Homophobic Bullying In Schools

Baseline Research - Northamptonshire

Kelly A Drake, Andrew Billington and Caroline Ellis

3Consultancy

Contents   Page

Executive Summary

A Northamptonshire-wide partnership was formed in February 2003 to address issues related to homophobic bullying in schools in the county. The partnership was formed following nationwide government and media focus on bullying in schools, local concerns of a link between the suicide of several young people in Northamptonshire and homophobic bullying, and to forward the stated aims of participating agencies. The partnership consisted of the Northamptonshire County Council Education Department, The Healthy Schools Initiative, Northamptonshire Lesbian Gay & Bisexual Alliance and various agencies within Northampton Borough Council including the Police Hate Crime Unit. The overarching aim of the partnership was to 'ensure that all schools in the County of Northamptonshire have in place policies, procedures, mechanisms and confidence to combat homophobia and homophobic bullying'.

In May 2003 the partnership commissioned *3 Consultancy* to carry out baseline research into the extent and scope of homophobic bullying within schools in Northamptonshire. Three schools volunteered to be part of the research, each school differing in terms of setting and student profile.

The research consisted of a comprehensive student and teacher survey, a student focus group in each school and an 'incident survey' over a two week period. The student survey was conducted amongst Year 9 and Year 10 students. As well as student and teacher perception of the extent and scope of homophobic bullying, the survey aimed to identify levels of knowledge about specific school-based anti-bullying policies and procedures, and views on the schools' response to homophobic bullying.

The research was planned and carried out within a very tight timeframe (June- July 2003). However there was an extremely good response rate to the student survey. 877 completed student surveys were returned from year 9 and 10 students in the three schools.

Key findings

1. 64% of students said they had seen other students being homophobically bullied. Nearly a quarter of witnesses to bullying had witnessed it over thirty times in the previous six months.

2. Over a quarter of student respondents said that they themselves had been homophobically bullied. Of these nearly 20% reported being bullied more than thirty times in the previous six months.

3. Students' immediate responses to witnessing bullying were primarily to 'do nothing' but also to feel 'bad' about doing nothing. Only a minority of students reported bullying to an adult. This is echoed in the responses of those students who reported being bullied, with only 20% having reported it to a teacher or headteacher.

4. When asked what students thought of homophobic bullying, a resounding 65% said they thought it was 'stupid and should be stopped'. However only 13% knew of the existence of any policies or rules in their schools related to homophobic bullying.

5. Sixty nine teacher surveys were returned from all three schools. Nearly three-quarters of the respondents said they had witnessed incidents of homophobic bullying, with the majority reporting having intervened in these incidences. The main reasons for not intervening centred on the regularity and the routine nature of such incidents.

6. Teachers were also asked about the welfare of lesbian and gay students in schools. Nearly half felt such students would experience problems in school related to their sexuality, with a further 30% unsure if they would.

7. The focus groups with students offered a rich seam of information on students' experience of, and attitudes towards, homophobic bullying, both within and outside of schools. From these groups and an analysis of the surveys it was possible to identify some emerging themes running through the research.

8. Students and teachers reported many incidents of 'low level' homophobic bullying, usually involving name-calling, jokes and the routine use of terms such as 'gay' and 'poof' to describe anything that was not liked. This was seen by many students as not harmful or 'just a laugh'. Some teachers saw this as an unpleasant part of 'teen culture'.

9. However, a number of students, particularly those who were frequently the butt of such jokes, reported the negative impact on them of such language. This comment from a student is typical; *"The first couple of times didn't really matter 'cos I think well I'll get over it but if it keeps happening and happening it gets you down"*.

10. Students did report a small number of incidents involving extreme homophobic language and/or violence. A small number of students reported being subjected to repeated and intense bullying,

11. Similarly, a small number of students demonstrated extreme homophobia. This can be evidenced by comments made on the surveys and in the focus groups. Unsurprisingly, many students reported being singled out because they did not adhere to gender stereotypes, although often this was broadly interpreted, as in the case of a young man who was bullied because of his 'long hair'.

12. Many students and teachers wanted homophobic bullying more widely acknowledged both in and out of school. Many asked for more opportunities to discuss homophobic bullying and sexuality issues within school and were keen to see 'something more' done.

13. To this end many students both identified why they thought bullying happens and said they would be keen to get involved in measures to help reduce the incidence. It was notable that some students saw this as an issue that schools alone could not deal with, situated, as it is, in society as a whole. Without knowing it, students had themselves identified the need for a partnership approach as inspired this project.

14. It is important to note that many students and teachers identified policies or systems in place in their schools that aimed to tackle homophobic bullying. Equally, a number of students noted individual members of the teaching staff they would turn to if they had related concerns. Specific lessons or programmes, such as 'Time for You' were noted as being highly effective in helping students and teachers voice concerns and combat bullying. Many students and teachers made practical suggestions on how to build upon the excellent work already taking place, such as the removal of all homophobic graffiti or extending lesson times for PSHE. The development of clear whole-school strategies 'with teeth' could bring this work together and give it drive and direction. Furthermore proper resourcing, perhaps in the form of training or teacher resources is also key to the development of future work to effectively combat homophobic bullying

15. The research report identifies a range of key recommendations to counter homophobic bullying, many of which were identified and voiced by the students and staff themselves. These can be summed up briefly as follows:

? **Development of strategies to challenge the widespread usage and 'normalisation' of homophobic language and bullying in the school setting**

? **Continued development of strategies and policies to challenge homophobic bullying and enhance the overall 'well-being' of the whole school community**

? **Creation of a 'tool-kit' of resources and training opportunities for teachers including case studies, scenario's and policies to directly aid and support teachers in challenging bullying of this nature**

? **Specific work with governors and parents to raise awareness of the incidence of homophobic bullying and its effects**

? **Curriculum developments which offer increased opportunities for students to discuss and explore issues such as homophobia, sexuality and bullying**

? **County-wide audits and reviews of school policies and procedures**

? **Further cross-county research, work and monitoring to identify positive outcomes of strategies and highlight continuing need for work in this area.**

Kelly A Drake, Andrew Billington and Caroline Ellis

3Consultancy

Section 1 – Background to this report

1.1 A Northamptonshire county-wide agency partnership was formed in February 2003 to take forward a new initiative aimed at tackling homophobic bullying in schools. The overall stated aim of the partnership was as follows:

'To ensure that all Schools in the County of Northamptonshire have in place policies, procedures, mechanisms and confidence to combat homophobia and homophobic bullying'.

The key partners are:

> NCC Education Department
> - ? NIAS
> - ? Healthy Schools/ PSHE
>
> Northamptonshire Lesbian Gay & Bisexual Alliance
> - ? 'Stamp Out Homophobia' Campaign
>
> Northampton Borough Council
> - ? Inter Agency Group Against Harassment-LGB
> - ? Northamptonshire Police – The Hate Crime Unit
> - ? Life Long Learning Unit
> - ? Inclusion and Pupil Support Unit
> - ? Local voluntary agencies; LOWDOWN
> - ? Northamptonshire Connexions Partnership
> - ? University College, Northampton

The partnership was formed as a result of the following:

? A number of young people in the county had committed suicide between 2000-2003 and anecdotal evidence pointed to a possible link with these events and incidents of homophobic bullying within the school setting.

? Increased press and media attention on a national level about bullying in general throughout the UK alerted the key partners to the need to address the issue on a county-wide basis.

? The Northamptonshire LGB Alliance's Manifesto 2002 – 2005 stated in clause 1.9 that a key aim of the organisation's work was 'to undertake projects to campaign and lobby for the equal rights of all lesbian, gay & bisexual individuals and communities, in particular to eradicate homophobic bullying in schools across Northamptonshire. A major area of focus is to be the repeal of Section 28'.

? Government and county wide directives linked to bullying, citizenship and sex and relationship education

Wider linked initiatives and changes to guidance for schools from both the national and regional perspectives dovetail into this project.

The National Healthy School Standard (NHSS) launched in 1999 as part of the Healthy Schools Programme led by the DfES and Department of Health stated that:
> "A healthy school is one that is successful in helping pupils to do their best and build on their achievements. It promotes physical and emotional health by providing

accessible and relevant information and equipping pupils with the skills and attitudes to make informed decisions about their health. A healthy school understands the importance of investing in health to assist in the process of raising levels of pupil achievement and improving standards. It also recognises the need to provide both a physical and social environment that is conductive to learning." (NHSS Guidance 1999).

The Northamptonshire Healthy Schools Award Scheme (NHSAS) is a partnership project between the three Northamptonshire Primary Care Trusts and the local education authority. As part of this county wide scheme (and specifically the 'emotional well-being element 9.4'), schools are under an obligation to develop strategies:

"For both staff and students that deal with all forms of bullying, e.g. racial, gender, sexual orientation, special needs etc." Additionally, the scheme states that "the school must have a supportive attitude for individuals who have been bullied".

In 2002 the National Healthy School Standard ran a number of training sessions for local co-ordinators and disseminated the 'Safe for All' resources to support local healthy schools partnerships. The resources aimed to support county wide partnerships in developing specific targets for addressing homophobic bullying within inequality and inclusion strategies, and to integrate these strategies into the Healthy School Partnership's medium and long term plans. The Northamptonshire co-ordinator attended the training sessions and identified the need for such an approach across the County.

The principles of 'Safe for All' support the whole school approach, as advocated in the NHSS, and support the implementation of the following specific themes within the NHSS: Emotional Health and Well Being (including bullying), Safety, PSHE/Citizenship and Sex and Relationship Education.

New updated 'Safe for All' resources were disseminated to all local programmes during summer 2003.

This project's aims and objectives are in line with the DfES Sex and Relationship Education Guidance (July 2000) which states in section 1.32 that:

"Schools need to be able to deal with homophobic bullying".

The PHSE & Citizenship criteria element 1a.6 states that:

"The programme should aim to enhance self esteem, develop   skills and explore attitudes and values as well as acquire and extend knowledge".

The Equal Opportunities criteria element 8.2 supports this project in asserting that:

"Equal Opportunities should apply in relation to health promotion; stereotypical attitudes and prejudices must be challenged".

1.2 Stated objectives of the Northamptonshire Anti-Homophobic Bullying Partnership

? Establish a base-line position of extent and scope of homophobic bullying across a pilot range of secondary schools through commissioned research

? Establish pilot projects in two or more schools and in particular to look at curriculum issues

? Establish clear guidelines for schools on tackling homophobic bullying

? Develop a 'Stamp Out Homophobic Bullying' Schools Pack with self-reporting forms and other appropriate resources

? Provide training for teachers to increase professional confidence when tackling homophobic bullying in schools and also when delivering sexuality education within the PSHE/Citizenship curriculum

? Ensure all school governors are informed of the need for this important area of work and to ensure that delivery is of the highest possible standard

? To deliver a conference – County based – to inform and engage all schools and educational institutions

? To proactively publicise this to the wider communities within Northamptonshire

Section 2 – Description of this research project

2.1 Background to baseline research on homophobic bullying in schools
A specialist consultancy partnership – *3Consultancy*, was awarded the tender to carry out the baseline research into the extent and scope of homophobic bullying across three diverse schools in the County. The project began in June 2003 with an end date of August 2003.

Three schools were approached by the Healthy Schools Development Advisor and agreed to be part of the research. The three schools are different in terms of setting, (being respectively rural, small town and large town), size, and the socio-economic backgrounds of the students. The town schools also have a much higher percentage of black and minority ethnic students as well as a higher percentage of 'statemented' students.

The schools are not identified by name in this report. The emphasis on confidentiality within the project was critical to enabling students and staff to freely report their experiences and attitudes.

For ease of reporting, where required, the three schools are referred to as either school A, B or C, where required.

2.2 Aims of Research
The project focussed on surveying both teachers and students and had the following aims:

2.2.1 Aims of the research with teachers
- ? To gain a snap-shot of the extent and nature of homophobic bulling as it is occurring in schools as experienced by teachers.
- ? To establish if teachers are aware of the existence of any policies, guidelines or mechanisms in their schools relating to, or attempting to combat homophobia and homophobic bullying.
- ? To establish if teachers are aware of the existence of any policies, guidelines or mechanisms in their schools relating to the welfare of lesbian, gay and bisexual students.
- ? To identify if teachers feel the need to, and are able to challenge homophobic bullying in schools.
- ? To establish if teachers believe lesbian, gay and bisexual students experience problems related to their sexuality in school.

2.2.2 Aims of the research with students
- ? To gain a snap-shot of the extent and nature of homophobic bullying occurring in schools, as experienced by students.
- ? To establish if students are aware of the existence of any policies, guidelines or mechanisms in their schools relating to, or attempting to combat, homophobia and homophobic bullying.
- ? To identify students' awareness of any classroom discussion or lessons relating to homophobic bullying.
- ? To identify students' responses to homophobic bullying.

2.3 Methodology
The consultants undertook the following:

- ? A survey of all teachers in all three schools during July 2003 – surveying teacher experiences and opinions relating to homophobic bullying.
- ? A survey of all students in Years 9 and 10 (age range 13-15 years) in all three schools during July 2003 – surveying student experiences and opinions relating to homophobic bullying.

? A single focus group within each of the three schools, each with 15 students from years 9 and 10 held in July 2003 - to investigate student experiences and opinions relating to homophobic bullying.

? An 'incident survey' of homophobic bullying in the pilot schools during two weeks of July 2003.

In addition the consultants undertook the following work:

? A desk and web review of all completed research and related questionnaires created in similar UK and international work on homophobic bullying in the education sector, including a review of websites on national anti-bullying organisations and initiatives.

? An electronic networking email sent to all identified researchers and colleagues known to have worked on related topics to share information and good practice.

? Initial liaison and discussion with all Heads of PHSE within the pilot schools to discuss the project and outline the key methodologies, deliverables and dates for the research period.

? A detailed definition of homophobic bullying was researched and drafted, to be included in all surveys, focus groups and incident forms. This ensured that all schools were working to the same definition and had a shared understanding of the behaviour that the research aimed to explore and quantify.

Lead teachers for the project were identified in each school. They were required to disseminate and collect the surveys and incident forms and recruit the students for the focus groups. They were given detailed instructions to help ensure confidentiality at all stages of the research process.

It was not compulsory for any teacher or student to take part in the project, and students and staff could opt-out of completing the questionnaires.

The content of the questionnaires and focus groups was developed in line with related guidelines and good practice as stipulated in the Sex and Relationship Education Guidance DfES Ref. 0116/2000, as well as the 'Recognising and Eliminating Bullying' Education Services Guidelines for Northamptonshire Schools, February 2003.

The surveys were developed to capture information on the following:-

? Teacher and student awareness of the existence of any homophobic bullying behaviour.
? The extent of any homophobic bullying since January 2003 as experienced/seen by students and teachers.
? The nature of any homophobic bullying experienced/seen by students and teachers.
? Student and teacher responses to any homophobic bullying and their knowledge of school policy and guidelines in relation to homophobic bullying.

The consultants were not able to formally pilot the surveys or to test out the focus group questions given the extremely tight timeframe within which they had to be developed and administered. This amounted to five weeks from initiation to delivery.

However, the consultants did engage some young people of ages 13 and 14 to read the questionnaires to check that the language was young person friendly, and that the definition of homophobic bullying was comprehensible and appropriate. An external evaluator, who was also a school governor, read the survey and focus group questions and fed back on language, pitch and tone. *3 Consultancy* made changes as a result of these checks.

2.4 The teacher survey
Surveys were distributed by the lead teacher in each school. After being completed by teachers they were returned to the lead teacher and sent on to *3 Consultancy.*

2.5 The student survey
A letter giving information about the project and asking for permission for their children to participate was sent out to all parents and carers of students in years 9 and 10 in all three schools by each Head of PSHE on behalf of the Healthy Schools Development Advisor.

The survey was distributed to all students (where parental/carer permission was granted) during class time or PHSE lessons. The survey was completed in silence and immediately handed back to the teacher.

2.6 The focus groups
The consultants designed a comprehensive list of 'ground rules' (see Appendix 1) for each focus group, to encourage an open and honest discussion of the research topic by students. The ground rules were based on similar used by some of the pilot schools in the delivery of their PHSE curriculum. Ground rules were discussed and explained with the students and outlined at the beginning of each group.

The focus groups were planned and structured to gain further detailed information about homophobic bullying within the school setting, and discussion topics were based solely on the content of the surveys. Each group lasted one hour and each was tape recorded. Teachers were not present, to encourage students to speak freely.

Lead teachers were given instructions to randomly 'select' pupils for participation in the focus groups, however this proved problematic in some cases (see **Section 3**).

2.7 The incident survey
The survey aimed to monitor incidents of homophobic bullying that took place during a set two week period as recorded by the teaching staff. The survey was a short tick box form asking the teacher to stipulate the type(s) of behaviour involved in the incident, the location and details of the incident, as well as a how they responded to the incident and any follow-up.

Section 3 – Key research results

3.1 Student survey

In school A, 306 forms were given out to students by teachers. 44 parents refused permission for their child to complete the survey. 32 surveys were returned blank or spoilt or not returned, the total number of completed surveys being 230.

In school B, 495 forms were given out to students by teachers. 21 parents refused permission for their child to complete the surveys. 172 surveys were returned blank or spoilt or not returned, the total number of completed surveys being 302.

In school C, 537 forms were given out to students by teachers. 32 parents refused permission for their child to complete the survey. 160 surveys were returned blank or spoilt, the total number of completed surveys being 345
Therefore a total of 877 were returned that were appropriate for analysis.

3.1.1 Extent of bullying

A total of 64% (567/877) of respondents said they had, at some time, seen other students being homophobically bullied. A further 13% (110/877) said they were unsure if they had seen homophobic bullying with 22% saying they had not seen other students being homophobically bullied. 1% (5/877) did not respond.

Of those that could identify approximately how often they had seen such bullying in the last six months 47% (262/557) said they had seen it happen two to ten times, with 20% (110/557) saying ten to thirty times and 22% (123/557) saying they had witnessed homophobic bullying happening over thirty times.

When asked if they had ever witnessed teachers homophobically bullying students, 64% (565/877) said no, 18% (161/877) said yes and 17% (146/877) did not know. 1% (7/877) did not respond.

Of those that could say approximately how often they had witnessed teachers bullying in the last six months 71% (111/157) had seen it happen between one and five times, 15% (23/157) had seen it happen between five and ten times with a further 15% (23/157) having seen it happen twenty times or more.

26% (230/877) of respondents said that they themselves had been homophobically bullied. A further 5% (45/877) did not know if they had been bullied whilst 68% (595/877) said they had not. 1% (9/877) did not respond.

Of those that were able to say approximately how many times they had been bullied in the last six months 50% (109/218) said it had happened one to five times, 32% (70/218) said it had happened between five and thirty times, with 18% (40/218) saying it had happened more than thirty times.

27% (235/877) of respondents said that they had homophobically bullied other students in the past. Of those that could approximate how many times they had done this in the last six months 57% (123/216) said they had done so between one and five times, 22% (48/216) said it had happened between five and twenty times with 18% (39/216) saying it had happened over thirty times.

3.1.2 Homophobic graffiti

When asked if they had seen homophobic graffiti in their schools 62% (548/877) said they had, with a further 9% (82/877) being unsure.

3.1.3 Where bullying occurs

3Consultancy   11

The most common places for homophobic bullying to occur in schools, as identified by students, were the classroom, the playground and the toilets.

3.1.4 Responses to bullying
Students were asked how they had responded in the past to seeing another pupils being bullied. Of those who had seen bullying, the most frequently response was 'I did nothing' (204/567), with 'I felt bad about it but did not do or say anything '(143/567), being the next most common response. 'Telling friends' (62/567) came considerable higher up on the list than telling teachers (30/567), parents (20/567) or the Head teacher (9/567).

3.1.5 Responses to being bullied
Students who had been homophobically bullied were also asked how they responded. 33% (76/230) said they had done nothing, although 18% (41/230) had told the bully to stop. 15% (35/230) had told a teacher, 12% (28/230) had told parents and 5% (11/230) had told the headteacher. Only 3% (7/230) had told a youth worker or contacted a helpline.

When asked what pupils thought of homophobic bullying, and permitted to choose as many responses as they thought appropriate (the total responses being 1045), the most popular response (65%) was that it was 'stupid and should be stopped', (682/1045). 21% of the total responses (221/1045) identified it as 'not a problem' or that the respondents did 'not care' what the bullies did. 4% of the total number of responses (40/1045) identified homophobic bullying as 'cool'.

3.1.6 Awareness of anti-homophobic bullying policies and classroom discussion of homophobic bullying
When asked if students knew if their school had any special rules about homophobic bullying, or if the schools had an anti-homophobic bullying policy or reporting policy 58% (509/877) said they did not know, 25% (221/877) said no and 13% (117/877) said yes. 4% did not respond.

When asked about discussion of homophobic bullying in lessons only 30% (264/877) said it had been discussed in PSHE lessons, the rest being unsure or replying in the negative.

Only 12% (108/877) said homophobic bullying had been discussed in lessons other than PSHE.

3.2 Results from teacher survey
A total of 69 teacher surveys were returned from all three schools.

3.2.1 Extent of bullying
Teachers were asked if they were aware of any incidents of homophobic bullying that had taken place in their school. 72% of respondents (50/69) said they were aware of such incidents, 23% were not aware of any incidents, 1% (1/69) was not sure and 3% (2/69) did not respond.

In answer to the question asking teachers if they had witnessed students homophobically bullying other students, 61% (42/69) said they had seen this occurring. Also 19% (13/69) had seen students homophobically bullying teachers. A much smaller number (3/69) had seen teachers homophobically bullying students.

When asked if they had intervened in such bullying when they had seen it taking place the majority, 86% (36/42) said yes. Of those that did not intervene reasons for doing so were varied; the frequency of its occurrence, its routine nature and lack of importance were reasons given for not intervening. Other reasons identified were: lack of confidence, pupils may assuming that the intervening teacher was gay and lack of time.

3.2.2 Where bullying occurs

Teachers stated they had witnessed homophobic bullying occurring in most parts of the school. The most common places they had witnessed it occurring were in the classroom, in the playground and in corridors.

3.2.3 Awareness of anti-homophobic bullying policies
When asked if their schools had any specific anti-homophobic bullying policies or guidelines 36% (25/69) of teachers did not know if any such policies existed.

3.2.4 Teacher views on lesbian, gay and bisexual issues within school
45% (31/69) of teachers felt that lesbian, gay and bisexual pupils were likely to experience problems in school related to their sexuality. A further 30% (21/69) were unsure if they would experience such problems.

19% (13/69) of respondents felt that lesbian, gay and bisexual teachers would experience problems in school related to their sexuality. A further 51% (35/69) were unsure if they would experience such problems.

67% (46/69) did not know of the existence of any guidelines or policies in their school that would on the whole, or in part, make reference to the welfare of lesbian, gay and bisexual students. Only 12% (8/69) of the teachers responding said they knew of the existence of such guidelines.

42% (29/69) of respondents said they had discussed homophobic bullying in their lessons.

3.3 Results from Focus Groups
Despite the consultants' request for a 'random selection' of students to attend the focus groups, this proved problematic for all three schools. Teachers recruited the attendees and naturally wanted the groups to be as dynamic and informative as possible. As such the focus groups contained a 'selected' group of students, some of whom had experienced homophobic bullying, or had demonstrated bullying behaviour, as well as students who they believed to self-identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual or who were questioning their sexuality, and students who had not been homophobically bullied. There was no consistent method used across the schools which inevitably led to three very differing groups (as outlined below). However, even though there was a mix of methods of selection across the schools the themes arising appeared to show a commonality of experience and opinion.

Common to all groups was the request from students that they be included in the development of guidelines and strategies to combat homophobic bullying. Many students volunteered solutions for ending the bullying culture in their schools.

3Consultancy feels that it is important to feed back on the three groups in terms of processes as well as key themes identified from what was said by pupils. The processes themselves shed some light on the extent and nature of homophobic bullying and feed into the overall themes arising from the research.

3.4 Feedback on process and key themes from focus groups

3.4.1 Focus group A – 15 attendees
During the group much of the discussion seemed ineffective and unfocussed characterised by pregnant pauses and sudden changes in direction and content of the discussion**.** Students at first seemed very unwilling to engage with the consultant's questions and declare any definite personal opinions and experiences. It appeared that the group was very 'untrusting' of the confidentiality of the process and unhappy to discuss much of the topic of homophobic bullying. At the end of the session about half of the participants left whilst the other half stayed behind talking to the

consultants. This smaller group then began to talk more informally and openly about their experiences. They identified many pupils in the part of the group that had already left as the 'bullies' and themselves as pupils who had been or were currently being homophobically bullied.

Themes that emerged from the group can be summarised as follows:
- ? The students reported feeling little confidence with the measures the school had in place regarding the reporting of any form of bullying, least of all homophobic. There also seemed to be a lack of knowledge about what measures were in place.
- ? It was felt that teachers were ineffectual at dealing with bullying in general.
- ? Students said they did not feel confident in confiding in the teaching staff – only one teacher in particular was seen as trustworthy.
- ? There seemed to be a strong sense of apathy from students as to whether bullying could ever be totally stopped in school. Students said they did not trust the school 'to deal with it' and/or to safeguard students who are 'different' in any way.
- ? Some students felt that 'heterosexual behaviour' from students was supported whilst homosexual behaviour was 'condemned'.
- ? Some students feel that racist bullying was dealt with effectively and therefore could not understand why homophobic bullying did not receive the same treatment.
- ? Students who had come out as gay at school said they felt that they 'should expect homophobia because of society'.
- ? All students said that most students used the word 'gay' pejoratively in school as an insult and that students would not want to change their language.
- ? The students identified boys as the more usual recipients of homophobic bullying.

3.4.2 Focus group B – 30 attendees
This was the largest focus group. The Head of PSHE in this school had reported that the project had caused much discussion amongst the students in years 9 and 10 and pupils had approached her to ask to be in the focus group.

The discussion in the focus group flowed smoothly, with a wide range of themes and issues arising that are of note to the research project including:
- ? Students identified widespread use of the word 'gay' by all students to describe something negative.
- ? Students felt teachers lacked the confidence to deal with homophobic bullying. Many also felt some teachers were unable to challenge homophobic bullying in the classroom.
- ? Students said that boys suffered more from physical homophobic attacks than girls.
- ? The students said they would like more opportunities to talk about sexuality and relationships in school.
- ? Students discussed the reasons why they felt bullying occurred. Many believed that people who bully are either themselves questioning their sexuality, or are getting bullied at home.
- ? Many students felt that if homophobic bullying and name calling is constant it can have severe and damaging effects on someone's well-being and self-esteem.
- ? A number of students expressed a lack of confidence in the police to deal with severe bullying that had been encountered.
- ? Many students felt that bullies should be punished for their actions, but should also be 'talked to and understood'.
- ? Students felt that classroom discussions about bullying and sexuality should happen in year 10, because this is when homophobic bullying started for them.

3.4.3 Focus group C – 15 attendees
This group contained 15 students amongst whom there was a consistency in feeling and opinion about homophobic bullying and the schools' response to it. Key themes emerging from this group were:

? Many students said that they used the words 'gay' and 'poof' 'when they were 'messing around' and only understood the homophobic context after reading the definition.
? Students said that they had heard teachers use the words 'poof' and 'gay' in certain circumstances and gave the example of it being said to boys during PE and sport. They felt that boys were expected to behave 'like men' and if they did not they were called 'gay' by certain teachers.
? Students reported much homophobic name-calling and 'rumour-mongering' in school but very little physical violence linked to homophobia.
? When discussing the reporting of bullying to teachers students said that it often led to the bullies who have been reported becoming more vicious.
? Students felt there was an inconsistency in approach to dealing with homophobic bullying from teachers. They felt some teachers did not know what to do, others did nothing at all and others did everything they could.
? Students felt there was a lack of clarity in the role of PSHE lessons. Some students remembered having talked about sexuality and homophobic bullying in lessons, others said they were just 'sat in front of a video' with no follow-up discussion.
? Students reported a general lack of knowledge and confidence in any reporting structures in place.

3.5 Results from Incident survey

A total of seven completed incident forms were handed back to the consultants from the three schools. Of the seven incidents reported over the two week period, six forms reported name-calling and verbal abuse as key elements of the incident. The following quotes give some detail of the nature of the incidents reported:

"Teacher had problem in playground, student had taken something, boy pushed teacher and called him a gay bastard."

"Girl shouted 'lesbo' to another girl as she left school."

"Teacher called gay in lesson."

"Student called batty boy by other boy."

"Student ran out of room because he was being called batty boy."

"When completing the survey, one boy made inappropriate jokes."

One of the incidents was reported to the Police due to its level of severity:

"Girl called 'dyke', and followed down town. Further verbal abuse. Fight started, others joined in and kicked the victim."

Section 4 – Emerging themes from the project

4.1 The extent of bullying and notion of 'levels' of bullying.

It appears that many students use language such as 'gay' and 'poof' in their everyday encounters with each other, and view it as a 'normal' and 'acceptable' part of present- day school and youth culture. It is commonly used to describe something or someone who is stupid, silly, bad or 'uncool', and most students reported that they believed that it was not harmful. However, when asked to reflect on this some students admitted that they had not thought about the impact of the words on fellow students/teachers.

> **"People don't mean it horribly they just say "gay" it's just a word nothing horrible is meant by it." (from student survey)**

> **"Being called gay isn't really a big thing at our school. Its usually just fun." (from student survey)**

> **"Not meaning anything bad, just as a laugh although I have never stopped to think how they feel." (from student survey)**

> **"Only playing" written next to admission of bullying on a survey.**

> **"People use the kind of words as a joke. I have never seen someone being physically harassed because of their sexuality. But I have seen a gay person being called abusive names." (from student survey)**

> **On a survey one student admitting to having bullied wrote "I'm sorry!!!"**

> **"You don't even realise you're doing it." (from focus group)**

This verbal bullying behaviour was described and characterised by some teachers as 'low level' homophobia, which seems to imply it is often viewed as a less serious form of bullying which is part of the norm; accepted by many and thus may not necessitate being challenged.

The surveys and focus groups demonstrated that most students seem unaffected by such name-calling. However they also highlighted that a significant minority of students were personally affected by this 'low level' bullying (primarily name calling); some regardless of their perceived, or known sexual orientation.

Others were clearly more affected because perhaps they were lesbian, gay, bisexual, questioning their sexuality, or 'vulnerable' in any other way. Some of these students also receive more homophobic abuse than their classmates because they were identified as 'different' in some way.

> **"The first couple of times didn't really matter 'cos I think well I'll get over it but if it keeps happening and happening it gets you down." (from focus group)**

> **"If someone says it over and over again, you're going to start believing it." (from focus group)**

> **"A lot of people do it using the words loosely not meaning anything by it but it can hurt." (from student survey)**

4.2 Use of extreme homophobic language and/or violence

In addition to the culture of name-calling within the schools, there were some clear examples from the surveys and focus groups of extreme verbal abuse and/or physical violence of a homophobic nature directed at certain individual students.

A small number of students reported being homophobically bullied consistently and maliciously: -

"They call me gay, puff, bent, twat, and queer ... It needs to stop!!!" (from student survey)

"I think verbal abuse can be a lot worse, it makes you feel so depressed." (from focus group)

"Mostly verbal abuse is as bad. It's like, 'sticks and stones can break my bones but words will never hurt you' but that's a load of bollocks. Words really can hurt. If they say it for a long time, you do start believing it yourself and it does really get to you, especially when you're young." (from focus group)

Two boys from the same class wrote: -

" They are twats because they don't know what it feels like…..sometimes it hurt depending what they said." (from student survey)

On one of the student surveys a respondent had written that they felt "upset, quite suicidal" and, in letters large enough to take up the whole of the last page; "STOP the homophobic b***ds please."**

Thus there does seem to be a link between the everyday use of homophobic language and the fact that, on their surveys, some students reported being extremely distressed and feeling suicidal. Being subjected to consistent name-calling may legitimise the bullying and may increase the apathy and hopelessness that some students feel.

Deep seated homophobic attitudes and bullying was reported by students via the surveys, comments below demonstrate this:

"Everyone does it because we all hate gays." (from student survey)

"I don't like gays." (from student survey)

"I love to bully." (from student survey – the same respondent also wrote many homophobic comments on the sheet)

"Many a time I've seen people being homophobically bullied and personally I find it hilarious. I believe they should get what they deserve. Men where (sic) put on this world to reproduce with women, not to knock about with men." (from student survey)

"I don't agree with gays and lesbians its disgusting but I don't make a big deal out of it." (from student survey)

"Serves them right for being gay its disgusting." (from student survey)

"Some of the people who get bullied are people that rub it in your face that there gay and its annoying." (from student survey)

In one school the surveys seemed to identify a 'gang' in the same class, since they wrote similar responses on the surveys: -

> **"If you are homosexual and broadcasting it publicly then it is bound to happen. Adam + Eve not Adam + Steve." (from student survey)**

> **"If homosexuals broadcast their sexuality they deserve it! GOD MADE ADAM + EVE NOT ADAM + STEVE." (from student survey)**

> **"It happens to gays because their gay. I don't agree with it. God made Adam and Eve not Adam and Steve." (from student survey)**

> **"If people flaunt that they are gay or bisexual, people are not going to agree with it and will let you know this. If you say anything about people being gay they take it the wrong way." (from student survey)**

4.3 Who gets bullied

Although many students seem to be the recipients of homophobic 'name-calling' the surveys and focus groups did identify that some students were more 'picked on' than others. Students felt that boys were called names more often than girls. Many students felt that this was as a result of boys having to live up to masculine stereotypes and being called names or abused when they did not. Girls seemed more likely to be homophobically bullied by other girls than by boys.

> **"Boys do mostly get picked on. If you're camp, if you've got a higher pitched voice and it hasn't broken yet. If you're more of a little boy. They expect boys at this age to be all manly, up for a fight. If you're not, you usually get called names and they usually think that you are gay." (from focus group)**

> **"Anyone who looks camp or is gay or admits to being a lesbian gets people laughing and taunting." (from student survey)**

> **"If they say 'you dirty dyke, you dirty dyke' you're gonna think you're wrong and feel disgusting." (from focus group)**

> **"I've heard some of the lads, especially on the rugby team, they say 'Oh don't be such a poof, you're a rugby player, you've got to be harder than this, you're not a mummy's boy, you're not a pussy' and the image of the hard man has come from it." (from focus group)**

> **"Gay is feminine. If you're male and you're gay, you have to have thirty shoes and handbags." (from focus group)**

> **"My friend is gay, he is a boy and he gets bullied all the time." (from student survey)**

Again, students who were perceived as 'different' in some way also reported receiving more homophobic abuse.

> **"Sometimes people are called gay because of stereotypes, what they are wearing, and their hair. I get called gay because I've got long hair." boy (from student survey)**

"People call each others 'gay etc' to try and be cool even though the person they are calling it are (sic) not even gay. They usually do it to people that seem different to them." (from student survey)

4.4 Peer pressure
Some students highlighted the pressure they felt from peers to join in bullying.

"People do it to be 'cool' and use it on more uncool kids and other people laugh so they can get in with the person. Too many people want to be considered cool or popular to stop it or try and stop it." (from student survey)

In addition there were examples from the surveys and focus groups of students not wanting to admit the extent of bullying and ignoring it;

"I don't want to get involved." (from student survey)

"The teachers don't care we don't care so go away!" (from student survey)

4.5 Effects of a rise in awareness of lesbians, gay men and bisexuals
Students reported experiencing a rise in homophobic bullying after lesbian, gay and bisexual issues were portrayed in the media, although for others this could be a positive factor:-

"I properly understood it when I watched Eastenders, when you saw couples. I didn't see anything wrong with it. My Mum and Dad, cos they have a Christian religion, said it's wrong. I could understand it more because the programme looked on it a bit better." (from focus group)

4.6 Pupil response to bullying
Although the majority of students said they were aware of homophobic bullying happening in their school, some felt it was not a problem and some felt it was not damaging in any way for those who were bullied.

"I think bullying happens a lot as in name-calling, ignoring people, friendship groups and I have seen people getting upset because of rumours being spread but there's hardly ever fights." (from focus group)

"Does not happen much but if it does its usually a joke." (from student survey)

However a smaller number of students described their responses as ranging from reciprocal physical violence to isolation to contemplation of suicide.

"When a boy starts on me, they think I'm not going to fight back because I'm gay but they're wrong. If one of them ever hit me, the first thing I would do is smack them back." (from focus group)

"They ganged up on me so I beat one of them up." (from student survey)

"I get bullied and I don't like it!!!" (from student survey)

"It made me feel really upset and not want to come to school......I don't like the attitude in the school towards gay people , I think its discusting (sic) and it should stop." (from student survey)

Bullying made a student feel "sad, unhappy, angry." (from student survey)

"It made me feel upset and angry. And that I wanted somebody to talk to." (from student survey)

Bullying left one student feeling "depressed, down, stressed, annoyed, angry." (from student survey)

"It made me feel unsafe to be at school." (from student survey)

"I see one of my mates get bullied and called "gay" and he is contemplating suicide." (from student survey)

Some students used their surveys to demand that something be done to end the homophobic bullying that happened in their school;

"It should stop + people should get punished more so they know when their in the wrong." (from student survey)

"The school should stop it." (from student survey)

"I think its really stupid…..people who do it are immature." (from student survey)

"It should be stopped……its entirely up to the teachers." (from student survey)

"Some people are open about their sexuality and the immature 'hard ones' feel threatened by it." (from student survey)

"They should punish it more. The 2 girls who beat someone up, I don't think they got a decent enough punishment." (from student survey)

The theme of suffering in silence, apathy and not reporting this type of bullying was apparent within the focus groups and surveys. Students who were different in someway, whether it was because of their fashion, sexual identity/orientation, appearance etc talked about seeking out others 'like them' and looking to their group for help and support. One group of students in a focus group had named themselves and their friends the 'social outcasts', as a way of dealing with this exclusion and difference.

"I feel like telling them 2 shut up but I can't." (from student survey)

"It happens a lot but what's the point of doing this because it's never going to stop!" (from student survey)

As in the survey results, students stated that they rarely reported homophobic bullying to teachers. Many said they preferred on the whole to keep it to themselves. One student who had experienced physical violence and had reported it to the police felt their reporting had not been taken seriously:-

"When I was at primary school, I got shot with a pellet gun coming through my local park and I got the police involved. The police did nothing about it. I was attacked again and had my phone stolen and my Mum phoned the police and they did nothing about it." (from focus group)

None of the students in the focus groups knew about the Hate Crime Unit, or of any specific police initiatives to support victims of hate crime or bullying.

As the surveys show there was a lack of awareness among students surveyed of reporting structures or policies within the school, concerned with homophobic bullying. This may have helped to promote the sense of disbelief that was identified among some students in the schools being able to halt bullying behaviour: -

> **"If bullying does occur, they get away with it cos they just make up stories like 'they did it first'. No one gets into trouble in the end and the teachers get run rings round." (from focus group)**

> **"Teachers hardly do anything about homophobic bullying, its usually people with lots of friends who get away with such bullying, as they can be used as 'witnesses'." (from student survey)**

> **"Teachers use dodgy excuses. We have a bullying policy that covers 'everything' except teachers don't use it…I was bullied for nearly 3 years. I was called names, hit, tripped over and even had tables thrown at me. All the teachers said, though, was 'grow-up' 'ignore it' 'we can't do anything, it would be racist' and 'his parents just split up'. They are excuses and they ought to have sorted it when it first happened. Not 3 years later, when I was scared to go to school." (from student survey)**

4.7 Student participation in developing anti-bullying understanding
Without being prompted by the surveys or focus groups questions, students took the opportunity to share their understanding of why homophobic bullying occurs and make suggestions of how it could be tackled: -

> **"I think most bullies have been bullied. If you've been bullied it makes you feel small so to make you feel big, you want to do it to someone else. It's like a ripple effect because then they'll feel small and then they'll want to feel big so they'll bully someone else. There's like the A, B, C classes for popularity, the A's bully the B's and the B's bully the C's. And then there's people who just get walked all over." (from focus group)**

> **"The people who bully, their parents are not like the best parents, they don't care what their children do, so if they do get kicked out of school for a few days, when they come back they are just the same as normal because their parents haven't done anything about it. They get kicked out the school, the first thing they do is go to a new school and they are exactly the same because their parents just don't care what their children do." (from focus group)**

> **"I think bullies need pity I do. It's a cry for help. If they are bullying someone and being homophobic, it doesn't actually mean they are homophobic but I reckon it's something else." (from focus group)**

> **"I think the people who are bullying …is the one who is gay and he/she is scared so they say someone else is gay." (from student survey)**

> **"People who bully are bullied at home. Their anger is pushed on something else so if they are not bullied at home then it wouldn't happen at school." (from student survey)**

4.8 Inadequate opportunities to discuss homophobic bullying/sexuality
Most students in the focus groups felt that their school's approach to teaching on homophobia, bullying and issues of sexuality was somewhat piecemeal. Students from the same focus group talked about very differing experiences of PHSE and other class teaching.

> **"Basically, we had one lesson in PSHE and they just sat us down to watch a video. They didn't explain anything that was in it. They didn't ask us if we had any questions. We've had one lesson in three years. I don't think the teachers know much about it. They didn't seem that comfortable with it. Because they don't know much about it, they can be embarrassed." (from focus group**

> **"I think it's much better for the students if you can have a discussion because people have their own opinions and quite a lot to offer. Better than just watching a video." (from focus group)**

> **"It should be started at a younger age because we only started learning about sexuality this year (year 10) which is a bit too late." (from focus group)**

> **"They should build up their opinion so that they have a stronger opinion of who they are or how they could react to people who are gay or bi." (from focus group)**

"They should do it when they first start sex education because that's when the bullying starts" (from focus group)

Students talked about needing more information about sexuality and sexual orientation, and suggested that external trainers come into school to deliver work. Many expressed a wish to talk more about sexuality and homophobia and explore the issues in a greater depth.

4.9 Teachers and homophobic bullying
Student opinion ranged from stating that many teachers do all they can to deal with homophobic bullying to recounting experiences of students themselves being the victims of teacher bullying. Many students felt that teachers lacked the confidence or will to deal with homophobic bullying, and thus they in turn did not see any point in reporting homophobic bullying to teachers.

> **"However much people pick on you, you say something to the teachers and eventually give up because they don't do anything about it." (from focus group)**

> **"Teachers don't do anything about it." (from focus group)**

> **"They don't know how to stop it, They don't know what to do." (from focus group)**

> **"I think some teachers just let it happen." (from focus group)**

> **"[*teacher's name*] is always calling people gays and poofs." (from student survey)**

> **"Teachers stopped two girls holding hands." (from focus group)**

> **"When teachers see a girl and a boy together they say 'aahhh' but when its 2 boys or 2 girls they say 'there's a time and a place for that'." (from focus group)**

> **"There are some teachers who use the language but they don't mean it like that." (from focus group)**

"Teachers sometimes bully students and you have no power over that whatsoever, and even if you do tell another person, they just say 'well they're a member of staff, they're my colleague, I don't think they would do that' - and that's a shame because there are staff who bully." (from focus group)

"I don't think teachers set a good example sometimes." (from focus group)

"Some teachers do really help, to take it all the way to the top, to stop bullying and then there's some who'll go 'oh, stop being so petty, stop telling tales'." (from focus group)

"The teachers do want to stop it but they don't know how to." (from focus group)

Students in one focus group gave an account where they felt that the victim of bullying ended up being punished;

"They took the girl out of school who was being bullied and did not get the person who did it – it was just the same when she came back." (from focus group)

4.10 Teachers' own responses to bullying (from teacher surveys)
As well as completing the surveys, many teachers added detailed comments. Like students most teachers identified the widespread use of word 'gay' to describe anything bad: -

"I have only witnessed low level bullying. The pejorative use of 'gay' as a label meaning anything bad or disliked is widespread, often used without any specific reference to sexuality but reinforcing a negative association with homosexuality."

Some noted the 'unthinking' way in which the term is used by students:-

"I have never witnessed children using it to speculate on the sexuality of another person……they have always used it as a catch all derogatory term……Children I have spoken to when asking them to choose a more appropriate word as an insult appear to have never considered that their use of the word 'gay' could be as offensive to gay people as racism is to coloured people."

And that:-

"Their comments can cause a huge amount of stress and upset."

Teachers pointed out that the widespread use of homophobic abuse extended to graffiti and a 'clean up' of such graffiti was an essential part of challenging this abuse: -

"Probably half the chairs in my classroom are vandalised with homophobic comments and I would like to see these cleared up if I am expected to enforce a 'no homophobic comments' rule in my classroom."

Some teachers were not aware of gay students experiencing problems with bullying going on at their school:-

"I have known/taught lesbians and homosexuals at…..They were usually quiet, pleasant individuals who had heterosexual friends and did not have problems with bullying, to my knowledge……"

However a teacher at the same school did identify some students being 'picked on' for being different:-

> **"It's a way of life to describe quieter, less trendy pupils as 'gay'."**

Teachers pointed out the difficulty of addressing homophobic abuse when it is so endemic to youth culture:-

> **"These words have become part of teen culture."**

> **"My school does try to address the problem but homophobic language and attitudes are deeply ingrained into youth culture…..It needs to become a more universal, national + all schools issue."**

Teachers did request support in dealing with the bullying:-

> **"Information on how best to deal with it would be useful."**

Others noted some of the barriers that existed for them in dealing with the problem but the need to draw on peer support:-

> **"Staff seemed scared to address the issue because of Section 28. Head embarrassed at staff asking for help, thus staff don't ask. Some staff deal with/assist others."**

Like the students some staff noted that they had occasionally witnessed a teacher bullying students such as one teacher who:-

> **"Was reluctant to have anything to do with (lesbian and gay students) and would spend time helping others."**

another teacher noted that: -

> **"I feel that too many staff have the 'yuck' attitude (to lesbian and gay students)"**

Another teacher identified the 'rumour mill' in school that can lead to 'name-calling':-

> **"Frequently female members of staff who work together are 'categorised' by students and staff as lesbian. Any male member of staff who demonstrates 'effeminate' traits is disrespected by many pupils."**

The difficulty of addressing the issue with parents was noted:

> **"Parents often cannot cope with any discussion of the sexuality of a child."**

Some teachers had been able to challenge the 'low level' name calling behaviour effectively:

> **"I have continuously corrected pupils when they do this, telling them it's not an appropriate word in this context and they are completely misusing it and could be seen to be offensive by others. Generally, their response to this is good and they haven't done it again."**

Section 5 – Some conclusions and recommendations

5.1 The importance of language
Many students and staff felt that use of words such as 'gay' and 'poof' was a routine and 'normal' part of school and youth culture. This report indicates that consistent and widespread use of such language may impact negatively on the wellbeing of a minority of students who may be targeted more than others, or may be more vulnerable because they are 'different', or both. It is also possible that the acceptance as 'normal' of this use of language may legitimise other forms of homophobic bullying or allow other more damaging abusive behaviour to be 'covered up'.

5.2 Homophobic bullying effects well-being
The findings indicate homophobic bullying may have a detrimental effect on the overall well-being of all members of a school community, either because they have been bullied, or they have witnessed it and not responded to it, or because they have bullied others.

5.3 Power and responsibility of teachers – a key in the whole process of change
Teachers have a leading role in developing a positive anti-bullying culture within school. The findings of this work show a range of responses among teachers to homophobic bullying, from some excellent practice in dealing with bullies though to confusion, and a lack of confidence in developing strategies to deal with it. Many teachers voiced a need for support and help in tackling this issue. It would be useful to develop resources such as case studies, scenarios, policies and specific tool-kits that would directly aid and support teachers in challenging homophobic bullying.

5.4 The importance of developing clear strategies
The research showed that a significant number of students and teachers had problems in knowing how to address the problem of homophobic bullying. Clear understanding of the nature of this type of bullying needs to be developed alongside specific strategies to ensure that students and teachers know what to do if they are unhappy – and that teachers and schools to know what to do in response.

The consultants would recommend that all strategies that are developed to deal with this specific type of behaviour are researched in full, as there are a number of differing and specific issues related to this type of bullying that set it apart from other types of bullying. For example, the levels of confidentiality needed, and ways of dealing with it and informing parents of bullied students and also the parents of students who actually demonstrate bullying behaviour. If such strategies are developed in line with the schools' Equal Opportunities policies then this may help to develop reporting strategies that 'have teeth'.

Any 'whole-school' strategies put in place to combat homophobic bullying need to be based on a consultative top-down and bottom-up process – from the Governors and Head teacher to the students and parents, and vice-versa. Resulting actions and strategies from forums such as the Secondary Heads Meeting and local school Senior Management Teams will work to send out a clear message that these types of behaviour are not tolerated 'from the top', and that it is important to discuss sensitive issues such as these within the school setting. A useful starting place may be to ensure that all school Governors within the county have access to this report.

5.5 Curriculum/teacher development
Students wanted time to talk about experiences and issues related to homophobic bullying and sexuality, and they reported that opportunities to do so were extremely limited or non-existent. One school has a system in place called 'Time for You' which was very favourably commented upon by students, as it provided a safe and confidential space to raise such issues. Given its popularity and success, perhaps the 'Time for You' drop-in facility, or the creation of similar 'safe and confidential spaces' within a school setting may be a useful model to duplicate across the county.

Students felt that 40 minute lesson slots for lessons such as PSHE did not allow enough time to generate useful discussion on subjects such as sex and relationships, sexuality, and bullying. They also voiced a need for more opportunities to develop creative work around the subjects. Use of art and drama was mentioned, as well as the benefits in bringing outsider practitioners in to tackle some of these more complex areas.

In tandem with this, teachers reported their need for accessible resources and training to support them in dealing with such anti-social behaviour within school. Areas such as building personal confidence around tackling this specific issue, assertiveness and classroom strategies and scenario's showing how to challenge such behaviour were mentioned, as well as a professional need to understand the impact of homophobic bullying on students' educational achievements.

Aligned to this, teachers voiced a need to have clarity from Governors and Head teachers about the impact of 'Section 28' of the Local Government Act on teaching practice within the classroom. Some felt that confusion about this statute created an atmosphere of fear where teachers were unsure of their standing should they discuss/challenge homophobia amongst students or other teaching staff.

Since Ofsted is now auditing schools for the effectiveness of generic anti-bullying policies and procedures, it may be useful for Northamptonshire Education Department to take a lead on developing strategies to audit its schools to ensure that schools have the full range of anti-bullying policies and procedures in place.

5.6 Graffiti
A very simple but effective strategy which also came from the teachers was to ensure that all homophobic graffiti be erased from school furniture and premises. Engaging the students in this process may well be a useful and creative means of starting discussion about homophobia and its effects in school.

5.7 Further research and work
This report points to further work needed across the county. A 'cross county approach' to the problem of homophobic bullying would be highly effective in making Northamptonshire schools a 'hub' of good practice. An audit (as mentioned above) of the extent of anti-homophobic bullying policies currently in place across the county would be useful work to ascertain when these had been written, and when they should be reviewed. Longer-term monitoring in this area is critical too, and there is a lack of existing research identifying the effects and outcomes of not only anti-homophobic bullying policies and procedures, but also programmes of work that aim to proactively tackle this issue in schools such as drama, targeted teacher training, student to student peer education etc.

Additional further research will support the continuing development of good practice in Northamptonshire. There is a need for more in-depth research to gain greater detail on the nature of homophobic bullying, perhaps also looking at attitudes. This would help in creating interventions that could challenge homophobia in schools. The effectiveness of such interventions could then be measured. It could also be very useful to research the myriad of successful models of peer-led education and training methods which have been successful in educating young people about prejudice. Since the students were so vociferous about this issue, it would make great sense to involve them in 'being their own solutions'.

Finally, it is important to ensure that any further programmes of work or research planned as a response to this report are adequately resourced and staffed and are backed-up by the co-operation of all parties who have a stake in stamping out this homophobic bullying across Northamptonshire schools.

APPENDIX 1

Ground rules for the Focus groups

- ? No personal comments
- ? No put downs
- ? Listen to each other, try not to interrupt each other
- ? No bullying in the group
- ? 'No blame' policy – explain, if needed by students.
- ? Confidentiality - researchers and pupil's commitment;
    Researchers - if people name names, we will not be naming names, no names in research; tapes will be erased after use (use of tapes for quotes – not linked to individuals).
    Students – what's said here stay's here. You can talk about your own experience (how you felt) but please don't talk about other people or what other people said. Why do you think that's important? Clarify if necessary
- ? Take part
- ? Don't make assumptions about people in the group

APPENDIX 2

Definition of homophobic bullying
After initial research and desk review of related literature the consultants drafted a definition of homophobic bullying that was purposefully broad. Existing documents were used to create an overarching definition that would be understandable to young people, that stipulated agreed and researched forms of homophobic bullying behaviour and which encompassed bullying that was verbal as well as physical. The consultants used this definition to capture the full extent of bullying behaviour happening within the school setting – from what became to be known as 'low level' bullying to bullying of a more serious/dangerous nature. Specific attention was given to previous work completed by:

?   The Bolton Homophobic Bullying Forum
?   Anti-Bullying Project Policy Working Group 2002 – Brighton and Hove Council
?   'Recognising and Eliminating Bullying' Education Services Guidelines for Northamptonshire Schools Feb 2003

Description of homophobic bullying used in the research

'Homophobic bullying is a particular type of bullying. It can be calling someone names, or teasing someone in a nasty way. The person doing it may use words like poof, gay, queer, faggot, bent and lots of other words that are usually used to describe someone who is lesbian, gay or bisexual. These words are used as a way of putting people down and making people feel bad. These words may also be being used to describe something people feel negative about and may not be aimed at anyone in particular.

The person doing it may also make fun of someone or spread rumours about them. They may say things like "He's gay – he likes touching men", or "he looks like a girl" if they are talking about a boy. They may say things like "she's a lezzie" or "she looks like a bloke" if they are talking about a girl. They may also write things like this as graffiti on the walls, desks or elsewhere in schools.

The person doing the homophobic bullying may also punch, kick, push and hurt other people while calling them names. Again they will be calling them names like poof, gay, queer, faggot and bent. They may also steal or damage other people's property. The person doing this may say they are doing it because the other person is gay, lesbian or bisexual. The person doing the bullying may also ignore the other boy or girl, get other people to ignore them or refuse to work with them. They may leave them out of activities and generally make them feel bad.
Pupils at school do not have to be gay, lesbian or bisexual to experience homophobic bullying. This type of bullying can happen between young people, between young people and adults, and between adults.'