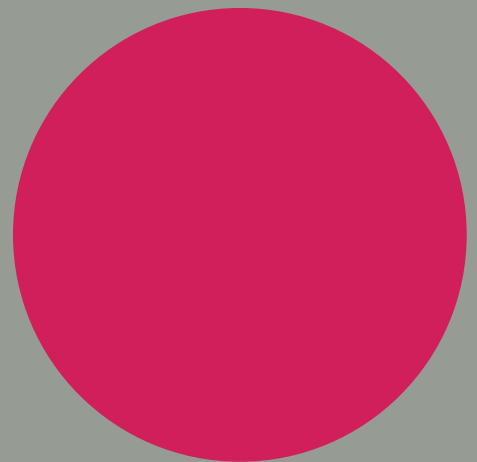


Homophobic  
bullying  
in Britain's  
schools



# THE TEACHERS' REPORT





# Homophobic bullying in Britain's schools

by April Guasp

# Introduction



In July last year, 18-year old Michael Causer from Liverpool was kicked to death by a young man shouting homophobic abuse. That young man had not been educated in the 1970s, or the 1980s, or the 1990s. He had attended a British secondary school during the last five years.

Stonewall's research, *The School Report*, a 2007 survey of more than 1100 secondary school pupils growing up gay, revealed that two thirds are victims of homophobic bullying in schools. Our latest groundbreaking study, the largest such survey of secondary and primary school teachers ever conducted, reveals an even more disturbing picture.

The effects of homophobic bullying reach far beyond the 150,000 young gay people we already knew to be affected.

This YouGov polling demonstrates that nine in ten secondary school teachers and more than two in five primary school teachers have witnessed children being subjected to homophobic bullying in their schools. And it's not only gay young people who are affected. Teachers reveal that boys who are academic, girls who play sports, young people with gay parents, friends or family members, and young people merely perceived to be gay are all victims of homophobic bullying.

Teachers say the vast majority of homophobic incidents go unreported by pupils and that they themselves are not confident in providing support to gay pupils or providing information, support and advice on lesbian and gay issues. Just as alarming for a problem that appears to be almost endemic in schools, nine in ten teachers say they have never received training on how to prevent and respond to homophobic bullying.

Homophobic bullying in Britain's schools damages the life chances of young lesbian and gay people forever. While it continues to go unaddressed in so many schools it also validates the prejudice of others, such as the killer of Michael Causer, against gay people too.

Stonewall has a vision of a Britain where one day every child will grow up free from hatred, or prejudice, or fear. Through our Education for All programme, we know that pioneering local authorities, schools and teachers are starting to make a real difference in protecting all young people from homophobic bullying. However, this research demonstrates how much remains to be done.

**Ben Summerskill**  
Chief Executive

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## The study

YouGov surveyed a sample of 2043 teachers and non-teaching staff from primary and secondary schools across Great Britain. The survey asked staff about their experiences of homophobic bullying of pupils in their schools and the inclusion of sexual orientation issues in their classrooms. Eighty per cent of the respondents were teachers. Half of the respondents work in primary schools and half in secondary schools. Ninety per cent work in state schools and eight per cent work in independent or private schools. Twenty three per cent of the respondents work in faith schools. Data have been weighted by school type and teaching / non-teaching staff.

# 1 Summary

**Nine in ten** secondary school teachers and more than **two in five** primary school teachers (44 per cent) say children and young people, regardless of their sexual orientation, currently experience homophobic bullying, name calling or harassment in their schools.

Secondary school teachers say that homophobic bullying is the **second** most frequent form of bullying (happening 'very often' or 'often') after bullying because of weight and **three times** more prevalent than bullying due to religion or ethnicity.

In addition to direct bullying, **95 per cent** of secondary school teachers and **three quarters** of primary school teachers report hearing the phrases 'you're so gay' or 'that's so gay' in their schools. **Eight in ten** secondary school teachers and **two in five** primary school teachers report hearing other insulting homophobic remarks such as 'poof', 'dyke', 'queer' and 'faggot'.

**Nine in ten** teachers and non-teaching staff at secondary and primary schools have never received any specific training on how to prevent and respond to homophobic bullying.

More than a **quarter** of secondary school staff (28 per cent) would not feel confident in supporting a pupil who decided to come out to them as lesbian, gay or bisexual. **Two in five** would not feel confident in providing pupils with information, advice and guidance on lesbian and gay issues.

**Half** of secondary school teachers who are aware of homophobic bullying in their schools say the vast majority of incidents go unreported.

# 2 Key Findings

## Bullying: The teachers' perspective

### In secondary schools

- **Ninety per cent** of secondary school teachers say pupils in their schools are bullied, harassed or called names for being – or perceived to be – lesbian, gay or bisexual and **one in four** say this happens 'often' or 'very often'.
- Secondary school teachers say homophobic bullying is the **second** most frequent form of bullying (happening 'very often' or 'often') after bullying because of weight and **three** times more prevalent than bullying due to religion or ethnicity.
- **Ninety five per cent** of secondary school teachers report hearing 'you're so gay' or 'that's so gay' in their schools with **three in five** hearing such comments 'often' or 'very often'.
- **Eight in ten** secondary school teachers report hearing other homophobic remarks such as 'poof' or 'dyke'.
- **Seventy per cent** of gay pupils experience verbal abuse (*The School Report, Stonewall 2007*) though just over half of secondary school teachers (55 per cent) report being aware of it.
- While **29 per cent** of gay pupils experience physical bullying (*The School Report*), only **eight per cent** of secondary school teachers report being aware that such physical bullying takes place in their schools.
- Lesbian and gay pupils report receiving death threats, having been sexually assaulted or threatened with a weapon, however no secondary school teachers (or in the case of being threatened with a weapon, only **one per cent**) report being aware of any of these forms of homophobic bullying.
- **Half** of secondary school teachers who are aware of homophobic bullying in their schools say the vast majority of incidents go unreported.

### In primary schools

- More than **two in five** primary school teachers (44 per cent) say children experience homophobic bullying in their schools. A variety of reasons are given for this, most of which are unrelated to sexual orientation.
- **One in five** primary school teachers say children experience homophobic verbal abuse in their schools.
- **Two in five** primary school teachers hear children using homophobic language such as 'poof' or 'dyke'.
- **Three quarters** of primary school teachers hear children use expressions such as 'that's so gay' or 'you're so gay'.

## Barriers to tackling homophobic bullying

- **Two in three** secondary school staff and more than **two in five** primary school staff (44 per cent) who hear homophobic language such as 'you're so gay' or 'that's so gay' do not always respond. **One in five** secondary school staff say they rarely or never respond.
- More than **two in five** secondary school teachers (43 per cent) and **three in ten** primary school teachers have heard homophobic language or negative remarks about gay people from other school staff.
- **Two thirds** of secondary school teachers and **three in four** primary school teachers believe homophobic language in broadcast media affects the frequency of homophobic language and homophobic bullying in schools.
- **Nine in ten** teachers and non-teaching staff at primary and secondary schools have not received any specific training on how to tackle homophobic bullying.
- More than **two in five** secondary school teachers (43 per cent) and over **half** of primary school teachers (55 per cent) say their schools do not have a policy that explicitly addresses homophobic bullying.
- Only **two in five** secondary school teachers and less than half of primary school teachers (46 per cent) say their headteacher demonstrates a clear leadership role when it comes to tackling homophobic bullying.
- **Two in five** secondary school teachers say they don't know of any lesbian, gay or bisexual pupils in their school.
- Over **a third** of secondary school teachers (36 per cent) and almost **two thirds** of primary school teachers (63 per cent) have not addressed issues of sexual orientation in their classrooms.
- More than **a quarter** of secondary school staff (28 per cent) say they would not feel confident in supporting a pupil who decided to come out to them as lesbian, gay or bisexual. **Forty per cent** would not feel confident in providing pupils with information, advice and guidance on gay issues.

## When things go well: Teachers' experiences

- **Nine in ten** secondary and primary school teachers believe that school staff have a duty to prevent and respond to homophobic bullying.
- **Nine in ten** secondary and primary school teachers say lesbian and gay issues should be addressed in schools or in specific lessons.
- **Three in four** secondary school teachers and **two thirds** of primary school teachers who have included sexual orientation issues in their classrooms report a positive reaction from their pupils.
- **Ninety five per cent** of secondary school teachers and primary school teachers who have addressed these issues say they would do so again.

# 3 Homophobic bullying: The teachers' perspective

## Prevalence of homophobic bullying in schools

Ninety per cent of secondary school teachers say pupils in their schools are bullied, harassed or called names for being – or perceived to be – lesbian, gay or bisexual.

One in four say this happens 'often' or 'very often'.

Secondary school teachers say that homophobic bullying is the **second most** frequent form of bullying (happening 'very often' or 'often') after bullying because of weight and **three times** more prevalent than bullying due to religion or ethnicity.

**'It always seems to me that homophobia is 100 per cent ingrained into the mentality and language of most teenagers. It's as fashionable as wearing the right trainers. Most teenagers are shocked these days**

**by sexism and racism and are equally shocked when they come up against pro-gay or lesbian views.'**

Ewan, teacher, secondary school (London)

More than **two in five** primary school teachers (44 per cent) say children experience homophobic bullying in their schools. Primary school teachers explain that this occurs for various reasons often unrelated to sexual orientation.

**'My experience in primary schools is that the bullying of this type tends to be a boy thing – directed at boys who are more "feminine" or just weaker or less popular than others, not necessarily homosexual.'**

Julia, teacher, primary school (London)

'I think that the terms "you're gay" or "that's gay" are very commonly used to express dislike or scorn. Usually when challenged about these comments, pupils are either embarrassed or defiant, expressing their views that to be gay is "gross".'

Kim, teacher, secondary school (Yorkshire & the Humber)

# SECONDARY SCHOOLS

## Who experiences homophobic bullying?

Stonewall's 2007 research, *The School Report*, which surveyed 1145 pupils across Great Britain who are lesbian, gay and bisexual about their current experiences at secondary school, revealed that **two thirds** of gay pupils experience homophobic bullying. However, teachers explained that gay pupils are not the only targets for homophobic bullying.

Of secondary school teachers who are aware of homophobic bullying in their schools, **three in four** say pupils who are perceived to be gay are bullied. **Half** say boys who 'act or behave like girls' experience homophobic bullying. **Three in ten** say pupils who are openly lesbian, gay or bisexual are bullied. **Three in ten** say boys who are not into sports and **a quarter** say boys who are academic experience homophobic bullying in their schools. **One in five** say girls who 'act or behave like boys' experience homophobic bullying. **One in ten** say pupils whose parents or carers are gay are bullied, and a similar proportion say pupils who have gay friends or family are bullied.

**'The majority of the anti-gay remarks are directed at students who are (probably) not gay but the remarks are intended as insults to insinuate that they are gay.'**

Anna, librarian, secondary school (West Midlands)

## What homophobic bullying looks like

Over half of secondary school teachers (55 per cent) say they are aware of homophobic verbal abuse in their

schools. More than **two in five** (44 per cent) say homophobic bullying takes the form of malicious gossip. **One in four** say bullied pupils are ignored and isolated. **One in five** secondary school teachers say pupils who experience homophobic bullying are subjected to intimidating looks and a similar proportion say they are subjected to cyberbullying.

**'Usually gay pupils sit together towards the front of the class and abuse can be from a small group of anti-gay pupils rather than between two individual pupils.'** Nicole, teacher, secondary school (East of England)

**'One student was encouraged by outside agencies to come out at the age of 15. Consequently he was severely bullied and ended up leaving the school.'**

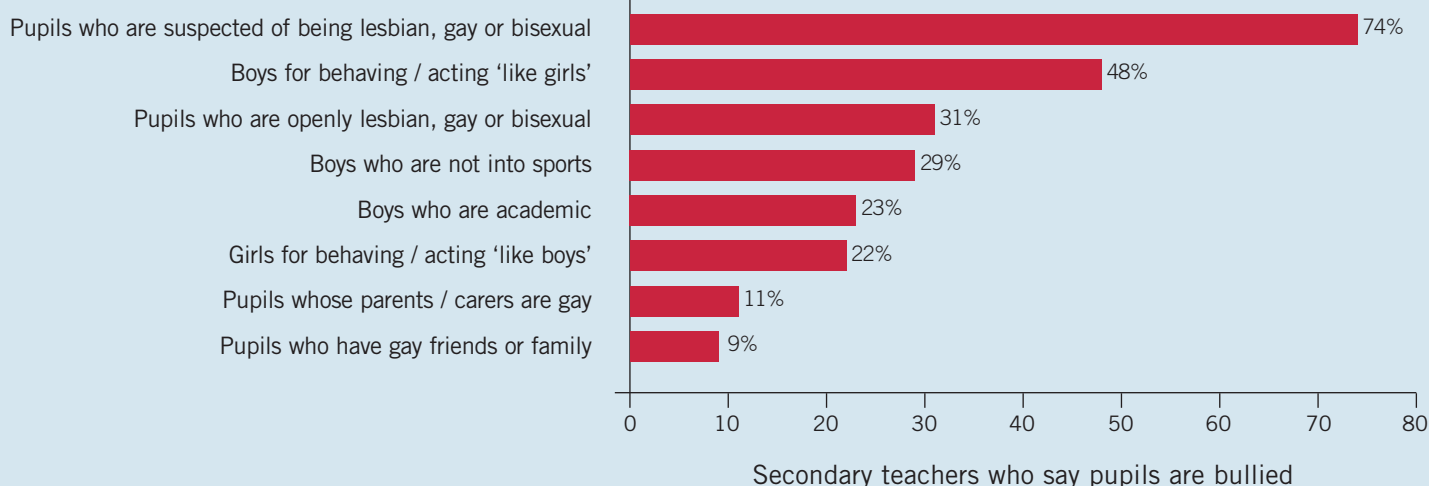
Lawrence, teacher, secondary school (West Midlands)

**'In particular cyberbullying (online messengers etc) are a huge problem related to anti-gay bullying.'**

Amy, teacher, independent secondary school (North West)

**Ninety five per cent** of secondary school teachers report hearing phrases such as 'you're so gay' or 'that's so gay' in their schools with **three in five** hearing such comments 'often' or 'very often'. **Eight in ten** hear other homophobic remarks such as 'poof', 'dyke', 'queer' and 'faggot'. **Half** of secondary school teachers who hear homophobic language say these remarks are made by some or most of the pupils.

## Who experiences homophobic bullying?





**'Use of phrases like "that's so gay" have become commonplace.'** Megan, administrative support, secondary school (East Midlands)

**'I think that the terms "you're gay" or "that's gay" are very commonly used to express dislike or scorn. Usually when challenged about these comments, pupils are either embarrassed or defiant, expressing their views that to be gay is "gross".'** Kim, teacher, secondary school (Yorkshire & the Humber)

**'Most of the comments I hear are of the "you're gay" type, from one pupil to another. When challenged, the pupils say they mean the term to be generally derogatory, but not specifically anti-homosexual. I think most boys and many girls would find it impossible to come out in school as the term is seen as derogatory.'** Sophie, teacher, secondary school (West Midlands)

## What happens to pupils

Stonewall's *The School Report* found that 65 per cent of young lesbian, gay and bisexual pupils experience homophobic bullying. The extent and nature of homophobic bullying observed by teachers differs from that reported by young gay pupils who have been bullied. It appears that teachers fail to see a significant proportion of what is happening to pupils.

Seventy per cent of gay pupils experience verbal abuse (*The School Report*) though just over half of secondary school teachers (55 per cent) report being aware of verbal abuse.

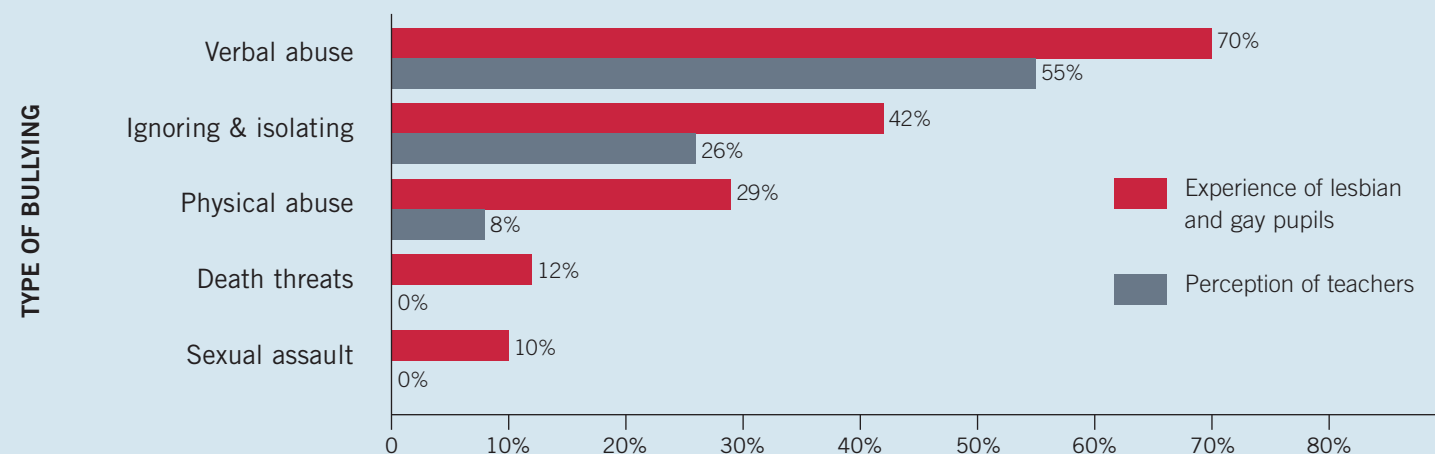
While 29 per cent of gay pupils experience physical bullying (*The School Report*), only eight per cent of secondary school teachers say they are aware of such physical bullying taking place in their schools.

Lesbian and gay pupils report receiving death threats, having been sexually assaulted or having been threatened with a weapon (*The School Report*), however no secondary school teachers (or in the case of being threatened with a weapon, only one per cent) report being aware of any of these forms of homophobic bullying.

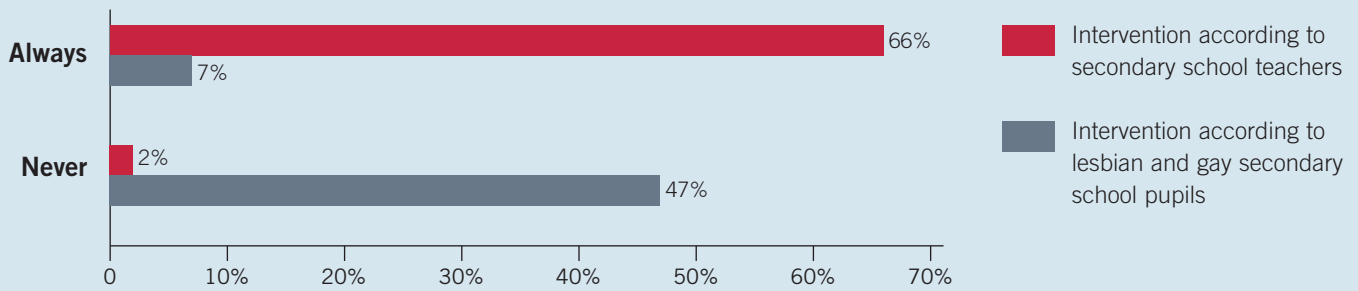
**'A few years ago a boy "came out" at school and as far as I am aware received no negative anti-gay bullying – if anything there were comments made by boys who had a lack of understanding, but nothing was meant maliciously against the boy, just a joke made out of feeling uncomfortable or unsure.'** Erin, teacher, secondary school (South East)

**'I work in a boys-only school. When there was a group of boys who presented as being quite effeminate, other boys teased them but they were accepted as a whole. Some of these boys were gay, some were not. I don't believe any of them were bullied.'** Sam, teacher, secondary school (London)

## Experience of gay pupils vs perception of teachers



## How often do staff intervene when they hear homophobic language?



**'Anti-gay bullying is a very minor issue. I have been aware of only one or two occasions when derogatory comments were addressed to a pupil with serious intent to question or imply gay or bisexual orientation. Most such name-calling is applied fairly randomly; the target today is as likely to be the instigator tomorrow.'** Alan, teacher, secondary school (West Midlands)

Over three quarters of secondary school teachers (78 per cent) who say homophobic bullying occurs in their schools claim they intervene every time they are aware of it. Two thirds who hear homophobic remarks such as 'faggot' or 'dyke' claim they respond every time they hear them and just over a third (37 per cent) who hear comments such as 'you're so gay' or 'that's so gay' claim they respond in every instance.

However, lesbian and gay pupils claim half of school staff never respond to homophobic language and that only seven per cent of staff respond every time they hear homophobic language (*The School Report*).

Of those who are aware of homophobic bullying in their schools, three in five secondary school teachers either think pupils who have experienced bullying are unlikely to report the incident to a teacher or other member of staff, or do not know how likely this is. Half believe the vast majority of incidents are not reported.

Stonewall's *The School Report* found that almost three in five gay pupils (58 per cent) never tell anyone if they are experiencing homophobic bullying.

**'I am not aware of much anti-gay bullying at my school but that does not mean I'm not aware that it may well be happening.'** Hannah, teacher, secondary school (London)

**'I'm aware that a lot more may be going on than I know – I feel we are a supportive school and that students can come to me. Whether they do is a different matter.'** Judy, teacher, secondary school (South East)

'People seem to be very defin  
"proper" boy or a "proper" girl  
It takes very little deviation  
for a person to be singled out

Afshan, teacher, primary school (East Midlands)

# PRIMARY SCHOOLS

More than two in five primary school teachers (44 per cent) say children experience homophobic bullying, name calling or harassment in their schools.

## Who experiences bullying

Three in five primary school teachers who are aware of homophobic bullying in their schools say boys who 'behave or act like girls' are bullied. Two in five say boys who are not into sports are bullied. A quarter say pupils who are perceived to be gay are bullied. One in five say boys who are academic experience homophobic bullying. One in six say girls who 'behave or act like boys' experience homophobic bullying and one in ten say girls who are into sports are bullied. One in ten say pupils whose parents or carers are gay experience homophobic bullying.

**'People seem to be very definite in their ideas of what a "proper" boy or a "proper" girl should do or be interested in. It takes very little deviation from these so called norms for a person to be singled out and picked on.'** Afshan, teacher, primary school (East Midlands)

## What homophobic bullying looks like

One in five primary school teachers say children experience homophobic verbal abuse in their schools.

**'A six year old boy had often showed feminine tendencies, preferring to dress-up in female clothes etc. He would ask to carry my handbag. He always dressed-up as a woman during playtime. He became withdrawn and refused to play with others for fear of name calling from others – this continued into the classroom. His mother was asked into school and the issue was discussed. The boy is very withdrawn, he is wary of older boys. His behaviour has deteriorated as has his school work.'** Abigail, teacher, faith primary school (Wales)

Three quarters of primary school teachers hear 'that's so gay' or 'you're so gay' in school. Two in five primary school teachers hear children making homophobic remarks such as 'poof', 'dyke', 'queer' and 'faggot'.

**'I teach primary age children who use the terms "poof", "queer", etc when name calling.'** Emily, teacher, primary school, (East Midlands)

**'At primary level to call another child gay is currently a term of abuse.'** Jill, teacher, primary school (Yorkshire & the Humber)

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should do or be interested in.  
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and picked on.'

# 4 Barriers to tackling homophobic bullying

## 'It's not homophobia'

There is substantial evidence to indicate that homophobic bullying causes long-term damage to young people. More than **three in five** secondary school teachers (63 per cent) say that homophobic bullying has a negative impact on pupils' school work. **Seven in ten** young gay people who experience homophobic bullying say that it impacts their school work.

**Two in three** secondary school staff and more than **two in five** primary school staff (44 per cent) who hear homophobic language such as 'you're so gay' or 'that's so gay' do not always respond. **One in five** secondary school staff say they rarely or never respond.

**Half** of secondary school teachers who have not always intervened in instances of homophobic language report this was because they did not believe pupils were being homophobic.

**'The expression "gay" in this context has little or nothing to do with sexuality. It is interchangeable with "crap" or "stupid".'** John, teacher, secondary school (West Midlands)

**'It is an expression used widely by pupils, not in the anti-gay sense, instead when things are not right or different.'** Polly, teacher, faith independent secondary school (Scotland)

**'Describing something as gay is not homophobic bullying, but it is suggestive of a negative attachment to the word gay, and as such is similar in level of offence to swearing. One has to pick one's battles as a teacher, and that means occasionally turning a blind eye to inappropriate language in certain contexts. There are no occasions that I would not intervene in cases of anti-gay bullying.'** Bill, teacher, independent secondary school (South West)

Almost **half** (46 per cent) of secondary school teachers who have not always intervened claim that the homophobic language they heard was 'just harmless banter'. **One in six** say homophobic language is 'too common' to intervene in every instance.

**'I think occasions where I have heard the phrase "she's a lezzie" or something similar have been said**

**at some distance from me and did not lead me to believe that anyone was being hurt or upset by what was being said. It is a rare occurrence.'** Juliette, teacher, faith independent secondary school (East of England)

**'The teenager was a bit "girly" and wanted to sit with me at sports day instead of participating. One pupil made a joke of it; I felt I didn't want to create a big issue out of it. At the time it seemed better to let it pass; now I'm not so sure.'** Alexandra, teacher, secondary school (Scotland)

**'The homophobic expression "that's so gay" and others of that type are so commonplace that there is not enough time to challenge every utterance of it.'** Hope, teacher, secondary school (South West)

Over a **third** of primary school teachers (36 per cent) who have not always intervened in instances of homophobic language also report that this is because they did not believe the pupils were being homophobic and a **quarter** felt that the homophobic language they heard was 'just harmless banter'.

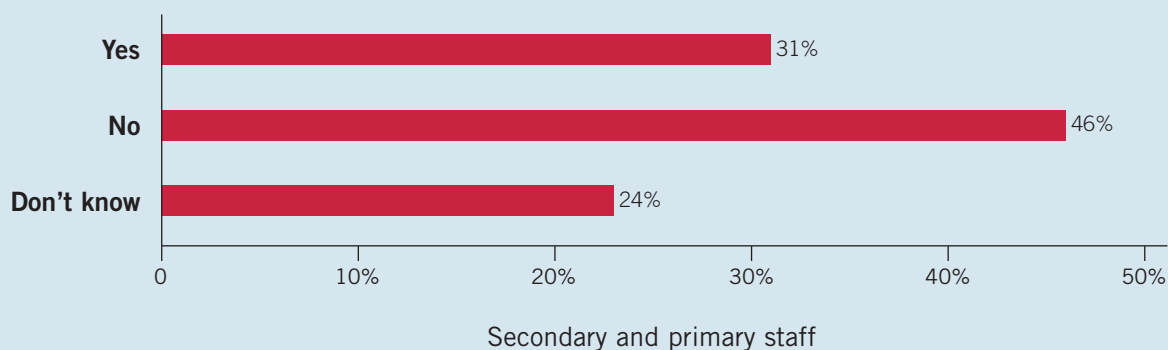
**'Mostly it is not bullying but playground carry-on. This type of banter has been in the playground for years but most kids can shrug it off. Some terms like "poof" and "faggot" are standard insults usually between older boys... the younger children don't know what these terms mean.'** Molly, midday assistant, primary school (Scotland)

**'Most young children experiment with language and use it for effect or as exploration of what may and may not be permitted. We come down hard on malicious behaviour, but let good-natured banter pass, so long as the recipient is not unhappy about it.'** Stephen, teacher, faith primary school (West Midlands)

**'Children use it as an insult but don't know what it means. In similar vein I have heard pupils use the term "spaz" – I have even heard white Anglo-Saxon children of six or seven years of age call each other "Paki"!' Sue, headteacher, primary school (South West)**

**'With primary schools, I have found no actual anti-gay bullying. The children call each other names or say**

## Does your school have policies that explicitly address anti-gay bullying?



**someone is gay usually just to upset them.'**

Lisa, teacher, primary school (West Midlands)

**'If I dealt with all misbehaviour I would never get my job done – tactical ignoring and moving a situation on by distraction often neutralises it.'**

Sian, teacher, primary school (Wales)

### Homophobic staff

More than two in five secondary school teachers (43 per cent) and three in ten primary school teachers have heard homophobic language or negative remarks about gay people from other school staff. As *The School Report* revealed, half of gay pupils have heard homophobic remarks from teachers or other school staff and 30 per cent report that adults have been responsible for incidents of homophobic bullying in their schools.

**'As a Christian I believe that homosexuality is wrong. I believe that this molycoddling of so-called gays is wrong. I have every confidence that as a teacher with over 30 years experience and as a head of year, I could discuss issues with girls who claim to be gay but I would probably not be very sympathetic.'**

Shannon, teacher, grammar school (East of England)

**'I teach PSHE (sex and relationships education), so it's a regular theme. Homosexuality is a deviant behaviour, probably with a strong genetic component. A significant number (ten per cent) of teenagers experience a fleeting brush with homosexuality, but then revert to normal sexual behaviour for the rest of their lives. With less than one per cent of adults being homosexual, there is no need to keep seeking to promote this aberrant behaviour in schools or anywhere else. Homosexuals are tolerated in society – disliked, but accepted. If you want to be a sexual deviant, fine, in the privacy of your own home and if**

**it's between consenting adults. Just don't do things in public that offend and don't involve children (i.e. have them in the same home).'**

Martin, teacher, faith independent secondary school (West Midlands)

### Anti-bullying policies

More than two in five secondary school teachers (43 per cent) and over half of primary school teachers (55 per cent) say their schools do not have a policy that explicitly addresses homophobic bullying. A quarter of secondary and primary school teachers do not know whether their schools have such a policy. Lesbian and gay pupils report that they are more likely to feel positive about school if their school has explicitly stated that homophobic bullying is against the rules. In schools that have said homophobic bullying is wrong, gay young people are 60 per cent more likely not to have been bullied (*The School Report*).

Of those who do have policies, only half of secondary and primary school teachers say that these policies are publicised and promoted to pupils. Only half of all secondary and primary school staff (53 per cent) agree that they have confidence in their school procedures and policies with regard to tackling homophobic bullying.

### Training

More than nine in ten teachers and non-teaching staff at secondary and primary schools (94 per cent) have not received any specific training on how to tackle homophobic bullying.

**'Staff need to have more training in what is acceptable in the way they deal with gay issues as well as what they should not tolerate.'**

Grace, teacher, secondary school (East Midlands)

**'I think that phrases such as "you're gay" and "that's gay" are now in common use among secondary school**

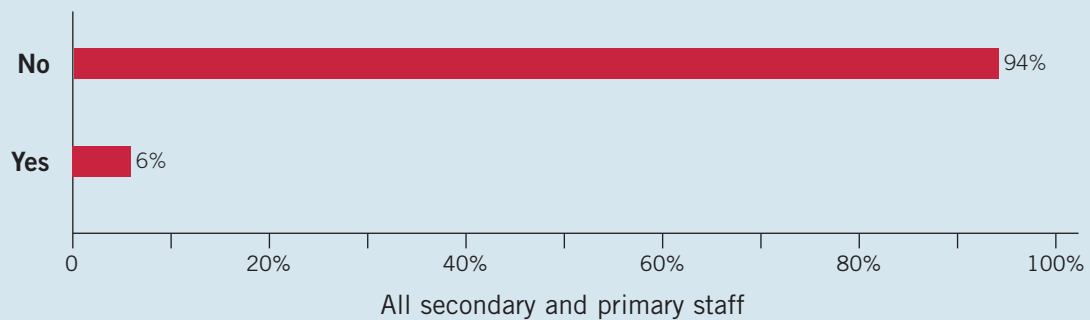
‘As a Christian I believe that homosexuality is wrong. I believe that this mollycoddling of so-called gays is wrong. I have every confidence that as a teacher with over 30 years experience and as a head of year, I could discuss issues with girls who claim to be gay but I would probably not be very sympathetic.’

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‘I teach PSHE (sex and relationships education), so it’s a regular theme. Homosexuality is a deviant behaviour... If you want to be a sexual deviant, fine, in the privacy of your own home and if it’s between consenting adults. Just don’t do things in public that offend.’

Martin, teacher, faith independent secondary school (West Midlands)

## Have you received training on how to tackle homophobic bullying?



**aged pupils as a way of showing displeasure at something. It is often not tackled by many teachers as no training is offered on how to tackle it, and when it is so prevalent, it is not always appropriate for a teacher to stop their lesson to address the phrases being used.'**

Leah, teacher, secondary school (Yorkshire & the Humber)

**'An issue that is getting more common and no training is given!'**

Anne, teacher, faith secondary school (West Midlands)

### Leadership

Only **two in five** secondary school teachers and less than **half** of primary school teachers (46 per cent) say their headteacher demonstrates a clear leadership role when it comes to tackling homophobic bullying. Only a **quarter** of secondary and primary school teachers in England and Wales say their school governors demonstrate a clear leadership role when it comes to tackling homophobic bullying.

**'There needs to be much more work done before homophobia is treated the same way as racism in schools as in the wider community. This is especially true of schools in which students come from cultures, and therefore families, that are homophobic. Teachers need more guidance and support but this needs to come from the headteacher.'**

Siobhan, teacher, secondary school (Yorkshire & the Humber)

**'We need more back up from supervisory staff.'**

Cheryl, administrative support, primary school (West Midlands)

**'It is difficult to address this particular situation when the male headteacher is obviously anti-gay.'**

Abigail, teacher, faith primary school (Wales)

**'Our headteacher and the governors are all bigots. I feel 100 per cent sure the head would not care if anyone suffered from gay bullying. He has made it**

**quite clear how he feels about gays and lesbians and even women.'**

Paul, teacher, secondary school (North East)

**'It is a subject which a lot of leadership teams dismiss or think isn't a problem in their schools. I think that we need to act urgently to prevent these problems.'**

Elizabeth, teacher, secondary school (North West)

**'I do not believe my headteacher to be supportive in the slightest of our gay and lesbian students: he is, in my opinion, as bigoted as the bullies.'**

Daniel, teacher, secondary school (North East)

### Parents

Teachers expressed the importance of having parents involved in efforts to tackle homophobic bullying.

**'It is a difficult area, more so than racist bullying. Education has not changed attitudes in other spheres and so there is a difficulty here as personal and social education comes mainly from home but there are many peer group pressures. Change will be slow and parents must be involved as education in isolation will not be successful.'**

Rebecca, teacher, primary school (Yorkshire & the Humber)

**'Schools can only be effective in any area with the support of the wider community. Families and society have the strongest effect on children's attitudes to life. Schools that try to convey ideas that are not supported by families will not achieve anything other than "lip service" from pupils.'**

Charlotte, teacher, primary school (Scotland)

Some teachers explained that parents can be a barrier to tackling homophobic bullying.

**'I have had mothers withdrawing their kids from**

**classes / outings / school trips because they believed gay kids were included and they didn't want their own kids to be exposed unduly to that experience.'**

Mary, independent secondary school (London)

**'Rural school perspective – a lot of narrow minded bigotry passed on from parents to students. Parents are always the biggest challenge!'**

Tina, teacher, secondary school (South West)

However, half of secondary and primary school teachers feel that they have the support of parents in tackling homophobic bullying. One in five secondary school teachers and one in four primary school teachers who intervene in instances of homophobic language and bullying say they do so because they are confident that they have the support of parents in doing so.

## Religion

Staff in secondary and primary faith schools are only half as likely to say that homophobic bullying is a serious problem in their schools compared to staff in non-faith schools. Two in five staff in faith schools say that homophobic bullying never occurs in their schools. However, gay pupils in faith schools

are more likely to experience homophobic bullying than their peers in non-faith schools. Three quarters of young gay people who attend faith schools have experienced homophobic bullying (*The School Report*).

Some teachers did explain that the religious ethos of their school or the beliefs of their pupils can be a barrier to tackling homophobia or addressing lesbian and gay issues in classrooms.

**'Children need to be taught to value gay relationships. I worry that there may be homophobic staff because my school is Catholic and this may have a negative impact on the children.'** Amelia, teacher, faith primary school (North West)

**'We are a mainly Muslim school and many parents are quite adamant that their child should not receive teaching related to gay issues.'** Katherine, teacher, primary school (Yorkshire & the Humber)

**'As I work in a Catholic school I feel the issue is ignored or actually condemned and I don't think this is right or helpful.'** Ailsa, teacher, faith secondary school (London)

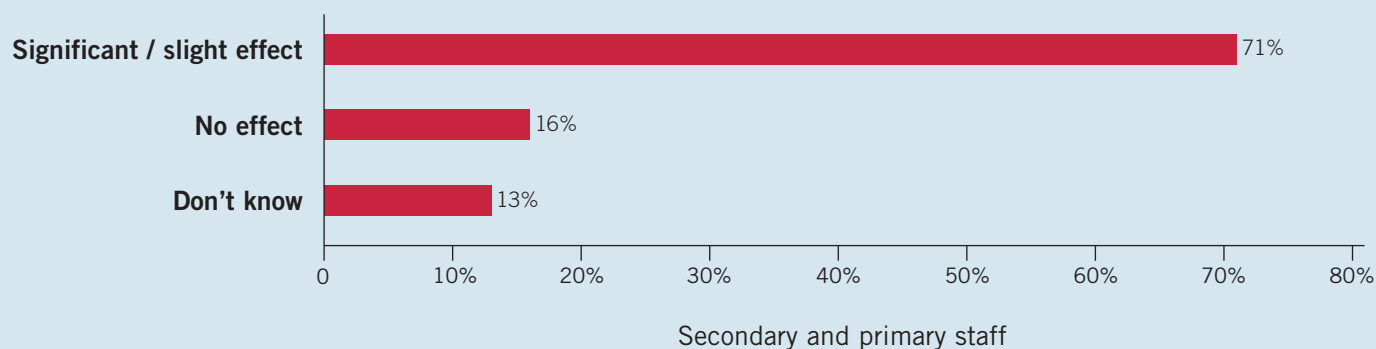
**'It can be difficult to address this because of sensitive cultural issues – many students in our school are against homosexuality “for religious reasons” and**

**'I do not believe my headteacher to be supportive in the slightest of our gay and lesbian students: he is, in my opinion, as bigoted as the bullies.'**

Daniel, teacher, secondary school (North East)



## Does anti-gay language in broadcast media affect the frequency of homophobic language and bullying in schools?



**therefore there is a good deal of hostility when we attempt to address the use of “gay” as a pejorative term.’** Gillian, teacher, secondary school (South East)

**‘Teaching in a school with a predominantly Asian and Somali intake it is very difficult to combat the homophobia which many pupils feel to be an intrinsic part of their religion.’** Wendy, teacher, secondary school (London)

### Media

Two thirds of secondary school teachers and three in four primary school teachers believe homophobic language in broadcast media affects the frequency of homophobic language and homophobic bullying in schools.

**‘Children have misconceptions of meanings and usage. This needs to be addressed, but what is viewed in the media appears to be the main cause of this.’**

Tom, teacher, faith independent primary school (South East)

**‘Media exposure has a negative influence on children especially some of the charts music.’**

Niamh, teacher, primary school (South West)

**‘If anti-gay words or bullying has occurred it has generally been found (through circle-time and pupil interviews) that they do not understand what the words mean but have heard them used as insults by adults or on TV.’**

Olivia, teacher, primary school (North West)

### Including issues of sexual orientation in the classroom

Over a third of secondary school teachers (36 per cent) and almost two thirds of primary school teachers (63 per cent) have not addressed issues of sexual orientation in their

lessons. Seven in ten lesbian and gay pupils have never been taught about lesbian and gay people or seen lesbian and gay issues addressed in class (*The School Report*).

**‘The whole issue is too controversial with many people believing and accepting different things. It can’t be taught as it is a matter of opinion, belief or religion as to whether or not lesbian, gay or bisexual issues are natural (as nature intended) or otherwise.’**

Bridget, teacher, primary school (East Midlands)

**‘I feel that homosexuality can be “learned” as well as something to do with genetics and, in my opinion, I feel that it is not healthy to be focussing on such issues. Some easily-led, attention-seeking children may decide to “try it out” (being gay) and this is something I would not be supportive of for religious reasons.’**

Andy, teacher, primary school (Scotland)

Two in five secondary school teachers and a third of primary school teachers who have not addressed gay issues say this is because it is ‘not relevant’ in their lessons. This is in spite of the fact that more than a third of teachers (35 per cent) know pupils with gay parents or family members.

**‘The children I teach haven’t even reached puberty yet. Let alone started to consider their sexuality beyond basic sex education. I don’t believe in creating an issue where one doesn’t exist.’**

Gwen, teacher, primary school (Wales)

**‘Ours is a small rural primary school. Issues of sexual preference are never a subject for discussion for the children. Issues of anti-gay bullying are not relevant to our children. When children use the remark “he’s so gay” they have no idea what it means.’**

Patrick, teacher, faith primary school (South East)

One in five secondary school teachers and more than

a quarter of primary school teachers (29 per cent) say they would not feel confident in addressing gay issues in the classroom. One in six secondary school teachers and one in four primary school teachers would not feel confident in responding if a pupil were to ask questions regarding gay issues in the classroom.

Almost six years after the repeal of the controversial Section 28 of the Local Government Act 1988 which outlawed the so-called 'promotion' of homosexuality by local authorities (and nine years after the repeal of the Scottish equivalent Clause 2A), teachers reveal a lingering misperception about the legislation. Although it never applied directly to schools, teachers still remain unsure as to whether they are allowed to address gay issues in the classroom.

**'I would want to be following a clear and specific school policy regarding these issues before I addressed them in the classroom to ensure I would not be left open to criticism from school senior management, governors or parents.'** Nat, teacher, faith primary school (East of England)

**'Not sure of the law – I know I am not allowed to promote homosexuality and am not sure what this involves.'** Zoe, teacher, independent primary school (London)

**'It should be dealt with by a specially trained person rather than a class teacher.'** Beya, teacher, primary school (London)

## Supporting gay pupils

More than a quarter of secondary school staff (28 per cent) say they would not feel confident in supporting a pupil who decided to come out to them as lesbian, gay or bisexual and forty per cent would not feel confident in providing information, advice and guidance on gay issues.

**'I am not sure of the legal position of any advice given.'** Andrew, teacher, secondary school (London)

**'We need more information. These kids need to be able to contact support services outside of school as school is only a small part of their daily lives.'**

Morgan, teacher, secondary school (South East)

Although the Government estimates that six per cent of the wider population are gay, two in five secondary school teachers say they don't know any lesbian, gay or bisexual pupils in their school.

'I would want to be following a clear and specific school policy regarding these issues before I addressed them in the classroom to ensure I would not be left open to criticism from school senior management, governors or parents.'

Nat, teacher, faith primary school (East of England)

# 5 When things go well: Secondary school experiences

More than nine in ten secondary school teachers (93 per cent) believe that school staff have a duty to prevent and respond to homophobic bullying.

## Challenging homophobic language

Almost two thirds of secondary school teachers (64 per cent) who have intervened in instances of homophobic language do so because they feel it is important to challenge all use of homophobic language.

**'I feel very strongly that it should be challenged and that sometimes students genuinely don't realise it is offensive until you have spoken to them and made them think about it.'** Grace, teacher, secondary school (East Midlands)

**'If a teacher doesn't intervene when pupils use anti-gay language, it could go further the next time (more specific anti-gay bullying, for example).'**

Jessica, teacher, independent secondary school (Scotland)

Teachers explained how they intervene when pupils make homophobic remarks, even if they feel the intent is not deliberately homophobic, to help pupils to understand the implications of what they are saying.

**'A student used the word gay in a negative way, and we got into a conversation about inappropriate use of language, and how using it like that was offensive to people who were gay. I compared it to racism, and he understood exactly what I was getting at.'**

Hailey, teacher, secondary school (West Midlands)

**'The word faggot was used. So I asked if they would call someone a "Paki" or "black git" to try and get them to see that it is the same.'** Terry, teacher, secondary school (North West)

**'I intervened when a student called the work we were doing "gay". I pointed out that gay was not a term of abuse.'** Emma, teacher, secondary school (South East)

**'I'm very directly challenging of uses of anti-gay language in my classroom. Whenever a pupil calls**

**another pupil gay, I congratulate them for being supportive of their friend's lifestyle choices. When they demur, I ask them what they did mean by the phrase; they usually look suitably embarrassed, knowing at some level that they oughtn't to use such language. They will typically then say something like "I meant he was an idiot". I will then ask them if they believe that homosexuals are idiots. They, of course, will say no, so then I conclude with the admonition that they ought not to use the two words interchangeably as it only makes them look ignorant.'**

Lauren, teacher, faith secondary school (South East)

**'I work with deaf students, some of whom were using the "gay sign" as general winding-up of peers. It was clear they were unaware of exactly what they were signing. I explained why it was offensive, and why it was against our policies.'** Joe, teacher, secondary school (North West)

Teachers also explained how they intervene to tackle comments and bullying when the intent is deliberately homophobic.

**'If pupils express misunderstanding about what it means to be gay, or show an anti-gay attitude, I confront the issue directly with the whole class so that it removes any mystery or secrecy.'**

Ailsa, teacher, faith secondary school (London)

**'In a PSHE lesson where a pupil expressed his distaste towards the gay community, I said that he's entitled to his own opinion but suggested that he needed to widen his perspective, and compared this with other narrow-minded views within society, with examples of racism and sexism.'**

Holly, teacher, secondary school (London)

**'We stopped a mathematics lesson for a full class discussion / lecture on the issue of both the name calling and what the issues were with actually being lesbian, gay or bisexual.'**

Neil, teacher, secondary school (Scotland)

**'In a small group sex education lesson a pupil asked if gay people had sex. I replied that they did. The**

pupil responded with “urggh, that's gross”. I explained that it was no more gross than a heterosexual couple having sex and that as long as it was consensual, both types of sexual relationships were about showing love for another person and were therefore perfectly natural and not gross.’ Leah, teacher, secondary school (Yorkshire & the Humber)

**‘We spoke about how homophobia was the same as racial abuse and is prejudice.’**

Sam, teacher, secondary school (London)

**‘I talked to the kids when they called one of the boys gay because he was a dancer. They realised how talented he was and began to look up to him.’**

Alison, teacher, secondary school (West Midlands)

## Lesbian and gay issues in the classroom

More than nine in ten secondary school teachers (93 per cent) say lesbian and gay issues should be addressed in schools or in specific lessons even though only three in five secondary school teachers say they have addressed gay issues in their classrooms.

**‘It is time for a major initiative to tackle issues, including homophobia, in schools as part of the national curriculum rather than as a whim of each headteacher.’** Yasmin, teacher, secondary school (Yorkshire & the Humber)

Three in five secondary school teachers who have addressed gay issues in class did so because they feel it is ‘important’ to include these issues. A quarter say they did so because they are confident about how to integrate this within their lessons. Teachers explained the ways in which they include gay issues in their classrooms.

**‘During relationship lessons with a Year 10 tutor group we discussed all types of relationships including same-sex civil partnerships.’**

Robert, teacher, secondary school (East Midlands)

**‘I teach English so this does come up. I am careful (when I remember) not to make assumptions about relationships with the students. I discussed Shakespeare's sonnets which are possibly addressed to a young man and the idea of gay relationships in the Renaissance period.’** Heather, teacher, independent secondary school (London)

**‘I teach Film Studies and constantly foreground issues of gender representation; perhaps because the question interests me and I like to challenge the possible prejudices of my students. I deliberately select films that address sexuality, so I teach *My Summer of Love*, *Show Me Love*, *Together*, *Mysterious Skin*, *Victim*, *Sunday Bloody Sunday*... I think the most recent example would be a screening and discussion / analysis of *Mysterious Skin*, but it is a regular feature of my classes and courses.’**

Stan, teacher, secondary school (East Midlands)

**‘In Geography, we discuss issues surrounding discrimination against different groups within society. I use gay / lesbian issues as one of these groups.’**

Darren, teacher, independent secondary school (South East)

**‘I teach Drama and a group were thinking of exploring the idea of a gay relationship as a piece of drama. We discussed how the individuals would feel as young people discovering their sexuality, how they would feel about the response from others and how they think others would respond. The pupils explored this in a very mature way. They decided to go with a different issue but I feel they took a deeper understanding of this with them.’**

Daisy, teacher, secondary school (South East)

**‘I teach English – In teaching texts such as *Two Weeks with the Queen* and *The Colour Purple* issues of sexuality frequently arise. I am confident in discussing these issues and have also discussed them in PSE lessons.’** Kirsten, teacher, secondary school (Scotland)

**‘I have done lessons on equal rights and human rights and always include gay people in my list of those protected by anti-discrimination laws and I always make the case that racism and homophobia are just as bad as each other.’** Hannah, teacher, secondary school (London)

Three in five secondary school teachers who have addressed gay issues in their classrooms did so because pupils brought the issue up themselves. Teachers explained how they responded.

**‘A student openly stated that her mother was bisexual along with her mother's sister. This became a discussion within the group as to what this meant and the student spoke about what this meant to her. I managed the discussion although I didn't need to do much as everyone involved was very sensible in their responses.’** Claire, teacher, secondary school (West Midlands)

‘The word faggot was used. So I asked if they would call someone a “Paki” or “black git” to try and get them to see that it is the same.’

Terry, teacher, secondary school (North West)

‘I work with deaf students, some of whom were using the “gay sign” as general winding-up of peers. It was clear they were unaware of exactly what they were signing. I explained why it was offensive, and why it was against our policies.’

Joe, teacher, secondary school (North West)

**‘I was asked whether I knew any gay people and what are they like? I answered honestly telling them about my friends who are gay. They were interested in what I had to say and this led to further discussions on how you should treat people. The students were very respectful.’** Maya, teacher, secondary school (Yorkshire & the Humber)

**‘Talking about Bram Stoker yesterday a thirteen year old girl pupil said “there was something wrong with his sexuality”. I said, “No, there was something different about his sexuality”, followed by a little reinforcement along the lines of ... it’s not wrong, bad etc – just different.’** Katie, teacher, secondary school (South West)

**‘Student asked a question over whether an historical political figure was gay and this turned into discussion on what are essential qualities for leadership and whether sexuality is relevant.’** Eleanor, teacher, independent secondary school (South East)

**‘They asked me if I thought homosexuality was wrong. I told them it was perfectly normal and that many of my close friends are gay.’** Marie, teacher, secondary school (London)

Stonewall’s *The School Report* found that lesbian and gay pupils who have been taught about gay issues are 13 per cent less likely to experience homophobic bullying and pupils who have been taught in a way that they find positive about gay issues are nearly 60 per cent more likely to feel happy at school.

## Tackling religion and homophobia

Teachers in faith schools explained how they are able to positively tackle gay issues. Teachers in non-faith schools also shared how they address issues surrounding religion and sexual orientation.

**‘It’s a tricky issue as I teach in a Catholic school.’**

**I have to be careful not to openly disagree with the church’s teachings but I can emphasise the need for mutual respect and that everyone is a valued member of the community.’** Pamela, teacher, faith secondary school (Yorkshire & the Humber)

**‘My current school is a strongly Catholic school, with a very positive attitude towards lesbian, gay and bisexual students and their parents, and a strong anti-bullying position on all issues, including sexuality. Pupils are generally sensitive and supportive of one another and several are happy to be openly gay when they move further up the school.’** Lydia, teacher, faith secondary school (Yorkshire & the Humber)

**‘Teaching Religious Education means addressing all kinds of social and moral issues. It is important that students learn to treat others with respect regardless of whether they agree or disagree with their views. I expect my students to be able to discuss sexuality honestly and to listen to what others have to say about personal and religious beliefs. I especially want students to learn empathy – to understand what it feels like to be on the receiving end of abuse of any kind.’** Lynn, teacher, faith independent secondary school (West Midlands)

**‘The matter came up; I discussed the issue in terms of all human beings having differences and similarities, that some people held religious beliefs about homosexual acts, but that those beliefs also included the concepts of compassion. I finished with comments along the lines of homosexuality doesn’t mean that someone should not be treated with the same respect anyone else should receive.’** Louis, teacher, secondary school (London)

Only one in 25 secondary school teachers who have addressed gay issues in their classrooms say they had a negative reaction from students. Three in four report a positive reaction from their pupils.

Ninety five per cent of secondary school teachers who have addressed these issues say they would do so again.

# 6 When things go well: Primary school experiences

Almost nine in ten primary school teachers (87 per cent) believe that school staff have a duty to prevent and respond to homophobic bullying.

## Challenging homophobic language

**‘Some young children use the terminology “you’re so gay” or “it’s so gay” without any understanding of what it means. They have just heard the words used by older siblings and think it is cool... a bit like swearing.’** Jane, headteacher, primary school (West Midlands)

Many primary school teachers suggest that children do not understand the meaning behind their homophobic remarks, however three in five primary school teachers who have intervened in instances of homophobic language say they

do so because they believe it is important to challenge all use of homophobic language, regardless of whether the children understand the meaning behind their remarks.

**‘It is offensive; the children often do not understand what they are saying and as with racism I don’t think it should be tolerated in schools. They use such language when they want to “get” at (bully) someone because they know it is considered unpleasant.’**

Lily, teacher, faith primary school (South East)

Some primary school teachers explained how they tackled casual use of the word gay as a derogatory term across all age groups.

**‘As we are a lower school with children up to age nine, I feel that this is an ideal opportunity to explain**

‘I teach eight and nine year olds. I explained in general terms why the language used was upsetting for the child concerned whose mother is a lesbian.’

David, teacher, primary school (Yorkshire & the Humber)

to any child who makes these comments that they are unacceptable. How I would do this would depend on the child and their level of understanding.'

Saheema, teacher, primary school (East of England)

'A child described his sister as "so gay" and didn't want to write about her. I knew he wasn't being homophobic so addressed it in a light-hearted way and said that there was nothing wrong with her being gay if she was, and perhaps he would like to write about her girlfriend too. This led him to question his use of the word "gay" in a bad way, and how perhaps he should choose a more suitable adjective in future.'

Victoria, teacher, primary school (West Midlands)

'It was in response to a child calling another boy "gay". This happens on a near daily basis, usually when they think I cannot hear. We have discussed it before as a class. On this occasion the remark was made in a "light-hearted" way and so I felt it was important to address why the comment was inappropriate. We discussed why it was wrong to use the word "gay" even as a jokey insult and one pupil compared it to racism. We then thought of alternative adjectives.'

Cerys, teacher, primary school (Wales)

'A child regularly referred to various things as being "gay". He also called another child gay. I spoke to him about the issue and then raised the subject with the rest of the class. We discussed what they felt the word meant and then the feelings related to name calling and how someone who was gay would feel to have that used as a derogatory term against others.'

Rose, teacher, primary school (Scotland)

'A pupil called another pupil "gay" as a general insult. This was immediately pointed out as being inappropriate behaviour – just name-calling is bad enough! When asked if they knew what "gay" meant, that pupil just said "stupid". Another pupil pointed out that it meant being in love with someone of the same-sex, and also pointed out she had a family member who was gay and that she was pleased about that. That was the end of the discussion.'

Eve, teacher, primary school (East of England)

'One boy referred to another boy as "gay" and he was challenged immediately in front of the whole class. His response was to say it meant he was happy but when the incident was repeated he was challenged again, made to write a letter of apology and made

'They need to be shown and taught about it, just like we do other countries, religions etc. Hiding won't make it go away.'

Niamh, teacher, primary school (South West)



**aware that his behaviour was unacceptable to the whole class.'** Tracey, teacher, primary school (North West)

**'I talked openly and honestly with the children about what "being gay" actually meant and discussed why it was not very nice or relevant to use the word gay as an insult.'** Nikky, teacher, primary school (North West)

Some primary school teachers also explained how they tackled more serious incidents of homophobic remarks and bullying.

**'I spoke individually to the child involved and pointed out that insulting someone because of their sexuality is similar to insulting someone because of the colour of their skin.'** Kay, teacher, primary school (Yorkshire & the Humber)

**'When one boy called another boy "gay" I asked if he knew what that meant. He did, to a degree, but was quite explicit in terms of he knew which bits were put where, between two men! I just explained that this kind of verbal abuse would not be tolerated in society, when he grew up. I said that it certainly would not be tolerated in my classroom and he should know that! He knew he had done wrong and apologised to the other child. I told him that I'd be speaking about this incident to his foster carer after school. I did and she supported me fully. They sat him down at home for a long talk.'** Jody, teacher, primary school (South East)

**'When a child said another child was "gay" I explained that one in ten people were gay, meaning that three children in the class would grow up gay. I also explained that there was nothing wrong with being gay – that it is a natural fact of life.'** Caitlen, teacher, faith primary school (South East)

**'I approached it from a "what would you do?" game – the children read different situations and had to decide and discuss what they would do. One was addressing what had been happening (one boy who acts quite "gay" had been ostracised a little and children had started making comments about his behaviour). The children discussed the situation and tried to put themselves in the person's shoes. The comments stopped immediately and have never started again.'** Mia, teacher, faith primary school (London)

**'Sometimes in role-play boys will wear a dress and get called "gay" by other boys or sometimes a boy will show affection to another boy. I always explain that most people like to receive affection and as long as both people feel the same then it is perfectly ok,**

**whoever it is. Regarding the dress wearing, I positively encourage children to try all the clothes available. If boys are rude to each other I point out that there is no difference between a boy choosing to wear a dress and a girl wearing trousers.'**

Janet, teacher, primary school (North West)

**'I teach eight and nine year olds. I explained in general terms why the language used was upsetting for the child concerned whose mother is a lesbian.'**

David, teacher, primary school (Yorkshire & the Humber)

## Lesbian and gay issues in the classroom

Only a quarter of primary school teachers have addressed issues relating to sexual orientation in their classrooms however, nine in ten primary school teachers think lesbian and gay issues should be addressed in schools or in specific lessons.

**'I feel that the younger it is addressed (from age five upwards), the more receptive the children are to believing that other ways of life are acceptable. You don't have to shove it in their faces, just teach them that some people have other ways of life and it is just as normal as the ways of life they are familiar with.'**

Alice, teacher, primary school (London)

**'They need to be shown and taught about it, just like we do other countries, religions etc. Hiding won't make it go away.'** Niamh, teacher, primary school (South West)

**'Pupils with parents or carers in same-sex relationships are often embarrassed to talk about it as they fear they will be bullied or negative comments will be made about their families. If this issue was discussed more openly in school then it would perhaps reduce issues such as this, as other children would hopefully see it not as something freaky or bad.'**

Victoria, teacher, primary school (West Midlands)

**'I do think that it is important for children to have the opportunity to discuss same-sex relationships etc. at primary level. We briefly touch on it when we do sex-education, but I doubt that many teachers go into it in much detail. I also think that it should be pointed out whenever relationships are talked about, so that children see same-sex relationships as just another type of relationship, rather than as something "different".'** Sarah, teacher, primary school (London)

Two thirds of primary school teachers who have addressed these issues in the classroom did so because the children

brought it up. Primary school teachers across all age groups explained how they responded to this.

**‘A child asked what lesbianism was, thinking it was a religion – like Sikhism. I explained that it was when a woman loved another woman and that this was natural.’**

Faye, teacher, primary school (London)

**‘Bearing in mind these children are six, one child was talking about his mum’s new girlfriend and another child attempted to correct him (saying “you mean boyfriend”). We had a very brief discussion about how families could consist of different makeups – e.g. mum / dad, mum / partner of either sex, grandparents etc. This was appropriate for the children’s level of understanding and satisfied the child’s interest.’**

Kiera, teacher, faith primary school (South East)

**‘When asked about people being gay during a sex education lesson in circle-time, I explained homosexuality in terms of loving someone and wanting to be with them – as in, some people find they are attracted to and fall in love with people of the opposite sex; some people are attracted to and fall in love with people of the same-sex.’**

Madeleine, teacher, primary school (North West)

**‘I have had two different children whose parents are lesbian and one of the children chose to talk about his family background. I simply explained to the children that in this society families can be different in many ways and some children may have two mums / dads in the same way that some others have just a mum / dad or live with mum / dad.’**

Amina, teacher, primary school (London)

**‘I teach Reception children (four and five year olds), so it only comes up when they talk about which of their friends they are going to marry when they grow up. Sometimes children say that boys can’t marry boys, and girls can’t marry girls (this comes up when a boy tells me he’ll marry one of his male friends, or girl says she wants to marry one of her female friends). I tell them that they can’t actually marry, but they can have something called a Civil Partnership which is just like being married.’**

Lee, teacher, primary school (South East)

Over half of primary school teachers (54 per cent) who have addressed issues relating to sexual orientation in the

classroom say they did so because they believe it is ‘important’. One in six said they were confident about how to integrate gay issues into their lessons. Primary school teachers explained how they included these issues in their classrooms.

**‘A child in my class has same-sex parents. I talked about it during circle-time with the class.’**

Jaime, teacher, faith independent primary school (North East)

**‘We now address such issues as a matter of course. The use of picture books has been especially useful with younger children.’**

Valerie, teacher, primary school (North East)

**‘It was in response to a very good sex and relationships video which included a female gay couple. The children noted that this was a relationship which did not include a male partner. We discussed the value of an understanding relationship of any kind of pairing.’**

Sue, headteacher, primary school (South West)

**‘During circle-time with Year 6 we looked at language which children used against each other.’**

Dee, headteacher, faith primary school (South West)

**‘It was covered as part of sex and relationships education with Year 5. All forms of teenage / adult relationships were discussed, both in terms of physical and emotional relations.’**

Amanda, teacher, independent primary school (London)

**‘A child said that women and men had to be married to make babies. I commented that women and men don’t need to be married, and that ladies can live with ladies and men with men and still have children.’**

Alisha, teacher, primary school (South East)

**‘We talked about how all families are different and some have two mums / dads.’**

Pele, teacher, primary school (London)

Only three per cent of primary school teachers report that their pupils had a negative reaction to discussing these issues. Two thirds say they had a positive reaction from their pupils.

Ninety five per cent of primary school teachers who have addressed these issues declare that they would do so again.

‘Bearing in mind these children are six, one child was talking about his mum’s new girlfriend and another child attempted to correct him (saying “you mean boyfriend”). We had a very brief discussion about how families could consist of different makeups – e.g. mum / dad, mum / partner of either sex, grandparents etc. This was appropriate for the children’s level of understanding and satisfied the child’s interest.’

Kiera, teacher, faith primary school (South East)

# 7 Recommendations

## 1 Acknowledge and identify the problem

Ninety per cent of secondary school teachers and more than two in five primary school teachers say pupils experience homophobic bullying, name calling or harassment in their schools.

Secondary school teachers say that homophobic bullying is the second most frequent form of bullying (happening 'very often' or 'often') after bullying because of weight and three times more prevalent than bullying to do with religion or ethnicity.

**Schools should acknowledge that homophobic bullying occurs in schools and take appropriate steps to prevent and respond to it by monitoring homophobic bullying incidents and responding to them when they happen.**

## 2 Develop policies and tell young people about them

More than two in five secondary school teachers and over half of primary school teachers say their schools do not have a policy that explicitly addresses homophobic bullying.

Of those who do have policies, only half of secondary and primary school teachers say that these policies are publicised and promoted to pupils.

**Schools' anti-bullying policies should include homophobic bullying. Young people should be involved in the development of these policies, which should be displayed prominently in schools. All staff and young people should be informed of these policies.**

## 3 Promote a positive social environment

Two in three secondary school staff and more than two in five primary school staff (44 per cent) who hear homophobic language such as 'you're so gay' or 'that's so gay' do not always respond. One in five secondary school staff say they rarely or never respond.

Even if a gay pupil has not been bullied, a culture of homophobia has an impact on their sense of belonging at school.

**Schools should ensure staff challenge all use of homophobic language to send a clear message that homophobic language and bullying are unacceptable.**

## 4 Address staff training needs

Nine in ten teachers and non-teaching staff at secondary and primary schools have never received any specific training on how to tackle homophobic bullying.

**Schools should ensure that staff receive training to help them respond to, and prevent, homophobic bullying and to support lesbian, gay and bisexual pupils. Training should include an understanding of homophobic bullying and how it affects young people, as well as practical ways to respond to and prevent homophobic bullying from occurring.**

## 5 Provide information and support

More than one in four secondary school staff would not feel confident in supporting a pupil who decided to come out to them as lesbian, gay or bisexual. Two in five would not feel confident in providing pupils with information, advice and guidance on lesbian and gay issues.

**Schools should ensure that pupils have access to support and information by, for example, making resources available in school libraries and ensuring internet access to safe websites. Schools should also ensure that young people feel comfortable and confident to ask school staff for support and advice.**

**6**  
**Integrate sexual orientation into the curriculum**

Nine in ten secondary and primary school teachers say lesbian and gay issues should be addressed in schools or in specific lessons. However, almost two thirds of primary school teachers (63 per cent) and over a third of secondary school teachers have not addressed these issues in their classrooms.

Schools should integrate sexual orientation into the curriculum in a positive and constructive way which enables all pupils to understand and respect difference and diversity.

**Primary schools provide a range of opportunities to discuss relationships and different families, including the SEAL initiative in England and Wales, and Health & Wellbeing in Scotland. Many other secondary school subjects are appropriate for discussing issues relating to sexual orientation.**

**7**  
**Use outside experience**

More than three in five secondary school teachers (63 per cent) say there is a negative impact on the school work of pupils who experience homophobic bullying.

**Schools should work with external bodies such as Stonewall's Education Champions Programme, gay charities, local youth workers or local authorities who can help schools tackle homophobic bullying and offer support to individuals.**

**8**  
**Encourage role models**

Of those aware of homophobic bullying in their schools, three in five secondary school teachers either think pupils who have experienced bullying are unlikely to report the incident to a teacher or other member of staff, or don't know how likely this is. Half believe the vast majority of incidents go unreported.

**Positive role models help reduce bullying, provide support and make young people feel more confident and comfortable. Schools should ensure that gay members of staff feel comfortable and supported to be open about their sexual orientation. Teachers who are gay are in a strong position to fulfill this role provided they are supported by their schools.**

**9**  
**Don't make assumptions**

Two in five secondary school teachers say they don't know of any lesbian, gay or bisexual pupils in their school.

Of secondary school teachers aware of homophobic bullying, three in ten say boys who don't play sports and one in five teachers say girls who act or behave 'like boys' experience homophobic bullying.

Not all pupils are or will grow up to be heterosexual and not all pupils' parents, carers or family members are heterosexual. Not all those who experience homophobic bullying will be gay.

**Schools should know, where possible, the backgrounds of their students, remembering that everyone and every family is different and that many young people will have gay family members and friends.**

**10**  
**Celebrate achievements**

Only half of all primary and secondary school staff (53 per cent) agree that they have confidence in their school policies with regards to tackling homophobic bullying.

Of those who do have policies, only half of primary and secondary school teachers say that these policies are publicised and promoted to pupils.

**Acknowledge and celebrate progress so that parents, governors, pupils and staff understand and are aware of the progress being made in the school's efforts to tackle homophobia.**

# THE TEACHERS' REPORT

Stonewall's Education Champions Programme provides bespoke support and guidance to local authorities in tackling homophobia and homophobic bullying with their local schools. Local authorities work with Stonewall and each other to establish ways in which they can address homophobic bullying and promote a safe and inclusive learning environment for all young people.

If you would like more information on Stonewall's Education Champions Programme please visit [www.stonewall.org.uk/educationchampions](http://www.stonewall.org.uk/educationchampions)

## **Methodology**

All figures, unless otherwise stated, are from YouGov plc. YouGov surveyed a sample of 2043 teachers and non-teaching staff from primary and secondary schools across Great Britain. Fieldwork was undertaken in November 2008. The survey was conducted using an online interview administered to members of the YouGov plc GB panel of 185,000 individuals who had indicated that they worked in schools. Data have been weighted by school type and teaching / non-teaching staff. The resulting data was analysed and presented by Stonewall. Some figures are presented in summary form rather than percentages and some figures have been rounded to the nearest fraction. Full statistics for references in the report are available on request.

## **References**

*The School Report*, Stonewall (2007) [www.stonewall.org.uk/educationforall](http://www.stonewall.org.uk/educationforall)



# THE TEACHERS' REPORT

'There needs to be much more work done before homophobia is treated the same way as racism in schools as in the wider community. This is especially true of schools in which students come from cultures, and therefore families, that are homophobic. Teachers need more guidance and support but this needs to come from the headteacher.'

Siobhan, teacher, secondary school (Yorkshire & the Humber)

'The homophobic expression "that's so gay" and others of that type are so commonplace that there is not enough time to challenge every utterance.'

Hope, teacher, secondary school (South West)