

Warrington N.U.T.

Prevalence of Homophobia Survey

January 2010



Introduction - Breaking the vicious silence

Child protection and the care of our school staff is a responsibility of government, police, social services and teachers but of us all. This report is another contribution towards a debate aimed at improving the quality of the teaching and learning environments in which millions of children and staff work each day. It is perhaps the sign of a more tolerant and responsible society that the systematic abuse of individuals and especially young people, because of their real or perceived human difference is increasingly being recognised and challenged. The campaign against racism informs us that addressing such bigotry and ignorance is not an easy or swift exercise but also that doing nothing or ignoring such discrimination is in itself part of the problem.

Many decades of campaigning motivated by the belief of human equality and in particular the on the central human issue of how who we have the 'right' to love the debate has removed a number of statutes that sought to persecute the wonder of human difference. However the debate of how we celebrate human difference and protect people, especially young people, from the hate born of prejudice is a matter close to the heart of all those who wish for a more happy and thereby tolerant society.

It is now a decade since the 'clause 28' of the Local Government Act was struck-off the statute books; a law which demanded the sexual instruction of pupils and students to the fallacious view that there was only one 'proper' form of sexual activity and family.

One obstacle for addressing the abuse faced by adults and young people (and often their families and friends) who have or are perceived to have a sexual orientation that is 'different' is the reduction of such discussions to sex! As if the complex issue of who we might love and who we wish to make a life-long commitment – is reducible to such considerations! The government in 2003 made a good start to addressing this blight on the lives of our children. The Department of Children, Schools and Families sent out guidance entitled '*Safe to Learn*' to all schools recommending measures that each school should take to protect its pupils and staff. This has been followed by a series of highly practical guidance documents together with encouraging comments by government ministers and politicians from all of the main political parties. Although the recent election of two English MEP's whose admiration of the horrendous and genocidal policies of Hitler's Germany, including the murder of thousands of gay men is perhaps instructive of the urgency of such work as this.

Added to the support the government has and continues to offer to schools the teaching unions including the NUT, groups such as Stonewall and Schools Out continue to offer a wealth and range of professional support and encouragement.

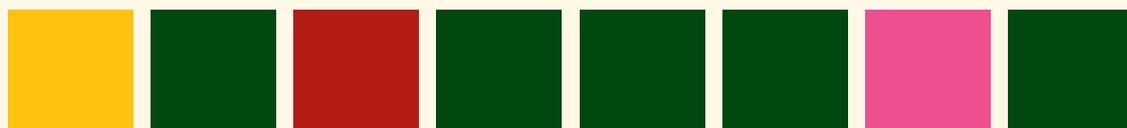
However as this survey again highlights in this area of protecting children, students and staff from homophobia the message and concomitant action has not been implemented with enough urgency or leadership on this matter is conspicuous by its absence. The question now for us all is do we add to that deadly silence and inaction or challenging such bigotry and protect and celebrate our wonderful human diversity? The pressing question is does the leadership of Warrington schools also share that view?

Elizabeth Purnell

Secretary & Teacher, Warrington NUT

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Equality Rep. (LGBT) & Teacher, Warrington NUT



The Survey Results

Background: this project is part of a regional response by the NUT to the increasing reports of 'endemic' homophobia in our schools [Stonewall 'School Report 2007], concerns by our members and the increasing amount of government advice on this matter.

Data collection method: this survey involved seventy-three teachers working in ten secondary schools in Warrington LEA who completed a one-page questionnaire in two sections: 'Prevalence of homophobia' and secondly 'Responses to homophobia'. The questionnaire was divided into two areas:

- i. **Prevalence of homophobia section;** invited teachers to report their professional assessment of homophobia. Namely if they had encountered such discrimination and is to give a measure of what they had directly observed within their classroom and more generally within their school. The seventy-three teachers were asked to grade any observed homophobia on a wide sliding scale from 'never' (i.e. no incidence) to 'common' (i.e. daily incidence). Assessment was invited on three aspects by which prevalence of homophobia might be gauged:
 - General climate,
 - Inter-pupil homophobia and finally
 - Homophobic bullying of staff by pupils.
- ii. **Responses to homophobia section;** invited teachers to report on how they professionally assessed the nature of the challenge afforded by the school to societal homophobic discrimination/bullying. Assessment was measured by a simple yes/no response to five statements that concentrated on:-
 - Teachers attitude towards the issue of homophobia
 - The perceived response to the schools management's response to the challenge of homophobia
 - Training needs

The results: The results confirm the growing body of evidence of a high prevalence of homophobia in our schools. The overall reported incidence of homophobic abuse/ hate crime in Warrington secondary schools is appalling high in which our colleagues and pupils/students teach and learn. However; a note of optimism is the consistent and heartening reflection of our member's professionalism, the consistency of the request for CPD to effectively address this area of discrimination.

It is the intention that this report will be shared with their members and the school management and governors as a prompt for action, preparatory to publication to the general public.

Results: Section 1, Prevalence of homophobia

Question 1 **Climate of homophobic abuse in the schools**

61%
(22)

...of teachers had overheard/observed homophobic abuse in their school on a **daily/weekly basis**.

86%
(31)

...of teachers had overheard/observed homophobic abuse in their school on at least a **termly basis**.

Question 2 **Prevalence of homophobic abuse/discrimination/bullying of pupils by pupils**

28%
(10)

...of teachers have observed/overheard specific pupils being the subject of homophobic abuse/discrimination/bullying on a **daily/weekly basis**.

76%
(27)

...of teachers have observed/overheard specific pupils being the subject of homophobic abuse/discrimination/bullying at least on a **termly basis**.

Question 3 **Homophobic abuse/discrimination/bullying of staff by pupils**

8%
(1)

...of teachers have themselves been the subject of homophobic abuse on at least a **termly basis**.

25%
(9)

...of teachers have themselves been the subject of homophobic abuse at within the **school year**.



Results: Section 2, Professional responses to homophobia

Statement 1 Attitude toward the seriousness of homophobic abuse/discrimination/bullying.

81%
(29)

...of teachers believe Homophobia is a serious issue demanding action.

Statement 2 Is your school vigorously addressing homophobic abuse/discrimination/bullying?

28%
(10)

...of teachers consider that their school is vigorously addressing homophobia.

C. Members' attitudes towards challenging Homophobic abuse and discrimination and training

Statement 3 Do you feel confident to challenge homophobic abuse/discrimination in your classroom?

61%
(22)

...of teachers feel confident about addressing homophobia in their classroom.

Statement 4 Would you welcome specific training to better address homophobic abuse/discrimination in your classroom?

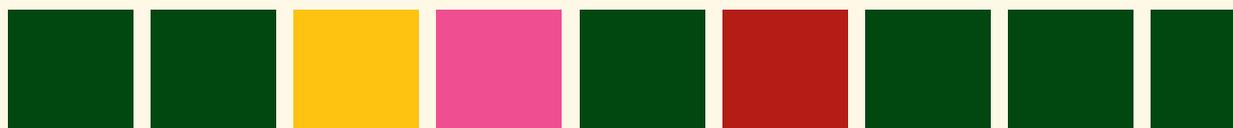
42%
(15)

...of teachers would welcome specific training to help them better address homophobia in their classroom.

Statement 5 Would you welcome whole school training to better address homophobia in your school?

72%
(26)

...of teachers would welcome whole school training to better address homophobic within their school.



Talking Heads

The empirical evidence contained in this Prevalence of Homophobia Report urgently endorses the need for the adoption of government guidance and legislation with regard to challenging discrimination and hate crimes against children, young people and staff in our communities and in particular; schools.

What is perhaps the greatest assets for our project to address this urgent need to protect children and staff in schools is teachers overwhelming and repeated demands for the professional advice and skill. Namely; provision of the strategies understand and thereby effectively address the particular ignorance and bigotry that maintains this variant of hate and human misery.

It is hoped that this report will cause all interest in young people's health and welfare and that of their teachers and other staff. Warrington NUT believes that such teaching and learning environments should not harbour ignorance and bigoted views. We trust that we can add vigour to the implementation of the statutory and moral imperatives to practically and effectively address such harmful and appalling endemic bigotry revealed in this survey.

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