is wrong, gay young people are **60 per cent** more likely not to have been bullied.

**“My school has always had an anti-bullying scheme present but the emphasis is always on not bullying people because of beliefs, colour and abilities. Never has sexual orientation been mentioned.”**

James, 17, independent school (South East)

**“It’s a Catholic school...and we are told ‘gay people will go to hell because the Bible condemns it’... It’s horrid, you just want to go and cry at some of the remarks made by the teachers. It’s just not fair.”**

Matthew, 18, single sex Catholic school (South East)

Over a **third** of all lesbian, gay and bisexual young people do not feel safe at school. If they have been bullied, they are significantly less likely (**60 per cent**) to feel safe, compared to those who have never been bullied.

**Forty one per cent** of gay pupils have experienced physical abuse. More than **one in eight** of those bullied have been subjected to threats with a weapon or sexual abuse. **One in six** has received death threats.

## 6.2 Pupils’ attainment and aspirations

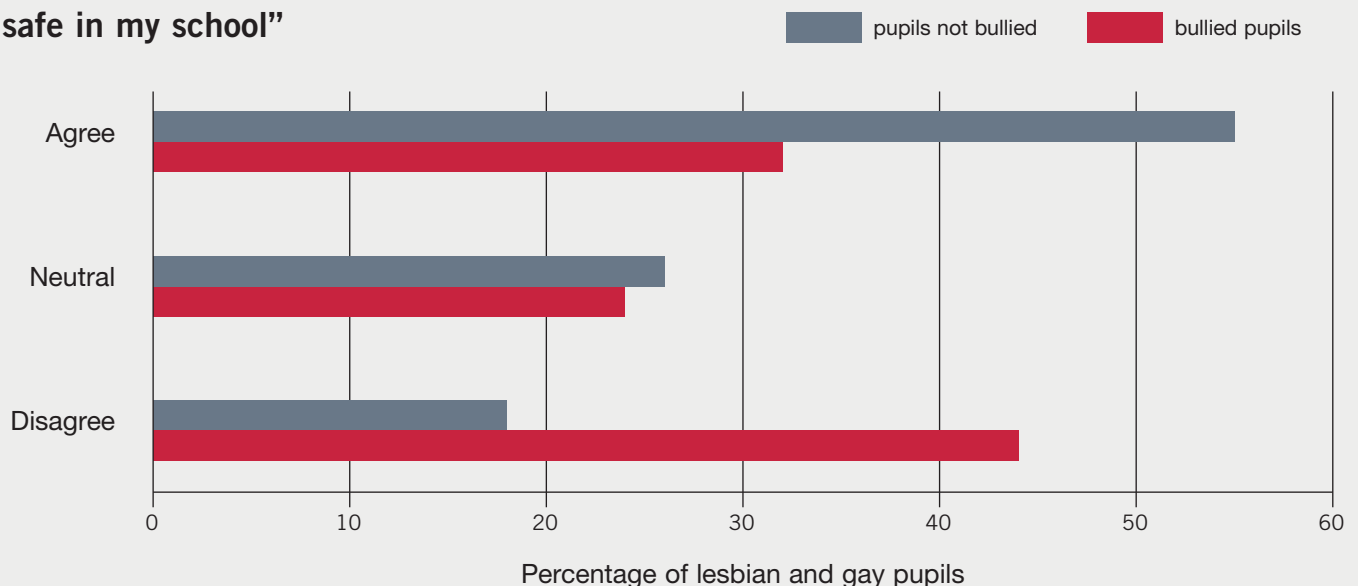
Lesbian, gay and bisexual pupils say that homophobic bullying affects their school work. **Seven out of ten** pupils who experience homophobic bullying state that this impacts on their school work. Over **half** of all lesbian and gay pupils, even if they have not been bullied, think homophobic bullying impacts on their school work. Girls are more likely to acknowledge that homophobic bullying affects their work.

**“A lot of the serious bullying was at my previous school in the GCSE years – years 10 and 11 – so I left the school early and went to a different 6th form college.”** Brad, 17, sixth form college (South East)

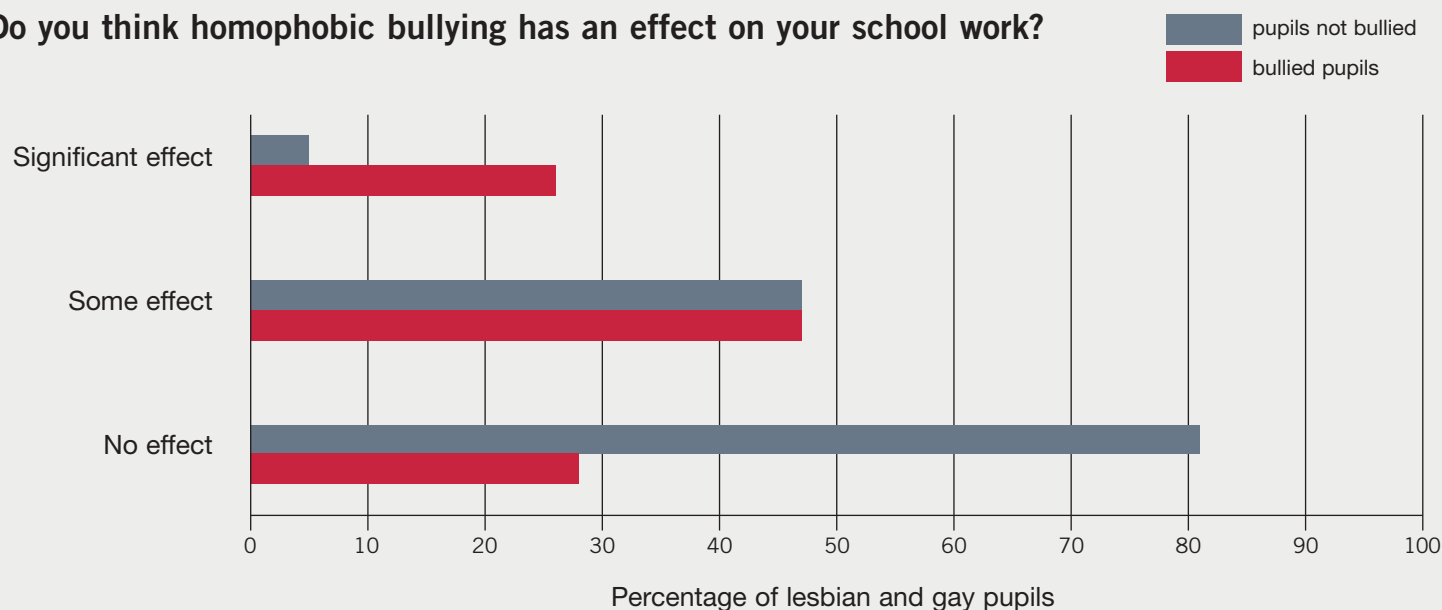
Gay pupils from black and ethnic minority backgrounds (even if they have not been bullied) are **twice as likely** as white pupils to disagree with the statement “I plan to go to university or college when I finish school” and are **three and half times** more likely to disagree with the statement “It is important for me to finish school with good qualifications.”

**“At one point it really got to me with all the stuff that was going on, and to be honest I really couldn’t take it anymore. So I had to change my phone, and be taken from some of my lessons because it got so bad.”** Jay, 18, FE college (North East)

### “I feel safe in my school”



## Do you think homophobic bullying has an effect on your school work?



### 6.3 Skipping school

Half of those who have experienced homophobic bullying have skipped school because of it and **one in five** has skipped school more than six times. A **third** of gay pupils who have been bullied are likely to miss school in the future.

Thirty four per cent of all young lesbian and gay pupils have skipped school at some point. Two in five black and ethnic minority gay pupils have skipped school, and **one in five** of them have skipped school more than six times – significantly more likely (**35 per cent**) than white pupils.

Over a **third** of young lesbian, gay and bisexual pupils do not like going to school. Pupils who have experienced homophobic bullying are **44 per cent** more likely to feel this, compared to those who have not been bullied.

Thirty five per cent of young gay people disagree that their school is an accepting, tolerant place where they feel welcome. This rises to **40 per cent** among all those who have experienced homophobic bullying and nearly half, **47 per cent**, of those who attend faith schools.

### 6.4 Curriculum and teaching

Seven in ten pupils have never been taught about lesbian and gay people or seen lesbian and gay issues addressed in class. **Three quarters** of those who experience homophobic bullying have never seen lesbian and gay issues addressed in class. Lesbian and gay pupils who have been taught about gay issues are **13 per cent** less likely to experience homophobic bullying.

However, lesbian and gay pupils comment that teaching about sexual orientation can sometimes be misleading and inaccurate, and this can lead to further bullying.

**“All we were told was that if two men have anal sex they will get HIV.”** Rory, now 19, FE college (North West)

**“PSHE was about AIDS – the teacher didn’t contradict that it was a ‘gay disease’ and implied what gay men did in bed was disgusting.”** Rachel, 18, independent secondary school (Greater London)

**“My teacher was very ignorant about gay issues and the laws about gay sex but I didn’t want to correct her because I didn’t want to draw attention to the fact I knew about it.”** Rhiannon, 17, comprehensive school (Wales)

Over **half** of young lesbian and gay people do not like playing team sports, but if they are bullied this is **22 per cent** more likely.

Half of young lesbian and gay people feel that it is hard for people like them to be accepted at school, and **half** feel unable to be themselves. Over a **third** are unhappy at school.

Of those who have been bullied, **44 per cent** are unhappy. Over a **third** of young lesbian, gay and bisexual pupils do not feel part of their school community. If they have been bullied, they are **50 per cent** more likely to feel this. **Two in five** lesbian and gay pupils do not participate in any extra curricular activities and **nearly half** do not participate in any volunteering opportunities outside school, compared with those who have not been bullied.

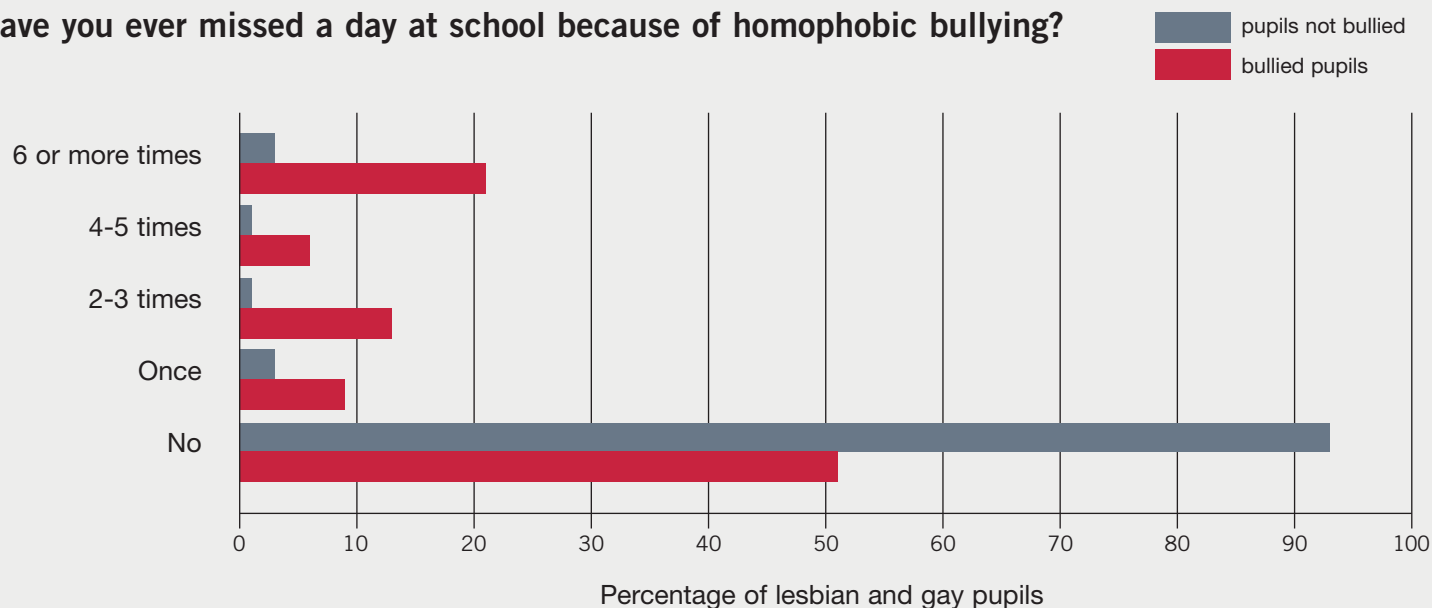
### 6.5 Resources for lesbian and gay pupils

Four in five young lesbian and gay people have no access to any information at school about lesbian and gay issues. There are no books in the libraries, and they do not have access to internet resources to find more information. Only six per cent of schools have a club specifically for lesbian and gay pupils and their friends.

Over **60 per cent** of young lesbian and gay people do not have an adult they can talk to at school, or at home. Young



## Have you ever missed a day at school because of homophobic bullying?



lesbian and gay pupils are more likely to tell a teacher about homophobic bullying if they knew the teacher was lesbian or gay. **Three in ten** know a gay teacher, and are **72 per cent** more likely to talk to an adult at school about being gay.

Young gay pupils are less likely to feel part of their school community, or local community, if they are being bullied.

underage. Nearly **two in five** lesbian and gay young people have attended a pub or club. **Forty five per cent** of those who have experienced homophobic bullying have been to a pub or club. Young lesbian and gay people are **two and a half times** more likely to go to a pub and club rather than a youth group.

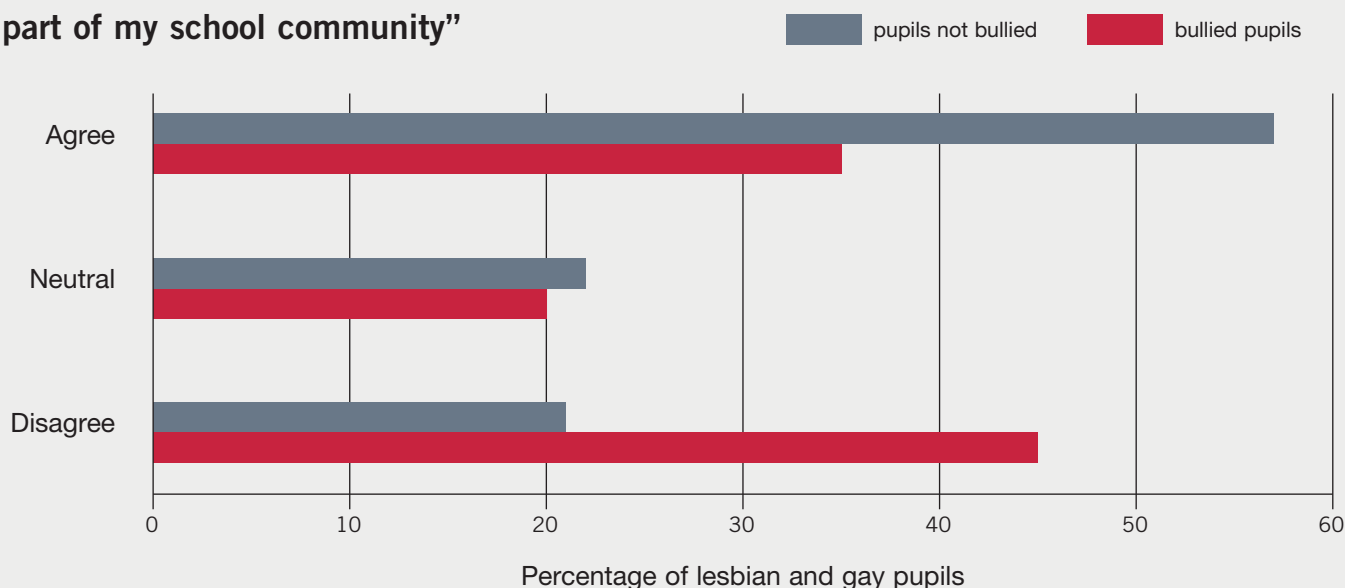
### 6.6 Staying safe outside school

Only **15 per cent** of young lesbian, gay and bisexual people have attended a gay youth group. Young people who attend such groups are **37 per cent** more likely to feel that there is an adult at home they can talk to about being gay, and **32 per cent** more likely to feel there is an adult at school they can talk to.

However, young people are more likely to seek support and a community in pubs and clubs, even if they are

**“Me and a lesbian couple I knew were at a pub getting drunk and three men were taking an interest in our conversation about being attracted to women... they verbally abused us a bit but it didn’t really bother me that much... when we left the pub they followed us without us knowing... when we got to a relatively secluded area they offered us money if we ‘proved we were lesbians’ and when we refused they got pushy... there was a fight and I ended up being undressed.”** Sammy, 17, FE college (South East)

### “I feel part of my school community”





“At one point it really got to me with all the stuff that was going on, and to be honest I really couldn’t take it anymore. So I had to change my phone, and be taken from some of my lessons because it got so bad.”

Jay, 18, FE college (North East)

# 7 What works well?

Schools can, and do, work to prevent and respond to homophobic bullying and take proactive steps to ensure the learning environment is a positive place for lesbian, gay and bisexual pupils.

Lesbian and gay pupils are more likely to feel positive about school if their school has **explicitly stated that homophobic bullying is against the rules**. Less than a quarter of young gay people have been told that homophobic bullying is wrong in their school. In schools that have said homophobic bullying is wrong, gay young people are **60 per cent** more likely not to have been bullied.

When schools do state that homophobic bullying is wrong, lesbian and gay pupils are **twice** as likely to feel that their school is an accepting, tolerant school where they feel welcome. Moreover, they are:

- **70 per cent** more likely to feel safe at school.
- Nearly **twice** as likely to feel part of their school community.
- **43 per cent** more likely to feel that their school notices when they are good at something.
- **81 per cent** more likely to feel that their school has ways to help them solve problems with other pupils.
- Nearly **twice** as likely to enjoy going to school, feel happy at school, and feel respected.
- More than **twice** as likely to feel able to be themselves.
- Finally, they are **two and a half** times more likely to feel able to talk to an adult at school about being gay.

**“Our school has a strong anti-discrimination policy for all minorities. All students are aware of this therefore little serious bullying occurs.”** Josh, 15, beacon secondary school (South West)

Lesbian and gay pupils are also likely to feel better about their school if **schools respond to homophobic bullying when it occurs**. Lesbian and gay pupils are more than **three times** more likely to feel that their school is an accepting, tolerant place where they feel welcome if schools respond to incidents. Furthermore, they are:

- **Three times** more likely to feel their school has ways of helping them solve problems with other pupils.
- Nearly **three times** more likely to feel able to be themselves and more than **twice** as likely to feel respected at school.
- **78 per cent** more likely to feel their school recognises when they are good at something.
- More than **twice** as likely to feel part of their school community.
- More than **twice** as likely to enjoy going to school, and two and a half times more likely to be happy.
- Finally, they are two and half times more likely to feel able to talk to an adult at school about being gay.

**“We were told how inappropriate it is because of their sexuality. Our school  
There is always someone you can talk  
seriously. If you are being bullied then  
immediately taken.”** Fergus, 17, comprehensive school (Scotland)

**“The teacher spoke to them about it and we got homophobia assemblies.”** Theo, 16, independent school (South East)

**“They were banned from taking exams (they were in year 11 and this was just before GCSE summer exams) and therefore banned from the school site.”**

Jamie, 16, beacon secondary school (East Midlands)

**“I knew four really great teachers that helped me... the school librarian was amazing and I owe her a lot.”**

Roy, 16, secondary school (West Midlands)

**“I told the Child Protection Officer at my school and I was assured that there would be action taken to ensure that there would be sex education lessons which included gay and lesbian relationships and a staff training day on how to deal with anti-gay bullying.”** Celia, 15, secondary school (South West)

Pupils who have been **taught, in a way that they find positive, about lesbian and gay issues** are also more likely to feel supported at school. They are:

- 60 per cent more likely to be happy at school and 40 per cent more likely to feel respected.
- 62 per cent more likely to feel that their school has ways to help them solve problems with other people.
- 60 per cent more likely to feel their school is an accepting, tolerant school where they feel welcome.
- 40 per cent more likely to feel part of their school community and feel that their school notices when they are good at something.
- One and a half times more likely to feel safe at school.
- 36 per cent more likely to enjoy going to school

and more than 69 per cent more likely to feel able to be themselves.

- Finally, they are 25 per cent more likely to feel that there is an adult at school who they can talk to about being gay.

**“We were just taught to be accepting in our PSHE lessons and that is fine... We’ve also had some references in English, e.g. one of the writers was lesbian, and we all just accepted it and it was just a fact.”** Pru, 16, Academy School (Wales)

**“As I was in a Catholic school, part of my R.E. GCSE, we had a topic about homosexuality and the Catholic church. We were basically told that being gay or bisexual isn’t a sin, but the sexual act is. Thankfully our teacher was young and pretty much only saying what she was told to say. She allowed us some debate on the subject because it seemed that she didn’t agree with the Vatican’s view even though she was a devout Catholic herself.”** Ruth, 18, Catholic Secondary School (West Midlands)

**“We were told how inappropriate it is to discriminate against people because of their sexuality. Our school is pretty good for things like that. There is always someone you can talk to about it who will take you seriously. If you are being bullied then it is taken seriously and action is immediately taken.”** Fergus, 17, comprehensive school (Scotland)

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# 8 Recommendations

There are ten key ways to support lesbian, gay and bisexual pupils at school

## 1 Acknowledge and identify the problem

Almost **two thirds** of young lesbian, gay and bisexual people experience homophobic bullying in schools, and **75 per cent** of young people in faith schools experience homophobic bullying.

Schools should acknowledge that homophobic bullying occurs in schools and take steps to prevent it, and respond to it. According to a recent YouGov poll conducted for Stonewall, **92 per cent** of parents – including parents of under-18s – believe that homophobic bullying should be tackled. **Nine out of ten** ‘people of faith’ agree. The majority think teachers, head teachers and parents have a responsibility to take the lead.

## 2 Develop policies and tell young people about them

Only a **quarter** of young gay people have been told that homophobic bullying is wrong in their school. In schools that have said homophobic bullying is wrong, gay young people are **60 per cent** more likely not to have been bullied. Lesbian and gay pupils feel more positive about their school if it has developed policies about homophobic bullying. They are twice as likely to feel their school is an accepting, tolerant school where they feel welcome.

Schools should develop explicit homophobic bullying policies, tell pupils about them and implement them.

## 3 Promote a positive social environment

**Half** of teachers fail to respond to homophobic language when they hear it and **three in five** pupils fail to intervene but become bystanders to bullying. Even if a gay pupil has not been bullied, a culture of homophobia has an impact on their sense of belonging at a school.

Lesbian and gay pupils are **three times** more likely to feel that their school is an accepting, tolerant school if schools respond to incidents. Staff should feel able to contribute towards a social environment where gay people, and gay issues, are respected.

## 4 Address staff training needs

Only **5 per cent** of teachers are reported to respond every time they hear homophobic language. In total, **30 per cent** of lesbian and gay pupils report that adults have been responsible for bullying them. **Three in five** pupils never report homophobic incidents. When they do, **62 per cent** of the time nothing is done as a result of them telling a teacher.

School staff need training to help them respond to, and prevent, homophobic bullying and support lesbian, gay and bisexual pupils. When staff respond to incidents, pupils are more than **three times** more likely to feel their school is an accepting and tolerant environment.

## 5 Provide information and support

**Four in five** young gay people have no access in school to appropriate resources that can help them stay healthy. There are no books in libraries, and they have no access to internet spaces. Only **15 per cent** attend a local youth group but nearly **two in five** have attended a club or a pub. Young lesbian and gay people are **two and a half times** more likely to attend a gay pub or club, than a youth group.

Schools have a responsibility to help *all* young people stay safe, and take healthy risks when they are growing up. Frequently, young lesbian, gay and bisexual pupils do not receive this support. Schools should ensure that pupils have access to the information and support they need.

## 6 Integrate sexual orientation into the curriculum

Three quarters of young gay people who experience homophobic bullying have never heard lesbian, gay and bisexual people or issues discussed in school. Lesbian and gay pupils who have been taught about gay issues are **13 per cent** less likely to experience homophobic bullying. Pupils who have been taught in a way that they find positive about gay issues are nearly **60 per cent** more likely to feel happy at school.

Schools need to consider ways in which sexual orientation can be integrated into the curriculum, in a positive and constructive way, which enables both heterosexual and gay pupils to understand and respect difference and diversity.

## 7 Use outside experience

**Fifteen per cent** of young lesbian and gay people attend a gay youth group. Those who do attend a group are more likely to feel that there is an adult at home and school who they can talk to about being gay.

Lesbian, gay and bisexual organisations can provide support to schools and young people to help lesbian and gay pupils feel more positive and included in their community. Working with bodies such as local authorities can also help schools support individuals and classes to prevent homophobic bullying.

## 8 Encourage role models

Over **60 per cent** of young lesbian and gay people feel that there is neither an adult at home nor school who they can talk to about being gay. **Three in ten** know a gay teacher, and are **72 per cent** more likely to talk to an adult at school about being gay.

Positive role models can help a young person feel more confident and comfortable. Teachers who are gay are in a strong position to fulfil this role, provided they are supported by their schools.

## 9 Don't make assumptions

Lesbian and gay pupils report that they experience homophobic bullying even if they are not 'out' at school – **98 per cent** hear "that's so gay" or "you're so gay" on a regular basis.

Not all gay people are alike, and not all will experience being gay in the same way. Not all parents, governors or teachers will be heterosexual and not all pupils will grow up to be heterosexual.

## 10 Celebrate achievements

Acknowledge and celebrate progress so that all pupils, parents, governors and staff know and understand the progress that is being made. Celebrating work will also allow other schools to learn – a **quarter** of pupils attend schools that state explicitly that homophobic bullying is wrong and this reduces levels of such bullying.

These schools can help other schools. Lesbian and gay pupils feel more comfortable in school if they know there is an explicit policy about homophobic bullying, if there are resources available in school, if they know of a gay teacher, and if there is someone at school they can talk to.



Thanks to:

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Designed by Lucy Ward

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# THE SCHOOL REPORT

“I get called names all the time at school, especially poof and faggot. My stuff is always being ripped up or drawn on or stolen.”

Alan, 13, secondary school (Scotland)

“Nasty notes passed in class. The other girls wouldn’t let me change for PE in the same room as them.”

Kirsty, 17, single sex independent school  
(Greater London)