

# Executive summary

1. Every child in every school has the right to learn free from the fear of bullying, whatever form that bullying may take. Everyone involved in a child's education needs to work together to ensure that this is the case.

2. Schools need to take an active approach to tackling all forms of bullying, including homophobic bullying. Schools should be taking action to prevent bullying behaviour, as well as responding to incidents when they occur. A preventative approach to bullying means that schools safeguard the welfare of their pupils. It also means that schools are playing their part to create a society in which people treat each other with respect. Schools know how to prevent and respond to bullying, and will already have strategies in place. Preventing and responding to homophobic bullying should be part of these existing strategies. This guidance helps with the specifics around homophobic bullying. For more information on overall anti-bullying work, refer to Safe to Learn.

## What is homophobic bullying?

3. Homophobic bullying occurs when bullying is motivated by a prejudice against lesbian, gay or bisexual people.

4. Who experiences 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 different in some way – they may not act like the other boys or girls.
- Young people who have gay friends, or family, or their parents/carers are gay.
- Teachers, who may or may not be lesbian, gay or bisexual.

5. Who does the bullying and why?
- Anyone. Especially if they have not been told it's wrong.
  - They think that lesbian and gay people should be bullied, because they believe gay people are "wrong".
  - People who might be gay themselves, and are angry about that.
  - People who think "boys should act like boys" and "girls should act like girls".
  - People who think gay people shouldn't have the same rights as heterosexual people and use this as justification for bullying.
  - People who think gay parenting is wrong and pupils should be treated differently because of it.

### Why should schools do anything about it?

6. Schools have a legal duty to ensure homophobic bullying is dealt with in schools. Under the Education and Inspections Act 2006, head teachers, with the advice and guidance of governors and the assistance of school staff, must identify and implement measures to promote good behaviour, respect for others, and self discipline amongst pupils, and to prevent all forms of bullying. This includes the prevention of homophobic bullying.
7. Homophobic bullying can have a negative impact on young people:
- Bullying can also be linked to poor attendance with studies showing a high degree of absenteeism.
  - Seven out of ten young lesbian and gay people say homophobic bullying affects their work.

- Bullying can cause low self-esteem, including the increased likelihood of self-harm and the contemplation of suicide.
- Young people who experience homophobic bullying are unlikely to fulfil the objectives of Every Child Matters and Youth Matters.

### How to recognise homophobic bullying

8. Homophobic bullying can be hard to identify because it may be going on in secret. Sometimes, pupils may not want to tell anyone about it in case teachers/staff or other adults assume they are gay. A recent study found that three in five gay pupils never tell anyone (either at home or school) when they are being bullied. The fact that young people are particularly reluctant to tell is a distinctive aspect of homophobic bullying.
9. Generally, homophobic bullying looks like other sorts of bullying, but in particular it can include:
- Verbal abuse – including spreading rumours that someone is gay, suggesting that something or someone is inferior and so they are "gay" – for example, "you're such a gay boy!" or "those trainers are so gay!"
  - Physical abuse – including hitting, punching, kicking, sexual assault, and threatening behaviour.
  - Cyberbullying – using on-line spaces to spread rumours about someone or exclude them. Can also include text messaging, including video and picture messaging.
10. Can it happen in Primary schools?
- Yes. Pupils may not know what the words mean, but can use homophobic language against others as a form of bullying.

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- Or, they may bully a pupil who has gay parents/carers or family members.

### How to respond to homophobic bullying

11. 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'. Staff should feel able to respond effectively to incidents of homophobic bullying, and instil confidence in pupils and parents/carers that issues will be dealt with.

### Responding to homophobic language:

12. Casual homophobic language is common in schools but, if it is not challenged, pupils may think that homophobic bullying is acceptable. It is therefore important to challenge homophobic language when it occurs:

- Ensure that pupils know that homophobic language will not be tolerated in schools. Make sure it is included in policies and procedures.
- When an incident occurs, pupils should be informed that homophobic language is offensive, and will not be tolerated.
- If a pupil continues to make homophobic remarks, explain in detail the effects that homophobic bullying has on people.
- If a pupil makes persistent remarks, they should be removed from the classroom and teachers and staff should talk to him or her in more detail about why their comments are unacceptable.
- If the problem persists, involve senior managers. The pupil should be made to understand the sanctions that will apply if they continue to use homophobic language.

- Consider inviting the parents/carers to school to discuss the attitudes of the pupil.

### Responding to physical bullying in secondary schools:

13. Like verbal abuse, pupils may be reluctant to report incidents of homophobic bullying because they fear that staff will assume they are gay, even if they are not. 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. Schools know how to respond to incidents of physical abuse, and the same strategies should apply when motivated by homophobic bullying. Homophobic violence can be a crime. Anti-bullying policies should be rigorously enforced in order to keep pupils safe from physical abuse.

14. Teachers 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.

### Prevention

15. Heads, governors and staff can take a number of steps to help prevent homophobic bullying. Prevention should be a central focus of a school's work to tackle homophobic bullying since taking steps to prevent bullying makes it easier to respond to incidents when they occur. It also enables a school to create an ethos in which pupils are clear that bullying is completely unacceptable and will not be tolerated.

- Ensure relevant **policies** exist, for example, checking that homophobic bullying is included in anti-bullying policies and related policies and procedures.
- **Assess and monitor** the extent of homophobic bullying through anonymous staff and pupil surveys, and existing methods like bullying

boxes. Evaluate the responses received and ensure consistent recording and reporting.

- **Raise awareness** of what homophobic bullying is and how the school will respond. Ensure effective reporting systems are in place to enable pupils to report incidents.
- Evaluate and make use of **curriculum opportunities** in order to instil respect for others.
- Develop effective **intervention strategies**.
- Know how to provide sensitive **support** to lesbian and gay pupils to help them feel safe, and able to tell teachers about incidents of homophobic bullying.

## Summary

16. To create an inclusive environment in your school where all pupils feel safe and are able to fulfil their potential requires a whole school approach. This should be integral to your school's mission statement and overall vision. The following ten steps can be taken to address homophobic bullying in your school:

1. **Acknowledge and identify the problem of bullying.** *The most important step is to recognise that all sorts of bullying takes place in schools, even if some forms are not immediately visible.*
2. **Develop policies which recognise the existence of homophobic bullying.** *Ensure that your anti-bullying policy takes homophobic bullying into account. Take other appropriate action such as challenging use of the word 'gay' and ensuring fast removal of graffiti.*
3. **Promote a positive social environment.** *The ethos of the entire school community, including all staff and parents/carers, should be to support all pupils, regardless of their differences and to ensure that they are happy and safe.*
4. **Address staff training needs.** *Do not assume that only lesbian, gay and bisexual staff are able to deal with homophobic bullying, but ensure all staff are confident they know how to react to such situations.*
5. **Provide information and support for pupils.** *Make age-appropriate information about services and support available to all pupils. Refer pupils to services including ChildLine for additional support.*
6. **Include addressing bullying, including homophobic bullying, in curriculum planning.** *Try to include teaching about bullying, including homophobic bullying, in the curriculum as a whole in an age-appropriate way and in accordance with National Curriculum subject frameworks and guidance so that pupils understand and appreciate diversity. This can be done formally in lesson times, but also informally, e.g. by providing information about LGB groups within secondary schools, in accordance with the school's policy.*
7. **Feel able to use outside expertise.** *People working in external agencies (such as lesbian and gay charities, youth workers or local telephone helplines) can offer support, both outside and inside the classroom, in addressing homophobic bullying.*
8. **Encourage role models.** *Openly gay staff, governors, parents/carers and/or pupils can all be strong role models for the school.*
9. **Do not make assumptions.** *Do not assume that all pupils in a class are, or will be, heterosexual. Do not assume that all staff in a school or college are heterosexual. And do not assume that all pupils experiencing homophobic bullying are gay.*
10. **Celebrate achievements.** *Make successes known, such as updating the school anti-bullying policy or reducing the incidence of bullying, through tutorial time, newsletters, notice-boards or websites etc.*