C. ADVICE FOR TEACHERS AND SCHOOL STAFF

C1: Introductions

C1.1 The purpose of this guidance

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

C1.2 Why should school staff address homophobic bullying?

Teachers and school staff are most likely to see, and be in a position to **respond** to, incidents of homophobic bullying. Schools have a legal duty to respond to bullying and 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 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[36] 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.

C2: 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 C2.1]
Relevant policies [see C2.2]
Relevant guidance [see C2.3]
Inspections [see C2.4]

C2.1   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[37]

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 [38]

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.

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[37] www.opsi.gov.uk/SI/si2003/20031661.htm
[38] 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.

C2.2 Relevant policies

Every Child Matters[39]
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[40]
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.

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[39] http://www.everychildmatters.gov.uk/
[40] www.DCSF.gov.uk/publications/youth/

C2.3 Relevant Guidance

Safe to Learn[41]
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[42]
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[43]
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.

C2.4 Inspection

Ofsted self-evaluation forms[44]
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." [45]

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

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

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

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

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

C3: Recognition

C3.1 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** [14.1], 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%[46] of schools surveyed had anti-bullying **policies** that addressed homophobic bullying. Whilst some more recent research suggests this figure may now be around 33%[47] 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[48] 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

C3.2 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

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[46] DCSF "Don't Suffer in Silence", 2002 (Douglas et al 1999, sample size 307)
[47] 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).
[48] 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.*

C3.3 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[49] 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

C3.4 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

C3.5 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"

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

- 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.*

C4: Prevention

C4.1 Leadership

Refer to **DL29** with this section
Preventing homophobic bullying is a long term strategy to eradicate it from schools. **Responding** to incidents is important, but teachers and school staff have a responsibility to provide on-going information to pupils and parents/carers about homophobic bullying, the **effect** that it has on pupils, and the consequences of bullying. Pupils will be more likely to understand that homophobic bullying is unacceptable if this is visible throughout the ethos of the school. Reiterating the message after an incident will only have a limited impact.

Staff should also feel **protected** [21] from bullying. Preventing homophobic bullying will also therefore have an impact on pupil attitudes to staff, and help prevent future incidents of bullying.

Further information about how to integrate homophobic bullying into wider approaches to bullying can be found in *Safe to Learn*.

C4.2 How to introduce the issue of homophobic bullying

Refer to **DL20** with this section
Heads and the senior leadership team (including those with strategic responsibility for anti-bullying work) will have developed general strategies for preventing homophobic bullying. This will include the school anti-bullying policy which, Departmental guidance suggests, should be re-communicated to all members of staff, parents/carers and pupils at least once a year. Giving students and staff an opportunity to comment on the school's approach to dealing with homophobic bullying ensures the issue is kept alive and understanding is maintained.

Schools can also use occasions such as national Anti-Bullying Week (November) to facilitate discussion and raise awareness about the topic. Other opportunities for incorporating prevention work are discussed within the following sections.

Some staff members can feel nervous about introducing issues related to homophobic bullying with pupils. It can be helpful in these situations if staff bear in mind the following three points:

That regardless of what a pupil thinks about gay people, no-one deserves to be bullied.

That gay people are entitled to equal rights in the UK, and will be protected from bullying of any sort.

That homophobic bullying is unacceptable in any context, even if it is being used against heterosexual people.

C4.3 How to discuss issues around homophobic language

Refer to **DL12** with this section
Homophobic language is often used without thinking and is often ignored because it is difficult to know how to respond. **Homophobic language** is often dismissed as "harmless banter" and not thought to be particularly hurtful. Homophobic language in schools needs to be challenged because ignoring it allows homophobic bullying in general to continue to escalate.

Homophobic language should be challenged within a general programme of work that the school undertakes to tackle the problem of homophobic bullying, including negative attitudes towards lesbian, gay and bisexual people. It is not a singular response to the difficulties that arise. Any action to challenge homophobic language should 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

Staff should consistently make it clear that homophobic comments are **unacceptable** and ensure that pupils who experience it feel supported. Staff will need to be sensitive when talking to pupils about incidents. They may be gay but not know how to tell someone that, or may be concerned that parents/carers will be involved.

"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, they need to understand the effect that their language has on other people. This could include asking the pupil to write why homophobic language is unacceptable in school. If the pupil continues to be homophobic, they could be spoken to by a senior manager. A pupil may be given detention, but parents will need to have been informed about this policy and be given 24 hours' prior notice if the detention occurs before or after the school day, or at lunchtime.

If a pupil continues to be bully others, schools may want to consider contacting **parents** or carers to discuss the issue and problem with them and reminding them about the school's anti-bullying

policy. Parents/carers also need to understand why homophobic language is unacceptable.

Sharing information with pupils and parents/carers is central to ensuring that they understand why their behaviour is unacceptable. Homophobic language is often used in ignorance, and therefore education is crucial.

For more information on sanctions see Safe to Learn and School Discipline and Pupil Behaviour Policies: Guidance for Schools.

C4.4 Using curriculum opportunities

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 key to tackling prejudice-driven bullying is to provide opportunities for pupils to think, understand and challenge their own prejudice.

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.

Citizenship and PSHE classes provide an ideal time to talk about **different families** and look at the effects of bullying, as well as to discuss inappropriate language and prejudice.

Teaching about sexual orientation does not mean teaching about sex or sexual activity. Instead, it is about teaching pupils about difference and diversity. Teaching about sexual orientation, and bullying, will prevent homophobic bullying.

C4.5 How to discuss 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, 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 key to tackling homophobic bullying.

Preventing homophobic bullying of this sort relies on a broader and more inclusive approach to discussing families and parents. 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

C4.6 How to support pupils who are lesbian, gay or bisexual

Refer to **DL14, DL15** and **DL26** with this section
Staff should feel comfortable enough to deal with a situation where a pupil "comes out" to them. 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 therefore:

- Listen and be **supportive**

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

- Tell pupils their **confidentiality** will be respected, and explain the circumstances where it may not be possible to do so

- Ask them how they would like to proceed

- Recommend other resources [see further 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.

C5: Responding

C5.1 Responding to homophobic incidents

Refer to **DL7** with this section
School staff interact with pupils on a daily basis and are more likely to see, and be told about, incidents of homophobic bullying. It is important that staff responses are, in line with Ofsted guidelines, *'swift, proportionate, discreet, influential and effective'*. This section explores ways in which staff can respond effectively to incidents of homophobic bullying, and instil confidence in pupils and parents/carers that issues will be dealt with.

C5.2 Working with policies and procedures

Refer to **DL3** with this section
The first stage in the process of preventing homophobic bullying is to evaluate the effectiveness of anti-bullying measures already in operation and consider how these can be applied to homophobic bullying. It is **Heads** and **governors** who have a duty to ensure that the necessary policies and procedures are in place. These policies should include homophobic bullying and should be developed in consultation with staff, parents/carers and pupils. Therefore all staff should be aware of them.

Responding to incidents of homophobic bullying should be done within the context of a school's own policy, for example, with regards the 'hierarchy of sanctions' which the school has deemed appropriate for responding to inappropriate behaviour. This section of guidance should be read with these policies in mind.

For more information on sanctions and tackling bullying see *Safe to Learn* and *School Discipline and Pupil Behaviour Policies: Guidance for Schools*.

C5.3 How to respond to verbal abuse

Refer to **DL16** and **DL17** with this section
Stopping verbal abuse, particularly the use of homophobic language, is part of the broader, whole school approach to preventing homophobic bullying. If heads develop **"zero-tolerance"** strategies for incidents of homophobic language, this will help staff intervene and take action. Taking steps to ensure respect for people regardless of their sexual orientation will enable pupils to be more open about their experiences of bullying.

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 member of staff does not assume the pupil is either gay or heterosexual. Staff members 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

C5.4 How to respond to physical abuse

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." [50]

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

C5.5 Holding people who bully to account

Refer to **DL9** and **DL25** 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 should not be 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.

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

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.

C5.6 Supporting those harmed by bullying

Refer to **DL8, DL26, DL14** and **DL15** with this section One of the greatest barriers to addressing homophobic bullying is under-reporting. Pupils may feel reluctant to report incidents because they think that the staff member will assume that they are gay, or that they will respond negatively. In order to **safeguard** all pupils, children and young people need to feel confident that the school will be able to **support** them effectively.

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: Stonewall's 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).

A pupil who has experienced homophobic bullying needs to have the opportunity to state what has happened, and have an opportunity to express how they feel (in writing if they prefer). If they want to, a parent, carer or other adult or friend can support them.

Pupils need to understand what is going to happen as a result of them telling a member of staff. Staff will want to consider if they should also use the opportunity to provide further pastoral care, especially if the pupil is **gay** and wants to talk about it.

Pupils may also be reluctant to use pupil support systems for example, peer mentoring systems. All those involved in anti-bullying work need to understand the sensitivities around homophobic bullying.

It is important to involve pupils in developing the policies in place relating to 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.

C5.7 Working with parents whose child has experienced bullying

Refer to **DL10** with this section **DL10**
No **parent or carer** wants their child to be bullied. Any young person, whether they are gay or not, can experience homophobic bullying. It can affect

children and young people at primary school or secondary school. Young people however, often do not tell their parents/carers about homophobic bullying, because they do not want their parents/carers to think, or know, that they are gay. Parents, carers and families may not even know this is happening.

It is advisable that schools work with parents/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.

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. Schools should consider using vehicles such as the prospectus to emphasise that **anti-bullying policies** include homophobic bullying. Letters home about bullying should ideally make reference to homophobic bullying.

For more on working with parents and carers see **"How to respond to verbal incidents"**.

C5.8 Multi-agency working and safeguarding

Schools 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. Staff 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.**

C6: Monitoring

C6.1 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.

As part of the ongoing process of monitoring and
evaluation schools should celebrate the successes
which they make, and which their pupils make,
through tutorial time, prize giving, letters to parents/
carers and the local press.

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