



Tackling Homophobic Bullying

AN ISSUE FOR EVERY TEACHER



Introduction

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

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

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

Made up of people from different religions, ethnic groups, disabled people and people of different ages, the LGBT community is highly diverse. Substantial change in the understanding of and social attitudes towards sexual orientation over the last few decades has led to considerable improvements in the position of LGBT people within society. Many LGBT students, however, are still bullied or feel alienated because of homophobia. Research has shown that homophobic bullying can lead to educational underachievement, lack of confidence and even suicide.

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

A Whole School Approach

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

Every school should have an equal opportunities policy that includes a section on equality for LGBT students, staff, and parents. An equal opportunities policy should clarify the school's approach to staff, pupils, governors, parents, carers and external agencies. It should enable staff to manage equal opportunities issues with confidence, competence and consistency.

To be effective, all members of the school community, including pupils, staff, parents and governors, should be involved in the development of the policy. It should cover all aspects of school life, including the curriculum, organisation, staffing and management with the aim of enriching the culture and ethos of the school.

Developing an equal opportunities policy is the start of the process of promoting equality and

tackling discrimination and schools should regularly review the policy and monitor its effectiveness in meeting its aims.

The Employment Equality (Sexual Orientation) Regulations 2003 require employers, including LEAs and governing bodies, to protect all employees from discrimination, harassment or victimisation on the grounds of their actual or presumed sexual orientation. This provides a legal impetus for schools to challenge homophobia. The Regulations ban discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation in employment and in vocational training.

What is Homophobic Bullying?

Research shows that homophobic bullying is a significant element in anti-social behaviour in schools in England and Wales. Homophobic bullying involves the targeting of individuals on the basis of their perceived or actual sexual orientation.

Young people are singled out for abuse if they do not conform to a perceived dominant masculine or feminine gender image or if the perceived or actual sexual identity or sexual orientation of their parent or carer does not conform to such images. Sexist and homophobic terms form a large part of playground banter. It is often aimed not only at those who are lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender and who have been open about their sexuality but also at those who are perceived by others to be LGBT.

Homophobic jokes and insults are widely used in schools, although younger children often do not understand the meaning of the words being used. Teachers frequently report that the word 'gay' is used to describe situations or generally anything that the students dislike or perceive as dysfunctional. Homophobic abuse of this nature requires challenging and deconstructing.

Many LGBT young people experience bullying at school and at home. This might include physical acts of aggression, name calling, teasing, isolation and ridicule. Behaviour associated specifically with homophobic bullying includes:

- the regular use, consciously or unconsciously, of offensive and discriminatory language, particularly the widespread pejorative use of the term 'gay';
- spreading rumours that cause an individual's perceived sexual orientation to be ridiculed, questioned or insulted;
- exclusion from social groups, isolation and rejection; and
- in extreme cases, sexual assault or physical attack.

Effects of Homophobic Bullying

Research shows links between homophobic bullying in schools, truancy and educational under achievement. Homophobic bullying impacts upon the health, emotional well being and academic attainment of young people subjected to such bullying.

A research study in 2000 found that 72 per cent of victims of homophobic bullying have a history of truancy and that the majority of victims of homophobic bullying with a history of truancy leave school at age sixteen, regardless of academic qualifications.

Further research in 2001 which explored the long term effects of homophobic bullying on emotional health and well being found that of those LGB adults who had been bullied at school over half had contemplated self harm or suicide.

All forms of bullying, including homophobic bullying, need to be identified and tackled. It has taken some time for homophobic bullying to become recognised as an issue in schools. There is an urgent need to tackle bullying relating to sexual orientation in schools. There is evidence to show that sustained anti-bullying initiatives can decrease bullying.

It takes courage for students to approach teachers for help when they are being bullied. This is especially true for those subjected to homophobic bullying. Anxiety can lead to self-harm, violence towards others, substance abuse or even suicide. Some seek pregnancy or fatherhood.

Children who do not feel safe within an educational institution do not perform to the best of their ability. Those who are bullied commonly lack confidence, concentration and motivation. Such pressures are likely to impact negatively on their academic performance. Children truanting or refusing to attend school often cite bullying as a factor in this behaviour.

Practical Strategies

Strategies available for addressing homophobic bullying include:

- an explicit reference in the school's anti-bullying strategy and equal opportunities policies to strategies to prevent homophobic bullying;
- the development of a school-wide initiative to challenge the use of offensive and homophobic language;
- the removal of graffiti;
- the commitment of staff INSET time to building staff confidence in tackling homophobia and the provision of practical training around challenging homophobic bullying behaviour;

- the inclusion of curriculum resources in the school library that are relevant and appropriate for school age pupils;
- a commitment to work on homophobia within the PSHE (or PSE curriculum in Wales) and SRE curriculum and citizenship frameworks;
- the development of links with outside agencies to offer expertise to schools and to offer advice and support to students experiencing issues around their developing sexuality;
- work on solutions to reduce the homophobic content of commonly used terms of verbal abuse and challenge negative stereotypes;
- proper supervision of the school site, including attention to areas where pupils may be vulnerable;
- procedures to achieve and monitor systems to provide a consistent experience in terms of responses to homophobic bullying behaviour and teacher reactions to individuals, situations or incidents;
- the collection and analysis of information on the incidence of bullying, taking full account of the views of the pupil;
- checking that follow-up action on confirmed allegations of bullying is appropriate in its range and is sustained;
- the use of positive peer pressure and the involvement of pupils in befriending and mentoring schemes;
- the use of LEA professionals to work alongside teachers, pupils and parents in overcoming the extreme effects of bullying; and
- links between all forms of discrimination including racist, sexist, disablist, homophobic and transphobic behaviour.

DfES Guidance

LEAs have specific duties to tackle bullying. Schools are required to have discipline policies that involve addressing bullying. LEAs are required to ensure that schools comply with their duties.

The NUT welcomed the DfES guidance 'Don't Suffer in Silence', which provides information and practical advice on steps schools can take to combat bullying. The DfES advises that a school policy on bullying "should be short, succinct and written in a language that everyone understands" and include a definition of bullying which includes "racist, sexist and homophobic bullying".

The DfES guidance makes the point that pupils do not necessarily have to be lesbian, gay or bisexual

to experience homophobic bullying and that just being different can lead to such bullying. The pack contains a section specifically dealing with bullying related to sexual orientation and recommends taking the following steps to address homophobic bullying:

- covering homophobic bullying in INSET days on bullying in general;
- guaranteeing confidentiality and appropriate advice to lesbian, gay or bisexual pupils;
- challenging homophobic language;
- exploring instances of diversity and difference;
- exploring pupils' understanding of their use of homophobic language; and
- including homophobic bullying in the school's anti-bullying policy.

In addition, DfEE circular 10/99 'Social Inclusion: Pupil Support' says that schools need to deal with all forms of bullying, including homophobic bullying. The circular warns that:

"The emotional distress caused by bullying in whatever form – be it racial, or as a result of the child's appearance, behaviour or special educational needs, or related to sexual orientation – can prejudice school achievement, lead to lateness or truancy and, in extreme cases, end with suicide."

Welsh Assembly Guidance

The National Assembly for Wales has produced guidance for schools on the issue of tackling homophobia in schools. The guidance says that:

- "Name-calling is the most common direct form. This may be because of individual characteristics, but pupils can be called nasty names because of their ethnic origin, nationality or colour, sexual orientation (or perceived) or some form of disability."
- "Sexual bullying can also be related to sexual orientation. Pupils do not necessarily have to be lesbian, gay or bisexual to experience such bullying. Just being different can be enough."

The Governing Body

The governing body plays a key role in developing and reviewing school discipline policies, as well as in supporting the maintenance of discipline in line with these policies. DfEE Circular 10/99 'Social Inclusion: Pupil Support' says that "the governing body should advise the headteacher of their views on specific measures for promoting good behaviour. This might include such issues as bullying, racial or sexual harassment, and maintaining regular attendance".

Governing bodies must by law have regard to Annex B of Circular 10/99 when drawing up discipline policies and advising the headteacher. This Annex says that:

- Each school should have a clear school behaviour policy. It should make clear the boundaries of what is acceptable, the hierarchy of sanctions, arrangements for their consistent and fair application, and a linked system of rewards for good behaviour. It should promote respect for others, intolerance of bullying and harassment, the importance of self-discipline and the difference between "right" and "wrong".
- The governing body should set the framework of a school's discipline policy through a written statement of general principles. This should cover the ethos of the school, its values and the boundaries of acceptable behaviour; the school's moral code; positive and constructive rules of conduct; and the rewards and punishments to be fairly and consistently applied.
- The governing body should oversee the headteacher's sound maintenance of discipline at the school in line with their policies. The headteacher has day-to-day responsibility for discipline, with the backing of the governing body.
- Headteachers should put in place effective strategies against bullying which are developed and put into effect by everyone in the school, including pupils. Governing bodies should regularly review their school's anti-bullying policy.
- Prospectuses and other documents for staff, pupils and parents should explain arrangements for pupils to report bullying to staff and how staff will investigate them.

OFSTED Framework for Inspecting Schools

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

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

The inspectors are required to assess the extent to which schools actively enable pupils to understand and respect other people's feelings, values and beliefs and to understand the responsibilities of living in a community.

Inspectors are further required to assess the extent to which the school provides effective PSHE, including sex and relationships education and the extent to which the school ensures that pupils work in a healthy and safe environment.

A recent OFSTED report has shown that schools can reduce incidences of bullying. The main findings include those set out below:

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

The Role of the NUT

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

- has a working party on Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Equality in Education which provides advice to the National Executive on the promotion of equality for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender teachers and pupils;
- organises an annual conference on LGBT equality in education;
- was the first teachers' union to hold a seminar on homophobic bullying;
- is actively involved in TUC activities which promote LGBT equality, including the annual TUC LGBT Conference;
- at international level, continues to work with other Commonwealth teachers' unions and Education International to develop policies on lesbian and gay equality; and
- persistently campaigned for the repeal of Section 28.

The NUT is part of a joint campaign developed by Stonewall, FFLAG and LGBT Youth Scotland called Education for All which is working with national government, local authorities and education, voluntary and community sectors to develop and implement a UK wide action plan to ensure that all LGBT young people can fulfil their potential and that the school system can deal appropriately with homophobia.

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

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

Advice to NUT School Representatives

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



Further Information

Education and Equal Opportunities Department The National Union of Teachers

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

Chrysalis

(Working for the rights and perspectives of lesbians,
gay men, bisexual and transgendered people)
Tel: 020 7635 0476
chrysalis03@yahoo.co.uk

Department for Education and Skills (DfES)

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

Educational Action Challenging Homophobia

Office 24
14 Clifton Down Road
Bristol
BS8 4BF
www.eachaction.org.uk
info@eachaction.org.uk
0117 974 3795
Helpline: 0808 1000 143

FFLAG: Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays

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

Joint Action Against Homophobic Bullying (JAAHB)

(Lesbian, gay and bisexual support in the South West)
The Intercom Trust
P O Box 285
Exeter
Devon EX1 2YZ
Email: jaahb@intercom.freemove.co.uk
Bullying helpline: 01392 20 10 18

LAGER

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

Press for Change

(campaigning for respect and equality for all trans people)
BM Network
London
WC1N 3XX
Email: editor@pfc.org.uk
www.pfc.org.uk

School's Out! National

(Working for LGBT equality in education)
BM School's Out! National
London
WC1N 3XX
secretary@schools-out.org.uk
www.schools-out.org.uk

Stonewall

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

Stonewall Cymru

c/o EOC
Windsor House
Windsor Lane
Cardiff
CF10 3GE
029 20237744
Derek@stonewall.org.uk

Stonewall Cymru

Bangor office
Ty Gwydr
1 Rhes Trefelyan
Bangor
Gwynedd
LL57 1AX
01248 370082 / 0845 4569823
Jenny@stonewall.org.uk

Welsh Assembly Government

Pupil Support Unit
Cathays Park
Cardiff
CF10 3NQ
www.wales.gov.uk



Further Resources

Safe for All: a best practice guide to preventing homophobic bullying in secondary schools by Ian Warwick and Nicola Douglas, Education Policy Research Unit, Institute of Education, University of London.

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

Citizenship 21 Project

46 Grosvenor Gardens

London

SW1W 0EB

Email: info@c21project.org.uk

Tel: 020 7881 9440

Bullying: don't suffer in silence

Smith, P. London

<http://www.dfespublications.gov.uk/cgi-bin/dfes>

Sex and Relationship Education Guidance

DfEE 0116/2000, Department for Education and Employment 2000 (DfEE)

now Department for Education and Skills (DfES)

<http://www.dfes.gov.uk/sreguidance>

Circular 10/99 Social Inclusion: Pupil Support

Department for Education and Employment (1999)

<http://www.dfes.gov.uk/circulars/10-99>

The three publications above can be ordered from:

DfES Publications

P O Box 5050

Sherwood Park

Annesley

Nottinghamshire NG15 0DG

Tel: 0845 602 2260

Fax: 0845 603 3360

Email: dfes@prolog.uk.com

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

DfES and Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (2000)

The QCA publication on citizenship can be ordered from:

QCA Publications

P O Box 99

Sudbury

Suffolk CO10 6SN

Tel: 01787 884 444

<http://www.nc.uk.net>

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

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

OFSTED publications can be ordered from:

OFSTED Publications Centre

Tel: 07002 637 833

Fax: 07002 693 274

Email: freepublications@ofsted.gov.uk

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

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

Respecting Others: Anti-Bullying Guidance

National Assembly for Wales Circular No: 23/2003

The publication above can be ordered from:

Department for Training & Education

National Assembly for Wales

Cathays Park

Cardiff

CF10 3NQ

Phone: 02920 821652

Fax: 02920 801044

www.teachers.org.uk



OUR AIM: PROFESSIONAL UNITY