Stonewall
EDUCATION GUIDES

Including different families

education for all

Including different families

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Foreword

Advances in gay equality over the last decade have happily made it easier for same-sex parents to bring up children. These changes mean that there are more children from same-sex parents in British schools. All of the evidence suggests that these young people learn, grow and develop in the same way as their peers and are not disadvantaged by being raised by same-sex parents.

Stonewall's groundbreaking research *Different Families: The experiences of children with gay parents* (2009) found that within school the children of same-sex parents find that their families are not included in teaching and that the use of homophobic language often goes unchallenged. All of our research shows that schools want to make sure that the children of same-sex families feel included in the education system and that their schools are the sort of places where gay parents want to send their children.

This guide has been produced to furnish simple, practical ways to ensure that your teaching reflects the reality of 21st century life. It also showcases leading schools from amongst Stonewall's Education Champions programme to whom we are grateful for sharing their excellent work. They found that talking openly about different families helps to socialise all children to better live in modern Britain.

Ben Summerskill
Chief Executive, Stonewall

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1 Introduction

The children of same-sex families see their families as special and different in just the same way that any other young person would do, because it's their family. Problems arise however when schools don't take steps to ensure that their families feel included. This is something which is confirmed by teachers. **Two in three** secondary and **two in five** primary school teachers admit to not responding to the use of phrases such as 'that's so gay' or 'you're so gay'. This sense of exclusion applies to same-sex parents themselves. They often feel unable to take part in the school community and fear exclusion either by the school or fellow parents. **Three in ten** gay people told Stonewall that they expect to be treated worse than heterosexual parents when trying to get their children into a school. These problems arise because teachers haven't received the training to enable them to support different families: **nine in ten** primary school teachers believe that lesbian and gay issues should be addressed in the classroom but only **one in six** feel confident enough to do so. This guide is written for schools and in particular primary schools, although secondary schools may find some of the information useful. The guide helps teachers ensure that the children of same-sex parents, and parents themselves, feel included in education and play an active part in the school community. It is based on the findings of Stonewall's groundbreaking research *Different Families: The experiences of children with lesbian and gay parents* and *The Teachers' Report,* YouGov polling of over 2000 primary and secondary school teachers. Further information about these themes can be found in those reports.

2 What are different families?

Recent decades have seen an increasing recognition and honesty, particularly in education, that families come in all shapes and sizes. The majority of families still have a mum and a dad but different families exist too. These include, for example, those with single parents, gay parents and children living with their grandparents. This guide looks at the experiences of same-sex parents and their families, although many of the ideas and suggestions can be adapted to reflect other family structures as well.

Children of same-sex parents are not a new phenomenon in Britain. Children have been brought up by gay or lesbian parents for decades. Same-sex two-parent adoption and parallel provisions in the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Act (2008) both introduced legislation designed to protect the interests of the children of same-sex parents. They have meant that it is now easier for gay people to raise children as couples and be more open about their families with schools and friends. This openness about families is better for children, leads to more effective communication from schools with parents and also helps to socialise other children to better live in a 21st century Britain.

Gay parents

Just as heterosexual families come in many different shapes and sizes, so too do same-sex families. Lesbian and gay people may have adopted a child, conceived a child using donor sperm, used a surrogate, have caring responsibilities for children from the wider family, or have children from a previous relationship. Schools should be aware of these differences just as much as they should be aware of the fact that same-sex parents exist.

Schools have sometimes thought that because most parents are heterosexual, all parents are heterosexual. The children of gay parents

tell Stonewall that they feel that they have to 'come out as having gay parents', although they are not gay themselves. They find themselves having to explain to teachers, teaching assistants, school staff and other pupils that their parents are gay and what this means.

JESS AND ALEXEI'S FAMILY, LONDON

Jess, ten, lives in London with her two mums and little brother, Alexei, seven. Jess and Alexei live with their mums, but stay with their dads on Fridays and for the whole of every third weekend. Jess and Alexei's dads are also a couple, one was the sperm donor. Jess and Alexei refer to their parents as mum, mum, dad and dad – except for when Alexei calls them by made-up nicknames.
The family often have family days where they spend a day together going to a pantomime, theatre or cinema. Jess loves school, has many friends and says that her only real worry is about whether she'll be chosen to sing the solo in the school play. Alexei really likes maths and writing in his diary, but doesn't like the recorder. At home, Alexei enjoys standing upside down on his head on the sofa.

JOSEPH AND DANIEL'S FAMILY, SOUTH EAST

Joseph, nine, and Daniel, seven, were adopted from abroad by dads Martin and George. Joseph and Daniel attend a private school in London that attracts a lot of families from abroad, particularly from the Middle East. Joseph was three years old when adopted and Daniel was a baby. Joseph likes to cook with Martin and go to the cinema with George. Joseph is particularly proud of the medals he's won at school for sports and swimming. Outside school he likes to go to museums and to the park over the road from his home. Joseph and Daniel and their family go to a house in the country for Daniel's birthday. When there, Daniel enjoys going to the jungle gym and enjoys being pushed on the swings by his Daddy – Daniel calls George, Daddy, and Martin, Papa. At school, Daniel enjoys maths, outside-break, sewing and singing.

3 Experiences of children from different families

The children of lesbian, gay and bisexual parents think that their families are different. But they think this because they think all families are different.

Interviewer: Do you think your family is like other people's families or is it a bit different?
Lewis: … I don't really get that.
Interviewer: OK. So if you think about your friends' families do you think that there are things that are similar with your family and their family or do you think there's some things different?
Lewis: I think they're all different.

In fact Stonewall's research *Different Families* (2009), conducted by Cambridge University, found that differences in age, ethnicity, hair colour and appearance all appeared much more 'different', particularly to young children from same-sex parents, than the fact that they had same-sex parents.

"I don't think there is a sort of general, you know, stereotypical family anywhere really. I think you get to know anyone's family and there are all kinds of weird quirks and interesting things and things that are really great and things that are not so great. Megan 23 (North East)

When they get older and children's awareness of relationships grows they do begin to notice that their families are slightly different to heterosexual families, but they don't see this as a problem and they often welcome the fact that their families are particularly special.

"My sister said to me 'I've got two parents who love me. It doesn't matter if they're a boy or a girl.' And to be honest I think that's the best answer anyone could ever give. Hannah 16 (West Midlands)

Questions from other pupils

In general, children from different families report that their friends don't care about the fact that they have gay parents, but they do find that they're always having to explain their family.

"When I went to high school I thought it might be a little bit awkward if someone came round to the house. They'd ask where's your dad? I would say I've got two mums, and they'd say 'coo-ool' so it wasn't like a massive thing. Morag 18 (Yorkshire)

"With most peoples' families you don't have to explain to everybody about your whole family, but I do in the playground. People will be like oh, how come you've got two mummies, you can only have one, and then I have to explain it all, but other people don't really have to do that. Briony 6 (London)

This is made worse because schools rarely include gay people in the curriculum and when they learn about families their families aren't included. Polling of teachers conducted by YouGov for Stonewall in *The Teachers' Report* (2009) found that only **a quarter** of primary school teachers have addressed issues relating to sexual orientation in the classroom. *The School Report* (2007) found that **seven in ten** secondary school pupils have never been taught about lesbian and gay people.

"I would want to be following a clear and specific school policy regarding these issues before I addressed them in the classroom to ensure I would not be left open to criticism from school senior management.

Nat, teacher, faith primary school (East of England)

The legacy of Section 28, repealed in 2003, is that many teachers wrongly believe that they are not allowed to deliver lessons around same-sex relationships. This is not the case.

"Not sure of the law – I know I am not allowed to promote homosexuality and am not sure what this involves. Zoe, teacher, independent primary school (London)

Homophobic language and bullying

Children from different families generally enjoy school but they can experience certain issues that stop them from fulfilling their potential. The use of casual homophobic language, in particular phrases such as 'that's so gay' or 'you're so gay', can be upsetting as it equates their family with something negative. Often schools aren't good at responding to incidents. More than **two in five** primary school and **two in three** secondary school staff say they don't always respond when they hear homophobic language.

"Ours is a small rural primary school. Issues of sexual preference are never a subject for discussion for the children. Issues of anti-gay bullying are not relevant to our children. When children use the remark 'he's so gay' they have no idea what it means. Patrick, teacher, faith primary school (South East)

"When people say 'gay'… I feel worse than other people. Mark 8 (London)

"With primary schools I have found no actual anti-gay bullying. The children call each other names or say someone is gay usually just to upset them.
Lisa, Teacher, Primary School (West Midlands)

Children from different families can also experience direct bullying. **One in ten** teachers report that they witness pupils being bullied because their parents are gay. This type of bullying often goes unchallenged in schools.

"Sometimes they say … you know, everybody's got a dad, he must be dead, or something. I say no, he's not dead. Well he's not there, he's never been there. All I've got is a donor dad and sometimes I get teased by them calling my dad a donor dad, donut dad. Mark 8 (London)

"I would get people coming up to me and saying, your mum's gay. And I was like – it started to get to me because I realised then it wasn't normal,

it was different. I sort of felt picked on and the amount of times I went to see the teachers and they said, just ignore them, they'll get bored. They never did get bored. Sacha 19 (Yorkshire)

As a result of this bullying some of the children of gay parents find that they have to keep their families a secret. This can affect their performance at school because it doesn't allow pupils to be honest about their lives and what's important to them. When schools don't do anything to stop homophobic bullying this problem is exacerbated.

"I wish I could talk openly about it to people. I'm too scared to, too scared of what would happen, of what would they say, what about if they told someone. I said not to tell anyone and they told somebody, and although it might not seem a big thing to anybody else, it does to me. Katie 12 (East Anglia)

"If I dealt with all misbehavior, I would never get my job done – tactical ignoring and moving a situation on by distraction often neutralises it.

Sian, teacher, primary school (Wales)

4 Including children with gay parents

The vast majority of teachers recognise that children come from all sorts of families, including same-sex families. Teachers want to make sure that all pupils feel that their families are reflected in their teaching and that pupils are able to be open and honest about who they are and where they come from. *The Teachers' Report* (2009), YouGov polling of over 2000 primary and secondary school teachers, has indicated that most teachers feel that they don't know how to or have the support to do it. Only **one in six** primary school teachers say that they are confident about how to integrate gay issues into the classroom and **nine in ten** say that they've never received training on how to prevent and respond to homophobic bullying. Most teachers and other school staff want to ensure that teaching and learning is inclusive and want to know what practical steps they can take to create the best possible learning environment for the children of gay parents.

Start early

Appropriate teaching about different families is most effective when started in Primary School. It's at this time that the family is introduced and discussed in schools and the time when young people start to consider what is right and wrong and how to behave towards other people. Introducing different families at an early age ensures that all young people are familiar with the idea of different families and recognise that they are a normal family type. For the children of same-sex parents it means that their families are included in school from day one and allows them to feel comfortable talking about them.

"I feel that the younger it is addressed (from age five upwards), the more receptive the children are to believing that other ways of life are acceptable. Alice, teacher, primary school (London)

The classroom

Talking about different families needn't be difficult. Lessons and circle time provide great opportunities for children to learn about the family and talk about their own families. There are a number of easy ways to do this:

- Delivering a lesson around family trees. Show pupils a number of family trees including one or more that feature a same-sex relationship and ask children to draw their own. This provides you with an easy opportunity to discuss how families differ and what they can look like. Alternatively, describe an imaginary family, which includes a same-sex parent, and ask the children to draw a tree. This lets them learn about describing how things are connected but does not necessarily make them feel that they have to describe their own family.
- Show children clips of different families from various television shows. Ask them how they're different from their families and which sort of families are missing from TV and why they think that they are missing. This is a way of introducing children to the fact that the media often portrays only a certain type of family and that there are more family structures than just the conventional two-parent opposite sex families.
- Ask the children to write down what they think makes a family work well together and what all families need. Pupils will usually write down words such as love and support and the aim of the exercise is to show them that it isn't who is in a family that matters but what a family does, how they feel about each other, and how they support one another.

The most important thing is to point out that there are lots of different families and that whether the parents are a man and woman, two women, two men, one woman or one man, what matters is that they all care for one another. In doing this teachers ensure that the first things children hear about gay people and gay parents aren't negative comments or the use of gay in a derogatory manner.

> Pupils with parents or carers in same-sex relationships are often embarrassed to talk about them as they fear they will be bullied or negative comments will be made about their families. If this issue was discussed more openly in school then it would perhaps reduce issues such as this, as other children would hopefully see it not as something freaky or bad.

Victoria, teacher, primary school (West Midlands)

> Well a boy in Year 6 came up to me and said have you got a dad? And I said … I was quite afraid to say it, and I said no. And he said well that's stupid isn't it, and I was like ... no. He said yes it is, and he started ... he tried to chase me and he got me once and he kicked me. Alisha 7 (East Anglia)

The case studies in chapter 7 give some other ideas about how to integrate different families into lessons. A lesson plan is on page 14.

Reading about different families

One of the reasons that children and young people from different families say that their families are almost invisible in teaching is because many of the books they read or TV shows they watch – whether it be *Spot* or fairy tales in which the prince finds a princess – are exclusively focused around 'traditional' heterosexual relationships.

> The videos that they used to show you in school, all about life and everything, it would be the conventional family with mum, dad, kids and dog. And it wasn't ever two mums or two dads. It was always a mum and dad. Sacha 19 (Yorkshire)

One way to include different families is to stock children's books which feature different families, alongside others. *And Tango Makes Three, King & King* and *Space Girl Pukes* are three examples of books which feature same-sex families and there are many more – see **www.stonewall.org.uk** for a comprehensive list. These books are good quality and they have been designed specifically for primary school children; they're age appropriate, subtle and fun to

read as well. Schools that have used these books have reported that children very rarely question or give negative feedback about the same-sex relationships and care more about the stories in the books.

And Tango Makes Three: Based on the true story of two gay penguins Roy and Silo in New York's Central Park who live as a couple and eventually adopt a chick.

King & King: The queen insists that her son, the prince, gets married, but after meeting every princess in the land he decides that it's a prince he'd really like to marry.

Space Girl Pukes: Young Space Girl is especially lucky to have two mothers and a very curious cat nearby when rocket troubles and nausea begin.

> We now address such issues as a matter of course. The use of picture books has been especially useful with younger children.

Valerie, teacher, Primary School (North East)

You needn't draw special attention to the books, and they should be stocked on the shelves with other books, to be read and borrowed in the same way. Alternatively you could choose to use one of the books in story-time either as a stand-alone or to trigger a wider discussion about different families. Some further ideas that have already been tried in schools are listed below:

- Turning one of the books into a play provides an engaging and fun way of deepening children's understanding of difference and diversity and allows them to showcase this to a wider audience.
- Asking the children to decide what happens next in one of the stories helps them to engage more with the books as well as allowing them to express their own thoughts – creating a base for further discussion.
- Using the books in conjunction with other books which feature different sorts of families and asking each pupil or

group of pupils to read a different book and then feedback about the family in their story.

As well as using these books there are other occasional ways to include different families. For instance, when selecting characters for a mathematical problem, rather than structuring the problem around a heterosexual family, a teacher can make a same-sex family the protagonists.

> Bearing in mind these children are six, one child was talking about his mum's new girlfriend and another child attempted to correct him (saying 'you mean boyfriend'). We had a very brief discussion about how families could consist of different makeups – e.g. mum / dad, mum / partner of either sex, grandparents etc. This was appropriate for the children's level of understanding and satisfied the child's interest.

Kiera, teacher, faith primary school (South East)

These methods have been tried and tested in schools and have proved successful. *The Teachers' Report* (2009), YouGov polling of over 2000 primary and secondary school teachers found that **two thirds** of teachers said that their pupils had a positive reaction to discussing these issues and only **three per cent** reported a negative reaction. **95 per cent** of primary school teachers said that they would be addressing these issues again.

On the next page is an example lesson plan on the theme of different families – it can be reproduced and circulated.

Different families Stonewall Plan KS1: Year 1 or 2

National Curriculum links: Key Stage 1 joint non-statutory framework for PSHE and Citizenship 4.
Pupils should be taught: c) to identify and respect the differences and similarities between people; d) that family and friends should care for each other;
Key vocabulary: *relationships, partners, girlfriend and boyfriend, husband, wife;* family words, *e.g. daughter, grandson, cousin, aunt,* etc.
Learning intention: To begin to understand diversity in families

Whole class

Introduction

You will need to prepare by selecting some books which include reference to or images of different families. There are now many good KS1 books which mention but do not labour the point that families come in many shapes and sizes. We start the lesson with just two books. For example, *And Tango Makes Three* and *Space Girl Pukes*. Have fun reading them aloud. As a class, think back to the last session and talk about the **relationship webs** which *Tango* and *Space Girl* might have. Discuss the differences between the families portrayed in the two books.

In groups

Activity

Children are going to do some 'research'. This will involve looking through some familiar picture books and noting the kinds of families they portray. If resources are limited, you might want to carry out the activity with a small group at a time. If you discover that your book box contains very few books showing diverse families, this might be an opportunity to review your stock!

Differentiation opportunities

Older and more able children

Older and more able children may wish to look through a pile of books placed on their table and design a way to record the types of families shown in them. They might devise their own tables or charts, or they might wish to record in lists. They might want to work with 'relationship webs'. Designing how best they might record and communicate the information is important.

Some children may prefer to have a pre-established format in which to record their findings. This might be a set of boxes for lists of the characters in the fictional families, with opportunities to indicate their relationships. They might independently review the books provided.

Some children may prefer to record their results pictorially. This might involve using a pre-established format such as circles and spokes, as in the relationship webs activity. They might review the books provided on their table with the support of an adult.

Younger or less able children

Some children may benefit from being provided with a frame, with pre-drawn/printed circles in which to draw a limited number of figures, and 'spokes' connecting the circles, as in the previous session. They might wish to select from a smaller range of books or work with an adult to identify the relationships between characters in familiar picture books.

Whole class

Plenary

Discussion: What do we notice about the types of families portrayed in the books? If children are comfortable with discussing their own families, they might like to think about how they differ from some of those shown in the books (… yes, they don't have a dad who's a penguin!).

Don't make assumptions

Teachers sometimes assume that when they teach young people, all of them come from heterosexual families where everyone has a mum and a dad. Young people suggest it can mean that they feel excluded from learning at an early age.

"There was one time when we had to do some exercise like write down your name and what your mum and your dad do and I remember being like ... well you know, I could write down what my mum and my dad do, but I don't live with my dad, is that what you mean? Do you want me to write down what my mum and Kim do? They hadn't thought that there might be children there that weren't in a typical family. There are always going to be children that don't have a dad around or whose mum died or something and I think that's just insensitivity. Simon 23 (South East)

One reason that young people can feel uncomfortable telling others about their families is because the teachers already assume they have heterosexual parents. This isn't deliberate, but the impact is often that young people with gay parents feel the need to keep their family life secret. Effort is therefore required on the part of teachers to avoid these kinds of assumptions. For instance when asking children to talk about their parents' jobs, ask what do their parents or carers do rather than what do their mum and dad do. This gives children from all family types a chance to talk about their families.

Teachers may also consider these differences when planning lessons which focus on the family. When young people are asked to make Mother's Day cards teachers should remember that some young people might have two mums, whereas others might not have a mum at all, because the mother has died, or they might have two dads. Exercises such as this, which have already successfully been used in schools, provide a way for teachers to explain that there are lots of different family types and types of mummies. This in turn would mean a young person with two mothers felt able and comfortable making a card for both and able to talk about their family.

"I can still remember when I was younger we had to draw a medal that said No. 1 dad. I said I didn't want to do it. And they just said … well my teacher,

it was like a supply teacher, and if I'd have had my normal teacher I think she would have said well you could draw one for your mum, but she just sort of said … well just do one, don't moan. And I found that really hard.

Katie 12 (East Anglia)

Include lesbian and gay people in the curriculum

'I got really into this project and I went and told my teacher about it because he asked what we were going to do it about and he was like, well, can you stay off the gay topic? And I kind of sat there and my whole class was listening to the conversation and I was like ... what? And he was like ... well, you know, the whole gay topic. Catholic school Lauren 17 (London)

As well as talking and teaching about different families it is also important and easy to include lesbian and gay people more broadly in the curriculum. This helps to make sure that young people know that being gay or lesbian is normal, and also increases awareness and understanding. At its most basic this should include talking about gay relationships in relationship and sex education – again highlighting that these relationships are natural and normal.

Introducing these themes needn't require a particular extra effort. Lessons can be adapted to include lesbian, gay and bisexual people:

- When covering topics such as persecution in the Holocaust mention that gay people were among the groups incarcerated and killed in concentration camps.
- If looking at the work of a gay or bisexual author, such as Carol-Ann Duffy, you could mention this to your pupils and ask them what impact it might have had on their work.
- If exploring expressions of cultural identity, consider including events such as gay pride, why they take place, what they mean and how that meaning has changed.
- Bring in relevant topics from current affairs which cover lesbian, gay and bisexual people, for instance, their persecution in some parts of the world, and look at how this compares to other minority groups and why prejudice/discrimination occurs.
- Consider using a text which features lesbian and gay characters, books such as *Two Weeks With The Queen* can be set for study in English lessons.

Including lesbian and gay people in the curriculum will improve the experience of children of different families and let them take pride in their family and where they come from. *The School Report* (2007) found that lesbian and gay pupils who were taught in a positive way about lesbian and gay issues were **60 per cent** more likely to be happy at school and **13 per cent** less likely to experience homophobic bullying.

"I think that if a lesson involves current affairs or something, just throwing in every now and then a current lesbian or gay issue would really help normalise it. Because since it is never mentioned it makes it impossible to mention, except in a negative light which people seem to find really easy. Mike 17 (South East)

"I teach English so this does come up. I am careful (when I remember) not to make assumptions about relationships with the students. I discussed Shakespeare's sonnets which are possibly addressed to a young man and the idea of gay relationships in the Renaissance period.

Heather, teacher, independent secondary school (London)

Respond to homophobic language

For the children of gay parents the unchecked use of the word gay as an insult can be particularly upsetting because it makes them feel as if people see their families as something bad or negative. Phrases such as 'that's so gay' or 'you're so gay' are prevalent in both primary and secondary schools. **Ninety five per cent** of secondary school teachers and **three quarters** of primary school teachers report that they have heard the phrases. Teachers can tackle the use of this language.

"Well in school now I don't like it how people make fun of lesbian people. Like when they say oh, that's so gay. It's really, really irritating. This guy who I know, Sam, he said oh, your pumpkin's turning gay Maheen... I'm like what's that supposed to mean? And everyone thought he wasn't being mean but I knew that he was saying something about gay people. It's just like they don't have to use the word gay. Most people say it as a joke, and it's not funny at all. Maheen 13 (Yorkshire)

> A student used the word gay in a negative way, and we got into a conversation about inappropriate use of language and how using it like that was offensive to people who were gay. I compared it to racism and he understood exactly what I was getting at. Hailey, teacher, secondary school (West Midlands)

Schools need to adopt an explicit zero-tolerance policy when dealing with this kind of language, but should also explain to pupils why using this type of language is wrong. Most primary school teachers suggest that children don't know the meaning behind their remarks, with **over a third** giving it as their reason for not intervening when homophobic language is used. Comments such as 'that's so gay' are rarely referring to sexual orientation, but still equate being gay as something bad. This is why it's important to explain what gay actually means and that it isn't a negative thing. Well-run schools should treat homophobic language in the same way as racist language, and in a similar way children should be made to understand the impact of their prejudice. Equally, schools should make clear that there's nothing wrong with using the word in the appropriate context.

> A pupil called another pupil 'gay' as a general insult. This was immediately pointed out as being inappropriate behaviour just name-calling is bad enough! When asked if they knew what 'gay' meant, that pupil just said 'stupid'. Another pupil pointed out that it meant being in love with someone of the same sex, and also pointed out she had a family member who was gay and that she was pleased about that.
>
> Eve, teacher, primary school (East of England)

For more information on handling this sensitive topic, see Stonewall's Education guide *Challenging Homophobic Language.*

Prevent homophobic bullying

Children of same-sex parents don't talk about their families because they fear that they will be bullied. These children very often

experience homophobic bullying with **10 per cent** of teachers observing this kind of bullying. This can have a profound impact on their attendance, behaviour and attainment. Almost **nine in ten** primary school teachers believe that school staff have a duty to respond to and prevent homophobic bullying.

> My brother and I knew some people in our school that had gay and lesbian parents that did get bullied quite a lot and that scared us from telling people ... so yeah we never really told anyone. It was hard keeping secrets.

Stacey 20 (London)

When bullying does occur teachers need to be prepared to act swiftly, in line with their schools' anti-bullying policy. School anti-bullying policies are particularly important in combating homophobic bullying as they make explicit what isn't acceptable. Currently more than **two in five** secondary school teachers and **over half** of primary school teachers say their schools do not have a policy that explicitly addresses homophobic bullying.

Promote a positive environment

A strong policy on bullying should be supported by a positive environment which makes difference and diversity something to be celebrated. In addition to an inclusive curriculum, schools can do this through:

- A monthly award for the pupil who has shown the best commitment to community cohesion or for a particular act which helped to combat prejudice.
- Displaying Stonewall posters, such as *Different Families, Some People Are Gay, Get Over It*, or posters designed by the pupils, which promote positive messages about gay people and different families.
- Assemblies themed around different types of families, which encourage young people to celebrate the diversity of their own families.
- Installing a diversity notice board in a prominent place where it will be seen by students, displaying examples and images of diversity and difference.

This approach should be endorsed across the school and in particular by the senior management and governing body. It should also be communicated to parents on a regular basis.

> Just this year a new English teacher joined who is gay, I think, and he has one of the Stonewall *Some People Are Gay, Get Over It* posters in his classroom. I don't do English but I know him because I go to debating and he runs that. Just seeing the poster in his room is really cool, especially at a school where it's never mentioned, none of it is ever mentioned. So just to see that in his room is really cool – rare, but nice to see. Mike 17 (London)

Understanding and awareness

Staff may not be aware that children with gay parents are in their school. As part of school staff's continuing professional development they should learn about different families and the ways in which they can ensure that the children of different families are supported in their school. This should be an opportunity for discussion where all staff are invited to share their ideas, alongside those listed above and a chance to tailor these themes and ideas for your school.

> If a teacher had come up to me and said, look, we understand your parents are gay, fine. If you ever get any problems from it, or anyone saying anything negative then come and tell us. That makes me feel it's absolutely fine, no one is really bothered. But if there is someone who is bothered, I have someone to talk to. Hannah 19 (North West)

5 Including gay parents

Often it's not only children who feel that they would face barriers because of their sexual orientation but also gay parents. YouGov polling of 1500 lesbian, gay and bisexual people in Stonewall's *Serves You Right* (2008) found that **three in ten** gay people would expect to be treated worse than heterosexuals if they wanted to enrol their child into a primary school or secondary school and more than **four in five** think that they would face barriers to becoming a school governor because of their sexual orientation.

Equality legislation now means that schools have a legal duty to ensure that their admissions systems don't either actively or passively discriminate against lesbian, gay or bisexual parents or their children. In order to make same-sex parents feel included in the school community, schools could develop policies that not only challenge homophobic bullying but also take steps to demonstrate that lesbian and gay people will be welcome and included in school life. This might include:

- Encourage gay and lesbian parents to apply to become school governors. The best school governing boards are those that are the most diverse.
- Make it clear from the outset through the school prospectus and in open evenings that your school values diversity and difference. Show that your school is an environment where young people from all backgrounds will be able to learn and grow.
- Make sure that gay parents feel able and comfortable to attend school events such as parents' evening, family days, fêtes and school trips. When inviting parents in to talk about their backgrounds, include gay parents as well.
- Ensure that all parents as well as students sign up to the

school's anti-homophobic bullying policy and respect agreements. This lets gay parents know that schools are making efforts to tackle homophobia and also ensures that all parents are aware of the importance of treating everybody with dignity and respect.

- Create an environment where staff feel comfortable being open about their sexuality. This depends on the ethos and code of conduct of the school but if a heterosexual teacher is open about their relationship status, lesbian, gay and bisexual teachers should be able to be open as well. Having openly-gay staff sends out a message to students and parents that the school environment is one which welcomes all people regardless of their sexual orientation.

TEN QUESTIONS FROM PARENTS WHO ARE CHOOSING A SCHOOL

Increasing school choice and diversity of provision means that parents are now able to choose a school for their child with the educational orthodoxy and philosophy with which they agree. Below we've listed ten questions that parents ask schools when deciding where to send their children.

1. *Do you have an anti-bullying policy which specifically mentions homophobic bullying?*
2. *How is the school's stance on homophobic bullying/use of language communicated to pupils?*
3. *What is your procedure for responding to homophobic bullying?*
4. *Are staff given training as part of their continuous professional development around different families and ways to make sure that the children of gay parents are supported/included?*
5. *Are you aware of children within the school who have same-sex parents?*
6. *Do you stock books which look at a range of different families?*
7. *How do you include different families such as same-sex families in your curriculum?*
8. *Do you include same-sex relationships as part of sex and relationship education?*
9. *Do you have openly gay, lesbian or bisexual members of your governing body or staff?*
10. *Do you display posters or other materials around school which celebrate difference, including sexual orientation, in a positive light?*

6 Including different families in practice

case study 01

Holbrook Primary School, Trowbridge, Wiltshire
225 pupils

'Gay' is never used in the right way!' were the words used by Bethany, a Year Six pupil, at the start of what was to be a learning curve for our primary school in Wiltshire's county town.

One of my first acts as headteacher was to convene a working party of pupils to write the school's anti-bullying policy. The group of ten children wrote a robust leaflet full of advice. When I asked them to write action points to go with their advice, I was surprised by their number one priority: 'Stop people calling each other 'gay'.

So, we determined that we were going to tackle homophobic language head on: the working party released their leaflet with copies going to pupils and their families; it was introduced in assembly and the reasons for it explained; and the anti-bullying log was extended to include all incidents where homophobic language had been used.

Two years on, I found myself questioning our approach. The leaflet had definitely reduced incidents of homophobic language but had other unintended effects. During a discussion in relationship education a pupil volunteered to the class that his cousin was gay. As soon as he announced this another boy was shocked and said, 'You can't say that!' I asked why not, if his cousin is gay? 'But we mustn't call people gay, it's wrong,' was the reply. It was never the intention to make the word 'gay' a forbidden one but we were in danger of doing just that.

To help us raise our own awareness as teachers, we invited three

gay teenagers to come to talk about their experiences of school. We wanted to find out if there was anything we could do, as primary teachers, that would help our youngsters later, especially those who grow up gay. We found three articulate teenagers who were willing to tell us what school had been like for them. Their memories were mainly negative and some of the anecdotes shocking. As primary teachers we deal with different types of incident and work with young people whose sense of their own sexuality has, on the most part, yet to develop, but after hearing the teenagers we were keen to know what primary schools could do. Our guests replied, 'Tell pupils that gay people exist'.

So our work since has been to do just that. As primary teachers, we have no idea which of our pupils will grow up to be gay. We don't know whether any of the parents are gay or whether we will enrol a child with gay parents. What we do know is that we have a responsibility to our pupils to help them feel welcome in society and to encourage them to make it better. As part of this we want to make sure that the diversity of relationships and the diversity of families are represented through our work. Stonewall's poster showing the variety of relationships and types of family helped with this. We want our pupils to recognise that, regardless of their own situation, there are other, equally valid, families and partnerships. We bought books which show the diversity of families and examined the images we use so that all types of family are represented.

We continue to ensure that homophobic language is dealt with but we also make sure our pupils recognise the word gay has a positive use as well.

Roger Whitewick Headteacher

case study 02

Jenny Hammond Primary School, Leytonstone, London Borough of Waltham Forest
210 pupils

Our school is situated in East London near the Olympic site. We serve an ethnically and religiously diverse community with many children coming from socially deprived families. We foster a warm, friendly, inclusive ethos including for those young people who have same-sex parents or who will grow up to be gay.

When we informed parents that we would be doing some specific work for LGBT History Month, only six parents voiced concern. Three parents came into school and spoke with the Head and myself. When we showed them the books and the lesson plans, they all said that teaching about accepting difference was something they did anyway and were happy for their children to take part.

Our work in challenging homophobia and homophobic language made use of age-appropriate picture books featuring different families. I read the books to the different classes, anticipating that the children's responses would be quite negative. They weren't. In fact, using the books led to very interesting conversations about same-sex relationships, appropriate language to use, the meaning of the language and respecting difference. We were encouraged by how positive the children were about the books and found, early on, that explaining about discrimination

and bullying and allying it with racism, brought home to our children how wrong homophobia is.

Using the books, and creating a school-wide response, the children wrote an opera based on *And Tango Makes Three*, the true story of two same-sex penguins in an American zoo, Roy and Silo, who adopt an egg, hatch it and Tango, their chick, is born.

A group of students from Reception to Year 6 performed the opera to different groups of children from our school, parents and invited guests including the borough PSHE team. Everyone really enjoyed it. The opera explored other family groups before telling the story of Roy and Silo. It presented their story as just another couple who loved each other and were just another kind of family group. We were even invited to perform the opera at two local secondary schools!

I am pleased with the noticeable change in attitudes from parents particularly. We have had some interesting discussions about the perceived hierarchy of discrimination: they know that it's not okay to be racist but somehow it's more acceptable to be homophobic and we've worked together to look at challenging this assumption in our school.

John Harold Deputy Headteacher

case study 03

Prince Henry School, Otley,
Leeds City Council
1400 pupils

We recently made homophobia the focus of our week long 'Same Difference' Diversity Festival. The campaign was launched on Monday, so that when the students came into school after the weekend they found *Some People Are Gay, Get Over It!* bunting down the corridors, round the servery and in the dining room and Sports Hall. There was a poster in every classroom (70+), 16 staff wearing a t-shirt and every other member of staff wearing a sticker.

We invited Pride Sports, who work to combat homophobia in sport, to deliver workshops to three different year 7-9 cohorts (each of 110 students) about homophobia in sport. We then had a bit of a frantic washing and drying operation each night so that a different 16 staff wore the t-shirts each day Monday – Thursday. In other words, it wasn't just a day, but rather the whole week, and by the end of the week over half the staff (of 120+) had worn a t-shirt showing their support. This was all going on alongside special workshops on other aspects of diversity: deaf awareness and sign language, wheelchair basketball sessions, workshops on Hinduism, etc., with our Caribbean Carnival day on the Friday involving the whole school. Meanwhile, the normal timetable was operating Monday – Thursday, so students were also looking at different aspects of diversity through their subjects, wherever staff could work this in.

Diversity Festival Week allowed a safe way in to dealing with homophobia head on. By looking at sexuality as part of our wider focus on equality, it was very easy for our young people to see the parallels with other forms of discrimination: if they agreed

that racism was wrong and comments about people with disabilities were unacceptable, why should it be OK to treat someone differently because of their sexuality?

Of course, it's not all about banners and bunting and slogans. What really makes a difference is what goes on in the classroom day in, day out, lesson by lesson. It's about the curriculum-based work we do in our Citizenship lessons. The positive portrayal of gay, lesbian and bisexual authors, athletes and musicians in what we teach and in our classroom displays. And it's about having a whole school policy whereby every member of staff systematically challenges the use of words like 'gay' to refer to something in a negative way. The *Some People Are Gay* campaign has built on this to move us on yet again to the next level of acceptance.

I was struck by the number of colleagues who commented to me how stunned they were with the response from students – the maturity with which they had reacted to the whole campaign. Perhaps not surprisingly the pervasive nature of the slogan gave rise to numerous spontaneous conversations with staff about why we were doing this, what the slogan meant, why it was important.

Across the whole week not a single colleague reported the slightest inappropriate comment or negative reaction. Not one of the posters was damaged or written on. In fact the only thing that bothered some staff was that they had been challenged by their students about why THEY weren't wearing a t-shirt too! Not surprising, therefore, that we had a staff waiting list for t-shirts!

Chris Lillington Assistant Headteacher

7 Top 10 tips for including different families

1 START EARLY

When young people start to learn about families in primary school they want to see their families included. Use opportunities in circle time to talk about the different types of family. This means that the first thing children hear about gay people isn't negative and that children with gay parents don't have to explain about their families to everyone else.

2 DON'T MAKE ASSUMPTIONS

No two families look the same. They come in many different shapes and sizes. Some of the young people in your school will have same-sex parents. Avoid using language which focuses on, or structuring lessons around, the conventional mum and dad family structure and instead talk about families more broadly.

3 TEACH ABOUT DIFFERENT FAMILIES

Make sure that you talk about the different types of family in school and give young people an opportunity to learn about different family structures. This might include stocking books which feature different families for pupils to read or reading one out loud during circle time.

4 INCLUDE LESBIAN, GAY AND BISEXUAL PEOPLE IN THE CURRICULUM

Schools should make an effort to include lesbian, gay and bisexual people in the curriculum and show young people the contribution that they make to society.

5 INVOLVE PUPILS

Give pupils an opportunity to talk about their families and what they mean to them, allow them to make pictures and posters which can be used around school to highlight the diversity of family life.

6 RESPOND TO HOMOPHOBIC LANGUAGE

When young people hear phrases such as 'that's so gay' or 'you're so gay' it makes them feel as if their families are being associated with something bad and may have developmental consequences. Homophobic language should be challenged in the same way as racist language.

7 TACKLE HOMOPHOBIC BULLYING

All young people should be able to grow up free from fear of bullying and the children of same-sex parents are no exception. Develop rigorous and explicit anti-homophobic bullying policies.

8 PROMOTE A POSITIVE ENVIRONMENT

Make sure that your school clearly celebrates difference and diversity. Use assemblies and school-wide campaigns. Communicate this to parents.

9 SHOW THE CONSEQUENCES OF DISCRIMINATION

It is important that children realise why discrimination is wrong and what its effects and consequences are in order to prevent bullying.

10 INCLUDE SAME-SEX PARENTS

Make sure that all parents feel able to be involved in school life, encourage gay parents to attend school events and take part in the running of the school perhaps by becoming a school governor.

8 Further information

For further information on Stonewall's Education for All campaign, supported by over 70 organisations and 40 local authorities, or to find out more about our events, reports, materials and teaching resources please visit **www.stonewall.org.uk/atschool**

Further resources

www.stonewall.org.uk/resources

- *Primary School Book List* A comprehensive list of books dealing with same-sex relationships and different families each with a brief plot summary
- *Different Families – The experiences of children with gay parents* The experiences of 82 children and young people from age 4 upwards who have same-sex parents
- Education Guides: *Challenging homophobic language*, *Supporting lesbian, gay and bisexual young people*
- *FIT* An interactive feature length film and teaching resource on homophobic bullying for Key Stages 3 and 4. It includes a teaching resource pack and online lesson plans
- *Spell It Out* A training DVD for secondary school teachers and staff which covers issues such as how to challenge homophobic language in the classroom and staffroom and how to react when a young person comes out
- *'Oh no! Not the gay thing!'* Lesson ideas on how to integrate lesbian, gay and bisexual issues into the curriculum for 7 subject areas at Key Stages 3 and 4
- *The School Report* (2007) The experiences of over 1,000 lesbian, gay and bisexual young people in British schools
- *The Teachers' Report* (2009) YouGov polling of over 2,000 primary and secondary teachers and other school staff

- *Some People Are Gay. Get Over It!* materials including stickers, posters, postcards, t-shirts and travelcard holders
- *Different Families* posters

Stonewall education events
www.stonewall.org.uk/educationevents

- Education for All Conference for youth and education sector professionals, both primary and secondary
- Youth events for young lesbian, gay and bisexual people

Further links and information

- *What's in my area?* – database for local LGB community and youth groups www.stonewall.org.uk/whatsinmyarea
- For links on issues such as health, family and friends, faith www.stonewall.org.uk/atschool/links

Stonewall programmes

- Education Champions programme for local authorities www.stonewall.org.uk/educationchampions
- Youth Volunteering Programme for young people 16-25 www.stonewall.org.uk/youthvolunteering
- Diversity Champions programme for employers www.stonewall.org.uk/diversitychampions

Stonewall is currently in the process of expanding its collection of primary school resources including a teacher training DVD for primary schools and other resources looking at different families.

We'd like to hear from you!
Tell us what you think about Stonewall's materials and find out how you can get more involved in the Education for All campaign,
visit www.stonewall.org.uk/atschool
email education@stonewall.org.uk
or call 08000 50 20 20 (free from landlines).

Stonewall's **Education Champions** Programme provides bespoke support and guidance to local authorities in tackling homophobia and homophobic bullying with their local schools. Local authorities work with Stonewall and each other to establish ways in which they can address homophobic bullying and promote a safe and inclusive learning environment for all young people.

If you would like more information on Stonewall's Education Champions Programme please visit
www.stonewall.org.uk/educationchampions
or email **educationchampions@stonewall.org.uk**

Education for All is Stonewall's national campaign to tackle homophobic bullying

education@stonewall.org.uk
08000 50 20 20
www.stonewall.org.uk/educationforall

Including different families

Stonewall
EDUCATION GUIDES

education for all