

INCLUDING LESBIAN, GAY & BISEXUAL STUDENTS IN SCHOOL POLICIES: GUIDELINES FOR PRINCIPALS



National Association of Principals and Deputy Principals
Cumann Náisiunta Priomhoídi agus Priomhoídi Tánaisteacha



Introduction

In recent years there has been greater attention paid to issues related to sexual orientation in second level schools. There is widespread recognition that homophobic bullying is a serious issue with the potential to have very harmful impacts on those who experience it, regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity. There is also recognition that generic name-calling and use of words such as 'gay' as pejorative terms of abuse have become commonplace in many schools.

The National Association of Principals and Deputy Principals (NAPD) has been to the fore in providing information to Principals and school leaders on new developments in this area, including the availability of new resources to support schools to combat the problem.

Why this resource?

In 2009 the Department of Education and Skills and GLEN – Gay and Lesbian Equality Network issued guidance to schools on sexual orientation issues - *Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Students: Guidance for Principals and School Leader*. All second level schools should have received a copy of the guidelines from the Department (These are also available to download from the Department's website).

The guidelines suggest that school policies should expressly include reference to lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) students. To complement the Guidance and to support the recommended inclusion of LGBT students NAPD and GLEN have developed this resource with the cooperation of the Department of Education and Skills.



Why include LGBT students specifically in policy?

The inclusion of specific reference to sexual orientation in school policies has been linked to a reduction in homophobic bullying and harassment.

What is involved?

Providing for the inclusion of LGBT students generally requires a review of existing policies to ensure that they are inclusive of LGBT people and other minority groups, rather than a full rewrite of policies.

What's in this resource?

The following sections of this resource provide guidelines on how LGBT students and issues can be included in the following key policy areas:

- Anti-Bullying Policy
- Code of Behaviour
- Relationships and Sexuality Education Policy
- Staff Development Plan
- Educational Disadvantage Programmes
- Guidance Plan
- Pastoral Care Plan

Anti-Bullying Policy

“Where schools have developed harassment, anti-bullying and other policies that specifically include sexual orientation, students are less likely to report harassment when compared to schools whose policies do not include sexual orientation”

GLSEN (2005) From Teasing to Torment: School Climate in America. Hunt & Jensen (2006) The School Report: The Experiences of young gay people in Britain's Schools

Each school is required to have in place a policy which includes specific measures to deal with bullying behaviour. Inclusion of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) students and issues in the anti-bullying policy will be facilitated by the following suggestions:

Name Homophobic Bullying

- > Schools should make specific reference to homophobic bullying in anti-bullying policies.
- > The school's anti-bullying policy should be linked to the code of behaviour. Unacceptable behaviour that can lead to bullying should be identified and listed. Name-calling and use of gay related words or phrases (e.g. 'those trainers are gay') should be listed under types of unacceptable behaviour that can lead to bullying.
- > Homophobic bullying and harassment should be named as unacceptable behaviour.

Define Bullying and specifically Homophobic Bullying

- > A detailed definition of bullying should be provided.
- > Homophobic bullying should be listed under types of bullying behaviour. Homophobic bullying is bullying that is motivated by a dislike or fear of someone because of the real or perceived lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender identity of the individual being targeted.

Highlight the difference between harassment and bullying

- > It should be noted that while bullying is defined as 'repeated' incidents, one incident of harassment and/or sexual harassment is considered a breach of the Equal Status Acts (2000 and 2004).

Include classroom management approaches

- > The anti-bullying policy may include classroom management approaches to deal with anti-gay name-calling and pejorative use of terms associated with LGBT identity.

Make provision for easy reporting

- > Recognition should be made within the anti-bullying policy of possible difficulties students may experience in reporting incidents of bullying, including homophobic bullying. Consideration of alternative forms of reporting should be made where a student doesn't have to report the incident in person, for example by providing a feedback section on the school's website or an incident box situated in a safe but convenient location.



Code of Behaviour

The code of behaviour is the set of programmes, practices and procedures that together form the school's plan for helping students in the school to behave well and learn well.

The code of behaviour helps the school community to promote the school ethos, relationships, policies, procedures and practices that encourage good behaviour and prevent unacceptable behaviour.

Developing a Code of Behaviour: Guidelines for Schools. NEWB (2008).

Under the Education (Welfare) Act 2000, all schools are required to have in place a Code of Behaviour and this code must be drawn up in accordance with the guidelines of the National Educational Welfare Board (NEWB).

The NEWB guidelines make it clear that each school must have policies to prevent or address bullying and harassment and schools must make clear in their code of behaviour that bullying is unacceptable.

A school's Code of Behaviour must specify amongst other content, the standards of behaviour to be observed by each student attending the school; that standard is underpinned by the value of respect for self and others.

Disrespect towards LGBT people should be named as unacceptable behaviour

- > In outlining what is unacceptable behaviour the Code should clearly name *at a minimum*, disrespect towards those groups protected under the equality legislation and should specify that it is unacceptable to be disrespectful about someone's gender or sexual orientation amongst the other grounds which include religion, age, disability, race, membership of the Traveller Community, family status or civil status.

Anti-gay name-calling is unacceptable behaviour

- > Disrespectful behaviour should be defined to include general name-calling. Provide examples to illustrate, such as using 'gay' as a pejorative term, including instances when it is not directly targeted at any one individual e.g. 'this subject is gay'.

Schools must make clear in their code of behaviour that bullying is unacceptable

- > The list of unacceptable behaviours should include all forms of bullying and harassment.
- > Homophobic bullying should be explicitly named under types of bullying.

Relationships and Sexuality Education Policy

Schools are required to teach all aspects of the Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) programme, including sexual orientation. Schools must also have an RSE policy and are obliged to implement an RSE programme at all levels of post-primary schooling as an integral component of SPHE at junior cycle and as a programme in senior cycle.

Department of Education and Skills recommend that LGBT issues should be included in RSE

- > The Department of Education and Skills template on Relationships and Sexuality Education confirms that the RSE curriculum includes sexual orientation:

The post-primary RSE Curriculum Guidelines include the subject of sexual orientation. There is a lesson on sexual orientation in the RSE Senior Cycle Resource Materials (page 151). RSE training courses delivered by the SPHE Support Service provide teachers with further materials. A school may decide the topic needs to be addressed before Senior Cycle, especially if homophobic bullying is an issue.

The Equal Status Act, 2000 and the Equality Act, 2004 prohibit discrimination across nine grounds, including sexual orientation. Consideration needs to be given to the messages that are conveyed if the subject of homosexuality is not discussed in a clear and open way in schools. However, teachers will need guidance from the policy committee on the parameters within which such a discussion will take place.

LGBT issues may be addressed at each year of RSE

- > It should be noted that most young people discover they are LGBT at a young age, 12 years being the most common age. Therefore addressing LGBT issues should ideally start from first year onwards.
- > As stated above the Department of Education and Skills RSE Curriculum Guidelines note that it may be necessary to address sexual orientation before senior cycle, especially if homophobic bullying is an issue.

Provide examples of appropriate approach and use of language on LGBT issues

- > The policy should state that all aspects of RSE should be taught with the understanding that there will be students who identify as LGBT in the classroom or students who have LGBT people in their families, as parents, siblings or other relatives. Consequently, language should be inclusive to reflect this for example, when teaching RSE teachers should use phrases such as

'this applies to everyone regardless of their sexual orientation'

'most people are attracted to people of the opposite sex, some are attracted to people of the same-sex' 'boyfriends and girlfriends' should be used regardless of the gender composition of the class.

Highlight the school's commitment to increasing capacity on LGBT issues

- > The RSE policy should state the school's commitment to in-service training for RSE teachers and in particular its commitment to training that is aimed at increasing capacity to address LGBT issues and support LGBT students. Prompt questions could include the following:

'Are teachers released to attend RSE training?'

'Do all teachers of SPHE/RSE have access to the SPHE and RSE teaching materials?'

Staff Development Policy

Improvement in schools can happen only with teachers at the centre. Change must focus on teacher growth and development.

(School Development Planning: Guidelines and Resources for Post-Primary Schools, 2001)

State the school's commitment to equality training

- > The staff development policy outlines the schools plans for continuing professional development and has at its core the key aim of improving teaching and learning. The policy should ensure that adequate attention is given to personal and professional development including training in equality related issues, such as LGBT issues and addressing homophobic bullying.
- > The policy might also outline how teachers will be supported to develop their capacity to deal with anti-gay name-calling and pejorative use of terms associated with LGBT identity through effective classroom management strategies.
- > The policy could highlight training opportunities that exist such as that on sexuality and sexual orientation issues delivered by the Relationships and Sexuality Education Support Service and from outside organisations such as LGBT organisations.

Outline opportunities for staff to share learning

- > The policy should outline the schools' commitment to facilitating the sharing of learning experiences and competencies between staff members particularly in relation to potentially sensitive issues such as sexual orientation and gender identity.

Educational Disadvantage Programmes

Educational disadvantage means the denial of equal access to educational opportunities, the tendency to leave education at the first opportunity, and the hindrance of achievement by social and environmental factors.

(Mortimore and Blackstone – Disadvantage and Education, 1982 cited in School Development Planning: Guidelines and Resources for Post-Primary Schools, 2001)

Acknowledge LGBT students as potentially at risk

- > Schools operating under DEIS, the Home School Community Liaison (HSCCL) scheme and the School Completion Programme (SCP) should acknowledge that LGBT students may be at risk of irregular school attendance and early school leaving.

Engage parents on LGBT issues

- > Many young people are very comfortable with their LGBT identity and enjoy the support of their families, they may welcome the opportunity to discuss how this impacts on difficulties at school due to the behaviour of others. Other LGBT people may be at risk of not reaching their educational potential which may be related to their LGBT identity or their perceived LGBT identity. It may be difficult or/and at times inappropriate to raise LGBT issues with the parents of an LGBT individual. However opportunities may arise to do so in a general way when discussing with parents school policy on anti-bullying, substance abuse and code of behaviour.

Build staff capacity on LGBT issues

- > HSCCL and SCP Coordinators should be facilitated to attend LGBT awareness training to develop competence in dealing with LGBT identity and homophobic bullying in the school context and issues related to LGBT identity in the home context, e.g. parents who are LGBT themselves or parents dealing with their child 'coming out'.

Guidance Plan

The school guidance plan describes the school guidance programme and specifies how the guidance needs of students are to be addressed by the Guidance Counsellor and the whole school community.

LGBT students should be included as potentially at risk of early school leaving

- > Given that LGBT young people are at risk of early school leaving they should be identified as a vulnerable group when deciding on target groups for whom resources will be allocated.
Resource allocation could be considered as follows:
 - Reviewing all existing policy to ensure that it adequately addresses LGBT inclusion;
 - Training on LGBT issues for staff, parents and student councils;
 - Provision of information on relevant supports for LGBT young people.

Develop a 'coming out' response for inclusion in the Guidance Plan

- > The Guidance Plan provides an ideal opportunity for the school to address its response when students 'come out' as lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender. The following is an excerpt from *Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Students: Guidance for Principals and School Leaders* published by the Department of Education & Skills and GLEN which has further information on 'coming out'.

A policy can be developed within the School's Guidance Plan that sets out good practice guidelines for staff when responding to a student who 'comes out'. The policy might include:

Identifying relevant resources and supports such as information leaflets and organisations (local and national) that could be of assistance.

- **Identifying key individuals who could be of support to the student** such as the Guidance Counsellor, Chaplain or Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) Coordinator.
- **Consulting with the young person** on how they would like the school to deal with their 'coming out'.
- **Advising staff members on what they should do** if a student tells them he or she is questioning their sexual orientation and might be lesbian, gay or bisexual. This includes a willingness to listen to the student; offering support relative to his/her needs and avoiding assumptions that a student is going through a phase or is too young to make such a discovery.
- **Ensure that the school's Anti-Bullying Policy and the Code of Behaviour are reinforced** through assembly, tutorial and through appropriate spaces on the formal curriculum, e.g. within Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE), Civic, Social and Political Education (CSPE), Religious Education and Guidance.

Refer to existing resources

The National Centre for Guidance in Education has collaborated with GLEN to produce guidelines specifically for Guidance Counsellors in their support role to LGBT and other students. The resource provides suggestions on the Guidance Plan and practical suggestions in working with young people. The resource can be downloaded from the NCGE or GLEN websites.

Pastoral Care Plan

School Pastoral Care is an approach to education which seeks to value and develop the young person at every level. It implies caring for the quality of relationships between all the partners in the school community. It involves the engagement of all school polices, processes and programmes in the development of the appropriate structures, roles and resources to support the development of the emerging adult.

(From the website of Irish Association of Pastoral Care in Education 19/1/11)

Articulate the school's value of the diversity within the school community

- > The pastoral care plan should articulate the schools values with regard to valuing and respecting the diversity of the student community regardless of any aspect of their identity, including sexual orientation and/or gender identity.

Outline the school's commitment to positive communication through training and raising awareness

- > The importance of good relationships within a school is articulated in most Pastoral Care plans. Good relationships are created by building understanding, and positive communication. As such, the pastoral care plan should provide for awareness raising around LGBT issues amongst the wider school community including students, staff, parents and ancillary staff.
- > In addition the pastoral care plan should provide for awareness and professional training for all members of the pastoral care team that would include content on:
 - School experiences of LGBT students;
 - Support for students 'coming out' as LGBT while at school;
 - Understanding the impact of homophobic bullying and anti-gay name-calling on all students;
 - Developing capacity to address all of the above.

State the school's commitment to maintaining good classroom management and support of LGBT students

- > The pastoral care plan can include classroom management approaches to deal with anti-gay name-calling and pejorative use of terms associated with LGBT identity.
- > The pastoral care plan should include a commitment to provide information to students about LGBT positive services and supports, i.e. services that purport to change an individual's LGBT identity have been found to be damaging and ineffective and are not encouraged by the appropriate professional bodies.

Complementary Resources

For a full list of resources and supports refer to the Department/GLEN Guidance.

Department of Education & Science and GLEN. ***Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Students: Guidance for Principals and School Leaders*** available at www.education.ie

National Centre for Guidance in Education and GLEN. ***Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Students: The Role of the Guidance Counsellor*** available at www.ncge.ie and www.glen.ie

Mayock et al. (2009) ***Supporting LGBT Lives: A Study of the Mental Health and Well-Being of LGBT People***. GLEN and BeLonG To. This includes the school experiences of LGBT people. Full report and key findings leaflet available at www.glen.ie

Department of Education & Skills policy templates on ***Anti-Bullying policies, The Guidance Plan and Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE)*** are available at www.education.ie

Department of Education & Science and the Equality Authority. ***Schools and the Equal Status Acts (2nd edition)*** available at www.education.ie and www.equality.ie

'More than a Phase': A Resource Guide for the Inclusion of LGBT Learners in Formal and Non-Formal Education. Local Development Social Inclusion Programme (LDSIP), Pobal. 2006. Available from www.pobal.ie

National Education Welfare Board (NEWB). ***Developing a Code of Behaviour: Guidelines for Schools.*** www.newb.ie

Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) Support service provide RSE materials and training. www.sphe.ie

Growing Up Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual or Transgender: An SPHE Resource. Forthcoming from the RSE Support Service, HSE, GLEN and BeLonG To Youth Service



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Further Information: www.education.ie



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Founded in 1998, **NAPD** represents Principals and Deputy Principals at post-primary level and aims to provide a united voice nationally on issues of common concern. **NAPD** promotes the professional and personal development of principals and deputy principals and is committed to the development of school leadership that is based on philosophical and moral principles as well as professional skills.

Contact **NAPD** at **01 6627025** or email: info@napd.ie



GLEN works to change policy and practice to ensure equality for lesbian, gay and bisexual people in Ireland. A key priority for GLEN is to support the education partners in ensuring that schools are safe, supportive and affirming environments in which young LGB people may benefit from education on an equal footing with their heterosexual peers. GLEN was a 2010 People of the Year Award recipient.

Contact **GLEN** at **01 6728650** or email: education@glen.ie