

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).

Research¹⁷ 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.

¹⁷ www.stonewall.org.uk/schoolreport