B. ADVICE FOR HEADS AND SENIOR MANAGEMENT TEAM

B1: Introductions

B1.1   The purpose of this guidance

This section provides information for heads and the senior leadership team about their roles and responsibilities in relation to homophobic bullying.

B1.2   Why should heads address homophobic bullying?

Heads have a **legal duty** to ensure homophobic bullying is dealt with in schools. They are also in the strongest position to state clearly that homophobic bullying is wrong. Under the **Education and Inspections Act 2006** heads must determine measures to be taken with a view to promoting good behaviour, respect for others, and self discipline amongst pupils, and to prevent all forms of bullying. Ministers have made it clear that this includes the **prevention** of homophobic bullying. For more on overall duties to promote the welfare of pupils and to safeguard them see *Safe to Learn* and **www.teachernet.gov.uk/wholeschool/ familyandcommunity/childprotection/guidance/**

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[17] indicates that young people who experience homophobic bullying are more likely to leave school at 16, often 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 the senior leadership team have explicit responsibility to ensure that schools respond to and prevent homophobic bullying. It is important that all **staff**, at all levels, are aware of the school's approach to addressing bullying.

B2: 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 B2.1]
Relevant policies [see B2.2]
Relevant guidance [see B2.3]
Inspections [see B2.4]

B2.1   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 2003[18]
These laws protect all staff 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 they are being discriminated against, support is available through channels such as trade unions and professional associations [see Further resources]. Creating a culture 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 2006[19]
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.

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.

---

[18] www.opsi.gov.uk/SI/si2003/20031661.htm
[19] www.opsi.gov.uk/acts/acts2006/20060003.htm

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 lesbian and gay people 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.

B2.2 Relevant policies

Every Child Matters[20]
Every Child Matters provides a focus for the education sector and the wider children's workforce to think about supporting children and young people 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 Matters[21]
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 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.

---

[20] http://www.everychildmatters.gov.uk/
[21] www.DCSF.gov.uk/publications/youth/

B2.3   Relevant Guidance

Safe to Learn[22]
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.

Stand Up For Us[23]
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 Guidance[24]
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.

B2.4   Inspection

Ofsted self-evaluation forms[25]
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." [26]

---

[22] www.teachernet.gov.uk/wholeschool/behaviour/tacklingbullying/safetolearn/

[23] www.wiredforhealth.gov.uk/cat.php?catid=1101&docid=7707

[24] www.dfes.gov.uk/sreguidance/

[25] www.ofsted.gov.uk/schools/sef.cfm

[26] www.gtce.org.uk/standards/disc/StatementOfProfValues

B3: Recognition

B3.1 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 B3.2], 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. 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%[27] of schools surveyed had anti-bullying **policies** that addressed homophobic bullying. Whilst some more recent research suggests this figure may now be around 33%[28] 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* 2007 [29] 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

B3.2 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.

---

[27] DCSF "Don't Suffer in Silence", 2002 (Douglas et al 1999, sample size 307)

[28] 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).

[29] Sample, 1,140 (2007)

"Everything is gay. No-one even thinks it is a form of bullying."
14 year old girl, Leicester

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.*

B3.3   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. ChildLine [30] 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

B3.4   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** [see B4.9] 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

B3.5   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

---

[30] www.ChildLine.org.uk/extra/homophobicbullyingsurvey.asp

- 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.

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.*

B4: Prevention

B4.1   Leadership

Refer to **DL20** with this section
Heads provide leadership to a school. The heads who deal most successfully with challenging homophobic bullying make it clear that such abuse is not tolerated within their school. Individual teachers and members of staff cannot undertake this work in isolation: the whole school should try to be involved. In order for this to be possible, heads and the senior leadership team need to demonstrate clear and unequivocal leadership by recognising the problem and pro-actively taking steps to prevent it. It is not an issue that can be ignored.

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

The most 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. Research suggests that only 6%[31] of schools have a fully inclusive **anti-bullying policy** that specifically addresses homophobic bullying. Whilst some more recent research suggests this figure may now be around 33%[32] in secondary schools, it remains clear that too few schools make specific mention of bullying of this kind. 76% of respondents to "Stonewall's *The School Report*"[33] attended schools that did not explicitly mention homophobic bullying in anti-bullying policies. Ignoring the problem creates an unsafe learning environment for all. This section details ways in which heads and the senior management team can prevent homophobic bullying and develop existing strategies to include homophobic bullying.

B4.2   Roles and responsibilities – who does what?

Every member of the school community has a responsibility to prevent homophobic bullying and the head should ensure that staff members understand how to deal with incidents should they occur. 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.

The following downloads discuss individual roles in more detail:

Governors [DL 2]
Heads [DL19]
Teachers and school staff [DL7]
Parents/Carers [DL10]

---

[31] DCSF "Don't Suffer in Silence", 2002 (Douglas et al 1999, sample size 307)
[32] 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).
[33] Sample, 1,140 (2007)

B4.3 Developing policies to be inclusive

Refer to **DL3** and **DL5** 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 B2.1] concerning homophobic bullying and consider the implications of this when drawing up the anti-bullying policy within their behaviour policy.

The key to developing policies relating to homophobic bullying is to integrate the work into policies and plans that are already in place. Within these documents it is important to make explicit reference to homophobic bullying. It cannot be assumed that staff, pupils and parents/carers will understand that general anti-bullying policies will include homophobic bullying.

Heads need to consider **consulting** staff, students 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.

In reviewing the anti-bullying policy the head will also want to consider what sanctions are appropriate for dealing with homophobic bullying, and how incidents will be dealt with.

A **'hierarchy of sanctions'** helps staff respond effectively to bullying. Heads may want to consider the following when determining 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** 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*.

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. As such heads should consider establishing a **homophobic bullying incident log.**

The procedure for dealing with homophobic incidents should be clear and **everyone** in the school should be familiar with it. The DCSF advises as best practice that incidents that are recorded should be reviewed and pupils given appropriate **support** in the same way that they would for other forms of bullying.

Heads should also consider other policies where it might be necessary to include homophobic bullying. This might include:

•   School improvement policies

•   Equal Opportunities policy

•   Pupil support and safeguarding policies

•   **Staffing** policies

•   Site policies including before/after school, break, lunchtime and travel management supervision routines.

B4.4   Staff, pupils, parents and governors – raising awareness

Refer to **DL10** and **DL7** with this section
Raising awareness about the issue of homophobic bullying is a key element to preventing it. When **data** indicates that homophobic bullying exists in a school, a head has a **responsibility** to act on that data and take targeted steps to prevent homophobic bullying.

Data and audits about the nature and extent of homophobic bullying in schools should be shared with **governors**. Governors can help a head develop policies and strategies for preventing homophobic bullying. Getting them on board is a crucial aspect of any prevention plan.

Writing to **parents/carers** about the findings of any audit and data collection provides an opportunity to explain to them that homophobic bullying can affect

anyone perceived as different. Engaging the support of parents and carers from the outset will help answer any concerns they may have about preventing homophobic bullying and ensure their continued support. Parents/carers can have a positive role to play in helping to tackle homophobic bullying by engaging children and young people with sensitive issues at home and ensuring their children and young people understand the concepts of respect and community.

Staff should understand the nature and extent of homophobic bullying in schools and feel empowered to **respond and prevent it**. Staff will feel more confident about preventing homophobic bullying if the head and governors are clear about its importance.

Pupils should understand that the school will not tolerate any homophobic bullying and that homophobic comments and behaviour are prejudiced. If this message is consistent amongst the staff including the head, the senior team, and the anti-bullying leads, pupils will understand that the whole school is committed to **preventing** and **responding** to homophobic bullying. Heads can raise awareness through messages in the prospectus, during tutorial time, in **anti-bullying** policies and through **curriculum development**.

B4.5 Using curriculum opportunities and developing social and emotional skills

Refer to **DL6, DL21, DL22, DL23** and **DL24** with this section
Schools should refer to what the guidance on the sexual orientation regulations says about the curriculum. The guidance can be found at: **www.teachernet.gov.uk/sholeschoole/equality/ sexualorientation/regulations2007/**

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

Through **curriculum** subjects, including English, Geography, History, Art, Music, Drama, PE, Citizenship and PSHE opportunities may be provided to introduce issues around homophobic bullying. More widely General Studies and Religious Education lessons can be used as vehicles for discussing this topic, although they should not be considered the only subjects where it is appropriate to raise issues around bullying and discrimination. In raising issues around religious perspectives it is important to distinguish that bullying behaviour is entirely different from religious belief.

SEAL
The Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning (SEAL) programme is being implemented in primary schools, and the rollout of SEAL to secondary schools starts in September 2007. Primary SEAL provides a whole-curriculum framework and resource to develop pupils' social and emotional skills, through a whole-school approach. It focuses on five key areas of learning: self-awareness, empathy, managing feelings, motivation and social skills. Developing skills in these areas is likely to help reduce bullying. SEAL helps schools to meet many of the requirements of the non-statutory PSHE framework and to acquire National Healthy School status through its contribution to promoting emotional health and wellbeing.

For more information on SEAL please visit **www.teachernet.gov.uk/SEAL** or see *Safe to Learn*.

B4.6   Different families

Refer to **DL13** with this section
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 who have adopted a child

• Siblings from different families and different ages

• Parents who live with a child and a parent who does not live with the child

• Looked after children and young people, including those in long and short-term care.

It is likely that some children and young people in a primary school and secondary school will either have, or know about, same-sex parenting.

"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 pupil, Birmingham

Children and young people can experience bullying because of their family arrangements, regardless of whether or not a parent is gay. Some pupils 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.

Preventing homophobic bullying of this sort relies on a broader and more inclusive approach to discussing families and parents and pupils should understand that different family structures exist.

"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 girl, Lancaster

B4.7 Staff development and training

Refer to **DL7** with this section
Under the **Employment Equality (Sexual Orientation) Regulations (2003)** [see B2], 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. This means that heads 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 staff members.

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, the programmes conducted by the National Strategies, and the wide-range of

resources available, to ensure all 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 to be proactive in 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

B4.8 Developing pupil support systems

Refer to **DL14, DL15** and **DL26** with this section
In order to safeguard young people all pupils 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 pupils 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 admitting it is occurring. If a pupil is experiencing racist bullying, they may feel able to discuss this with their **parents or carers**. Whilst it is desirable for a pupil who is experiencing homophobic bullying to confide in their parents/carers, evidence suggests that 75% of young people feel that they are unable to do so as they may be worried that parents or carers will either find out that they are gay, or assume that they are, even if this is not the case (Source: The School Report).

"I'm not gay, but always been rubbish at sports at 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 boy, Cardiff

Schools need to develop robust **confidentiality** policies that pupils understand and be able to offer help to pupils who are unable to access support at home. In terms of confidentiality, it is important to bear in mind that "coming out" or a disclosure about consensual sexual activity, is not in itself a reason to breach confidentiality. However, an admission of behaviour, which places the young person, or other young people at risk of significant harm, regardless of their sexuality, may constitute a need to breach confidence. School confidentiality policies should be in line with local child protection protocols which reflect the principles of Working Together (2006).

Pupils may also be reluctant to use pupil 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 pupils 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 pupils that bullying of this nature will not be tolerated.

B4.9 Working with pupils who bully

Refer to **DL9, DL25** and **DL20** with this section
If pupils have not previously been taught that homophobic bullying is wrong, it may take time to make pupils 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 pupils to develop policies, and ensuring that pupils understand what **sanctions** will be applied if they fail to follow the rules. Discussions and ideas about sexual orientation are not 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.

Some pupils may be reluctant to stop bullying because they think their stance is justified. This position can sometimes be supported by **parents/ carers**. Schools need to be very clear that homophobic bullying is not tolerated under any circumstances and that **sanctions** and consequences apply.

B4.10 Working with parents and carers

Refer to **DL10** with this section
No **parent or carer** wants their child to be bullied. Any young person, whether they are gay or not, can experience homophobic bullying. Young people however often do not tell their parents/carers about homophobic bullying, because they do not want their parents to think that they are gay.

Schools will need to work with **parents and 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 with regards how best to communicate with those caring for looked after children.

Parents/carers, like pupils, may think that homophobic bullying is acceptable. Schools will want to consider explaining to parents/carers what homophobic bullying is, and what strategies there 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 pupils to be gay. This is not the case, and this needs to be made clear to parents/carers. The DCSF advises that schools consider using vehicles such as the prospectus to emphasise that **anti-bullying policies** include homophobic bullying. Letters home about bullying may also make reference to homophobic bullying.

B4.11 Multi-agency working and safeguarding

Heads 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. Heads will 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.**

B4.12 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.

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** 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 **information** [see Further resources] around secondary schools and also 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

The DCSF advises that 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.

B5: Responding

B5.1   Responding to homophobic incidents

Adopting a "zero-tolerance" approach towards homophobic bullying is vital. Schools need to make it clear to pupils that homophobic comments are as serious as racist comments, and homophobic incidents are as serious as other forms of bullying.

Schools should respond consistently and effectively to incidents of homophobic bullying. This will indicate to pupils that incidents are taken seriously, thereby encouraging them to report 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 need to aim:

*   To protect the person experiencing homophobic bullying

*   To hold to account the person causing the harm

*   To repair, as far as possible, relationships between pupils

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

B5.2   How to respond to verbal incidents

Refer to **DL17** and **DL17** with this section
Staff need to feel able to discuss issues of homophobic bullying with pupils and **parents/carers** and deal with incidents quickly and effectively before a situation becomes more serious. Homophobic language is often used without thinking and is often ignored because it is difficult to know how to respond. Homophobic language in schools needs to be challenged because ignoring it allows homophobic bullying to continue to escalate.

Any action to challenge **homophobic language** needs to 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 boy, London

Those doing the bullying
Staff should consistently make it clear that homophobic comments are unacceptable and ensure that pupils who experience it feel **supported**. Staff need to be sensitive when talking to pupils about incidents, taking into account the worries the pupil may have.

"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 an essay on why homophobic language is not acceptable in our schools."
Secondary school teacher, Manchester

If a pupil continues to use **homophobic language**, staff need to point out the effect that their language may be having on other people. This could include asking the pupil to write why homophobic language is unacceptable in school.

If the pupil still continues to engage in homophobic bullying, they could be spoken to by a senior member of staff. Schools may also consider giving a detention, ensuring first that parents have been informed about this policy and have been given 24 hours' prior notice if the detention occurs before or after the school day, or at lunchtime.

If the problem persists schools may want to consider directly contacting **parents or carers** to discuss the issue, and reminding them about the school's anti-bullying **policy**. In doing so it may also be necessary to explain to the parents or carers why **homophobic language** is unacceptable.

For more on the use of sanctions see *Safe to Learn* and *School Discipline and Pupil Behaviour Policies: Guidance for Schools.*

Those on the receiving end
It is important to create a **secure time and space** where pupils can report incidents. It is essential that when a young person is reporting an incident or incidents, the staff member does not assume the pupil is either gay or heterosexual. Staff should listen carefully to the young person'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 pupil knows that staff will respond to **verbal bullying** with sensitivity, they may feel more comfortable about discussing other issues (including issues relating to **sexual orientation**).

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

"We hear "gay" as a term of abuse every single day. The children may not know exactly what it means, but they know they are using it as an insult. That's why we need to tackle it at this stage. "
Primary School Head Teacher, North East

B5.3 Responding to physical incidents

Refer to **DL18** with this section
Like **verbal abuse**, pupils may be reluctant to **report** incidents because they fear that staff will assume they are gay. Physical abuse can indicate a young person is at risk, and the overarching strategies that are implemented to safeguard pupils 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 pupils **safe** from physical abuse.

Teachers and other staff members should refer to the **anti-bullying policy** and the **'hierarchy of sanctions'** when responding to homophobic bullying. In particularly severe circumstances the school should consider permanent exclusion.

The Department's guidance on exclusions 2006 states:

"A decision to exclude a pupil should be taken only:
a) in response to serious breaches of the schools behaviour policy; and
b) if allowing the pupil to remain in school would seriously harm the education or welfare of the pupil or others in the school."

Only the head or teacher in charge of a Pupil Referral Unit (or, in the absence of the head or teacher in charge, the most senior teacher who is acting in that role) can exclude a pupil.

The guidance further states:

"In cases where a head has permanently excluded a pupil for: … persistent and defiant misbehaviour, including bullying (which would include racist or homophobic bullying), or repeated possession and/or use of an illegal drug on school premises, the Secretary of State would not normally expect the governing body or an Independent Appeal Panel to reinstate the pupil." [34]

Note this guidance is due to be updated Summer 2007 when the wording may change slightly.

B5.4 Supporting lesbian, gay and bisexual pupils

Refer to **DL14**, **DL15** and **DL17** with this section
If pupils receive a supportive reaction from staff, they are more likely to feel able to tell someone about incidents of homophobic bullying. Staff should feel comfortable enough to deal with a situation where a pupil comes out to them. Staff should consider therefore:

- Listening and being **supportive**

- Discussing how **parents** and carers might respond

- Telling pupils their **confidentiality** will be respected, and pointing out the circumstances when this may not be possible

- Asking them how they would like to proceed

- Recommending other **resources**, such as local youth groups 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 girl, Cumbria

Staff who respond negatively to pupils who come out can compound the sense of isolation that a young person may be experiencing. Pupils may be reluctant to tell anyone else, and will not feel able to report incidents of homophobic bullying if this occurs.

---

[34] Source: www.teachernet.gov.uk/wholeschool/behaviour/exclusion/guidance/part1/

B6: Monitoring

B6.1   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.

Heads can also use existing informal mechanisms for
reporting bullying, such as report boxes. Heads can
also ask their staff whether they have witnessed
homophobic bullying. **Studies**[35] indicate that one in
four secondary school teachers is aware of physical
homophobic bullying and four in five are aware of
verbal homophobic bullying. Schools will have
developed systems for collecting data relating to
incidents of racist bullying. These systems can be
applied to 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 if new initiatives are effective.

Evaluating progress also makes it easy to celebrate
success and helps those involved keep focused and
motivated. Heads should aim to evaluate progress on
a termly basis, and report back to governors regularly.
This will help governors think about the progress that
is being made, and what is left to be done.

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

---

[35] www.stonewall.org.uk/educationforall