

LESBIAN, GAY AND BISEXUAL STUDENTS IN POST-PRIMARY SCHOOLS

Guidance for Principals and School Leaders



AN ROINN OIDEACHAIS
AGUS EOLAÍOCHTA | DEPARTMENT OF
EDUCATION
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glen

EQUALITY
RESPECT
PROGRESS

gay + lesbian equality network



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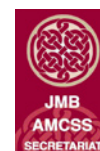
Association of Secondary Teachers, Ireland



Irish Vocational Education Association



Joint Managerial Body for Secondary Schools



National Association of Principals and Deputy Principals



National Parents Council Post Primary



Teachers' Union of Ireland



Front Cover: Members of BeLonG To Youth Services posing for the cover of Gay Community News (GCN).
Photo courtesy of GCN.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The ethos of the entire school community should be supportive of all students and ensure that they are happy and safe, regardless of difference. This resource is written at a time of increasing awareness amongst educators, including principals and other leaders in schools, of the emerging visibility of lesbian, gay and bisexual (LGB) students and the serious consequences of homophobic bullying for these students. Such bullying can make schools unsafe for those who are or are perceived to be LGB. No school is immune from the challenges these issues present. Statistically every school is likely to have lesbian, gay or bisexual students, or students who will identify as such. This means that in every classroom 1 to 2 students may be lesbian, gay or bisexual¹.

School leaders often find themselves having to deal with these challenges without supports and resources being readily available. In response to this, the Department of Education & Science has worked collaboratively with GLEN (Gay and Lesbian Equality Network) to produce this resource. It is intended to support school leaders when addressing the challenge of homophobic bullying and when addressing other sexual orientation issues in their school.

The resource is set out in stand-alone sections and provides information and practical suggestions on how school leaders can support young people who are lesbian, gay or bisexual.

WHY IS THIS RESOURCE NECESSARY?

Irish research² consistently reveals that many young people who identify as lesbian, gay or bisexual have negative experiences of school and the stress this causes puts them at a greater risk of:

- **not achieving their full potential**
.....
- **developing poor self-esteem**
.....
- **leaving school early**
.....
- **experiencing mental health problems**
.....
- **becoming involved in self-harming behaviour.**
.....

1 Based on an average class size of 28 students where 6% of any population is gay, lesbian or bisexual. Percentage taken from the National Survey of Sexual Attitudes and Lifestyles II, 2000-2001. UK.

2 See Mayock et al, 2009; Minton et al, 2008 and Norman et al, 2006.

A recent report³ funded by the National Office for Suicide Prevention of the Health Service Executive examined the experiences of more than 1,110 lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people in Ireland. It found that the most common age that people realise they are lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender is 12 years and the most common age that they first disclose their sexual orientation or gender identity to others ('come out') is 17 years. The study's key findings on school experiences relate to the safety, participation and support of young people in school:

SAFETY OF LGBT STUDENTS

- **58% reported the existence of homophobic bullying in their schools;**
- **Over 50% had been called abusive names by fellow students;**
- **34% reported homophobic comments by teachers and other staff members;**
- **25% had been physically threatened by peers;**
- **40% had been verbally threatened by fellow students because they were or thought to be LGBT.**

PARTICIPATION OF LGBT STUDENTS

- **72% felt that they couldn't be themselves at school;**
- **20% admitted to missing school because they felt threatened or were afraid of getting hurt at school;**
- **5% left school early because of how they were treated as a consequence of their LGBT identity.**

SUPPORT OF LGBT STUDENTS

- **60% said that there wasn't a teacher or other adult in school that they could talk to;**
- **4% said there was open discussion of LGBT issues in anti-bullying seminars;**
- **4% said that there was a written policy to protect LGBT students from homophobic bullying.**

³ *Supporting LGBT Lives: A Study of the Mental Health and Well-Being of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender People*, authored by Mayock et al, 2009.

In their management of policy, school leaders can have a major impact on how LGB people experience school. Where schools have developed harassment, anti-bullying and other policies that specifically include sexual orientation, students are less likely to report harassment when compared to schools whose policies do not include sexual orientation⁴.

This new knowledge about the impact of homophobic bullying, coupled with the growing visibility of LGB students in schools, presents new challenges to school leaders. This resource is intended to provide support in meeting these challenges as well as aiding schools in complying with their legal obligations in this area.



Although Ireland is making considerable progress in developing a culture of genuine equality, recognition and acceptance of gay men and women, there is still an undercurrent of both bias and hostility which young gay people must find deeply hurtful and inhibiting. For them, homosexuality is a discovery, not a decision and for many it is a discovery which is made against a backdrop where, within their immediate circle of family and friends as well as the wider society, they have long encountered anti-gay attitudes which will do little to help them deal openly and healthily with their own sexuality.

...we could and should decommission attitudes that encourage bullying of all sorts and in particular attitudes that are deeply hurtful to those who are homosexual.”

Remarks by **President McAleese**
at the International Association of Suicide Prevention XXIV Biennial Conference,
Irish National Events Centre, Killarney, Co Kerry, 31st August 2007

4 See GLSEN (2005) and Hunt & Jensen (2006).

2. PRINCIPALS & STUDENTS

2.1 IDENTITY

The years that coincide with post-primary education run parallel with those in which young people are coming to know, understand and develop their own identities and their place as members of family, community, society and the world. It is a time when young people experience considerable pressures to fit in, be accepted and maintain a sense of belonging.



Sexual orientation is an intrinsic part of what it means to be human.

Sexual orientation⁵ is an intrinsic part of what it means to be human and it is during the post-primary school years that the majority of young people go through puberty and begin the process of maturation. It is also a time when young people come to an awareness and understanding of their sexuality. For the majority this can be a challenging and exciting period. However, for many LGB young people it can be a very difficult time in their lives, particularly when 'gay' prevails as a common term of abuse and many are exposed to homophobic bullying.

Research in Ireland reveals that many young LGB people or those perceived to be LGB, have a very negative experience within school due to homophobic bullying and harassment⁶. As a result of their experiences in school, many young LGB people are at greater risk of not achieving their full potential, of leaving school early, experiencing mental health problems and becoming involved in self-harming behaviours that often go hand in hand with poor self-esteem. It has been found that anti-bullying policies that do not explicitly name homophobic bullying and sexual orientation have little impact on safe-guarding the welfare of LGB students⁷. The same research also found that where schools specifically address sexual orientation in policies, LGB students were less likely to experience harassment at school; were far more likely to report incidents of harassment when they occurred; and were twice as likely to have a teacher intervene in incidents of homophobic bullying.

There are clear benefits for the whole school community in addressing issues related to sexual orientation. Students will receive the message that everyone is a valued member of the school community, no matter what their difference may be and that diversity is a valued part of the school culture.

5 Sexual orientation is distinguished by emotional, romantic and/or sexual attraction to individuals of a particular sex. The majority of people are heterosexual, ie, attracted to people of the opposite sex. Some people are homosexual ie, attracted to people of the same sex. Others are bisexual ie, attracted to people of both sexes.

6 See Mayock et al, 2009; Norman et al, 2006; Minton et al, 2008; Lynch & Lodge, 2002; Youthnet, 2004

7 GLSEN (2005) and Hunt & Jensen (2006)



SUGGESTIONS

- **Make explicit reference to the 9 grounds of the Equality legislation**, including sexual orientation, in your school policies and mission statements.
- **Ensure that your school does not tolerate students using pejorative or homophobic name-calling** (e.g. 'gay' being used as a put-down). It is recommended that staff members be co-opted to develop a whole-school approach to this problem.
- **Use appropriate opportunities (for example, stories from national and local media) to make positive reference to LGB people** to promote an inclusive and supportive environment for LGB students.

2.2 VISIBILITY – 'COMING OUT'

2.2.1 WHAT DOES 'COMING OUT' MEAN?

'Coming Out' is the term used to describe the process where a person realises that they are lesbian, gay or bisexual and begins to disclose their sexual orientation to others. The process also involves developing a positive identity as an LGB person. Most LGB people 'come out' in their teens.

The level of support available to young people from family, friends and schools is a major determinant of how easy or difficult it is for a young person to 'come out'⁸. School can often be a difficult environment as evidenced in a 2006 Department of Education & Science study⁹:

- **79% of teachers were aware of verbal homophobic bullying**
- **16% of teachers were aware of physical homophobic bullying**

Recent research has found the most common age that young people realise they are LGBT is 12 years, however most will not disclose this to another person for at least another 5 years¹⁰. The study also found that the period between initial awareness of one's sexual orientation and 'coming out' was generally experienced as difficult,

8 Mayock et al, 2009

9 Norman et al, 2006

10 Mayock et al, 2009; 16. These figures relate to average ages. The study showed that the most common age that LGBT people realise their sexual orientation or gender identity is 12 years and the most common age of disclosure is 17 years.

daunting and traumatic by most LGB people. Fear of rejection by family and friends as well as isolation and harassment in school were the main reasons for this being such a difficult time.

As this can be a very challenging time for young LGB people, it is important that if they do speak to someone about their concerns, that this person will have their best interests at heart.

2.2.2 WHY DO LESBIAN, GAY AND BISEXUAL PEOPLE ‘COME OUT’?

Being recognised and affirmed for who you are is critical to feeling included and to developing a sense of belonging. It is also important for good self-esteem. Lesbian, gay and bisexual people ‘come out’ in order to express who they are and to avoid assumptions that they are heterosexual. ‘Coming out’ involves discovering one’s sexual orientation and disclosing this to others. Disclosure is often a statement that one is becoming comfortable with one’s sexual orientation.

2.2.3 HOW SHOULD THE SCHOOL RESPOND IF A YOUNG PERSON ‘COMES OUT’ IN SCHOOL?

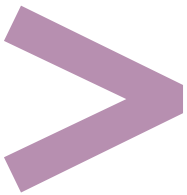
Most young people ‘come out’ to a friend or another trusted individual before ‘coming out’ to family. Sometimes this trusted individual is a teacher or the school guidance counsellor. All staff members need to be prepared for a student ‘coming out’ and the following points will support such preparations:

- **Schools should communicate a message to LGB young people that they are valued equally; will be treated equally to other students, and that the school leadership will ensure their safety and support. It is critical that a young LGB person discovering their sexual orientation feels supported and valued, regardless of whether or not they disclose their sexual orientation.**
- **When a young person ‘comes out’ as lesbian, gay or bisexual they are disclosing their sexual orientation and identity. It is important that this is not interpreted as a statement of engagement in sexual behaviour¹¹. However, the advice given in the Child Protection Guidelines¹² relating to sexual activity applies to all students regardless of their sexual orientation.**
- **Only if school authorities have legitimate cause for concern for the student’s safety should engagement with the student’s parents be made. Often a young**

11 The legal age of consent in Ireland is 17 years for boys and girls for heterosexual and homosexual sex.

12 Department of Education & Science, 2004. Child Protection Guidelines and Procedures for Post-Primary Schools.

person experiences intense fear of rejection by his/her family and consequently finds it easier to 'come out' to others first. A positive experience 'coming out' to others, where they are met with acceptance is critical to safeguarding the young person's mental health and well-being; it can also lessen the fear of the young person eventually disclosing to his/her family and friends¹³.



SUGGESTIONS

- **A policy can be developed within the school's Guidance Plan** that sets out good practice guidelines for staff when responding to a student who 'comes out'. The policy might include:
 - › **Identifying relevant resources and supports** such as information leaflets and organisations (local and national) that could be of assistance. See resources section.
 - › **Identifying key individuals who could be of support to the student** such as the Guidance Counsellor, Chaplain or Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) Coordinator.
 - › **Consulting with the young person** on how they would like the school to deal with their 'coming out'.
 - › **Advising staff members on what they should do** if a student tells them he or she is questioning their sexual orientation and might be lesbian, gay or bisexual. This includes a willingness to listen to the student; offering support relative to his/her needs and avoiding assumptions that a student is going through a phase or is too young to make such a discovery.
 - › **Ensure that the school's Anti-Bullying Policy and the Code of Behaviour are reinforced** through assembly, tutorial and through appropriate spaces on the formal curriculum, e.g. within Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE), Civic, Social and Political Education (CSPE), Religious Education and Guidance.
- **Review the school's Anti-Bullying Policy** against the Anti-Bullying Template provided on the Department of Education & Science website. See Resources section.

¹³ Mayock et al, 2009.

2.3 VULNERABLE STUDENTS

In many schools today anti-gay name-calling is a regular occurrence and students frequently use expressions such as 'you're so gay' 'that's so gay' in derisive and pejorative ways. Many students, regardless of their sexual orientation, are vulnerable to such name-calling because some aspect of their identity is deemed to be objectionable, such as their appearance, interests, physical characteristics or family background. This does not mean that they are lesbian, gay or bisexual. Regardless of their sexual orientation, all students have a right to participate in school in a safe, supportive and affirmative environment. For students who are lesbian, gay or bisexual (or questioning their sexual orientation) the impact of this name-calling can be enormously damaging.

“ It is necessary to address the behaviour of the student(s) targeting a vulnerable student and to protect the student being bullied from further harassment.”

WHAT ABOUT THE STUDENT WHO IS PERCEIVED TO BE LESBIAN, GAY OR BISEXUAL?

Some students may be targeted for such name-calling because of an assumption that they are lesbian, gay or bisexual. Unlike other aspects of identity, sexual orientation is not necessarily a visible or apparent attribute; it is for the person himself/herself to come to an understanding of their identity. Therefore, it is important that pupils are not asked about their sexual orientation unless they volunteer such information themselves. Equally it should not be assumed that a young person who is lesbian, gay or bisexual is necessarily troubled by their sexual orientation.



It is necessary to address the behaviour of the student(s) targeting a vulnerable student and to protect the student being bullied from further harassment. Responding to such bullying presents an opportunity to provide leadership to the whole-school community by reinforcing the school's Code of Behaviour and Anti-Bullying Policy.



SUGGESTIONS

- **Include specific reference to homophobic bullying** within the school's Anti-Bullying Policy.
- **Develop and/or maintain a zero tolerance approach** to the use of anti-gay language that is pejorative or derisive in all areas of the school.
- **The school Guidance Plan should include actions** to address the needs of any student who is identified as being vulnerable.
- **Encourage class-based programmes** to develop awareness of the impact of language/words and stereotyping on self and others. Specific reference should be made to anti-gay name-calling and stereotyping.
- **Encourage subject planners** to develop programmes that encourage respect for diversity and the dignity of each person (with specific reference to LGB people). Subjects such as Civic, Social and Political Education (CSPE), Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE), Religious Education and Social Studies provide an ideal framework.

2.4 RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN STUDENTS

School leaders may have to deal with issues related to romantic relationships between students. Debs dances and other social events often present challenges for schools if a young person expresses the desire to invite a person of the same-sex. Same-sex relationships within the school environment should be treated in the exact same way as opposite-sex relationships are treated.

School policies on relationships between students, whether opposite sex or same-sex, are individual school matters. However, consideration of such matters could be included within the development of the school policy on Relationships and Sexuality Education in consultation with teachers, parents, management and students. Sexuality and sexual orientation are aspects of the Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) programme. Schools should ensure that RSE is fully implemented and that teachers attend the training provided by the Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) and RSE Support Services.

3. PRINCIPALS & PARENTS, GUARDIANS & CARE GIVERS¹

3.1 ADDRESSING QUESTIONS OR CONCERNS

3.1.1 PARENTS OF LESBIAN, GAY AND BISEXUAL STUDENTS

Issues related to sexuality can be difficult for parents to address and this may be especially so if their child is lesbian, gay or bisexual. Parents² who have LGB children have understandable concerns for the safety of their LGB children in schools, particularly in relation to bullying and isolation. Engaging with these parents in the development and promotion of the schools Anti-Bullying Policy and the Code of Behaviour may help to address these concerns and this can be done through the Parents' Association.

3.1.2 OTHER PARENTS

Many principals fear a negative reaction from other parents when issues related to sexual orientation, particularly LGB issues, are raised in schools. All of the education partners including management bodies (JMB, ACCS and IVEA), teacher union organisations (ASTI and TUI), the professional body for principals and deputy principals (NAPD) and the National Parents' Council (Post-primary) have given their support to addressing homophobic bullying in schools. In supporting this resource the National Parents Council Post-primary has stated that

“schools need to be proactive in handling all forms of bullying, including homophobic bullying. Principals and their staff should take action to prevent bullying behaviour, as well as responding to incidents when they occur. A preventative approach to bullying means that schools safeguard the welfare of their pupils. It also means that schools are playing their part to create a society in which people treat each other with respect. Schools have strategies in place to prevent and respond to bullying. Preventing and responding to homophobic bullying should be part of these existing strategies”

1 The use of the term 'parents' is understood to include parents, guardians and other care givers acting *in loco parentis*.

2 Loving Our Out Kids (LOOK) is an organisation for parents who have LGBT children. See resources section.



The rationale for proactively responding to homophobic bullying is set out below:

- Schools are governed by the Education Act (1998), the Education (Welfare) Act (2000) and the Equal Status Acts (2000 to 2008) in which the promotion of equality is embedded. Schools are required to prepare a Code of Behaviour along with other policies that specifies the standards of behaviour which must be observed by students. Schools have a responsibility to address homophobic bullying and respect for difference and diversity (including sexual orientation) when addressing bullying.
- Research has shown the value that parents place on Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) being addressed in schools³. Further research reveals an overwhelming percentage (82% of parents) felt that issues related to sexual orientation should be addressed, while 90% of parents felt that negative attitudes to LGB people should be addressed in schools⁴.
- Heterosexual, homosexual and bisexual orientations are a normal part of what it means to be human. LGB young people follow the same developmental challenges and pathways as those of their heterosexual peers. In addition, they may have to cope with negative attitudes, discrimination and harassment directed towards LGB people. This

³ Mayock et al, 2007

⁴ Gleeson & McCormack, 2006 Unpublished.

legitimate fear of being victimised may reduce the willingness of an LGB young person to seek support or “come out”. It is therefore very important that school environments are open and accepting so that these young people will feel comfortable sharing their thoughts and concerns, including the option of disclosing their sexual orientation. Such disclosure is an expression of a normal tendency to want to share personal information about oneself with significant others. It is healthy for teenagers to share information about themselves with friends and families.

- It is highly likely that every school and every classroom will have lesbian, gay or bisexual students even if they have not ‘come out’ while in school. Homophobic bullying and anti-gay name-calling are serious issues that impact greatly on LGB students. They also impact on any student who is considered different and who is targeted for this type of bullying. By addressing sexual orientation issues, homophobic bullying and anti-gay name-calling, the whole school population benefits from the promotion of inclusion and respect for diversity.
- No parent wants his or her child, or any child, to be bullied. Equally no parent wants his or her child to be a bully. It is in the interest of all parents to support the school in carrying out its legal obligations to protect all students and to eliminate bullying.
- Some parents may assume that if a school is preventing homophobic bullying, they are therefore discussing sexual activity, or encouraging pupils to be lesbian, gay or bisexual. This is not the case, and this needs to be made clear for parents. Strategies to prevent homophobic bullying cannot make someone become lesbian, gay or bisexual. Schools could consider using vehicles such as the school prospectus or website to emphasise that their Anti-Bullying Policy includes homophobic bullying. Letters home about bullying may also make reference to homophobic bullying⁵.



SUGGESTION

- **Hold a seminar on the theme of bullying for parents** in collaboration with the school’s Parents’ Association. Within this be specific about addressing homophobic bullying, anti-gay name-calling and the content of RSE related to sexual orientation.

⁵ Department for Children, Schools and Families, UK. (2008)

3.2 DIVERSITY OF FAMILY FORMS

School leaders are very aware that family forms have changed considerably in the past few decades. In addition to the traditional family form of mother, father and children, schools now have to respond to the diversity of family forms to which their students belong, including:

- **One parent families (either mother or father)**
- **Trans-generational families (one or two grandparents as the main care givers)**
- **Step-family arrangements**
- **Foster families**
- **Two parents of the same-sex**
- **Siblings from different families**
- **Families where parents have separated and live apart**
- **Young people in care**

Acknowledging and respecting the family background of every student is important to their overall well-being and their subsequent ability to derive maximum benefit from their education. The language used by a school and the respect afforded young people's parents and family structure is critical to their sense of belonging.



SUGGESTIONS

- **In referring to home situations use language that is inclusive** of the diversity of family forms in Ireland.
- **Try not to make assumptions about the family background** of a young person until such time as he or she makes it clear to you.
- Inclusive practice suggests that all letters home should be **addressed to parents, guardians and other care givers** who may be acting *in loco parentis* to the student. Acknowledging other care givers should always be with the agreement of parents/guardians.
- **Promote respect** for different family forms where possible.

4. PRINCIPALS & STAFF

4.1 EQUIPPING TEACHERS TO ADDRESS THE ISSUES

Many teachers and other staff members want support to address sexual orientation issues. School leaders who participated in recent research¹ funded by the Department of Education and Science expressed the need for guidance and support in addressing homophobic bullying and anti-gay name-calling and felt that they currently lacked the capacity to do so effectively. Some participants in the research were concerned about the lack of a whole school approach, including policy, related to combating homophobic bullying and felt that this created an environment that could potentially put LGB students (and LGB teachers) at risk of victimisation.

Further research² in Ireland, funded by the Department of Education and Science, conclusively reveals that:

- **The majority of teachers hear and witness homophobic name-calling and bullying.**
- **A sizeable proportion of teachers are aware of physical homophobic bullying**
- **The majority of teachers want to do something to address homophobic bullying**
- **Many teachers feel ill-prepared to address the issue of homophobic bullying**
- **Teachers need to know that in supporting and affirming LGB students and challenging negative behaviour, they in turn will be supported and resourced to do so.**

Teachers' Union organisations³ recognise the role that teachers play in addressing issues like homophobic bullying and actively support members in tackling these issues.



1 Summary Report, Lodge, Gowran & O'Shea, 2008.

2 Norman et al, 2006.

3 The Association of Secondary Teachers of Ireland and the Teachers' Union of Ireland have jointly with GLEN produced a resource to support teachers in addressing homophobic bullying. See resource section.



SUGGESTIONS

- **Provide time at a staff meeting to discuss how the school is responding to the needs of LGB students** and addressing issues such as homophobic name-calling and bullying.
- **Plan for staff training to address homophobic bullying** and the support of lesbian, gay and bisexual students.
- **Encourage and resource a small team of interested staff members** to progress the school's response to homophobic bullying, anti-gay name calling and other LGB issues.
- **See the resource section for practical suggestions** on how individual teachers can respond to these issues.

4.2 LESBIAN, GAY AND BISEXUAL TEACHERS IN SCHOOLS

Schools that are inclusive and supportive of LGB students are also supportive and inclusive of all LGB people, including teachers. School culture and ethos determine how open staff can be about their personal lives in the staff room. Research with LGB teachers has shown that they often feel limited in their ability to be open about their personal lives in the staff room⁴. The support of school management can make a significant difference to LGB teachers and to the whole school culture and ethos. Such support can be demonstrated by explicit reference to LGB people in all policy and staffing issues.



SUGGESTIONS

- **State that staff will not be discriminated against** in employment and promotions on any ground including sexual orientation.
- **Display information on staff notice boards** about second level teachers' union groups for lesbian, gay and bisexual teachers e.g. ASTI LGB Group.

4 Gowran, 2004.

5. PRINCIPALS & THE SCHOOL

5.1 SCHOOL ETHOS

The ethos of the entire school community should support all students, regardless of difference and ensure that they are happy and safe. School policies reflect a school's ethos. Making specific reference to diversity and difference (including explicit reference to sexual orientation) in school policies sends an important message to all students, including LGB students, that they are valued and equal members of the school community and will be supported to develop their full potential.

SUGGESTIONS

- **Display information, including posters and leaflets, about appropriate services for LGB students such as BeLonG To Youth Service, which is supported by the Department of Education & Science and the Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs. See Resources section.**
- **Promotional media such as school prospectus, websites and notice boards can highlight the schools inclusion of all students, making specific reference to sexual orientation and other minority groups.**
- **Develop a mechanism whereby students can report instances of anti-gay name-calling, homophobic bullying or other instances of negative behaviour.** Such a mechanism would provide an unambiguous message that the school wants to hear about areas it can improve on.

5.2 POLICIES

The inclusion of specific reference to sexual orientation in school policies has been linked with a reduction in homophobic bullying and harassment⁵. Schools strive to treat all students equally. The Education Act (1998) and the Education (Welfare) Act (2000) along with the Equal Status Acts (2000 to 2008) set out the legislative foundation for the equal treatment of all students. School policies are created in line with this legislation. Providing for the inclusion of LGB students does not have to entail re-writing all existing policy. It is suggested that schools should 'proof' existing policies to ensure that they are inclusive of LGB people and other minority groups.

Expressly including sexual orientation in all policy areas and promotional material shows commitment to the inclusion of lesbian, gay and bisexual students. Failing to

⁵ GLSEN, 2005 and Hunt & Jensen, 2006.

do so means that the school is contributing to the invisibility of LGB students and the silencing of sexual orientation issues.

Key policy areas where references to lesbian, gay and bisexual people can be addressed include:

- **Anti-Bullying**
- **Relationships and Sexuality Education**
- **Guidance Plan**
- **Pastoral Care Plan**
- **Staff Development**
- **Home-School-Community Liaison**
- **Code of Behaviour.**

Some schools may also wish to consider other statements of policy such as the Mission Statement of the school and the Admissions Policy. More detailed reference to each of these policy areas is provided within *More Than a Phase: A Resource Guide for the Inclusion of LGBT Young People* available on the RSE section of the Department of Education and Science website.



SUGGESTIONS

- Review existing school policies and include sexual orientation where relevant.
- Specifically state within the Anti-Bullying Policy and Code of Behaviour that homophobic bullying and anti-gay name-calling are unacceptable in any circumstance and will be treated seriously.
- Ensure the Guidance Plan includes a section on the schools response to students 'coming out' or to working with vulnerable students.
- Develop a set of actions to ensure that the inclusion of sexual orientation and LGB students in policy becomes embedded in practice.

5.3 TERMINOLOGY

Research shows that the word 'gay' is the primary term of abuse within schools. Consequently LGB students fare worst with regard to prejudice in the Irish school system⁶. The most simple and supportive action a school can take to address this is to prohibit all forms of homophobic or anti-gay name-calling in the school. A whole-school decision to address this can quickly lead to its cessation. Staff should be encouraged to model the respectful behaviour towards LGB people and other minorities that is expected of students. Research has demonstrated that when schools address these issues, the experiences of young LGB people dramatically improve and the culture of the school improves for all students and for staff.

Generally, terms such as 'gay', 'lesbian' and 'bisexual' are preferable to 'homosexual' which is a medical term with negative historical connotations for many LGB people.



SUGGESTIONS

- Use opportunities that arise to provide respectful messages about lesbian, gay and bisexual people.
- Discourage stereotyping and encourage critical thinking and discussion around difference and diversity.
- Use the terms 'lesbian', 'gay' and 'bisexual' rather than 'homosexual'. The former are preferred by LGB people.
- Develop a whole school approach to eradicating use of the word 'gay' as a pejorative and all anti-gay language.

5.4 EQUALITY LEGISLATION

Under the Equal Status Acts (2000 to 2008), all schools are legally responsible for harassment or discrimination experienced by students unless they take reasonable steps to prevent it. Within this, schools are also liable for discrimination or harassment committed by an employee (or anybody else who has the right to be at the school) in the course of their work, whether or not it was done with the school's knowledge or approval.



SUGGESTION

- See section 6 for a list of available resources.

⁶ Lodge and Lynch, 2002.

6. FURTHER GUIDANCE, INFORMATION & SUPPORT

Type of Support	Description	Further Information
Policy Guidance		
	The Department of Education & Science has suggested that schools include homophobic bullying within their Anti-Bullying Policy . An Anti-Bullying Policy template is available on the Department’s website as a tool to assist school leaders and principals in dealing with incidences of bullying in a professional and prepared way.	www.education.ie and search for “anti-bullying policy”.
	The National Education Welfare Board (NEWB) has issued copies of Developing a Code of Behaviour: Guidelines for Schools to all schools. The Guidelines set out a framework of good practice to assist schools in developing their code of behaviour for the first time, or in strengthening an existing code.	www.newb.ie
In-service		
	The Social, Personal and Health Education Support Service provide Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) training on a range of issues including sexual orientation.	Information is available from www.sphe.ie .
Resources		
	An excellent resource developed by the semi-state agency, Pobal, called More than a Phase: A resource guide for the inclusion of young LGBT people provides comprehensive and practical information and suggestions.	Available from www.pobal.ie
	The Equality Authority and BeLonG To Youth Service have produced a booklet, posters and other materials under the banner of Making Your School Safe for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender students.	Available from www.belongto.org and www.equality.ie
	Teachers Unions, ASTI and TUI along with GLEN have produced a resource to support teachers in addressing homophobic bullying. Teachers Supporting Diversity: Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Students . ASTI, TUI and GLEN.	www.glen.ie

Type of Support	Description	Further Information
Laws		
	The Equality Authority has produced a booklet for schools outlining schools obligations under the <i>Equal Status Acts 2000 & 2004 (Schools and the Equal Status Act, 2nd Edition)</i>	www.equality.ie
Research & Further Reading		
	<i>Supporting LGBT LIVES: A Study of the Mental Health and Well-Being of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender People.</i> (2009) TCD/UCD.	Available from www.glen.ie
	<i>Straight Talk: Researching Gay and Lesbian Issues in the School Curriculum</i> (2006) DCU.	
	<i>Valuing Visibility: An Exploration of How Sexual Orientation Issues Arise and Are Addressed in Post-Primary Schools – Summary Report.</i> NUI Maynooth, GLEN and DES.	Available from www.glen.ie
National LGBT Organisations		
	GLEN – Gay and Lesbian Equality Network. GLEN works to change policy and practice to ensure equality for lesbian, gay and bisexual people in Ireland. A key priority for GLEN is to support the education partners in ensuring that schools are safe, supportive and affirming environments in which young LGB people may benefit from education on an equal footing with their heterosexual peers.	www.glen.ie
	BeLonG To Youth Service A national youth service for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender young people aged between 14 and 23. BeLonG To's training and advocacy services also provides support to teachers and principals. The Service began with the support of the Department of Education & Science and is now funded partly by the Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs.	www.belongto.org
	Transgender Equality Network Ireland (TENI) An organisation that supports transgender and transsexual people, provides information and support to transgender people and their families and advocates for transgender equality in Ireland.	www.teni.ie

Type of Support	Description	Further Information
National Parents' Groups		
	<p>Loving Our Out Kids (LOOK)</p> <p>LOOK (formerly Parents' Support) is an organisation run by parents who have lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender children of all ages. The organisation supports other parents whose children are LGBT.</p>	<p>www.lovingouroutkids.org</p>
Regional Parents' Groups		
	<p>Support groups for parents who have LGBT children exist in some regions for example, Cork.</p>	<p>Contact GLEN for more information</p>
Regional LGB Organisations		
	<p>There are LGB groups in many parts of the country that work with schools in addressing LGB issues.</p>	<p>Contact GLEN for more information</p>
	<p>There is a network of LGBT youth groups throughout the country. These groups are delivered and/or supported by BeLonG To Youth Services and many can be contacted to work with schools locally.</p>	<p>Contact BeLonG To Youth Service</p>

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glen
 EQUALITY
 RESPECT
 PROGRESS
 gay + lesbian equality network

In association with

Association of Community and Comprehensive Schools



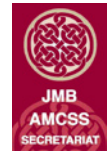
Association of Secondary Teachers, Ireland



Irish Vocational Education Association



Joint Managerial Body for Secondary Schools



National Association of Principals and Deputy Principals



National Parents Council Post Primary



Teachers' Union of Ireland

