Respecting others:
Homophobic bullying

Guidance

Respecting others: Homophobic bullying

Audience   Schools, local authorities, parents/carers, families, learners and school governors; social workers, health professionals and voluntary organisations involved with schoolchildren.

Overview   This guidance provides information for all involved in tackling bullying in schools. Local authorities and schools should find it useful in developing anti-bullying policies and strategies, and responding to incidents of bullying. This document forms part of a series of guidance materials covering bullying around race, religion and culture; bullying around special educational needs and disabilities; sexist, sexual and transphobic bullying; and cyberbullying.

Action required   For use in developing anti-bullying policies and strategies.

Further information   Enquiries about this guidance should be directed to:
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Additional copies   This document is only available on the Welsh Government website at www.wales.gov.uk/educationandskills

Related documents   *Respecting Others: Anti-Bullying Guidance* National Assembly for Wales Circular 23/2003 (2003)
National Behaviour and Attendance Review (NBAR) Report (2008)
Inclusion and Pupil Support National Assembly for Wales Circular 47/2006 (2006)
School-based Counselling Services in Wales (2008)
School Effectiveness Framework (2008)

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Introduction

Homophobic bullying can have a significant impact on schools and individuals within that school. Learners who experience homophobic bullying are more likely to miss school, are less likely to stay on in education, are less likely to feel safe, enjoy and achieve, be healthy and make a positive contribution to their community. It is vital, therefore, that schools understand the issue, know how to prevent and respond to incidents, and are updated on the legal issues surrounding this challenging subject.

This guidance forms part of the Welsh Government's series of anti-bullying guidance materials for schools. Other guidance in the series includes:

- anti-bullying overview

- bullying around race, religion and culture

- bullying around special educational needs and disabilities

- cyberbullying

- sexist, sexual and transphobic bullying.

This guidance is aimed at all maintained primary and secondary schools in Wales, including maintained special schools and pupil referral units. Increasingly schools are expected to work in partnership with a range of other agencies, organisations and bodies who may also find this guidance useful.

Terminology

For ease of reading, the term 'children' is used to mean 'children and young people' throughout the text. The definition of a 'parent' or 'carer' for the purpose of this guidance is broadly drawn and includes any person who has parental responsibility (which includes the local authority where they have a care order in respect of the child) and any person, for example, a foster carer, with whom the child lives and/or the child's birth parent(s).

Where 'LGB' is used in the guidance, this is the shortened form of 'lesbian, gay, bisexual'.

Information on bullying in general can be found in the following documents.

- *Respecting Others: Anti-Bullying Guidance* National Assembly for Wales Circular No: 23/2003 which includes schools policies, definitions and strategies
  www.wales.gov.uk/respectingothers

- *Evaluation of Anti-Bullying Policies in Schools in Wales* commissioned by the Welsh Assembly Government in 2006
  www.wales.gov.uk/topics/educationandskills/schoolshome/ wellbeing/antibullying/publications/evaluationbullyingschools/?lang =en

- *Tackling Bullying in Schools: A survey of effective practice* published in 2006 by Estyn
  www.estyn.gov.uk

- *Anti-Bullying Self-Assessment Toolkit*
  www.wales.gov.uk/topics/educationandskills/schoolshome/ wellbeing/antibullying/publications/toolkit/?lang=en

Section 1: Understanding homophobic bullying

Schools need to take an active approach to tackling all forms of bullying, including homophobic bullying. Schools should be taking 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 learners, which schools have a duty to do so under Section 175 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006. It also means that schools are playing their part to create a society in which people treat each other with respect. Schools know how to prevent and respond to bullying, and will already have strategies in place. Preventing and responding to homophobic bullying should be part of these existing strategies.

This guidance helps with the specifics around homophobic bullying.

Defining homophobic bullying

Homophobic bullying is a specific form of bullying and occurs when bullying is motivated by prejudice against LGB people, or against those perceived to be LGB.

Who experiences homophobic bullying?

- Young people who are LGB.

- Young people who are thought to be LGB (whether correct or not).

- Young people who are 'different' in some way – for example, because they may be considered shy by other learners, or because they look and act differently to 'typical' boys and girls.

- Young people who have LGB friends or family, or their parents/carers are LGB.

- Teachers who may or may not be LGB.

Who does the bullying and why?

There is no one type of person who bullies in this way. It can be anyone – especially if they have not been told or taught that it's wrong.

Learners may use homophobic bullying because they:

- do not realise that it is bullying because it has not been properly explained to them

- think that LGB people should be bullied, because they believe LGB people are 'wrong'

- think they might be LGB themselves, and this makes them uncomfortable and hostile to others who are

- think it is acceptable to bully others who do not conform to their 'norm' – for example, people who think 'boys should act like boys' and 'girls should act like girls'

- think gay parenting is wrong and learners should be treated differently because they have gay parents/carers

- think LGB people shouldn't have the same rights as heterosexual people and use this as justification for bullying.

Other learners tend to be less likely to intervene in cases of homophobic bullying in case the bully thinks that they might be gay, or they think that it is ok to be gay. This makes the sense of isolation more profound for the person being bullied.

What does homophobic bullying look like?

Generally, homophobic bullying looks like other sorts of bullying, but in particular it can include the following.

- **Verbal abuse** such as suggestive remarks, jokes or name calling, including spreading rumours that someone is gay. It also includes suggesting that something or someone is inferior and so they are 'gay', for example, 'you're such a gay boy!' or 'those trainers are so gay!'. The wide use of 'gay' to illustrate 'something bad' creates a hostile environment at school where difference and diversity is not respected.

- **Non-verbal abuse** such as mimicry, offensive gestures, or body language. This can include ignoring or excluding someone because they are LGB, or thought to be LGB. It can also include the display or distribution of offensive material or graffiti.

- **Physical abuse** including hitting, punching, kicking, unwanted physical contact, sexual assault, and threatening behaviour.

- **Cyberbullying** including through e-mail, chatrooms and mobile phones (text and picture messaging). This might include using online spaces to spread rumours about someone or exclude them.

- **Death threats** – 17 per cent of LGB learners who have been bullied have experienced death threats.

Key issues relating to homophobic bullying

Homophobic bullying can be hard to identify because it may be going on in secret or going unreported. Sometimes learners may not want to tell anyone about it in case teachers/staff or other adults assume they are gay. A recent study found that three in five gay learners never tell anyone (either at home or school) when they are being bullied. The fact that young people are particularly reluctant to tell is a distinctive aspect of homophobic bullying.

The reported levels of bullying are particularly high, with seven out of ten young LGB people saying homophobic bullying affects their work. It can also be linked to poor attendance, with one survey showing that 72 per cent of LGB adults reported a regular history of absenteeism at school (Rivers, 2000). Research[1] also indicates that young people who experience homophobic bullying are more likely to leave school at 16, sometimes despite being keen to continue their studies.

As a result, homophobic bullying can negatively affect a young person's attainment and future life chances, and in the most severe cases can lead to young people self-harming and contemplating suicide. A survey by Rivers in 2000 showed that 53 per cent of adult lesbians and gay men who had been bullied at school reported contemplating self-harm as a result, while 40 per cent had gone on to harm themselves. A further study showed that more than 20 per cent had attempted suicide (Mullen, 1999).

Homophobic bullying can be particularly difficult for the young people affected by it, and schools find it a challenging area to address. 34 per cent of all communications received by the EACH helpline are from members of school staff seeking guidance on how best to deal with the homophobic bullying of learners (EACH, 2007, sample 3361).

In 2006, Stonewall asked young people from Great Britain who are LGB (or think they might be) to complete a survey about their experiences at school. The bullets below show some of the results.

- 65 per cent of young LGB people experience homophobic bullying in Britain's schools. (75 per cent of young gay people in faith schools experience homophobic bullying and are less likely than learners in other schools to report it.)

- 97 per cent of gay learners hear derogatory phrases such as 'dyke' or 'poof' used in school.

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[1] www.schools-out.org.uk/research/docs/school_report.pdf

- Only a quarter of schools say that homophobic bullying is wrong in their school. In schools that have said homophobic bullying is wrong, gay young people are 60 per cent more likely not to have been bullied. 30 per cent of lesbian and gay learners report that adults are responsible for homophobic incidents in their schools.

- Of those who have been bullied, 92 per cent have experienced verbal homophobic bullying, 41 per cent physical bullying and 17 per cent death threats.

- 58 per cent of lesbian and gay learners who experience bullying never report it. If they tell a teacher, 62 per cent of the time nothing is done.

- 50 per cent of teachers fail to respond to homophobic language when they hear it. Just 7 per cent of teachers are reported to respond every time.

- 60 per cent of learners fail to intervene and become bystanders to bullying.

- 70 per cent of gay learners have never been taught about lesbian and gay people or issues in class.

- Over 60 per cent of young lesbian and gay people feel that there is neither an adult at home or at school who they can talk to about being gay.

- 80 per cent of young gay people have no access in school to resources that can help them.

- Only 30 per cent of gay learners know of a teacher who is openly gay.

The level of homophobic bullying in schools in Wales

A *Survey into the Prevalence and Incidence of School Bullying in Wales* (Welsh Assembly Government, 2010) indicated the following.

• Learners in Years 6, 7, and 10 were asked whether they were 'bullied in a homophobic way, e.g. being called gay as an insult, whether or not it is true.' This is a measure of the incidence and frequency of bullying of a homophobic nature, rather than of the proportion of learners who are bullied because of their sexuality. Subject to this caveat, the survey shows that, in Year 6, 22 per cent of learners were bullied in a homophobic way, declining to 9 per cent in Year 10.

• The proportion of learners reporting seeing others being bullied in a homophobic way was high and fairly steady across Years 6, 7, and 10, with around 40 per cent to 45 per cent of learners reporting seeing others bullied in this way.

The main and summary reports are available from www.wales.gov.uk/topics/educationandskills/publications/ researchandevaluation/research/surveyschoolbullying/?lang=en

Section 2: The law relating to homophobic bullying

Strong legislation exists (for Wales, for the whole of the UK and internationally) which aims to protect the rights of children and young people to a life free from abuse and harm, including bullying. Existing legislation with relevance for bullying in general includes:

- Equality Act 2010

- Education and Inspections Act 2006

- Children Act 2004

- Education Act 2002

- The Government of Wales Act 1998

- Human Rights Act 1998

- United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC).

See also *Respecting Others: Anti-Bullying Guidance* National Assembly for Wales Circular No: 23/2003 available at www.wales.gov.uk/respectingothers

Equality Act 2010

The Equality Act 2010 (Equality Act) introduced a new general public sector equality duty. In the exercise of its functions, a public authority listed in Schedule 19 to the Act must have due regard to the need to:

- eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited under the Act

- advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it

- foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.

Meeting the requirements of these duties may involve treating some persons more favourably than others. That is not to be taken as permitting conduct that would otherwise be prohibited by or under the Act.

The Act harmonises and, in some cases, extends existing discrimination law covering the 'protected characteristics' of age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, and sexual orientation. It also makes provision for the Welsh Ministers to be able

to make regulations that impose specific public sector equality duties on 'relevant Welsh public authorities'. The purpose of these new specific equality duties is to enable the better performance of the general duty by the public sector in Wales.

Relevant Welsh public authorities include the governing body of an educational establishment maintained by a Welsh local authority, the governing body of an institution in Wales within the further education sector, and the governing body of an institution in Wales within the higher education sector.

Further information on the specific duties for Wales is available to download from the Welsh Government website at www.wales.gov.uk/equality

The Equality and Human Rights Commission has published new guidance on the Equality Act 2010. Further information and guidance can be downloaded from their website at www.equalityhumanrights.com

Section 28

Section 28 of the Local Government Act 1988 confused many schools with regards to what could be said in relation to homosexuality due to issues around the word 'promotion'. Section 28 was repealed in 2003 and is no longer law. There are no, and never have been, any legal barriers to teachers and staff discussing issues around sexual orientation in the classroom and responding to, and preventing, homophobic bullying.

Section 3: Preventing homophobic bullying

There are two main elements to anti-bullying work:

- preventative work – which is ongoing and sustained, providing a consistent ethos and framework for a school's actions (this is looked at in this section)

- responsive work – which comes into effect when bullying occurs, and is most effective within a consistent whole-school approach to preventative work (this is looked at in the next section).

A whole-school approach to preventing bullying – Pembroke Comprehensive School, Pembrokeshire

The Anti-Bullying Crew (ABC), made up of school learners, supports younger learners with bullying problems. Learners from Years 10 and 11 volunteer to join the ABC. The volunteers wear ABC badges and carry out support duties. For example, some visit lower school tutor groups during registration to build positive relationships with younger learners. Others carry out break time or lunchtime duties to support learners who may be worried or vulnerable.

In addition there is an Anti-Bullying Club which anxious learners can attend during lunch break. The club is supervised by the ABC with staff support. Year 12 and 13 learners also participate, often working with younger learners who have concerns about specific and current bullying problems. Members of the ABC have attended training provided by ChildLine.

Some 'bullies' have become members of the ABC, as they have realised that their behaviour was unacceptable and want to help stop bullying. Many 'victims' of bullying have joined the ABC, and their experiences have also proved to be very helpful in supporting others.

They have 'cascaded' the ABC down through the school year groups to include learners below Year 10. They are still in the process of making this happen, but it has certainly been very successful with younger learners too.

In addition, the school invite their sixth form to become peer mentors, and to 'bank' hours of community service towards their Welsh Baccalaureate Qualifications.

The importance of a whole-school approach to preventing homophobic bullying

Respecting Others: Anti-Bullying Guidance National Assembly for Wales Circular No: 23/2003 sets out general advice on developing a whole-school policy on bullying. This section focuses more specifically on preventing homophobic bullying.

Headteachers, governors and staff can take a number of steps to help prevent homophobic bullying. Prevention should be a central part of a school's work to tackle homophobic bullying, since taking steps to prevent bullying makes it easier to respond to incidents when they occur. It also enables a school to create an ethos in which learners are clear that bullying is completely unacceptable and will not be tolerated.

In creating a whole-school ethos which prevents homophobic bullying, schools should:

- make it clear within the school's overall ethos or mission statement that all members of the school community should be able to feel safe and respected

- evaluate the effectiveness of anti-bullying measures already in place and consider how these can be applied to homophobic bullying

- ensure relevant policies exist, for example, by checking that homophobic bullying is explicitly included in anti-bullying policies and related policies and procedures (such as equal opportunities policy, sex education policy, school improvement policies, learner support and safeguarding policies, curriculum policies, staffing policies, site policies including before/after school, break time, lunchtime and travel)

- involve and consult staff, learners and parents/carers about changes to policies; this will provide an opportunity to identify any resistance to taking steps to prevent homophobic bullying and will also help secure support when changes are implemented

- assess and monitor the extent of homophobic bullying through anonymous staff and learner surveys, and existing methods like bullying boxes; evaluate the responses received and ensure consistent recording and reporting

- raise awareness of what homophobic bullying is and how the school will respond

- ensure effective reporting systems are in place to enable learners and staff to report incidents

- evaluate and make use of curriculum opportunities in order to instil respect for others

- know how to provide sensitive support to LGB learners to help them feel safe and able to tell teachers about incidents of homophobic bullying; this should include providing literature that is relevant to the emotional and sexual health of young lesbian and gay people. Schools may also display helpline information around the school, ensuring that it is not removed or defaced.

Challenging homophobic bullying takes time. Once decisive action has been taken to tackle it, it is best practice to keep everyone informed of the progress made. Achievements should be celebrated regularly, perhaps through the headteacher, a local dignitary or a senior police officer, commending the school on its achievements.

> One of the ideas we've put into effect immediately is the creation of a series of oversized posters which sit above the reception areas. These make it clear to all who visit, learn and teach that everyone has a right to dignity and to be treated with respect. Sexuality is one of the criteria referred to.

(Secondary school teacher)

There are a range of key factors that need to be considered as part of a whole-school approach to preventing homophobic bullying. These include:

- creating an inclusive culture and environment

- ensuring participation of learners and their parents/carers

- involving all staff and partner services

- providing support for staff

- using curriculum opportunities

- understanding different families

- developing learner-support systems.

Each of these will be looked at in the subsections that follow.

Creating an inclusive culture and environment

> Homophobic language is rife in schools, and nobody seems to do anything about it.

(16-year-old learner)

A whole-school policy must directly address a culture of discrimination and seek to create an inclusive culture and environment.

While many schools are becoming more confident to deal with bullying motivated by other kinds of prejudice, such as racist bullying, fewer have specific measures in place, or the confidence to deal with, homophobic bullying. Stonewall's *The School Report 2007* shows that 76 per cent of LGB learners attend schools where there is no explicit mention that homophobic bullying is wrong.

This may in part be due to the fact that homophobic bullying can be difficult to recognise. Many learners find it extremely difficult to admit that they are experiencing homophobic bullying. This can be because they may not want to disclose their sexuality to a member of staff, or because they are not LGB and are embarrassed that they are being bullied in this way.

Furthermore, some LGB learners feel that being bullied is inevitable and therefore have no right to report it. Others may not report the bullying, as they are concerned about how staff may deal with the problem given the sensitivities involved, and possible prejudice from the teachers themselves. As such it cannot be assumed that where no homophobic bullying has been reported, it is therefore not an issue for that school, since, by its nature, homophobic bullying tends to be covert.

To create an inclusive culture and environment in a school where all learners feel safe and are able to fulfil their potential requires a whole-school approach. This should be integral to a school's mission statement and overall vision.

The following 10 steps can be taken to address homophobic bullying in schools.

1. Acknowledge and identify the problem of bullying. The most important step is to recognise that all sorts of bullying takes place in schools, even if some forms are not immediately visible.

2. Develop policies which recognise the existence of homophobic bullying. Ensure that your anti-bullying policy takes homophobic bullying into account. Take other appropriate action such as challenging use of the word 'gay' and ensuring fast removal of homophobic graffiti.

3. Promote a positive social environment. The ethos of the entire school community, including all staff and parents/carers, should be to support all learners, regardless of their differences, and to ensure that they are happy and safe.

4. Address staff training needs. Do not assume that only LGB staff are able to deal with homophobic bullying, but ensure all staff are confident that they know how to react to such situations.

5. Provide information and support for learners. Make age-appropriate information about services and support available to all learners. Refer learners to services, including ChildLine, for additional support.

6. Include addressing bullying, including homophobic bullying, in curriculum planning. Try to include teaching about bullying, including homophobic bullying, in the curriculum as a whole in an age-appropriate way and in accordance with national curriculum subject Orders, frameworks and guidance so that learners understand and appreciate diversity. This can be done formally in lesson times, but also informally, for example, by providing information about LGB groups within secondary schools, in accordance with the school's policy.

7. Feel able to use outside expertise. People working in external agencies (such as lesbian and gay charities, youth workers or local telephone helplines) can offer support, both outside and inside the classroom, in addressing homophobic bullying.

8. Encourage role models. Openly gay staff, governors, parents/carers, learners and/or role models from outside school, for example sports stars, can all be strong role models for the school.

9. Do not make assumptions. Do not assume that all learners in a class are, or will be, heterosexual. Do not assume that all staff in a school or college are heterosexual. Also, do not assume that all learners experiencing homophobic bullying are gay.

10. Celebrate achievements. Make successes known, such as updating the school anti-bullying policy or reducing the incidence of bullying, through tutorial time, newsletters, noticeboards or websites, etc.

Some teachers can feel nervous about introducing issues related to homophobic bullying with learners. It can be helpful in these situations if teachers bear in mind the following three points.

- Regardless of what a learner thinks about LGB people, everyone has the right to be free from discrimination on any grounds, including their sexual orientation.

- LGB people are entitled to equal rights in the UK, and will be protected from bullying of any sort.

- Homophobic bullying is unacceptable in any context, even if it is being used against heterosexual people.

Cardiff Council working in partnership primarily with Safer Wales and LGBT Excellence Centre, Cardiff Against Bullying and, to lesser degrees, with South Wales Police, Stonewall Cymru and the Anti-Social Behaviour Team.

This work was triggered in response to 103 homophobic incidents, three of which were physical assaults (against one teacher in one high school), and developed into a wide-ranging, multi-school, multi-agency preventative approach.

Cardiff Council started by setting up a multi-partnership steering group, with voluntary sector and public body agencies to look at interventions in one particular school. It was agreed to break the work up into three sections, namely staff training, learner education and behaviour management, and the steering group formed smaller working groups to design strategies within each category.

The success of this project led to a reduction in homophobic incidents, initially from several a week to several a month, and eventually to a complete cessation of incidents against this one teacher.

At this point the steering group evolved. Some of the members who needed to be on the group for this particular intervention left and new partners joined in order to design a city-wide preventative strategy to focus on both primary and secondary schools.

In total, the specific pieces of work that were undertaken, and continue to be undertaken, are:

- free INSET training for any school that requests it, on half-day or twilight basis

- development of our own primary materials with six-week support in pilot schools

- resources purchased for every primary and secondary school in Cardiff

- funding the development of a theatre and multi-media based half-day workshop for secondary schools, piloting the workshop and continuing to provide to secondary schools engaged in the initiatives

- a survey (as part of workshop) of whole year groups of learners in each school visited in order to build an accurate picture of levels of homophobia within our schools, and using data to evidence need for continuing work

- establishing the first All-Wales LGBT History Month Education Conference to encourage and share best practice

- developing lesson plans in a range of subjects including English, art and design, drama, geography, music, RE, history, ICT, science and PSE, and supporting schools to deliver anti-homophobia within those subject areas.

As a result of the work, there has been:

- huge reductions in incidents of homophobia in specific schools

- a definite rise in the sense among schools in Cardiff that anti-homophobia should be and can be as high a priority as anti-racism

- more awareness of the impact of homophobia on achievement and emotional well-being of learners and the evidence of need

- more confidence among teachers and leaders to take the anti-homophobia strategy forward in individual schools

- more engagement with the agenda with various departments within education, for example Healthy Schools, educational psychologists, anti-bullying team, as well as with individual schools.

Key messages for others

- Tackling anti-homophobia is not controversial. It is a requirement under national UK legislation, Welsh Government guidance and local policy. Section 28 is long gone.

- You can make a difference. Improvements will occur in every school that engages with this agenda. Objections from staff can be overcome, training is wanted, and there is a groundswell of educationalists waiting to engage with this if given the opportunity.

- Faith schools and secular schools are able and willing to engage.

- This is not a moral or political issue. It is an issue of achievement and emotional well-being of all learners.

Ensuring participation of learners and their parents/carers

Work to prevent homophobic bullying and to create an inclusive culture and environment will be most effective with full participation from learners and their parents/carers. This should be part of a whole-school approach based on mutual respect and positive relationships between everybody in the school.

No parent or carer expects their child to be bullied. Any young person can experience homophobic bullying, whether they are LGB or not. Young people, however, often do not tell their parents/carers about homophobic bullying because they do not want them to think that they are gay.

Schools should work with parents/carers to help prevent homophobic bullying. By working in partnership, parents/carers will be more aware of the issues around homophobic bullying, and are more likely to tell the school if they think their child is experiencing it. Communicating and consulting with parents/carers about this issue will also help challenge any resistance to the subject. Special consideration may need to be given on how best to communicate with those caring for looked after children.

Parents/carers, like learners, may think that homophobic bullying is acceptable. Schools should explain to learners and parents/carers what homophobic bullying is, and what strategies are in place to prevent it and respond to it. Some parents/carers may assume that if a school is preventing homophobic bullying, they are therefore discussing gay sex, or encouraging learners to be gay. This is not the case, and this needs to be made clear to parents/carers.

Schools should include references to homophobic bullying in letters sent to parents/carers about bullying policies, in any agreements drawn up between a school, parents/carers and learners before they are admitted, and in the school prospectus. Informing families in this way will ensure that they understand what is happening and why, which in turn will help foster their support. Schools that acknowledge and communicate that they are taking steps to prevent homophobic bullying send a clear message to the community that the work being done is positive and important. Schools that do not celebrate or communicate their plans can look defensive and uncomfortable. It is more difficult to gain the support of parents/carers for this issue if they think there is something wrong or covert about it.

For their part, parents/carers should:

- encourage their children to show respect for other individuals, and ensure that these values are modelled and taught to them at home

- encourage learners to follow the school rules and respect the school's behaviour policy, including policies that relate to homophobic bullying

- attend meetings with the school to discuss aspects of their child's behaviour, including incidents of homophobic bullying

- be encouraged to discuss with the school any worries they may have about their child being bullied or being involved in bullying.

Work to prevent homophobic bullying should be part of an overall approach to developing a safe and happy school environment based on mutually respectful behaviours. Children and young people should be made aware that they have the right to be kept safe from abusive or violent treatment, as stated in Article 19 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), and that this right applies to everyone, regardless of their age, race, religion, background, ability or sexual orientation. Bullying, including homophobic bullying, can also directly impact on children and young people's access to other key rights, in particular those set out in Articles 2, 3, 14, 28 and 29 of the UNCRC. Work to encourage positive attitudes and behaviours can be undertaken through PSE and other areas of the curriculum. But it can also be a part of everyday school life, for example through class agreements, through encouraging positive behaviours as part of teaching and learning, and through whole-school initiatives such as peer support and mediation.

Learners should be able to give their views as to how positive behaviours can be encouraged, and bullying, including homophobic attitudes and behaviours, reduced. Learners should also have opportunities to play an active role in developing and maintaining a safe and positive school environment. Some ways in which this can happen are through learners:

- taking part in consultations on the school's behaviour and anti-bullying policies

- working with staff to produce class behaviour agreements

- taking on positive roles such as playground pals, peer supporters or mediators

- representing learners' views as part of a school council or anti-bullying committee, and feeding back ideas and decisions.

There may be a role for the school council in considering other ways in which learners can help address bullying.

Involving all staff and partner services

> Apparently, we do not have any homophobic bullying in our school so there is no need to do anything about it.

(Secondary school teacher)

Individual teachers and members of staff cannot tackle homophobic bullying in isolation. The whole school must be involved. All staff need to recognise the problem and proactively take steps to prevent it in line with the school's agreed policy. It is not a problem that can be ignored. An important step is to recognise that all sorts of bullying takes place within a school, and it is likely that homophobic bullying is also occurring.

Anti-bullying work should be the explicit responsibility of an appropriately senior individual or team within the school. This team or individual will work closely with other members of the community to prevent homophobic bullying.

As part of the professional development programme for governors, the senior leadership team and all staff, schools should include provision to contribute to the work of the school in preventing and responding to homophobic bullying. Support and development opportunities need to be provided to all school staff, including non-teaching staff.

Any professional development plan to address homophobic bullying should include high aspirations, and should be seen within the context of wider whole-school action to address bullying.

Suitable aspirations for professional development in the area include the following.

- All staff (whatever their role in the school and including temporary staff, training placements, adults accompanying trips, etc.) and governors should have knowledge of school policy and practice to prevent harm to learners, including from homophobic bullying. All must be clear that homophobic bullying is unacceptable and should be challenged, and know how to respond to any incidents.

- All relevant staff should have the confidence and skills to enable classroom debate to challenge the prejudice or stereotypes underlying homophobic bullying, build knowledge, and support development of skills in learners.

- All staff should be clear on the school policy on confidentiality and safeguarding. Staff should feel supported in making professional judgements and in seeking advice in school and, through the school multi-agency processes, with external agencies.

- Staff with specialist or leadership roles (for example, in the learner support structure, or as anti-bullying lead) must be clear on principles and practices to prevent homophobic bullying and be supported in engaging in professional development work.

- Staff in partner agencies must be clear about how they can work within the school values against homophobic bullying to achieve school goals.

These aspirations could be met through including coverage of the following themes at the appropriate level for the phase and type of school.

- Building understanding of the underlying issues of prejudice and stereotyping which may be drivers for homophobic bullying.

- Responding with sensitivity to the person harmed, given the specific nature of the incident. This includes taking appropriate steps to safeguard learners and engage with other agencies as necessary.

- Challenging the learner causing bullying using the school policy on sanctions and other approaches, in a way which prevents recurrence.

- Encouraging confidence in reporting by learners – those directly affected and bystanders.

- Understanding the role of the curriculum and teaching and learning in preventing homophobic bullying.

- Understanding how data and other information can help analyse policy and develop practice.

Governors and senior leadership

Governing bodies and senior leadership have a responsibility to shape the ethos of a school. Creating an inclusive ethos so that all members of the school community feel safe and valued represents the most powerful action. They may need to:

- raise awareness among staff and learners of homophobic bullying

- make it clear that the school will not tolerate homophobic bullying of its learners, staff, parents/carers or other users

- ensure that homophobic bullying is identified and addressed swiftly and effectively

- ensure that policy is in place and its effectiveness is reviewed on a regular basis.

Teaching staff

Teaching staff must ensure that learners are able to work and progress in school. This means responding to incidents that prevent this from happening, including homophobic bullying. Staff need to have the confidence and skills to do this, including understanding and recognising curriculum opportunities to prevent homophobic bullying.

Teachers should seek to provide positive and targeted support for learners who lack confidence or who are unhappy at school. This includes learners who are experiencing homophobic bullying or who are LGB and need further support.

Other staff

All staff within a school should be:

- aware of the effect homophobic bullying has on learners and feel able to intervene in incidents

- able to provide pastoral support to learners who are experiencing homophobic bullying or might be LGB.

Partner services

Governors and schools in general have a responsibility to safeguard children and young people from harm, including bullying. This means that, on occasion, schools should engage with other services and agencies in order to protect children from bullying.

A range of services and agencies (such as youth justice, children's social care, education psychology, health, child and adolescent mental health, a range of voluntary organisations) can help and support the person who is being bullied, as well as the person who is bullying. Schools need to establish and maintain effective and coordinated links with all relevant services and agencies.

Providing support and training for staff

Under the Equality Act 2010, staff or potential staff cannot be discriminated against on the grounds of sexual orientation. This means that during recruitment sexual orientation should not be

relevant to the appointment. The regulations apply to all forms of employment (including teacher training) and schools must take appropriate action in response to homophobic actions or comments by any learners.

Under the law, all staff must be protected from homophobic bullying, regardless of their sexual orientation, and must feel able to challenge homophobic bullying when it occurs. This means that staff should not experience any form of direct or indirect discrimination or victimisation.

Governors have a legal responsibility to protect staff from harassment on the grounds of sexual orientation, even if the staff member is not gay. This includes situations when learners are harassing members of staff.

Schools should ensure that all new staff understand the policies and sanctions that are in place to prevent and respond to homophobic bullying. Schools can make use of recruitment induction training, INSET (including on non-teaching days), training provided by external organisations, including the local authority, and the wide range of resources available, to ensure staff feel confident enough to challenge homophobic bullying.

> As a result of dedicated training, staff now feel a good deal more positive about challenging homophobic language and behaviour, not only as and when it presents itself, but also in being proactive by raising the issue in class discussions.

(Headteacher)

Above all, staff members need to feel that they have the unequivocal support of the senior management team and other colleagues when dealing with homophobic bullying. If a staff member does not feel competent in dealing with the issue, they will not be best able to support the learners who need their help. Establishing a climate where diversity is celebrated benefits the entire school community.

> I spoke to a teacher about being gay and the fact I was getting bullied, but she told me although she was willing to listen, I mustn't tell anyone that we had spoken, or what she had said. It didn't really make me feel better about things.

(18-year-old learner)

Discussing scenarios

As part of staff training it can be helpful to discuss scenarios. The example scenarios here (from Terrence Higgins Trust) may be a useful starting point, but schools can generate their own scenarios or explore real situations.

- A teaching assistant within your school who is popular with both staff and learners has very strong views regarding homosexuality (these may or may not be related to faith), and does not believe it is appropriate to work with learners around this issue. Learners have recently started to intensify their homophobic language and attitudes. When you try to deal with this the teaching assistant is not supportive – the learners pick up on this. How would you deal with this situation?

- You are a form tutor to a group of Year 11 learners. A TV show popular with the learners has just begun a gay storyline about a 16-year-old boy 'coming out' as gay. Some of the learners are saying that they thought the character was 'alright' before he came out, but now they won't be watching the show any more. One of your learners you know or strongly suspect to be gay, but not out to his classmates, is looking more and more uncomfortable as the conversation continues. How would you deal with this situation?

- You are running a PSE lesson that is exploring sex and relationships to a group of Year 10 learners. The conversation veers towards gay relationships and while most of the learners are quite attentive and respectful a small group of boys say that they can't talk about 'gay stuff' because it's not part of their culture/religion and, if you continue, they will tell their parents/carers. How would you deal with this situation?

- While on duty in the playground, three learners are excitedly discussing that another learner's auntie has just come out to her friends as a lesbian. Other learners start to join in the conversation that is generally becoming more raucous and, although not

particularly negative, is becoming more speculative as to what lesbians 'do' together. You then see a learner who you know has a gay mum walk away from the group looking really uncomfortable and hurt. How would you deal with this situation?

Schools might ask the following questions to strengthen staff support mechanisms.

- Do all staff understand the purpose of the anti-bullying policy and their responsibilities in preventing homophobic bullying? Staff will not be able to prevent homophobic bullying if they do not understand the general policies about bullying.

- Do staff understand, feel motivated and confident that they can intervene to prevent homophobic bullying? If staff lack confidence in responding to incidents of homophobic bullying, they are likely to let incidents go without intervening.

- Do staff have access to, and know how to access, appropriate training, advice and support mechanisms to help them deal with preventing homophobic bullying?

- Do staff know how to talk to young people experiencing homophobic bullying? Have they been trained to respond appropriately to children and young people who are LGB? If a staff member responds inappropriately to a learner, the learner will feel unsupported and will be unlikely to report any future incidents.

- Do staff know how to support learners who are experiencing homophobic bullying, but are not gay? Do they understand that this may require a different response?

- Do staff know how to support learners who are experiencing homophobic bullying as a result of association?

- A learner may not tell anyone they are experiencing homophobic bullying if they think the teacher will think they are gay. Staff need to be trained to ask sensitive questions.

- Are all staff, including student teachers and unpaid staff, aware that homophobic bullying is unacceptable in school and that they should intervene? Staff often lack confidence about intervening in cases of homophobic bullying. All new staff need to be explicitly told they should intervene, and know how to do this.

- Do all staff feel protected from homophobic bullying and know that they will have the full support of the leadership team if they experience it? Staff who do not feel safe at school will not want to stay, and will not be as effective in the classroom. Staff need to know that they are supported, even if they are gay.

Using curriculum opportunities

The curriculum for any maintained school must be balanced and broadly based, promote the spiritual, moral, cultural, mental and physical development of learners, and prepare them for the opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of adult life. As part of this the school curriculum should promote equality, enable learners to challenge discrimination and stereotyping and introduce them to the concept that any kind of bullying is morally wrong.

By encouraging open discussion, promoting inclusion and challenging inequalities, schools will ensure that the needs of all learners are met. Teachers should deal honestly, sensitively and in a non-judgmental way with sexual orientation.

The key to tackling prejudice-driven bullying is to provide opportunities for learners to think, understand and challenge their own prejudice. Teaching about sexual orientation does not mean teaching about sex or sexual activity. Instead, it is about teaching learners about difference and diversity. Teaching about sexual orientation and bullying is a key element of preventing homophobic bullying.

Through curriculum subjects, including English, geography, history, art and design, music, religious education, drama and physical education, opportunities may be provided to introduce issues around homophobic bullying. In raising issues around religious perspectives it is important to distinguish that bullying behaviour is entirely different from religious belief.

All schools and learning providers in Wales have a responsibility to meet the diverse needs of all learners. Diversity encompasses age, social class, regional differences, gender, sexual orientation, religious and non-religious beliefs and values.

Unity and diversity (Welsh Assembly Government, 2009) provides guidance on opportunities to promote race equality, and ethnic, cultural, linguistic and religious diversity in the school curriculum in Wales. For more information see
www.wales.gov.uk/topics/educationandskills/schoolshome/
curriculuminwales/guidanceresources/unitydiversity/?lang=en

A strategy against homophobic bullying will need to align with existing anti-discrimination work, curriculum delivery within PSE, and the work undertaken on social and emotional competence (see Section 1 of the overview document for more information).

The core of the Welsh Baccalaureate Qualification, which is widely provided across 14–19 learning in Wales, includes a compulsory PSE component, which also provides opportunities for addressing bullying.

In using the curriculum to prevent homophobic bullying, schools might ask the following questions.

- Do curriculum leaders understand that anti-bullying, including homophobic bullying, should be incorporated into their curriculum? The school curriculum provides a range of opportunities to talk about homophobic bullying and discrimination in an age-appropriate way. Explore all opportunities.

- Have you reviewed the curriculum to identify opportunities to undertake anti-bullying work? Bullying does not just have to be tackled in the context of responding to incidents. Teaching and learning about self-respect and respect for others is key to preventing homophobic bullying.

- Do school curriculum planning documents make explicit reference to homophobic bullying? In so doing, staff will be given greater confidence to tackle and prevent homophobic bullying and look for ways to discuss this with learners.

- Have you identified specific ways to include homophobic bullying in PSE and across the curriculum? PSE provides explicit opportunities for learners to discuss relationships, to develop conflict-resolution skills and to recognise and challenge prejudice. Therefore broad, balanced PSE should include discussions about bullying, including homophobic bullying.

- Have you identified other opportunities to discuss homophobic bullying, such as class time, assemblies, tutorial time, and general discussions? Tutorials and class time can provide opportunities for learners to raise issues and enter into discussions. Teaching and learning about LGB people needs to be age-appropriate, but learners should feel able to raise issues and discussions themselves, in a variety of contexts.

- Have you considered specific activities that could be undertaken if a learner is experiencing bullying because they have LGB parents/carers, or are LGB themselves? Schools should be able to respond quickly to support individual learners in an appropriate, helpful, and sensitive way. Developing strategies for targeted work will be useful for staff.

Understanding different families

> My partner, my daughter's biological father, and I all have parental responsibility. The school was a bit confused to begin with but I think my daughter explained it all to them!

(Parent of a primary school learner)

The concept of what constitutes a family has changed over the years. Increasingly families can include:

- one parent, either a mother or father

- one or two grandparents

- one parent, and the partner of a parent (either same sex or opposite sex)

- parents (same-sex or mixed-sex couples) who have adopted a child

- a range of siblings from different relationships

- parents who live with a child and a parent who does not live with the child

- looked after children, including those in long- and short-term care.

In any school it is likely that some learners will have direct or close experience of same-sex parenting.

Children can experience bullying because of their family arrangements, regardless of whether or not a parent/carer is gay. Some learners report that they experience homophobic bullying because they come from a one-parent family, and it is assumed by peers that the parent is gay.

Acknowledging and recognising difference in families, and ensuring that those differences are not seen to be inferior, is central to tackling homophobic bullying, and should be dealt with sensitively in the classroom.

Schools can find ways of discussing different families in age-appropriate ways, but they need to ensure that activities do not reinforce stereotypes or prejudices.

- Very young learners can be asked to draw pictures of their family and then discuss the differences between families. The key learning point should be that families can be different, but they all do the same sort of thing.

- Older primary learners may use discussions around television families to look at how the media represents the world and how it does not always reflect society.

- Younger secondary learners may look at the importance of stable family relationships, how families work and that families may look very different, but things that go right or go wrong for similar reasons.

- Older secondary learners may look at issues around prejudice and the views society might have about certain families.

This teaches learners about respecting others who are not like themselves, which in turn discourages them from bullying. Young people who are experiencing homophobic bullying because they have gay parents or family members, will feel better about telling a teacher if they know the school welcomes and respects their family.

> All my friends know my mum is a lesbian and she has a girlfriend. I know I'm not the only one in school either, though I'm probably the most open. I've learnt some quick lines if anyone has a go. Most don't these days.

(14-year-old learner)

School actions should include:

- helping learners to understand that everyone is different; if learners tease other learners for having gay parents/carers, they should be helped to understand that this is a form of bullying and is not fair or nice

- knowing the family circumstances of their learners

- making sure literature encourages lesbian and gay parents/carers to feel included; they are more likely to tell schools they are gay if they know the school won't treat them, or their child, differently

- making sure all learners are included in general activities, and that activities do not reinforce stereotypes or prejudices

- making an effort to find opportunities to introduce and discuss the idea of different families, including families with gay parents/carers, into lessons

- challenging learners who bully other learners for having gay parents/carers – this should involve a general discussion about bullying, including the way it affects a school and individual learners

- ensuring gay parents/carers of learners entering a school feel able to tell the school about this and should expect to be treated the same as heterosexual parents/carers

- making efforts to talk inclusively about same-sex parents/carers, for example avoid assuming all learners will have a 'mum and dad'; when schools discuss marriage, they may also discuss civil partnership and adoption rights for gay people

- ensuring that all families feel able to be involved in school events, such as parent–teacher associations, and are welcome to apply to become governors

- acknowledging same-sex parenting arrangements exist, and that they are not inferior.

Developing learner-support systems

In order to safeguard young people, all learners and staff need to feel able to report incidents of homophobic bullying and feel confident that the school will deal with them effectively. Schools should demonstrate that all members of the community will be respected and listened to regardless of sexual orientation in order to prevent learners feeling embarrassed about speaking out.

Schools also need to demonstrate that anyone can experience homophobic bullying, regardless of whether or not they are gay.

Homophobic bullying is distinct from other forms of bullying since additional barriers exist to reporting that it is occurring. If a learner is experiencing racist bullying, they may feel able to discuss this with their parents/carers. While it is desirable for a learner who is experiencing homophobic bullying to confide in their parents/carers, evidence suggests that 75 per cent of young people feel that they are unable to do so as they may be worried that parents/carers will either find out that they are gay, or assume that they are, even if this is not the case (source: speakout survey).

> I'm not gay but I've always been rubbish at sports and stuff. My dad already thinks I'm lame. If he found out the other boys call me a poof, it would just prove him right I reckon.

(14-year-old learner)

Schools need to develop robust confidentiality policies that learners understand, and be able to offer help to learners who are unable to access support at home. In terms of confidentiality, it is important to bear in mind that 'coming out' is not in itself a reason to breach confidentiality, since it does not represent a risk. However, an admission of serious risk taking behaviour, for example, underage sexual activity on the part of any learner, regardless of their sexuality, may constitute a need to breach confidence.

Learners may also be reluctant to use learner-support systems, for example peer-mentoring systems. All those involved in anti-bullying work should understand the sensitivities around homophobic bullying.

It is important to involve learners in developing the policies in place on homophobic bullying to improve young people's confidence that the school will deal with the bullying, and to demonstrate to all learners that bullying of this nature will not be tolerated.

Counselling

Effective counselling will form a key part of a whole-school approach to preventing and responding to bullying. The Welsh Government is taking forward a national strategy, the aim of which is to develop a school-based counselling service that is independent, safe, accessible and of a high standard.

The full national strategy document is available from www.wales.gov.uk/topics/educationandskills/schoolshome/wellbeing/schoolcounselling/?lang=en

The School-based Counselling Operating Toolkit is a joint publication between the Welsh Assembly Government and the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy. Its primary purpose is to provide a resource to build upon the national strategy and includes standards, guidance and exemplar materials for counsellors and counselling services in Wales.

The toolkit is available from www.wales.gov.uk/topics/educationandskills/schoolshome/wellbeing/schoolcounselling/counsellingtoolkit/?lang=en

An inclusive learner-support system is one where the following is true.

- Learners feel able to tell staff about homophobic bullying.

  – All learners know that homophobic bullying is included in the anti-bullying policy.

  – All learners understand what homophobic bullying is and that it is unacceptable.

  – Staff feel motivated and committed to assist learners, and understand relevant school policies.

- Learners know how to report incidents, and understand what constitutes bullying.

  – Learners know what reporting structures exist and know when they can use them.

  – There are a number of reporting structures in place.

- Learners feel able to tell staff they are lesbian, gay or bisexual if they want to do so.

  – Staff have received training about how to support learners who are gay.

  – Learners know they will not be treated differently if they are gay, and will be protected from bullying.

- Staff understand how to identify learners at risk, when confidentiality needs to be maintained, and in what circumstances confidentiality cannot be maintained.

  – Staff understand that being gay in itself does not constitute a reason to breach confidentiality.

  – Staff respect requests for confidentiality and understand when it cannot be maintained, for example when it is judged that the young person is at risk of serious harm, and what needs to be done in such circumstances.

- Learners have input into homophobic bullying strategies.

  – Learners are involved in the development, implementation and review of anti-bullying policies and strategies.

- Learners are able to raise concerns anonymously.
  - Learners can raise concerns through suggestion boxes.
  - Learners understand that they can talk to peer supporters in confidence.
- Learners who provide support understand issues about homophobic bullying.
  - Other learners understand what homophobic bullying looks like and know how to intervene.
  - Learners know how to treat lesbian and gay learners with respect.
- Learners have access to age-appropriate information about local support services.
  - All staff know where to find information about local LGB groups or useful websites.
  - Age-appropriate information is available on school noticeboards.
  - Learners know how to use the internet safely and in line with school policy.

Supporting learners who are lesbian, gay or bisexual

Staff should feel comfortable enough to deal with a situation where a learner 'comes out' to them. If learners receive a supportive reaction from staff, they are more likely to feel able to tell someone about incidents of homophobic bullying and also give the message that the school is supportive to other learners.

Staff should therefore:

- listen and be supportive

- discuss how parents/carers might respond

- tell learners that their confidentiality will be respected

- ask them how they would like to proceed

- recommend other support networks and resources, such as local youth groups, helplines and websites.

My teacher told me that we have to all make choices and some choices are bad choices and some choices are good choices. She made it clear that I was about to make a bad choice.

(15-year-old learner)

Staff who respond negatively to learners who 'come out' can compound the sense of isolation that a young person may be experiencing. Learners may be reluctant to tell anyone else about reporting incidents of homophobic bullying, and may also share their negative experiences with other LGB learners.

'Coming out'

Identifying yourself as lesbian, gay or bisexual and disclosing this to other people is often referred to as 'coming out'. There are three main issues associated with coming out.

- 'Coming out' is a necessary and usually positive experience for most young people who grow up lesbian or gay. It can take place in the early to mid-teenage years. In this period, coming to terms with confusion about identity can affect a young person's social relationships, school work and self-esteem, both negatively and positively.

- Many young lesbian and gay people experience critical times when they have to decide who to tell about their sexuality. In making this disclosure they are often fearful of negative reactions, rejection and causing upset and distress to the person they are telling. Sometimes a young person may try 'coming out' to a supportive teacher or a school friend as a precursor to talking to parents/carers in order to rehearse their own part and to judge reactions. Receiving a negative reaction can be very distressing.

- Support and guarantees of safety are valuable to people 'coming out'. The availability of secure and confidential groups or contacts can be instrumental in reducing anxiety, which is only magnified by feelings of isolation. The presence of role models in the shape of adults who 'come out' and those who offer non-judgmental support and help young people access these groups can be important. Positive treatment by, and contact with, role models can also encourage them to feel confident about their future. (Terrence Higgins Trust)

Section 4: Responding to homophobic bullying

Preventative work should aim to minimise the occurrence of bullying. However, even where effective preventative work is undertaken, some incidents will still occur. This is where responsive work should come into effect, but it is most effective within a consistent whole-school approach to preventative work, as looked at in the last section.

Monitoring and recording homophobic bullying incidents

Most schools have mechanisms for recording incidents of bullying. Monitoring incidents of bullying enables a school to identify patterns of behaviour and the extent of bullying, and then take proactive steps to challenge it. It is best practice that schools record all incidents of bullying, as well as specific types of bullying, including homophobic bullying. Schools that use monitoring processes are able to modify their bullying policies to respond to specific trends and issues. Incorporating incidents of homophobic bullying into these existing systems, and sharing this information among staff, is an invaluable means of raising awareness about the issue among all staff.

In common with other forms of bullying, however, not all incidents of homophobic bullying will be reported to teachers and staff. Some schools have therefore included questions about homophobic bullying on anonymous learner surveys. One school found that sexual orientation (real or perceived) was the second most common motivator for bullying (the first was weight). This insight prompted the school to implement lessons and tutorial time that addressed the issue of homophobic bullying.

Schools can also use existing informal mechanisms for reporting bullying, such as report boxes.

Schools should respond positively to all bullying incidents with parents/carers and learners. Good recording procedures allow schools to demonstrate that they are taking steps to tackle bullying, and that initiatives are effective.

Evaluating progress also makes it easy to celebrate success and helps those involved keep focused and motivated. Schools should evaluate progress every term, and report back to all stakeholders, including learners. This will help show progress as well as what is left to be done.

Schools can make improvements in all areas of equality by:

- implementing an ongoing cycle of monitoring and analysing data

- using data to decide what their priorities for improvement are

- taking action to make those improvements, ensuring the cycle of improvement continues.

Choosing an appropriate response

Bullying should not be tolerated and should always be followed by an immediate and appropriate response. Adopting a 'zero-tolerance' approach towards homophobic bullying is vital. Schools must make it clear to learners that homophobic comments are as serious as racist comments, and homophobic incidents are as serious as other forms of bullying.

Schools must respond consistently and effectively to incidents of homophobic bullying. This will indicate to all learners that incidents are taken seriously, thereby encouraging them to report all incidents, and discouraging those behind the incidents.

Schools will already have procedures in place to respond to incidents of bullying, and these procedures, where appropriate, should be applied to incidents of homophobic bullying.

Procedures should aim to:

- protect the person experiencing homophobic bullying

- hold to account the person causing the harm

- repair, as far as possible, relationships between learners.

Part of these procedures will include helping all learners understand why homophobic bullying is unacceptable. This may mean explaining to learners about lesbian and gay people, and their rights in society.

School staff interact with learners on a daily basis and are more likely to see, and be told about, incidents of homophobic bullying. It is important that staff responses are swift, proportionate, discreet, influential and effective, and in line with school policy.

Working with policies and procedures

Responding to incidents of homophobic bullying should be done within the context of a school's own policy, for example, with regards to the 'hierarchy of sanctions' which the school has deemed appropriate for responding to inappropriate behaviour. A 'hierarchy of sanctions' helps staff respond effectively to bullying. Schools should consider the following when determining a hierarchy of sanctions.

- How can interventions be designed so that minor and perhaps unintended instances of homophobic bullying can be addressed? For example, what sanctions should apply to any learner using homophobic language such as 'That's so gay'?

- How can interventions be used when homophobic language is used against an individual? For example, 'Pass me the calculator you dyke'?

- How can interventions be used if a young person is not lesbian, gay or bisexual but is experiencing homophobic bullying?

- How might interventions be used for a young person who has gay parents/carers or family members and is experiencing homophobic bullying as a consequence?

- How can interventions escalate when an individual is experiencing continual homophobic bullying, if it is reported?

- How can the strategy apply to group bullying against an individual?

- How might the school keep parents/carers informed about incidents if the young person is LGB and does not want their parents/carers to find out?

- When will agencies be involved in incidents?

- How can schools consider incidents that occur outside school (including cyberbullying) when developing escalation strategies?

Responding to verbal homophobic bullying

What is verbal homophobic bullying?

Homophobic language is often used without thinking and is often ignored because it can be difficult to know how to respond without awareness and appropriate training. Homophobic language is often dismissed as 'harmless banter' and not thought to be particularly hurtful. Homophobic language and attitudes in schools need to be challenged because ignoring it allows homophobic bullying in general to continue to escalate.

Homophobic language and abuse can start in primary school where learners may call each other 'gay' or 'lesbian' without really understanding what it means. If such use is not challenged at this stage it can appear acceptable, making it more difficult to address in secondary school. Children may also experience verbal bullying because they have a gay parent/carer.

> They play with a pack of cards, and one card is the gay card. Whoever ends up with the card is the 'gay boy' for the day. These boys are nine years old.

(Primary teacher)

In secondary school, homophobic language can be more extensive. Homophobic language can be used to:

- describe an inanimate object or item that is thought to be inferior or laughable – 'that pencil case is so gay'

- bully someone who has gay parents/carers or other family members who are gay

- suggest that a person is inferior or laughable or in some way not behaving as they should do – 'Why do you want to play tennis? Are you gay?'

- suggest that an action or response is felt to be inappropriate – 'I'm not doing the play if I have to hug him, that's gay'

- intimidate someone or make them feel uncomfortable – 'Miss, are you a lesbian?'

- undermine and bully someone by suggesting that they are gay, including spreading rumours and malicious gossip

- verbally bully someone who is gay, or who is thought to be gay.

> Everything is gay. No one even thinks it is a form of bullying.

(14-year-old learner)

Learners may also experience indirect homophobic abuse, not directed towards a particular person or group, but used when remarks are made to pass negative judgement, such as 'your bag is so gay' or 'that ringtone is gay'. It is important for all staff to challenge learners, explaining the consequences of using 'gay' in a derogatory way. It might be time-consuming at first but a consistent approach to 'zero tolerance' of such language is central to achieving progress and an environment in which being gay is not thought of as bad.

Direct homophobic abuse is directed towards an individual or group of learners, as a one-off incident or repeatedly. A boy who is called 'poof' or hears 'backs to the wall' when he walks by, or a girl who is called 'dyke' and avoided as she walks through the school corridor, will suffer both short- and long-term harm.

Homophobic bullying increasingly takes place through cyberbullying, i.e. phone calls, text messaging, picture/video messaging, e-mail, online message boards, online chat rooms and on personal web spaces. Through modern technology vicious comments can be made and rumours spread about a person's sexual orientation. Whole communities become bystanders as these incidents largely go unreported.

> They set up a website that had all this stuff on it about me being gay . . . what I'd done, who I'd been with. I was really scared my parents would see it.

(14-year-old learner)

Schools need to ensure that they are alert to the risks of cyberbullying and include provision for it within their anti-bullying policies. Under the Education and Inspection Act 2006 a school's behaviour policy can include, as far as is reasonable, measures to regulate behaviour outside school premises when learners are not in the charge or control of members of staff (which is particularly pertinent to cyberbullying).

How should schools respond to verbal homophobic bullying?

Homophobic language should be challenged within a general programme of work that the school undertakes to tackle the problem of homophobic bullying, including negative attitudes towards lesbian, gay and bisexual people. It is not a singular response to the difficulties that arise. Any action to challenge homophobic language should be taken within the framework of the school's behaviour policy.

> They say gay means 'lame', and it is nothing to do with hating gays. It doesn't make me feel like that though.

(14-year-old learner)

Casual homophobic language is common in schools but, if it is not challenged, learners may think that homophobic bullying is acceptable. It is therefore important to challenge homophobic language when it occurs.

- Ensure that learners know that homophobic language will not be tolerated in schools. Make sure it is included in policies and procedures and that a 'zero-tolerance' approach is adopted.

- When an incident occurs, those learners involved should be informed that homophobic language is offensive and will not be tolerated.

- If a learner continues to make homophobic remarks, explain in detail the effects that homophobic bullying has on people.

- If a learner makes persistent remarks in the classroom, they should be removed from the classroom and teachers and staff should talk to him or her in more detail about why their comments are unacceptable.

- If the problem persists, involve senior managers. The learner should be made to understand the sanctions that will apply if they continue to use homophobic language.

- Consider inviting the parents/carers to school to discuss the attitudes of the learner.

In addition to a 'zero-tolerance' strategy for incidents of homophobic language, it is important to create a secure time and space where learners can report incidents. It is vital that when a learner is reporting an incident or incidents, the member of staff does not assume the learner is either gay or heterosexual. Staff members should listen carefully to the learner's experience, and work with them to identify appropriate responses. The school's anti-bullying policy and hierarchy of sanctions should form the basis of the response.

If a learner knows that staff will respond to homophobic language with sensitivity, they may feel more comfortable about discussing other issues (including issues relating to sexual orientation).

When we hear homophobic language, we make it clear it is not acceptable: I will not tolerate language like that in my classroom. If they say it's just a bit of banter, I make them write me a sentence on why homophobic language is not acceptable in our schools.

(Secondary school teacher)

When dealing with homophobic language in primary schools, staff need to take account of the fact that the motivations for using such language are likely to be different and should therefore respond accordingly.

> One child has gay parents. They call him 'homo-junior'. We're really trying to sort it out.

(Primary school teacher)

Responding to physical homophobic bullying

What is physical homophobic bullying?

Physical abuse can include hitting, punching or kicking in school. Young people also report that they experience vandalism and theft of property, being threatened with a weapon, and even death threats.

Homophobic physical abuse can also include sexual abuse. Some gay women report that they have experienced sexual abuse and humiliation from both heterosexual women and from men. Some young people who are lesbian or gay feel under pressure to have sex with someone of the same sex to 'prove' that they really are gay. Some also feel pressured into having sex with someone of the opposite sex, so that they can 'prove' they are not gay. These pressures are heightened by physical abuse and pressure from peers. Physical abuse might indicate that staff must take steps to safeguard the learner.

Physical homophobic bullying can affect anyone, regardless of whether or not they are gay, and has to be challenged and stopped within a school.

> On Tuesday we went on a geography field trip. One boy thought it would be funny to throw stones and mud at me because I was a 'filthy gay'. I shouted at him to stop, we started fighting. We both got detention but only for the fighting.

(13-year-old learner)

Primary school learners can experience physical homophobic bullying which may involve hitting, kicking or punching, but can also involve inappropriate touching between learners. These forms of bullying may be motivated by the fact that a child seems 'different' in some way. Teachers and staff may not realise that homophobic bullying is playing a part in the other learners' responses.

> I was first beaten up for being 'different' when I was eight. The teachers thought it was rough and tumble.

(16-year-old learner)

In secondary schools, homophobic bullying commonly manifests itself in the form of physical abuse. ChildLine has identified that boys are more than twice as likely to report being physically bullied, than girls. Physical homophobic bullying can take many forms, both sexual and non-sexual. A boy may be forced to undress in front of other learners, or may be beaten up. As a result of the embarrassment this kind of bullying causes, many learners do not report it.

> I was coming out of the toilets when a group of girls started giving me grief for being a lesbian. I told them to leave me alone, and then one punched me in the face. I reported it to the teachers but they didn't sort out the problem completely so I went to the police.

(16-year-old learner)

How should schools respond to physical homophobic bullying?

Like verbal abuse, learners may be reluctant to report incidents of physical homophobic bullying because they fear that staff will assume they are gay, even if they are not. Physical abuse can indicate a learner is at risk, and the overarching strategies that are implemented to safeguard learners might be appropriate in this context, for example working with other agencies, including, if necessary, the police. Homophobic violence can be a crime. Anti-bullying policies should be rigorously enforced in order to keep learners safe from physical abuse.

Teachers should refer to the school's anti-bullying policy and the school's 'hierarchy of sanctions' when responding to physical homophobic bullying. In particularly severe circumstances the school should consider permanent exclusion (within the usual guidelines) and police action.

The bullets below and on the next page summarise how staff should respond to serious incidents of physical homophobic bullying where safeguarding is a concern. They are intended to be used in the context of existent school policy and alongside current guidance on behaviour and bullying.

Identifying possible incidents of physical abuse

- You observe an incident of physical abuse.

- Make sure your interaction with the learner is sensitive. Do not assume that the learner is gay; this may discourage them from discussing the issue with you.

- Decide what action needs to be taken – can the issue be resolved between staff, the learner and the bully? Can the same methods of intervention used in verbal bullying be applied in this case?

- Is it an isolated incident or has it been going on for some time?

- Follow agreed sanctions, as set out in the school anti-bullying policy.

Responding to a learner who tells you about an incident

- Respond promptly and calmly to the learner's disclosure. Do not assume that they are gay just because they have experienced homophobic bullying. However, be responsive and respectful if they do tell you they are gay.

- Make it clear that it will be necessary to tell other people about the incident. This does not mean you will tell people that the learner is gay, just about the physical abuse. Make sure you follow set school procedures for reporting incidents.

- Give the learner appropriate reassurance and support.

- Talk to the learner at their pace; do not rush them or ask them unnecessary questions.

- Record the incident, and the details of the incident.

- Follow agreed procedures, as set out in the school anti-bullying policy.

Following policies and procedures

- Record all the information while it's still fresh in your memory.

- Make sure you make a distinction between what you have been told, what you observed, and what you've learned from elsewhere.

- Make sure that information that can be kept confidential (for example, if a learner has told you they are gay) is kept confidential. Be familiar with school policy and the law on confidentiality, and the times when you may breach this, for example, when it is judged that the young person is at risk of significant harm.

- Make sure that members of the school's anti-bullying team are aware of the incident. This will be important if the situation escalates, and other people might have to arbitrate.

Future work

- Ensure that the learner is safe and is not experiencing ongoing homophobic physical abuse.

- Examine new strategies for preventing homophobic bullying.

- Follow the school's hierarchy of sanctions to ensure bullies are held to account.

- Work with the bullies. Find out why they are behaving in this way.

Holding to account people who bully

If learners have not previously been taught that homophobic bullying is wrong, it may take time to make learners understand that their behaviour is inappropriate. Although schools can develop and implement immediate responses to homophobic bullying incidents, schools may also want to develop a longer-term strategy to help change attitudes.

This work is achieved by making use of curriculum opportunities, working in partnership with learners to develop policies, and ensuring that learners understand what sanctions will be applied if they fail to follow the rules. Discussions and ideas about sexual orientation should not be shut down. Examining sexual orientation in a positive, constructive way, rather than just as a response to bullying, helps tackle discrimination and prejudice, and thus helps prevent homophobic bullying in the future.

The following questions may help in working with those who use homophobic bullying.

- Does the learner understand that homophobic bullying is not acceptable in school?

- Do they understand why? Learners cannot be expected to learn by themselves that homophobic bullying is unacceptable. If they don't know why, they need to be told.

- Does the learner understand that homophobic language is unacceptable – 'I'm not reading that, it's gay'? If a learner is not told that homophobic language is always unacceptable, they may not understand that homophobic bullying is wrong.

- Does the learner understand the impact their actions have had on the learner? Do they recognise what they have done? The learner must acknowledge the harm they have done, and why the actions are in breach of school policy. They must also, where relevant, understand that their personal views do not justify bullying.

- Are there opportunities in school to talk about the damage that homophobic bullying does? Do young people understand that it is not acceptable in society? Learners may not realise that treating gay people differently is now illegal in the workplace and is unacceptable in society. Do they realise their attitudes are prejudiced?

- Does the learner recognise that action needs to be taken to make the bullied learner feel better? Do they recognise responsibility? It is crucial that the learner understands that they have a role to play in making the situation better. They should make suggestions about next steps, and understand that the bullied person may have a view.

- Will the learner make assurances that they will not bully someone again? Do they understand that the incident cannot be repeated? The learner must understand that the key to resolving the incident is a commitment not to reoffend. They must appreciate the importance of a general change in their behaviour.

- Does the learner understand what other sanctions will apply if they continue to bully? Are they clear about the escalation process, and how this can ultimately end in exclusion? Learners should not be discouraged from expressing their views about gay people and issues but they should understand the difference between expressing an opinion and bullying.

- Do parents/carers understand that homophobic bullying is wrong, regardless of their opinion about gay people? Do learners understand the difference? Even if learners and parents/carers have certain religious or moral views about gay people, this does not mean that bullying people is allowed.

- Are parents/carers aware of the policies that apply to homophobic bullying? Do they understand the consequences of their child's actions? Parents/carers need to appreciate the severity of homophobic bullying and understand what sanctions will apply if they are to help prevent bullying.

- Are staff confident discussing issues about sexual orientation in class, even if learners express uncomfortable opinions? Do they know the difference between strong views and bullying? Learners should not be discouraged from expressing their views about gay people and issues, but they should understand the difference between expressing an opinion and bullying.

- Do learners understand the sanctions that are in place in relation to homophobic bullying? Do parents/carers understand? Learners who bully need to understand that the sanctions applied to them will be the same as for any other form of bullying.

Supporting those harmed by bullying

The following questions may help in working to support those harmed by bullying.

- A learner reports an incident of homophobic bullying. Do you understand the effect that homophobic bullying has on learners? Don't assume that the learner is gay or necessarily wants to talk to you about being gay. Address the incident first and foremost.

- Have you provided a private and calm space for the learner to tell you exactly what has happened? The learner needs to feel safe and able to explain the incident(s). They must be able to give you names and times and as much detail as possible. Create the space for this to occur.

- Have you asked the learner how the incident has made them feel? Is the learner at risk at all? Is there a need to involve other people and agencies? Not all learners experience bullying in the same way or are affected in the same way. If the learner is reporting a period of systematic bullying there may be issues regarding safeguarding that you need to consider.

- Has the learner indicated what they would like to happen and what the next steps should be? Do they understand that the school will take the issue seriously? If the learner thinks that there are no consequences as a result of their disclosure, they are unlikely to tell you if any further incidents occur. Establishing next steps is central to gaining confidence.

- Have you discussed whether or not the learner is happy for you to discuss the incident with others? Are there issues around confidentiality? Do you feel able to record the incident in a formal log? Learners may not want parents/carers to be informed about incidents of homophobic bullying. Agree steps to tackle the bullying, but be clear to the learner the situations in which confidentiality cannot be maintained (i.e. safeguarding issues).

- Is the learner gay? Are there other issues relating to safety and support? If the learner is gay, they may feel responsible for the bullying and may have other concerns. Provide effective and considerate support.

Section 5: Resources and further reading

The Welsh Government does not necessarily endorse all the views expressed by these publications, websites and organisations.

Publications

Out in School
Free teaching pack from the Terrence Higgins Trust, providing teachers with ideas on how to talk about sexual orientation and challenge homophobia in schools, in a range of curriculum areas.
www.tht.org.uk

The school report – The experiences of young gay people in Britain's schools
The results of a 2006 survey, by Stonewall, which asked young people from Great Britain who are lesbian, gay, bisexual (or think they might be) to complete a survey about their experiences at school.
www.schools-out.org.uk/research/docs/school_report.pdf

Useful websites

Anti-Bullying Alliance (ABA)
The ABA brings together over 130 organisations into one network with the aim of reducing bullying and creating safer environments in which children and young people can live, grow, play and learn. The ABA produce resources and tools to help schools and local authorities develop anti-bullying strategies. The ABA national coordination team is based at National Children's Bureau.
Tel: 020 7843 1901
e-mail: aba@ncb.org.uk
www.anti-bullyingalliance.org.uk

ATL: An inclusive culture: Challenging homophobic and sexist behaviour
Established in 1884, ATL is the union for education professionals across the UK, and currently represents 160,000 members in the maintained, independent and post-16 sectors.
www.atl.org.uk/policy-and-campaigns/policies/an-inclusive-culture-homophobic-bullying.asp

Beatbullying
Beatbullying aims to reduce and prevent the incidence and impact of bullying, whether physical, emotional or verbal, between young people by establishing anti-bullying partnerships across boroughs and providing training for young people and professionals.
National Helpline: 0845 338 5060
e-mail: info@beatbullying.org
Interactive website for young people www.bbclic.com
www.beatbullying.org

Bullying Online

Bullying Online provides online information for schools, learners and parents/carers about bullying. They also provide workshops and training to schools, youth organisations, police forces and health trusts.
e-mail: help@bullying.co.uk
www.bullying.co.uk

Educational Action Challenging Homophobia (EACH)

EACH is the charity providing UK-wide helpline support to young people experiencing homophobic bullying and award-winning training to challenge homophobia in schools for local authorities and children's services.
National Helpline: 0808 1000 143 (Monday to Friday, 10am–5pm; Saturday, 10am–Midday)
Helpline Officer: 0117 946 7607
e-mail: info@eachaction.org.uk
www.eachaction.org.uk

Imaan

This is a social support group for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender Muslims, their family, friends and supporters, and those questioning their sexuality or gender identity.
www.imaan.org.uk

Jewish Gay and Lesbian Group

They provide an atmosphere of friendship and support for Jewish gay men, lesbians, bisexuals and their partners.
www.jglg.org.uk

Kidscape

Kidscape works UK-wide to provide individuals and organisations with practical skills and resources necessary to keep children safe from harm. The Kidscape staff equips vulnerable children with practical non-threatening knowledge and skills in how to keep themselves safe and reduce the likelihood of future harm.
e-mail: experience@kidscape.org.uk
www.kidscape.org.uk

Lesbian and Gay Christians

A UK-based international charity who are praying for an inclusive church.
www.lgcm.org.uk

LGBT Excellence Centre

The LGBT Excellence Centre is a social enterprise based in Wales with a commitment to Wales, although it also has projects working across the UK and abroad. The centre gathers and shares excellence, information and good practice for LGBT people, as well as organisations that want to achieve better equality and human rights.
www.ecwales.org.uk

LGBT History Month

February is LGBT History Month where organisations, including schools, explore issues relating to lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people and their history. The website has resources for schools.
www.lgbthistorymonth.org.uk

NASUWT: Prejudice-related bullying

Guidance on prejudice-related bullying, including homophobic bullying, racist bullying, faith-based bullying, disability bullying, sexist bullying and transphobic bullying.
www.nasuwt.org.uk

National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC)

NSPCC aims to end cruelty to children. It works with children and families, as well as influencing public policy and attitudes.
e-mail: help@nspcc.org.uk
www.nspcc.org.uk

Safra project

The Safra Project is a resource project working on issues relating to lesbian, bisexual and/or transgender women who identify as Muslim religiously and/or culturally.
www.safraproject.org

Schools Out

Schools Out provides both a formal and informal support network for all people who want to raise the issue of homophobia in education.
Helpline (Male): 01582 451 424
Helpline (Female): 0207 635 0476
e-mail: secretary@schools-out.org.uk
www.schools-out.org.uk

Sex Education Forum

This forum believes good quality sex and relationship education is an entitlement and provides useful information for schools to deliver in this area.
www.ncb.org.uk/sef

SPLAG Wales (Support for Parents of Lesbians and Gays in Wales)

SPLAG Wales aims to help parents who have a lesbian, gay or bisexual daughter or son to come to terms with their child's sexuality.
www.splagwales.org.uk

Stonewall Cymru

Stonewall Cymru is the all-Wales lesbian, gay and bisexual equality charity campaigning for equality and social justice for LGB people across Wales. It runs the Education for All Campaign. The aim of the campaign is to ensure that all young LGB people can fulfil their potential, and that the UK's schools and education systems can deal appropriately with homophobia and homophobic bullying. Stonewall has produced a number of resources and carried out key pieces of research into homophobic bullying in schools, including a DVD called 'Spell it Out', hold an annual conference for educational practitioners, and run a youth volunteering programme for all young people in Wales who want to tackle homophobic bullying.
e-mail: education@stonewallcymru.org.uk
www.stonewallcymru.org.uk

Terrence Higgins Trust (THT)

THT provides information and resources on HIV and AIDS, as well as information about challenging homophobia. They are increasingly providing youth groups around the country, and are able to visit schools and make presentations.
e-mail: info@tht.org.uk
www.tht.org.uk

Helplines and resources for young people

ChildLine
ChildLine is a free, 24-hour helpline for children and young people in the UK.
National Helpline: 0800 1111
www.childline.org

CLIConline
The Welsh Government's national information and advice service for young people aged 11 to 25 provides information on sexual orientation and homophobic bullying.
www.cliconline.co.uk

Educational Action Challenging Homophobia Helpline
National Helpline for young people experiencing homophobic bullying: 0808 1000 143 (Monday to Friday, 10am–5pm; Saturday, 10am–midday)
e-mail: info@eachaction.org.uk

Finding a youth group
Try 'Google', the local authority, or visit Stonewall Cymru's website where there are listings of resources for young people.
www.stonewall.org.uk/education_for_all/resources/young_people/default.asp

London Lesbian and Gay Switchboard (LLGS)
LLGS provides an information, support and referral service throughout the UK. You can find out about your local LGBT youth group here.
PO Box 7324
London
N1 9QS
National Helpline: 020 7837 7324
Fax: 020 7837 7300
e-mail: admin@llgs.org.uk
www.llgs.org.uk

Meic
The Welsh Government-funded bilingual national advocacy service for children and young people in Wales.
www.meiccymru.org/index.php

NSPCC Cymru
Free bilingual resources for schools in Wales, including a pack that supports learners in developing an effective campaign.
www.nspcc.org.uk

The Child Exploitation and Online Protection (CEOP)

This website offers information for children and young people, parents/carers and adults to help stay safe online.
www.thinkuknow.co.uk

The Children's Commissioner for Wales

The Children's Commissioner for Wales provides an advice and support service for children and young people.
Tel: 0808 801 1000
www.childcom.org.uk

Support for parents/carers

Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (FFLAG)

FFLAG is dedicated to supporting parents and their gay, lesbian and bisexual sons and daughters.
National Helpline: 0845 652 0311
Office: 0117 9429311
e-mail: info@fflag.org.uk
www.fflag.org.uk

Family Lives

Family Lives is a national charity providing help and support in all aspects of family life. Call the Parentline free on 0808 800 2222.
Office: 0117 9429311
www.familylives.org.uk

Pink Parents

Pink Parents works for lesbian, gay and bisexual parents and their children, providing information, resources, advice and access to local groups.
National Helpline: 08701 273 274 (Monday to Friday 9am–12pm (excluding public holidays))
Office: 0161 633 2037 (Monday to Friday 9.30am–2.00pm (excluding public holidays))
www.pinkparents.org.uk

SPLAG Wales (Support for Parents of Lesbians and Gays in Wales)

SPLAG Wales aims to help parents who have a lesbian, gay or bisexual daughter or son to come to terms with their child's sexuality.
www.splagwales.org.uk

Frequently asked questions

Sexuality is a private matter. Why is it relevant to school?

A person's sexual orientation is a private matter. But homophobic bullying is something which schools have a statutory obligation to address. Addressing homophobic bullying does not mean discussing sex. It means taking decisive and assertive action to prevent bullying.

It is important to remember that homophobic bullying does not just affect LGB people, or those perceived to be LGB. It can also be targeted towards those who are seen to be 'different' in some other way, for example, because they do not wear the 'right' sort of clothes.

Some parents/carers do not want us to respond to homophobic bullying. What do we do?

No parent/carer wants their child to be bullied. Nor do they want to hear that their child is a bully. Regardless of their views on gay people or sexual orientation, parents/carers have to understand that schools have a responsibility to keep learners safe. Preventing and responding to homophobic bullying is essential if schools are going to fulfil their responsibilities. It is important to consult parents/carers about any steps to prevent homophobic bullying. Parents/carers also need to understand that homophobic bullying can affect anyone, regardless of whether or not they are gay.

We have to respect cultural and religious difference. Does this mean learners can be homophobic?

Some religions or cultures believe that homosexuality is wrong and lesbian and gay people are not entitled to the same rights as heterosexual people. However, no religion or culture believes that bullying, including homophobic bullying, is ever acceptable. There can therefore be no justification for homophobic bullying. All young people can experience homophobic bullying, regardless of their sexual orientation, religion or views, and they deserve to be protected. Tolerance, respecting others and kindness should be integral to any school. A person can hold whatever views they want, but expressing views that denigrate others is unacceptable.

Primary school learners are too young to understand. Surely we should not mention gay people?

Primary school learners may be too young to understand their own sexual orientation, but it is likely that some primary school learners will know someone who is gay. This might be a member of their family, godparents, or family friends. Homophobic language is used in primary schools without the learners necessarily realising what it is that they are saying. Primary schools should respond to homophobic bullying in an age-appropriate way, while demonstrating that it is not acceptable in school. The same strategies can be used to tackle all forms of inappropriate language.

What about transgender people?

Gender identity and sexual orientation are two different things. Gender identity describes a person's gender. Sexual orientation describes whether a person is heterosexual, lesbian, gay or bisexual. Someone who is transgender is concerned with gender identity.

Some young people come to realise that their biological gender is not the same as the gender with which they identify, that is, they are born a girl but feel like a boy, or a born a boy and feel like a girl. Some trans young people can be heterosexual, lesbian, gay or bisexual, but like all learners can experience homophobic bullying and should be protected from it.

Trans learners may not conform to accepted gender norms and roles and therefore may experience homophobic bullying as a result. It is therefore important to be alert to the unique sort of bullying they may experience and protect them accordingly.

Is it ok to tell gay learners to be more discreet to avoid bullying?

No. A fundamental principle of equality is that children and young people should be able to grow up and discover their identities. Telling a learner to be more discreet undermines that identity, and suggests that the young person is responsible for the bullying they are experiencing. It is important to respond to the bullying, rather than removing the target. Encourage the young person to attend a local youth group if they are gay, or find friends and activities where they are able to be themselves.

It is important to work with children and young people who are being bullied to offer them the support they need and to equip them with the skills to assess their own safety.

I'm a gay teacher and learners talk to me about my sexual orientation. What can I say and not say?

Learners and parents/carers may need to be reassured that the personal beliefs and attitudes of teachers will not influence the teaching of sex and relationships education (SRE). Teachers, and all those contributing to SRE, should work within an agreed values framework as described in the sex education policy. Teachers should protect learners' privacy by always depersonalising discussions. It is not good practice for teachers to illustrate learning activities with personal experiences.

School culture and ethos determines how open staff are about their private lives, and you should therefore seek advice and guidance from your headteacher. The key is consistency between all staff regardless of sexual orientation.

Learners, especially gay learners, can benefit from knowing positive lesbian and gay role models. Staff should, however, remain professional and ensure that they provide advice and guidance in a way that is appropriate.

I think a learner may be gay. What should I do?

It is important that you do not ask learners about their sexual orientation, or assume that they are necessarily troubled by it. If a person does come out to you, it is important to be supportive. That way they will be more likely to tell you if they are experiencing bullying.

Creating a school ethos where all learners feel respected is central to giving learners the confidence to talk to staff if they need to. Use group discussion and classes to reiterate the school's anti-homophobic bullying policy, ensure posters displaying information about local groups and useful websites are prominently displayed, and reiterate the school's commitment to inclusivity.

We do not have any gay learners at this school. Why would this be relevant?

Homophobic bullying can affect anyone regardless of sexual orientation. Anyone who is thought to be gay, or just thought to be 'different' can be called gay or experience homophobic abuse.

The government estimates that 6 per cent of the population is lesbian or gay and therefore it is highly likely that your school will have gay learners, even if they have not yet 'come out'. Even if you do not have any gay learners, it is likely that learners may have gay friends or family and therefore it is relevant to them. Finally, there are gay people in the world (and in the workplace) and therefore tackling homophobic bullying is essential to a learner's wider education.

How do schools with a religious character respond to homophobic bullying?

Along with all schools, schools with a religious character condemn and will not tolerate any form of bullying, including homophobic bullying, for at the heart of a successful school is the respect for the dignity of the individual and bullying can have no place in such communities.

Everything is 'gay' these days. Do I have to challenge every word?

Homophobic language is common and its use is often casual, but it is very difficult to respond to more serious forms of homophobic bullying if certain words and usage are allowed. Homophobic language also contributes to a culture of intolerance, and may have an impact on how young people feel about themselves. It is therefore necessary to have a 'zero-tolerance' approach to homophobic language, regardless of how it is used. Staff should make it clear that homophobic language is not tolerated by the school and that a hierarchy of sanctions will be followed if it continues.

How should I treat the non-biological parent of a learner?

Like any other parent. Non-biological parents have the same rights and responsibilities as a step-parent. It is important that schools treat non-biological parents in the same way as biological parents, and they feel able to be involved in school life and activities. Some non-biological parents may apply to adopt a child. Some others may apply for a parental responsibility order. This enables them to sign official forms from school for example.

How do I respond to homophobic bullying in PSE?

Providing planned opportunities for learners to talk about sexual orientation and their views of lesbian and gay people as part of an agreed SRE programme is a good thing. You may not always like what they say but if the issue is up for discussion, it is not going to be ignored. There is, however, a crucial difference between expressing views about lesbian and gay issues (which may not be positive) and expressing hatred (homophobic bullying). Before the lesson begins, reiterate the agreed ground rules and the importance of respecting other people's views and circumstances. Learners should be able to present their viewpoints in a way that respects others. If a learner expresses views that cause particular concern, then follow agreed procedures after the lesson and provide additional support if necessary.

What about Section 28?

Section 28 was an often misinterpreted piece of legislation that prompted some schools to think they could not tackle homophobic bullying. Section 28 has now been abolished. This means that schools can and should respond to homophobic bullying without worrying about Section 28.

What about homophobic bullying outside school?

A school is not legally responsible for bullying that takes place outside school, but should take steps to tackle any bullying inside school, and be responsive to incidents that happen outside school.

Under the Education and Inspection Act 2006 a school's behaviour policy can include, as far as is reasonable, measures to regulate behaviour outside school premises when pupils are not in the charge or control of members of staff (which is particularly pertinent to cyberbullying).

The Learner Travel (Wales) Measure 2008 aims to strengthen protocols for good behaviour and discipline on school buses and provide free transport for more primary schoolchildren in Wales. The Travel Behaviour Code aims to promote positive behaviour and improve learners' safety. The code sets out the standards of behaviour expected of children and young people travelling to and from their place of learning. It applies to all learners up to 19 years of age and all modes of transport, including bus, train, walking and cycling. It aims to encourage positive behaviour and improve safety of all learners travelling to and from their place of learning.

The code can be accessed at
www.wales.gov.uk/topics/transport/publications/
travelbehaviourcode/?lang=en

Anti-bullying policies should enable learners to tell others when bullying is happening, even if it is outside school. Several steps can be taken to help a learner respond to homophobic bullying outside school.

- Talk to learners about how to avoid or handle bullying outside the school premises.

- Talk to the transport company about bullying on buses and trains. They should also be aware of the seriousness of homophobic bullying and should have strategies to help respond.

- As appropriate, discuss the problem with the local police. Police forces are very aware of the problem of homophobic hate crimes, and recognise that bullying among learners is common.

Our child is about to start primary school. Should we tell the school that we are a same-sex couple?

You do not have to tell the school that you are a same-sex couple, but telling them will enable them to ensure that your child is included and supported. Telling the school will also enable them to keep an eye on your child, and intervene swiftly and effectively if there is any homophobic bullying. Schools' primary concern is the children in their care, not their views on their family arrangements.

I have learners in my school who believe their faith condones homophobic bullying. Do I treat them differently?

All faiths fully support the declaration that all forms of bullying are wrong. No learner has the right to bully another and it is likely that such an assumption is based on a misunderstanding of religious teachings.

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- Cathays High School, Cardiff

- Duffryn High School, Newport

- Gorseinon Infant School, Swansea

- Hafod y Wern Primary School, Wrexham

- Markham Primary School, Caerphilly

- Ogmore Comprehensive School, Bridgend

- Pembroke Comprehensive School, Pembrokeshire

- Saundersfoot Community Primary School, Pembrokeshire

- Sketty Primary School, Swansea

- St Richard Gwyn Catholic High School, Flintshire

- St Teilo's Church in Wales School, Cardiff

- Terrence Higgins Trust

- Torfaen County Borough Council

- Valley and Vale Community Arts

- Youth Offending Service (Restorative Justice in Schools Coordinator), Bridgend

- Ysgol Gymraeg Bro Ogwr, Carmarthenshire