

Oldham N.U.T.

Prevalence of Homophobia Survey

November 2008



Introduction - Breaking the vicious silence

This survey together with a growing body of other evidence not least that provided by the Department for Children, Schools and Families reveals a deeply disturbing picture of endemic homophobia within our schools. This authority based survey and report indicates that while many individual teachers unflinchingly challenge homophobia in their daily practice much more coordinated action is required. This survey endorses the urgent need for an authority wide and whole school approach to this appalling and deeply harmful prejudice. The alternative cannot be anything other than the continuation of the status quo: the passive acceptance in the midst of the very institutions dedicated to enlightenment and good citizenship the incubation and perpetuation of deeply ignorant and deeply injurious bigotry.

We sincerely hope that this survey helps further concentrate minds among all those charged with the care and protection of our school pupils and staff. We suggest that nothing less than the concerted, coordinated and protracted challenge of such discrimination is required from us all. Not least the rigorous leadership, at an authority and school level – from the Director of Children's Services, school governors, Headteachers, with the active involvement of parents, pupils and staff. All these individuals and groups need to work together for one goal; challenging the deeply injurious bigotry that has and continues, as this report indicates, to blight so many lives.

The authors of this report believe that our children deserve much, much better and that the blight of bigotry and ignorance that is the opposite to learning must not be allowed to go unchallenged and damaging, apparently at will, the lives of so many. Parents, pupils and staff have the right to expect nothing less than the challenge of such homophobia and associated vicious bullying and dashed hopes. Making schools exemplars of the fairer society for which this union aspires and our members work unceasingly to achieve must be the goal.

The NUT and its members will continue its work alone if necessary to fight such discrimination that blights the lives of our members' and the pupils we teach but we are very keen to work with others especially our employers to eradicate such behaviour. The NUT intends to repeat this survey on a larger scale in twelve months time when we hope a more optimistic picture emerges. However, that, fairer picture, we fear will only occur if the message from our teachers detailed in this survey is heeded and vigorous practical action taken, by the authority and our schools, about which we would be keen to be part.

Tony Harrison
Secretary & Teacher
Oldham NUT

Jeff Evans
Equal Opportunities Officer & Teacher
Oldham NUT



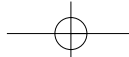
The Survey Results

Background: this project was initiated by the Committee of Oldham NUT in response to reports of members being subject to homophobic abuse being met by an apparent reluctance by the employer to address the issue. The Committee was also mindful of the plight of students, as revealed in the work of Stonewall who speak of an *'epidemic'* of homophobia in our schools. A pilot study was conducted at one school, the results of which informed the commissioning of this larger study to help quantify the scale of the problem faced by teachers and staff preparatory to considering remedial action.

Data collection method: this survey involved eighty-five teachers working in five secondary schools in Oldham LEA completing a one-page questionnaire in two sections: *'Prevalence of homophobia'* and secondly *'Responses to homophobia'*

- i. **Prevalence of homophobia section;** invited teachers to report their professional assessment of homophobia. Namely if they had encountered such discrimination and to give a measure of what they had directly observed within their classroom and more generally within their school. The eighty-five teachers were asked to grade any observed homophobia on a wide sliding scale from *'never'* (i.e. no incidence) to *'common'* (i.e. daily incidence). Assessment was invited on three aspects by which prevalence of homophobia might be gauged:
 - a. Teneral climate,
 - b. Inter-pupil homophobia and finally
 - c. Homophobic bullying of staff by pupils.
- ii. **Responses to homophobia section;** invited teachers to report on how they professionally assessed the nature of the challenge afforded by the school to societal homophobic discrimination/bullying. Assessment was measured by a simple yes/no response to five statements that concentrated on:-
 - a. Teachers attitude towards the issue of homophobia
 - b. The perceived response to the schools management's response to the challenge of homophobia
 - c. Training needs

The results: represent participation by approximately 45% of the NUT members at those schools – which is remarkable in itself when you consider the workload of many staff, and is all the more telling that so many colleagues chose to prioritise the completion and return of this questionnaire. The returns were then collated and presented to the commissioning body. The NUT representative in each of the participating schools has been sent a separate report detailing the specific returns from their teachers. It is the intention that these reports will be shared with their members and the school management and governors for prompt action.



Results: Section 2, Prevalence of homophobia

Question 1 **Climate of homophobic abuse in the schools**

85.5% Of teachers had overheard/observed homophobic abuse in their school on a daily/weekly basis

98.8% Of teachers had overheard/observed homophobic abuse in their school on at least a **termly basis**

Question 2 **Prevalence of homophobic abuse/discrimination/bullying of pupils by pupils**

65.1% Of teachers have observed/overheard specific pupils being the subject of homophobic abuse/discrimination/bullying on a daily/weekly basis.

90.4% Of teachers have observed/overheard specific pupils being the subject of homophobic abuse/discrimination/bullying at least on a termly basis.

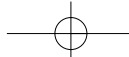
Question 3 **Homophobic abuse/discrimination/bullying of staff by pupils**

14.5% Of teachers have themselves been the subject of homophobic abuse on a daily/weekly basis.

31.3% Of teachers have themselves been the subject of homophobic abuse on at least a termly basis.

56.6% Of teachers have themselves been the subject of homophobic abuse at within the school year.





Results: Section 3, Responses to homophobia

Statement 1 Attitude toward the seriousness of homophobic abuse/discrimination/bullying.

77.1% Of teachers believe Homophobia is a serious issue demanding action

Statement 2 Is your school vigorously addressing homophobic abuse/discrimination/bullying?

14.5% Of teachers consider that their school is vigorously addressing homophobia

C. Members' attitudes towards challenging Homophobic abuse and discrimination and training

Statement 3 Do you feel confident to challenge homophobic abuse/discrimination in your classroom?

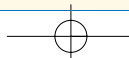
45.8% Of teachers feel confident about addressing homophobia in their classroom

Statement 4 Would you welcome specific training to better address homophobic abuse/discrimination in your classroom?

42.2% Of teachers would welcome specific training to help them better address homophobia in their classroom.

Statement 5 Would you welcome whole school training to better address homophobia in your school?

74.7% Of teachers would welcome whole school training to better address homophobic within their school.



Conclusion - Breaking the deadly silence

This organisation fully endorses the general recommendations contained in section eight of the Stonewall 'School Report'.

Oldham NUT has already supported attempts to address the specific training needs of schools to equip them with the skills to challenge homophobia in individual schools. However before such training can be given there needs to be a recognition that a problem exists and secondly a will to action to effectively challenge the bigotry.

This survey will hopefully help add a degree of urgency to that process.

For further information please contact;-

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Oldham

1. Hunt, Ruth & Jensen, Johan: 'The School Report: experiences of young gay people in Britain's schools' (Stonewall, 2007)



Talking Heads ...

"Homophobic insults should be viewed as seriously as racism.

Bullying of all kinds is a scourge on young people's lives and the human cost can be devastating. It can leave young people feeling helpless and isolated and can have a damaging effect on their learning and school achievement.

I reject any notion that addressing homophobic bullying is political correctness for its own sake. Even casual use of homophobic language in schools can create an atmosphere that isolates young people and can be the forerunner of more serious forms of bullying."

Michael Meacher MP for Oldham West & Royton

"The Council fully supports this initiative by the NUT and will give its cooperation and support to proposals put forward by the union to help stamp out homophobic bullying in our schools. Of course all forms of bullying are unacceptable, particularly where children are involved. Where needed we will look to improve things."

*Councillor Kay Knox
(Oldham Council's Cabinet Member for
Children, Young People and Families)*

The summary highlights a very serious problem in schools up and down the country. The message has been confirmed by Stonewall's School Report, which found that 98% of gay, lesbian and bisexual pupils say that they hear derogatory remarks about gay people at school and that two thirds have experienced homophobic bullying at school. The impact on pupils is enormous and lasting.

Liberal Democrats have campaigned on this issue in the past and continue to push the government to ensure that action is taken. We have, in particular, called for homophobic taunts and name calling in schools to be challenged immediately by staff; all schools' anti-bullying policies to be required to include measures specifically to deal with homophobic bullying; and at least one teacher in every school to undergo training which includes how to tackle homophobic bullying.

Nick Clegg MP, Leader of the Liberal Democrats

Oldham NUT's survey mirrors the findings of Stonewall's groundbreaking research, The School Report, reiterating the endemic nature of homophobic bullying in schools across the country. It is vital that schools take a zero-tolerance approach to homophobic bullying, in order that all young people can feel safe in their schools and enjoy learning.

STONEWALL

"The report was shocking but not surprising. The work we have done in schools and youth clubs in the North West would definitely correlate with the findings. Homophobia is endemic and epidemic in schools across the country and certainly within the North West. If this type of discrimination, harassment and language were used about people on the grounds of race or disability it would be seen as an outrage, and likewise everyone should treat homophobic incidents with the same level of gravitas. We know from the work we do that school experiences for LGBT young people can save their lives or do the opposite.. and sadly the high suicide statistics for young LGBT people speak for themselves. It is time to say stop... enough is enough. Young LGBT people, teachers and others who work with them deserve to be treated with dignity and respect. Investment, resources and training will go a long way to help make change happen."

Amelia Lee – Trustee, LGBT Youth North West

"We had a tremendous response from our members to this survey and it is shocking that not only do 85% of teachers hear homophobic abuse to pupils or staff each week, over half of the teachers who responded have been the target of homophobic abuse themselves by pupils during the school year. Homophobia is a destructive force and damages young people who are abused because of their sexuality or perceived sexuality"

Tony Harrison, NUT Division Secretary for Oldham

Talking Heads ...

"This pilot paves the way for a comprehensive study of homophobia across North West schools, which we believe will replicate the evidence we have collated in Oldham. Three quarters of teachers in the survey would welcome training both school wide and individually on addressing homophobia and we are working with Oldham to develop a comprehensive package to address their concerns."

*Avis Gilmore, NUT Regional Secretary
for the North West of England*

"I think it's amazing that such a positive step has been taken towards the eradication of homophobia, biphobia and transphobia in our schools, albeit it being in the form of such a negative but wholly unsurprising report. I just find it a shame that this work has only just been undertaken when, in reality, homophobia, biphobia and transphobia has been a problem in our schools for many, many years and so many young people have had to suffer, but, hopefully with these issues being brought into such a sharp focus less young people and teachers will have to suffer due to homophobia, biphobia and transphobia in schools.

I've known so many young people, including myself, that have had such terrible experiences in schools due to their sexuality or gender identity. One young man is bullied every day because he's gay... despite him identifying as heterosexual... just because he's very extroverted and enjoys performing arts. I firmly believe that the root to all homophobia and biphobia in our schools lies with transphobia. Psychologists believe that "gender policing" is more commonly associated with eight and nine year olds because they simply can't accept that males can do "feminine" things and females can do "masculine" things... well, if you can find many young people or even adults that can accept this difference without being too disgusted at the thought... then, I believe that this "gender policing" stage keeps going for a very long time. Most young people that receive homophobic or biphobic comments normally receive them because of some form of gender expression... be it a young woman wanting to play football (which is obviously a boy's game) or because a young man wants to wear a skirt to school... doing anything that defies gender stereotypes is an excuse to receive homophobic or biphobic bullying. I believe we need to reconsider and hopefully change this society's views on gender identity and gender expression and ultimately the stereotypes associated with gender in the hope that we will be able to start accepting people for who they are... and so we can finally realise the separation between gender expression and sexuality... being a feminine male and a masculine female doesn't mean you're homosexual.

I hope this report has a great impact on the levels of homo/bi/transphobia within our schools and I hope the lives of young people and teachers that suffer from homo/bi/transphobic bullying are greatly improved."

*Laura Critchley
LGBTQ rep. Oldham Youth Council*