



MEDIA RELEASE: 11TH JULY 2013

Special Rapporteur on Child Protection highlights homophobic bullying and lack of guardianship for civil partners

Geoffrey Shannon, the Government's Special Rapporteur on Child Protection in his report to Government, released by the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs today, 11th July, highlights the experiences of young lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) young people in schools in Ireland as a child protection matter and recommends the extension of guardianship to civil partners.

“The recommendation that the protection of LGBT young people in schools from bullying be considered a child protection issue is a clear recognition that homophobic and transphobic bullying are serious problems in Irish schools” said Sandra Irwin-Gowran, Director of Education with GLEN.

The Special Rapporteur's report outlines the Irish research that illustrates the difficult experiences of LGBT young people in Irish schools, including that 50% experienced verbal homophobic or transphobic bullying; 25% were physically threatened by their peers; and that 34% heard homophobic comments from their teachers. The research also found a direct correlation between homophobic and transphobic bullying and attempted suicide.

“The Minister and Department of Education also recognise the seriousness of the issue for young LGBT people and recently launched an Action Plan on Bullying which fully integrates measures to tackle the widespread homophobic and transphobic bullying. Full implementation of this plan will improve the lives of LGBT young people in our schools and communities” said Irwin-Gowran.

Schools already have legal obligations to address homophobic and transphobic bullying, and many schools are doing so. However **in many schools there is still a silence around LGBT issues, which creates a climate where such bullying continues unchallenged.**

“We also welcome the recommendation of the Special Rapporteur that further legislation should be introduced compelling schools to have a strong disciplinary code” said Irwin-Gowran. There are strong models discussed in the report, including that from Massachusetts.

Guardianship and Civil Partners:

The Report of the Special Rapporteur on Child Protection also explores the issues of guardianship of children in the context of civil partnership, and recommends that special guardianship rights be extended to civil partners and step parents. The Minister for Justice Alan Shatter is currently preparing a Family Recognition and Children Bill which will address these issues. The Constitutional Convention voted overwhelmingly last April for reform of parenting laws to fully include same-sex headed families.

“A critical and urgent gap in family law is the recognition and protection of lesbian or gay-headed families, highlighted again here by the Special Rapporteur. We welcome the recent announcement by the Minister for Justice that Heads of a Bill will be published shortly, and emphasise again **the urgency of providing protections for the many lesbian and gay headed families already existing in Ireland”** concluded Irwin-Gowran.

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