

Lancashire N.U.T.

Prevalence of Homophobia Survey

Summer 2009



Introduction - Breaking the vicious silence

Lancashire NUT members with our colleagues and managers in primary, secondary schools and colleges have been unrelenting in our endeavours to challenge bullying. The abuse and bullying of children, young people and increasingly their teachers is unacceptable and especially so in an environment where we nurture and develop future generations. Bullying has many causes but all such discrimination is fuelled by bigotry and ignorance that as teachers we are committed and best placed to address and eradicate. Homophobic bullying has for a number of years been largely an 'ignored' blight on the lives of many of our children and school staff. As this report suggests homophobic bigotry, as with all abuse of our children and their teachers, is not concerned with limiting those damaged by the awful consequences of such behaviour. Recent research by groups such as Stonewall and nearby Liverpool MBC suggests homophobic bullying in schools is at 'endemic' levels [School Report 2007] and is the second most common source of abuse in our schools. The level of abuse in Lancashire schools revealed by this report suggests that Lancashire school children and teachers are subjected to similar endemic levels of homophobic abuse within their learning and teaching environment.

This first decade of the new millennium has brought with it new legislation to protect and celebrate human dignity and equity, central to our democracy, common decency and sense of fair play. It has also seen the production of excellent national guidance from the Department for Children, Schools and Families on how schools can more effectively protect and address all forms of bullying that blight too many children's lives. That serial guidance includes *2004 Stand up for us*, *OfSTED new inspection criteria* and the *2007 Homophobic bullying? Safe to Learn: Embedding anti-bullying work in schools*. Our profound regret is that too many schools and local authorities have yet to implement such advice. We urge all Lancashire schools to conduct a self-evaluation procedure as recommended and that it is the prerequisite to implementing the necessary measures to better protect their pupils and staff. This Lancashire NUT survey of the Prevalence of Homophobia in our schools is designed to both highlight the unacceptable levels of homophobic abuse 'alive' in Lancashire schools and to prompt action to commence the urgent task of challenging the prevalence of such abuse.

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. The members of Lancashire NUT will continue to challenge the discrimination that blights the lives of our members' and the pupils we teach but appreciate that only working with others and especially our employers can we eradicate such behaviour.

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Lancashire NUT

Equal Opportunities Officer & Teacher,
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The Survey Results

Background: this project was initiated by the Committee of Lancashire 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 posting out of a one page questionnaire to a controlled group of teachers working in secondary schools in Lancashire LA. This questionnaire is made up of two sections seeking teachers' professional appraisal of: the prevalence of homophobia' and secondly extant and possible future 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. General 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: The returns were then collated and presented to the commissioning body. The NUT representative in each of the participating schools has been furnished with 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 a governor that we hope will prompt swift remedial action in protection of children and staff.

Results: Section 2, Prevalence of homophobia

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

57.6% Of teachers had overheard/observed homophobic abuse in their school on a **daily/weekly basis**.

95.6% 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**

23.5% Of teachers have observed/overheard specific pupils being the subject of homophobic abuse/discrimination/bullying on a **daily/weekly basis**.

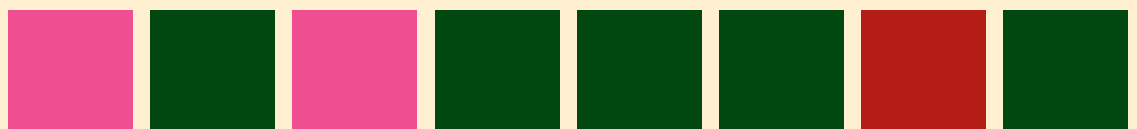
61.2% Of teachers have observed/overheard specific pupils being the subject of homophobic abuse/discrimination/bullying at least on a **termly basis**.

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

3.5% Of teachers have themselves been the subject of homophobic abuse on a **daily/weekly basis**.

11.8% Of teachers have themselves been the subject of homophobic abuse on at least a **termly basis**.

31.8% 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.**

80%

Of teachers believe Homophobia is a serious issue demanding action

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

39%

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?**

57%

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?**

47%

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?**

68%

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



Conclusion - Protection of children and staff from emotional, verbal and physical abuse

Lancashire NUT fully endorses the general recommendations contained in section eight of the Stonewall 'School Report' and the excellent national guidance from the Department for Children, Schools and Families, including:

- *2004 Stand up for Us.*
- *2007 Homophobic bullying ? Safe to Learn: Embedding anti-bullying work in schools.*

Lancashire NUT has already supported attempts to address the specific training needs of schools and colleagues to equip them with the skills to challenge homophobia in individual schools. However before such training can be given their needs to be a recognition that a problem exists and secondly a will to actively and effectively challenge the bigotry. This survey will hopefully help add a degree of urgency to that process.

Lancashire NUT hopes and trusts that it will no longer to continue to act alone and is soon joined by those charged by both moral and statutory imperatives to practically, effectively and consistently address such harmful and appalling bigotry revealed in this essay as endemic in our schools. Our children and staff are deserving of nothing less.

For further information please contact:

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See Lancashire NUT's web campaign against homophobia in schools and much more on **www.lancashirenut.org.uk**

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

