

# **B. ADVICE FOR HEADS AND SENIOR MANAGEMENT TEAM**

## 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%<sup>31</sup> 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%<sup>32</sup> 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*”<sup>33</sup> 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]**

<sup>31</sup> DCSF “Don’t Suffer in Silence”, 2002 (Douglas et al 1999, sample size 307)

<sup>32</sup> 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).

<sup>33</sup> 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/](http://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](http://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**

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- 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.