

A. ADVICE FOR GOVERNORS

A1: Introductions

A1.1 The purpose of this guidance

This section provides information for governors about their roles and responsibilities in relation to homophobic bullying.

A1.2 Why should governors address homophobic bullying?

Refer to **DL2** with this section

Governors have a legal duty to ensure **all** forms of bullying, including homophobic bullying, are dealt with in schools under the Education and Inspections Act 2006. For more on overall duties to promote the welfare of pupils and to safeguard them see *Safe to Learn*¹ and *Safeguarding Children in Education*².

Bullying can cause lasting damage to the self-esteem, happiness and well-being of the children and young people that encounter it. Homophobic bullying can be particularly difficult for the young people affected by it and the DCSF is aware that schools find it a challenging area to address. In fact 34% 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 pupils (EACH, 2007, sample 3361).

Research

Research by Stonewall³ indicates that young people who experience homophobic bullying are more likely to leave school at 16, sometimes despite being keen to continue their studies. Bullying can also be linked to poor attendance with one survey showing that 72% of LGB adults reported a regular history of absenteeism at school (Rivers, 2000).

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% of adult lesbians and gay men who had been bullied at school reported contemplating self-harm as a result, while 40% had gone on to harm themselves. A further study showed that more than 20% had attempted suicide (Mullen, 1999).

A school where any bullying is tolerated creates an unsafe learning and teaching environment for all. Therefore governors have explicit responsibility to ensure that schools respond to and prevent homophobic bullying.

¹ www.teachernet.gov.uk/wholeschool/behaviour/tacklingbullying/safetolearn/

² www.teachernet.gov.uk/wholeschool/familyandcommunity/childprotection/guidance/

³ www.stonewall.org.uk/schoolreport

A2: The Legal Framework

Legal duties and government policies: what this means for your school

This section sets out the relevant laws and policies in relation to this topic.

Relevant law [see A2.1]

Relevant policies [see A2.2]

Relevant guidance [see A2.3]

Inspections [see A2.4]

A2.1 Relevant law

For general law related to preventing and tackling bullying please see main text of *Safe to Learn*.

The Employment Equality (Sexual Orientation) Regulations 2003⁴

These laws protect all **staff** [see C2] in a school against discrimination or harassment on the grounds of their sexual orientation. **Discrimination**, either direct or indirect, involves treating one person less favourably than another on the grounds of their sexual orientation. **Harassment** is unwanted conduct which violates a person's dignity or creates an intimidating, hostile, degrading or humiliating environment. If employers do not take action to stop such behaviour against staff they run the risk of legal

challenge. The laws also cover perceived sexual orientation (if someone bullies because they think a person is lesbian, gay or bisexual even though they are not) or association (such as harassing a person over a friend or family member who is lesbian, gay or bisexual).

Employers should be aware that they are responsible for the actions of their employees, and what people may think of as just "banter" and "having a laugh" can be deemed harassment if it is at the expense of someone else's dignity. For staff who think that they are being discriminated against, support is available through channels such as trade unions and professional associations [see Further resources]. Creating a culture [see A4.2] of respect where difference is valued is important and heads and governors therefore have a key role in ensuring all members of staff, including those who are lesbian, gay or bisexual are treated fairly.

The Equality Act 2006⁵

Part 3 of the Equality Act 2006 gives powers to outlaw discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation in the provision of "goods and services". Regulations made under Part 3 came into effect on 30 April 2007 and cover public bodies as well as private, and specifically cover education.

⁴ www.opsi.gov.uk/SI/si2003/20031661.htm

⁵ www.opsi.gov.uk/acts/acts2006/20060003.htm

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In practice it means for instance, that a pupil could not be refused entry to a school on the grounds that they were, or were thought to be, lesbian or gay, or because they had gay relatives. It would also mean that privileges, such as being a prefect, could not be denied to lesbian or gay pupils. It also means that schools that do not treat homophobic bullying with the same level of seriousness as other forms of bullying could face legal action.

Guidance for schools on their duties and responsibilities under the Sexual Orientation Regulations can be found at:
www.teachernet.gov.uk/wholeschool/equality/sexualorientation/regulations2007/

The Regulations should have no effect on the teaching and curriculum in schools, provided that the subject of sexual orientation is approached in an appropriate manner in line with existing guidance.

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** [see A5] to, and **preventing** [see A4], homophobic bullying.

A2.2 Relevant policies

Every Child Matters⁶

Every Child Matters provides a focus for the education sector and the wider children’s workforce to think about supporting children to grow into respectful, confident and socially and emotionally healthy adults.

Those pupils who may be experiencing homophobic bullying will not be able to meet the outcomes Every Child Matters requires:

- **Being healthy:** Young people experiencing homophobic bullying are at risk of suffering from low self-esteem, and possibly experiencing mental health issues. They may also take part in risk taking behaviour.
- **Staying safe:** Young people experiencing homophobic bullying are at risk from harassment, and physical abuse, and are therefore not being kept safe.
- **Enjoying and achieving:** A young person who is experiencing homophobic bullying is less likely to enjoy school or achieve their full potential. Research suggests they may be reluctant to attend after school activities, or contribute fully to class in case this draws attention to them.
- **Achieving economic well-being:** A young person who experiences homophobic bullying may not do as well at school, and may not stay on to study further. Lesbian and gay pupils are more likely to leave school at 16, even if they do have an interest in continuing their studies.
- **Making a positive contribution:** Young people experiencing homophobic bullying will be discouraged from making a positive contribution to their school life and to their community.

Youth Matters⁷

Youth Matters is part of *Every Child Matters* and aims to ensure that all young adults (14-19) are supported to achieve the objectives of *Every Child Matters*.

The challenges facing young people, such as “study, money, employment, health, self-esteem and relationships” can provide additional challenges for

⁶ www.everychildmatters.gov.uk/

⁷ www.DCSF.gov.uk/publications/youth/

lesbian and gay young people. Learning about one's sexual orientation can however be a positive experience if suitable support structures are in place.

Since homophobic bullying can lead to an increased possibility of self-harm, educational underachievement, truancy, homelessness and even suicide it can prevent the objectives of *Youth Matters* being met.

A2.3 Relevant Guidance

Safe to Learn⁸

The DCSF's recently updated overarching guidance to schools, *Safe to Learn*, provides detailed guidance on how to tackle all forms of bullying. It includes sections on establishing a whole-school policy, practical interventions, data collection and working with parents/carers to strategically tackle bullying in the classroom and beyond. The strategies within it can also be used to tackle homophobic bullying.

Stand Up For Us⁹

Stand up for us, developed by DCSF and the Department of Health in 2004, helps schools challenge and respond to homophobic bullying through establishing and delivering a whole school approach.

DCSF Sex and Relationship Education Guidance¹⁰

DCSF guidance on Sex and Relationship Education (SRE) states that teaching in this area should demonstrate to pupils the importance of stable, loving relationships and respect and care.

In discussions about stable relationships, heterosexual and same-sex relationships can be discussed. The guidance also states that it is for schools to make sure that the needs of all pupils are

met in their SRE. Whatever their developing sexuality, all young people need to feel that SRE is relevant to them and sensitive to their needs.

It is also vital that schools can assure parents/carers that all SRE is age-specific and context specific.

A2.4 Inspection

Ofsted self-evaluation forms¹¹

The new Ofsted inspection regime is much more focussed than before with the emphasis on self-evaluation. Bullying is one of the issues that inspectors will look for in a school and Ofsted are increasingly sensitive to bullying motivated by prejudice.

The new forms require schools to evidence 'how well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve their potential' and to what extent 'learners feel safe from bullying and racist incidents'. In collecting evidence for the SEF a school will therefore look to demonstrate the ways in which it tackles all forms of bullying, including homophobic bullying.

The General Teaching Council in its document *The Statement of Professional Values and Practice for Teachers* supports the importance of maintaining total equality of opportunity.

"Teachers work within a framework of legislation, statutory guidance and school policies, with different lines of accountability. Within this framework they place particular importance on promoting equality of opportunity – challenging stereotypes, opposing prejudice, and respecting individuals regardless of age, gender, disability, colour, race, ethnicity, class, religion, marital status or sexual orientation."¹²

⁸ www.teachernet.gov.uk/wholeschool/behaviour/tacklingbullying/safetolearn/

⁹ www.wiredforhealth.gov.uk/cat.php?catid=1101&docid=7707

¹⁰ www.dfes.gov.uk/sreguidance/

¹¹ www.ofsted.gov.uk/schools/sef.cfm

¹² www.gtce.org.uk/standards/disc/StatementOfProfValues

A3: Recognition

A3.1 Homophobic bullying in schools: what does it look like?

Refer to **DL1**, **DL27** and **DL28** with this section. Homophobic bullying is a specific form of bullying and occurs when bullying is motivated by prejudice against lesbian, gay or bisexual people (LGB), or against those perceived to be lesbian, gay or bisexual. It can also be targeted towards pupils who are seen to be “different” in some other way, for example, because they may be considered shy by other pupils. In this way, a person’s identity is used to abuse them and homophobic bullying can therefore be experienced by all pupils, regardless of their sexuality.

The bullying suffered can include **verbal** and **physical** abuse by an individual or group towards an individual or group of people. It can consist of:

- **Verbal abuse** such as suggestive remarks, ‘teasing’, jokes or name calling
- Non-verbal abuse such as mimicry, offensive gestures, or body language
- Ignoring or excluding someone because they are gay or lesbian, or thought to be gay or lesbian
- Display or distribution of offensive material or graffiti
- Threatened or actual **physical abuse** or attack
- Unwanted physical contact, including sexual contact
- **Cyberbullying** [see A3.2], including via email, chat-rooms and mobile phones.

Homophobic bullying can occur in **primary** and **secondary** schools and through a range of channels.

There are some differences in the ways that **girls** and **boys** bully in this way. Girls tend to use methods of social exclusion, particularly rumour spreading, “funny looks” and ignoring the person being bullied. This can lead to the young woman being attacked feeling excluded and eventually being isolated and unable to re-integrate herself. If this occurs, she may be more likely to take part in risk taking behaviour, such as attending adult venues or meeting people online.

Boys are more likely to be the victims of **physical bullying**. In order to avoid being called ‘gay’, boys may try to conform to perceived masculine stereotypes. This strengthens the idea that there is such a thing as ‘gay behaviour’.

Whilst many schools are becoming more confident to deal with bullying motivated by other kinds of prejudice, such as racist bullying, few have specific measures in place, or the confidence to deal with, homophobic bullying. Research conducted on behalf of the DCSF found that only 6%¹³ of schools surveyed had anti-bullying **policies** that addressed homophobic bullying. Whilst some more recent research suggests this figure may now be around 33%¹⁴ in secondary schools, it remains clear that too few schools make specific mention of bullying of this kind. Additionally recent results from Stonewall’s *The School Report* 2007¹⁵ show that 76% of LGB pupils 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 pupils

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 lesbian or gay and/or are embarrassed that they are being bullied in this way.

Some LGB pupils 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. 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.

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

16 year old boy, Birmingham

A3.2 Verbal homophobic bullying

Refer to **DL12** with this section

Homophobic language is a common form of homophobic bullying. It can be casual and is therefore often dismissed as “harmless banter”. Schools need to take a consistent approach to tackling any kind of inappropriate language. For more information on overall anti-bullying strategies see DCSF guidance *Safe to Learn*.

Homophobic language and abuse can start in **primary school** where pupils may call each other “gay” or “lesbian” without really understanding what it means. If such usage 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.

“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 9 years old”.

Primary School Teacher, Sussex

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”
- To bully someone who has gay parents or other family members who are gay
- To suggest that a person is inferior or laughable or in some way not behaving as they should do – “why do you want to play basketball? Are you a gay?”
- To 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”
- To intimidate someone or make them feel uncomfortable – “Miss, are you a lesbian?”
- To undermine and bully someone by suggesting that they are gay, including spreading rumours and malicious gossip
- To 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 girl, Leicester

¹³ DCSF “Don’t Suffer in Silence”, 2002 (Douglas et al 1999, sample size 307)

¹⁴ Smith, P.K., Smith, C., Osborn, R. & Samara, M. (in press). A content analysis of school anti-bullying policies: Progress and limitations. *Educational Psychology in Practice* (2007, sample size 115 primary schools, 27 secondary schools).

¹⁵ Sample, 1,140 (2007)

Pupils 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 ring tone is gay'. It is important for all staff to **challenge** pupils, explaining the consequences of using 'gay' in a derogatory way. It might be **time consuming** at first, but a consistent "zero-tolerance" approach to such language is central to achieving progress and an environment in which being gay is not thought of as being inferior.

Direct homophobic abuse is directed towards an individual or group of pupils, as either 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 consequences in terms of the harm caused.

In both contexts, it is essential to challenge homophobic **language**. It is the role of **governors** to ensure heads, teachers and other staff feel supported in doing so.

Cyberbullying

Homophobic bullying increasingly takes place through 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.

"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 girl, London

Schools need to ensure that they are alert to the risks of cyberbullying and include provision for it within their anti-bullying policies. See *Safe to Learn*.

A3.3 Physical homophobic bullying

Physical abuse can include hitting, punching or kicking. 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 or opposite sex, to "prove" that they really are gay. Some young people are also pressured into having sex with someone of the opposite sex in order to "prove" they are not gay. These pressures are heightened by physical abuse and pressure from peers. Physical abuse might indicate that staff need to take steps to **safeguard** the pupil.

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 boy, London

Primary school pupils can experience physical homophobic bullying, as well as verbal abuse. This may involve hitting, kicking or punching but can also involve inappropriate touching between pupils. 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 pupils' responses.

"I was first beaten up for being "different" when I was 8. The teachers thought it was rough and tumble."

16 year old boy, London

In **secondary schools**, homophobic bullying commonly manifests itself in the form of physical abuse. ChildLine¹⁶ 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 pupils to be laughed at, or may be beaten up. As a result of the embarrassment this kind of bullying causes, many pupils 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 girl, Leeds

A3.4 Who experiences homophobic bullying?

Anyone can experience homophobic bullying:

- Young people who are **lesbian, gay or bisexual** (LGB)
- Young people who are thought to be lesbian, gay or bisexual
- Young people who are thought to be different in some way, for example, might work hard, or may not be as good at sport, or may have a particular hobby or interest
- Young people who have **parents**/carers [15.10] or friends or family who are lesbian, gay or bisexual
- **Teachers and other school staff**, who may or may not be lesbian, gay or bisexual.

Homophobic bullying can also occur when a bully uses **homophobic language** [see A3.2] to describe something, for example: "Those trainers are so gay".

In this context, the general hurtful action is delivered in a way that is homophobic.

The wide use of 'gay' to illustrate 'something bad' creates a hostile environment at school where difference and diversity is not respected.

"Homophobic bullying makes me miserable. Nothing else to say really."

14 year old boy, West Midlands

A3.5 Who does the bullying and why?

There is no one type of person who bullies in this way.

Pupils may justify homophobic bullying because:

- They think that lesbian and gay people should be bullied, because they believe gay people are "wrong"
- They do not think there is anything wrong in bullying someone because of their sexual orientation. This may in part be motivated by an incorrect interpretation of what is taught by the faith to which they belong
- They do not realise that it is bullying
- They may have low self-esteem, poor communication skills, and were possibly bullied themselves
- They think they might be lesbian or gay, and this makes them uncomfortable and hostile to others who are
- They think it is acceptable to bully others who do not conform to their "norm"
- They think **gay parenting** is wrong and pupils should be treated differently because of it.

¹⁶ www.ChildLine.org.uk/extra/homophobicbullyingsurvey.asp

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In addition pupils tend not 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.

For more information on the motivations for bullying and strategies to deal with this, please see *Safe to Learn*.

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

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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.**

A5: Responding

A5.1 Responding to homophobic incidents

Governors have a role in supporting **heads** [10] in developing systems and processes to ensure that a range of **interventions, sanctions** and systems are in place to respond to homophobic bullying if it occurs.

The first stage in the process of preventing homophobic bullying is to evaluate the effectiveness of anti-bullying measures already in place and consider how these can be applied to homophobic bullying. The **Education and Inspections Act 2006** requires governors to develop a statement of behaviour principles. This statement helps the head develop **policies** to respond to incidents of bullying. Although governors are unlikely to be involved in responding directly to incidents, they still have a role in helping heads develop effective policies.

A '**hierarchy of sanctions**' helps staff respond effectively to bullying. Governors can help shape those sanctions. Governors may want to consider these questions when advising on a hierarchy of sanctions:

1. 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 a pupil using **homophobic language** such as "That's so gay"?
2. How can interventions be used when **homophobic language** is used against an individual? For example, "Pass me the calculator you dyke"?
3. How can interventions be used if a young person is not lesbian, gay or bisexual but is experiencing homophobic bullying?
4. How might interventions be used for a young person who has **gay parents** or family members and is experiencing homophobic bullying as a consequence?
5. How can interventions **escalate** when an individual is experiencing continual homophobic bullying?
6. How can the strategy apply to **group bullying** against an individual?
7. How might the school keep **parents/carers** informed about incidents if the young person is lesbian, gay or bisexual and does not want their parents to find out?
8. When will **multiple agencies** [see A4.5] be involved in incidents?
9. How can schools consider incidents that occur **outside** school (including cyberbullying) when developing escalation strategies?

For more on determining the use of sanctions see *Safe to Learn*.

A6: Monitoring

A6.1 Monitoring and evaluation

Refer to **DL3** and **DL4** with this section

Most schools have mechanisms for recording incidents of bullying, and in particular, racist bullying.

Monitoring incidents of bullying enables a school to identify patterns of behaviour and the extent of bullying, and then take **pro-active** steps to challenge it. The DCSF therefore recommends as best practice that schools record all incidents 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 is an invaluable means of raising awareness about the issue amongst all staff.

In common with racist 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 pupil 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 **group discussions** that addressed the issue of homophobic bullying.

Good recording procedures allow **heads** to demonstrate that responses have been made to particular bullying incidents, which is useful in the event of a **complaint**. It also enables heads to demonstrate that they are taking steps to tackle bullying, and to assess which initiatives are most effective.

Governors should also aim to evaluate how the school is performing in this area. Evaluating progress also makes it easy to celebrate success and helps those involved keep focused and motivated.

For more information on data collection see *Safe to Learn*.