A. ADVICE FOR GOVERNORS

A4: Prevention

A4.1 Developing policies, practices and procedures

Refer to **DL3**, **DL5** and **DL29** with this section Anti-bullying policies will be school specific, depending on pastoral and management structures within the school. Heads and governors should be aware of **government guidance and legislation** [see A2] concerning homophobic bullying and consider the implications of this when drawing up the anti-bullying policy within their behaviour policy.

Governors need to ensure that explicit reference is made to homophobic bullying in the anti-bullying policy, as well as an explanation of the **sanctions** which will be invoked to deal with such incidents. It is important that the policies, practices and procedures that relate to other forms of bullying (such as racist bullying) are applied equally to homophobic bullying.

Governors should consider **consulting** staff, students and parents/carers about changes to policies. This will provide an opportunity to identify resistance to taking steps to prevent homophobic bullying and will also help secure support when changes are implemented.

Schools should also consider whether their Equal Opportunities policy, designed to ensure fair access to provision and processes, details the school's attitudes to tackling bullying, including homophobic bullying.

For more information on developing an Anti-Bullying policy, see *Safe to Learn.*

A4.2 The role of leadership

School governors provide leadership to a school and ensure that the ethos and culture of the school is reflected in all its workings. It is important that in doing this they make it clear that the school will not tolerate homophobic bullying. The governors will therefore lead the way in considering and including measures to respond to and prevent homophobic bullying in schools. This includes informing and consulting [see B4.4] pupils, parents/carers and staff. Governors need to be clear that homophobic bullying can affect anyone who is perceived as different, and a bullying culture creates an unsafe learning environment for everyone.

A4.3 Supporting the development of staff

Under the Employment Equality (Sexual Orientation) Regulations (2003) [see A2], 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 pupils.

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. Therefore 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 pupils are **harassing** members of staff.

Schools will want to 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, the programmes conducted by the National Strategies and the wide-range of resources available, to ensure staff feel confident enough to challenge homophobic bullying. A full list of organisations and websites that may help can be found in the **Further Resources** section.

"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."
A Head-teacher's comments to EACH

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 pupils** 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 woman, Birmingham

A4.4 A whole-school ethos – key milestones

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.

Governors should consider including references to homophobic bullying in letters sent to parents/carers about bullying policies, in any agreements drawn up between a school, **parents/carers** and pupils before they are admitted, and in the school prospectus. This does not necessarily mean sending out explicit information about homophobic bullying but including it when references are made to bullying, and anti-bullying policies. Informing families in this way ensures that they understand what is happening and why, which in turn will help foster their support.

Schools might also consider getting in touch with their Local Authority to see if they can offer additional support or provide examples of best practice.

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 and carers** [see B4.10] for this issue if they think there is something wrong or covert about it.

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

• Making 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

- Displaying **Helpline information** [see Further resources] in an appropriate place in secondary schools (and in line with school policy), ensuring that it is not removed or defaced

- Providing age-appropriate **literature** [see Further resources] that is relevant to the emotional and sexual health of young lesbian and gay people

- Revising the **anti-bullying policy**

- Establishing an **incident log**

- Collating **feedback** requested from both pupils and staff as to the effectiveness of any new policy or reporting system.

This demonstrates that ongoing interest is being maintained in the issue and suggestions will be acted upon.

"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."
A teacher's feedback to EACH

Achievements should also regularly be celebrated perhaps through the head, or a local dignitary or a senior police officer commending the school on its achievements.

Further national mechanisms also exist that enable a school to develop work to prevent homophobic bullying, and celebrate progress in this area. See *Safe to Learn* for more information.

A4.5 Multi-agency working and safeguarding

Governors and schools in general have a responsibility to **safeguard** children and young people from harm, including bullying. This means that on occasion, schools may want to engage with other agencies in order to protect children and young people from bullying. See Safe to Learn for more information. Governors will also want to be aware that some voluntary organisations can offer support to children or young people experiencing homophobic bullying. **Please see the Further Resources section for more information**.