LGBT Safe & Supportive Schools

Toolkit

Creating schools that are fully inclusive of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Young People

SIX ACTION AREAS

- STAFF ORGANISATION AND DEVELOPMENT
- POLICY AND PLANNING
- DIRECT SUPPORT TO YOUNG PEOPLE
- CURRICULUM
- COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIP
- SAFE AND SUPPORTIVE ENVIRONMENT

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**Creating schools that are fully inclusive
of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Young People**

Michael Barron & Lisa O'Hagan

April 2016

Foreword

Moninne Griffith, Executive Director, BeLonG To Youth Services, April, 2016.

In May 2015 Ireland voted Yes to marriage equality. We sent a message to young lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people and parents that it was safe to come out, that we had changed what it meant to grow up LGBT in Ireland.

However the *LGBTIreland Report*[1] a national study of the mental health and wellbeing of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) people, with a special emphasis on young people, found that all is still not well. Young LGBTI people face considerable barriers to good mental health, including bullying at school, fear of rejection and discrimination, harassment and violence and negative attitudes and stereotypes.

The findings are stark. Compared to the My World National Youth Mental Health Study ,

LGBTI young people in this study had:

- **2 times the level of self-harm**
- **3 times the level of attempted suicide**
- **4 times the level of severe/extremely severe stress, anxiety and depression**

Being LGBT in itself does not increase the risk of poor mental health. It is the experience of being bullied, rejected or harassed because you are LGBT that leads to higher levels of self-harm and attempted suicide. The *LGBTIreland Report* confirmed the correlation between these alarmingly high rates of mental health difficulties and homophobic and transphobic bullying in schools. The researchers recommended inter alia that we as a society protect and support LGBTI children and young people in schools and build the knowledge and skills of professionals and service providers.

The Safe and Supportive Schools model provides a holistic solution to homophobic and transphobic bullying. It has the potential to transform school experience for LGBT young people and all young people throughout Ireland and to save lives. The model was developed and rigorously tested through working with teachers, parents, students and the broader community to build safe, supportive and inclusive schools.

On behalf of BeLonG To and every young LGBT person in school in Ireland now and in years to come, I would like to thank the Health Promotion & Improvement Department - Health and Wellbeing Division (HSE West) for their generous partnership with this ground-breaking project. I would also like to thank Michael Barron, BeLonG To's founding director who co-created this excellent and innovative project with Lisa O'Hagan, HSE. Thank you to Kiran Sarma for his thorough work evaluating the project so we have evidence of the positive impact of Safe and Supportive Schools. A very special thanks to the schools, staff members, parents, youth workers and young people. You are all pioneers of an equal Ireland.

It is my hope that every school in Ireland is supported to implement the Safe and Supportive Schools model so that LGBT young people are empowered to embrace their development and growth confidently. Let's work together to create the Ireland we voted for last May where LGBT people are equally valued, respected and protected.

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Glossary of Terms and Abbreviations

Sexual Orientation	Sexual orientation ranges along a continuum, from exclusive sexual attraction to the opposite sex through to exclusive attraction to the same sex. People can identify their sexual orientation as heterosexual, lesbian, gay or bisexual.
Lesbian	A woman who is physically and emotionally attracted to someone of the same sex.
Gay	A man who is physically and emotionally attracted to someone of the same sex.
Bisexual	A person who is attracted to both people of the same sex and people of the opposite sex.
Gender/Gender Identity	Gender identity is the person's feeling of being male, female, both, a mixture, or neither, which is shown to other people through gender expression (clothes, hairstyles, mannerisms, etc.). It is separate and independent from sexual orientation. Trans people can be lesbian, gay, bi-sexual, straight, pansexual, etc.
Trans	Trans is an umbrella term used to describe people with a gender identity and / or gender expression different to their sex assigned at birth. It may be used to encompass many identities that are outside of a cisgender identity (where a person's gender identity and/or expression is the same as their birth sex i.e. Someone who is identified as male at birth and grows up to identify as a man).
Coming out	Coming out is the process through which an LGBT person accepts their sexual orientation or gender identity as part of their overall identity. It not only refers to the process of self acceptance, but also to the act of sharing this identity with others.
Homophobia/ Homophobic Bullying	Homophobia is a behaviour or belief that discriminates against a person because they are lesbian, gay or bisexual. Homophobic bullying is bullying behaviour directed at a person who is perceived to be lesbian, gay or bisexual.
Transphobia/ Transphobic Bullying	Transphobia is a behaviour or belief that discriminates against a person because they are trans. Transphobic bullying is bullying behaviour directed at a person who is perceived to be trans.
BeLonG To	The national organisation for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Trans (LGBT) young people.
Stand Up!	Stand Up! is Belong To's annual LGBT Awareness Week aimed at creating positive understanding of LGBT young people and their issues. An educational pack for Stand Up! is sent to all schools via the Principal in advance of the week.
DES	Department of Education and Skills
HPS	Health Promoting Schools – an evidence-based approach to promoting the health and wellbeing of the whole school community through the four action areas: Environment (Social and Physical); Policy and Planning; Curriculum and Learning; and Partnerships.
HSE	Health Service Executive
LGBT	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender
LGBTI	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Intersex
RSE	Relationships and Sexuality Education
SPHE	Social, Personal and Health Education

What is the Toolkit and who is it for?

This 'toolkit' for is for Post-Primary staff who want to create safe and supportive schools that are fully inclusive of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) young people. The document outlines a 'Whole-School Community' model with 6 key action areas that can effectively be implemented through strong school leadership and senior management support.

The 'Whole-School Community' model has been jointly developed by BeLonG To and Health Promotion and Improvement (Health and Wellbeing Division - Health Service Executive). It is informed by national and international good practice. It has been intensively piloted in two Donegal Post-Primary schools with positive outcomes. A context of this work in Donegal, along with the pilot study process and results, can be found in the 'LGBT Safe and Supportive Schools Interim Evaluation.' For simplicity and brevity, results have not been included in this document. However, throughout the document there will be references to the full report to highlight significant points.

To provide a context, this document outlines a rationale that highlights the importance of this work from a youth mental health and an educational outcomes perspective. A legislative and policy context has also been included to set the scene for this work within current educational policy.

This toolkit is intended for all staff but is of particular relevance to Boards of Management, Senior Management, Student Support Teams (often referred to as Care Teams or Pastoral Care Teams), Coordinators and teachers of SPHE, and Parents Associations.   In a school where implementation of the toolkit is being considered, *all* staff (teaching and non-teaching) should have an opportunity to review and discuss this document. Everyone in the school community has a role to play in creating safe, supportive and inclusive environments for all students including LGBT students.

How to use the Tookit

It is important to highlight that many schools are already taking action in one or more of the identified key areas. Each of the six key areas of the model has distinct features but all six interlink to provide a whole school-community response; in that way, each area supports the other. Schools working within the Health Promoting School (HPS) concept will be familiar with some of the key areas and HPS would be one way of approaching this piece of work. Indeed, the interim evaluation of the pilot study highlights the benefits of the Health Promoting School approach in involving students in school processes. Student Councils could also play a role in encouraging student input and action.

As a starting point, schools may choose to review their current practices using the accompanying LGBT Safe and Supportive Schools - Rapid Assessment Tool before prioritising further actions.
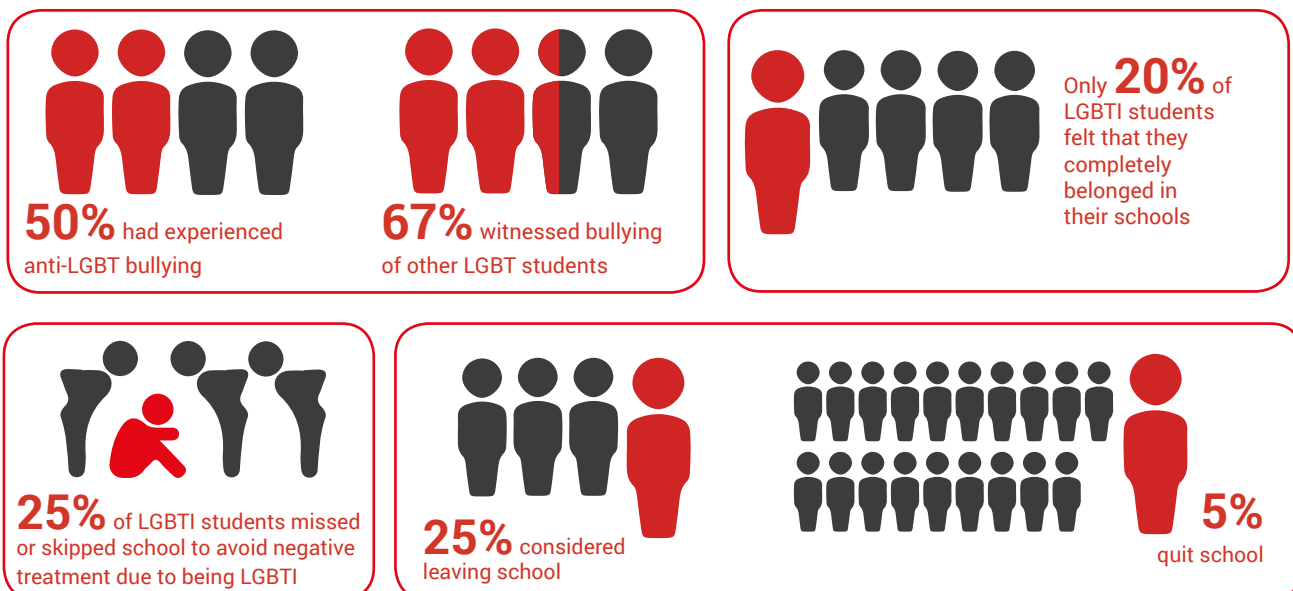
Why is this work important?

In is estimated that between 5 and 10% of the population is Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual or Transgender (LGBT). Irish research indicates that the majority of LGBT young people are aware of their LGBT identity by the age of 12 and throughout their post-primary school experience.[1] Unfortunately, stigma and in particular homophobic bullying means that they often have a very difficult time at school.

Nationally and internationally, homophobic and transphobic bullying has been highlighted as a serious problem. UN Secretary General Ban Ki Moon described homophobic bullying as "*a moral outrage, a grave violation of human rights and a public health crisis…*" and speaking of the devastating impact of homophobia highlighted that "*it is also a loss for the entire human family when promising lives are cut short.*"

Launching BeLonG To's *Stand Up! Don't Stand for Homophobic Bullying* campaign in March 2012, the then Minister for Education and Skills Ruairi Quinn said:

"Eliminating homophobic and transphobic bullying are the shared goals of the Government and of all political parties. We can no longer accept a culture where young people learn of their identity in an unwelcoming, hostile or threatening environment. It is our duty as political leaders, and the duty of school leaders and the whole school community to ensure that we create a supportive and affirming environment for LGBT young people, and for all young people." [2]
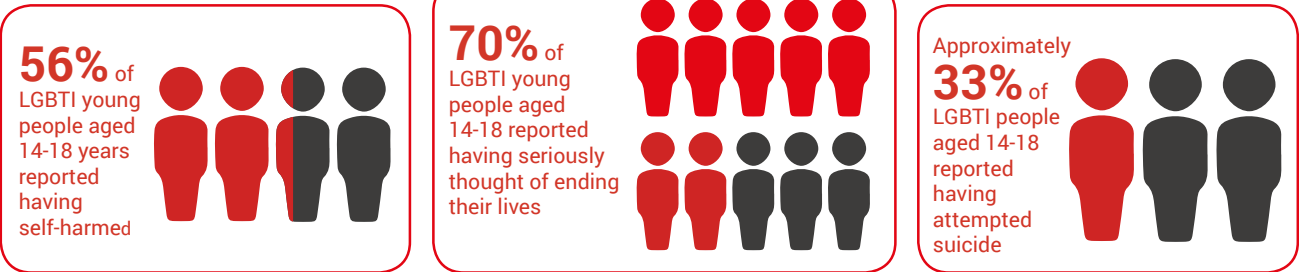
In Ireland, homophobic bullying has been found to be one of the most widespread forms of bullying[3]. Trinity College Dublin's School of Education found that 16% of *all* Irish second-level students were the targets of bullying[4] with even higher rates of bullying experienced in the LGBT community. The *LGBTIreland Report*[1], a major new study funded by the Health Service Executive's (HSE) National Office for Suicide Prevention (NOSP) found that in relation to LGBTI young people's school experiences:

50% had experienced anti-LGBT bullying

67% witnessed bullying of other LGBT students

Only **20%** of LGBTI students felt that they completely belonged in their schools

25% of LGBTI students missed or skipped school to avoid negative treatment due to being LGBTI

25% considered leaving school

5% quit school

Irish teachers have also reported witnessing very high levels of homophobic bullying. Research funded by the Department of Education and Skills (DES) and carried out by Dublin City University (DCU) found that the majority of teachers were aware of homophobic bullying in their schools [5]. The same study established that teachers found it more difficult to deal with homophobic bullying than other forms of bullying. Irish research also shows that only 1 in 5 LGBT young people who are experiencing homophobic bullying seek any support from their school or teachers [6].

A core aim of all schools is to promote and foster an environment that encourages children to attend school and participate fully in the life of the school [7]. Yet research highlights that homophobia and transphobia clearly impact on attendance and engagement at school.

Aside from educational outcomes, the urgency for tackling these problems lies in the devastating impact that homophobic, biphobic and transphobic bullying can have on young people's lives. The *LGBTIreland Report* [1] found:

56% of LGBTI young people aged 14-18 years reported having self-harmed

70% of LGBTI young people aged 14-18 reported having seriously thought of ending their lives

Approximately **33%** of LGBTI people aged 14-18 reported having attempted suicide

The report also found a direct correlation between homophobic, biphobic and transphobic bullying and mental health difficulties amongst LGBTI young people, i.e. young people who experience such bullying are more likely to experience depression, anxiety and stress, use alcohol, self-harm and attempt suicide.

Legislative and Policy Context for this work

Equal Status Act (2000)

Schools are legally obliged to deal with homophobic and transphobic bullying under the Education (Welfare) Act (2000) and the Equal Status Acts (2000 to 2008). Under the Education (Welfare) Act (2000) all schools are required to have in place a Code of Behaviour. The Act requires that this code must be prepared in accordance with guidelines issued by the National Educational Welfare Board (NEWB). The NEWB's publication "*Developing a Code of Behaviour: Guidelines for Schools*" was issued to schools in 2008. In accordance with the Education (Welfare) Act (2000) and the guidelines issued by the NEWB, all schools are required to have an Anti-Bullying Policy within the framework of their overall code of behaviour.

The Equal Status Act (2000) prohibits schools from discriminating (with certain exemptions) on nine grounds, including gender and sexual orientation. Harassment on sexual orientation and gender grounds is prohibited. This prohibition applies to all aspects of school life: in the class room, during extra curricular activities, on school trips, on the sports field, and so on.[8]

A person who is responsible for the operation of a school must not permit a student of a school (or anyone else who has the right to be in the school) to be harassed because of their sexual orientation or to be sexually harassed because of their gender. Schools are also liable for discrimination or harassment by an employee (including teaching and ancillary staff), whether or not it was done with the school's knowledge or approval.[9]

Department of Education & Skills Action Plan on Bullying and Mandatory Reporting Procedures (2013)

The Department of Education and Skills (DES) Action Plan on Bullying replaced the DES 1993 Guidelines on Bullying. It features a detailed overview of the latest research on bullying and recommendations for key strategies that schools and the DES need to take to fully address bullying. The Action Plan was groundbreaking in its recognition of the importance of tackling homophobic and transphobic bullying in schools.

The Action Plan includes an analysis of the role of prejudice-based or identity-based bullying, a term that encompasses homophobic and transphobic bullying, along with, for example, racist bullying and bullying of those with special educational needs. It discusses the impact of bullying, including the devastating impact of homophobic bullying on young people's mental health. The Action Plan draws attention to how equality legislation gives schools particular responsibilities regarding homophobic and transphobic bullying. The Action Plan notes that the '*development of new national anti-bullying procedures for schools including the promotion of school cultures that are welcoming of diversity; and the recognition that elimination of homophobic and transphobic bullying will lead to improvements in school climate for all students.*'

The interaction of legislation and school ethos sometimes raises concerns for principals. However this Action Plan clearly states that *"a school's ethos cannot and should not be a barrier to: promoting a school that recognises, respects and values all identities, including those of LGBT members of their school community; comprehensive delivery of curriculum subjects like RSE and SPHE; and tackling homophobic bullying."*

In December 2015 the Equality (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill 2013 passed into law, and in part amended the provisions of Section 37(1) of the Employment Equality Act. The amended section had previously allowed religious schools to opt out of employment equality legislation on the grounds of preserving religious ethos, which meant that LGBT teachers and school staff were uncertain of their employment protections. The amendment now means that no uncertainty exists and LGBT teachers and staff have the same employment protections as everyone else under the law.

The DES Anti-Bullying Procedures [10] and accompanying Circular 0045/2013 now makes it *mandatory* for both primary and post primary schools, and centres of education, to address homophobic and transphobic bullying and to develop education strategies to ensure that LGBT young people are welcomed and supported in every school. This involves:

- **The development of anti-bullying policies naming homophobic and transphobic bullying.**
- **All Boards of Management formally adopting and implementing an anti-bullying policy that fully complies with the requirements of these procedures. This policy must be reviewed annually.**
- **Schools making their anti-bullying policy available to parents, Parents Association, students and the Department of Education.**
- **Schools documenting reports of incidents of homophobic and transphobic bullying and gathering data so that they can identify trends in their school.**
- **Schools documenting the actions they take to create a school culture that is safe and welcoming of LGBT young people.**

Arising from recommendations made in the Action Plan on Bullying, '*the Inspectorate will be placing a stronger focus on the actions schools take to create a positive school culture and to prevent and tackle bullying… this will apply to whole-school and other evaluations.*' Adopting the recommendations included in this toolkit will assist schools in meeting their obligations as outlined above.

Introduction to the Whole School Community Model

We recognise that implementing change takes time, effort, and schools have many commitments to realise with limited resources. However, time invested *proactively* is well spent when an issue arises and the school can respond in an effective, appropriate and consistent manner, which is in keeping with educational policy and best practice. The Whole School Community model presented below intends to support schools to meet this goal in a clear and straightforward way.   The model comprises six key areas that overlap and interlink to provide a comprehensive approach to developing a safe, supportive and inclusive school that includes:

- **Creating a supportive school environment for all students, including LGBT students.**
- **Developing and implementing effective school policies and plans.**
- **Implementing a curriculum that supports diversity and respect.**
- **Ensuring that staff are LGBT aware and equipped to address LGBT issues and support vulnerable students.**
- **Providing direct supports to LGBT young people through the appropriate school structures including:**
    - :: **Responding appropriately and supportively when an LGBT young person 'comes out'.**
    - :: **Signposting LGBT young people as appropriate to outside agencies and supports.**
- **Working with the community outside the school gates, including the local LGBT youth project, parents and community organisations to promote a wider LGBT inclusive community.**

In the sections that follow, each key area will be explained in detail including recommendations for school implementation.

Policy and Planning

Making specific reference to diversity and difference (including sexual orientation and gender identity) in school policies sends an important message to all students and staff, including LGBT students and staff, that they are valued and equal members of the school community and that they will be supported within the school setting.[11]

Anti-Bullying Policy

It has been consistently highlighted in Ireland and in the UK that homophobic bullying is lower in schools that have developed anti-bullying policies that explicitly state that homophobic bullying is wrong and it will not be tolerated. In these schools, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Trans students are less likely to experience harassment and are more likely to report incidents when they occur. Furthermore, teachers in these schools are much more likely to intervene in incidents of homophobic bullying.

It is imperative *that 'every incident of homophobic bullying (including homophobic name-calling) is taken seriously and acted upon quickly, with clear and consistent sanctions for those responsible.'*[12] To support this, the Anti-Bullying Policy should clearly outline what happens if someone is found to be engaging in bullying behaviour. It should also state the supports and follow-up provided to the person engaging in bullying behaviour and the person on the receiving end of the behaviour. Anti-bullying policies, as with other policies, should be regarded as 'living documents', which are continuously reviewed. In line with the DES mandatory Anti-Bullying Procedures, as part of the oversight arrangements, the Board of Management of each individual school must undertake an annual review of the school's anti-bullying policy and its implementation.

The use of homophobic language is often common-place in schools and in society in general. It is often tolerated as it is sometimes not directed at a particular person; however, it is almost always used pejoratively. It is reported by LGBT people as distressing and damaging. A no tolerance approach should be taken in relation to all homophobic/transphobic language. When the use of such language is witnessed, it should be clearly named as homophobic/transphobic with the message given that it is not accepted in the school.

LGBT students are often afraid to report bullying incidents, including name-calling for fear of being 'outed'. Non-LGBT students may also fear reporting the same in case they are labelled as LGBT. Note that all bullying, which makes reference to LGBT, is homophobic/transphobic bullying, regardless of the person's sexual orientation or gender identity. This should be made clear within the whole school community.

Parents need to be involved in bullying issues in schools. For the student who is LGBT, this does not necessarily mean that their sexual orientation needs to be disclosed. The LGBT young person needs to be involved in how the issue is dealt with. As above, it must be remembered that anyone can be a target of homophobic and transphobic bullying, so the focus should be on the nature of the bullying behaviour rather than the sexual orientation (or perceived sexual orientation) of the person being targeted.

In relation to school policy, see also the guidance published in 2016 by GLEN, with the support of the Department of Education and Skills, *Being LGBT in School: A resource for post-primary schools to prevent homophobic and transphobic bullying and support LGBT students.* [13]

Responding to a student who has 'come out' as LGBT

'Coming out' to others, including peers and teachers, is often very challenging for an LGBT person and not all LGBT young people will publically come out during their time at school. How to appropriately respond when a student discloses their LGBT identity is also an issue of concern for staff, who often fear that they will 'say or do the wrong thing'. Although it is important that the Pastoral Care/Guidance Team are aware of how to respond to a student's disclosure of LGBT identity, it is likely that the student will talk to the member of staff that they feel most comfortable with. For this reason, it is important that all staff members are aware of best practice in this regard and can make an appropriate and supportive response. The needs of LGBT young people should be carefully considered and included in the School's Guidance Plan. For further details, see GLEN's guidance, *Being LGBT in School: A resource for post-primary schools to prevent homophobic and transphobic bullying and support LGBT students.*[13]

WHOLE SCHOOL COMMUNITY MODEL

6

SAMPLE ACTIONS

Encourage staff training and development especially for key staff providing support

Ensure trained staff disseminate information and guidelines

Include Board of Management in training initiatives

5

SAMPLE ACTIONS

Give young people a positive 'coming out' experience

Be guided by the young person's needs

Identify key members of staff to provide further support

Keep contact details of support services and local LGBT youth groups

Display sensitivity towards Trans students' needs around issues like bathrooms, uniform and pronouns

4

SAMPLE ACTIONS

Inform parents/carers of LGBT friendly policies and initiatives

Support LGBT staff

Develop links with local youth and community groups

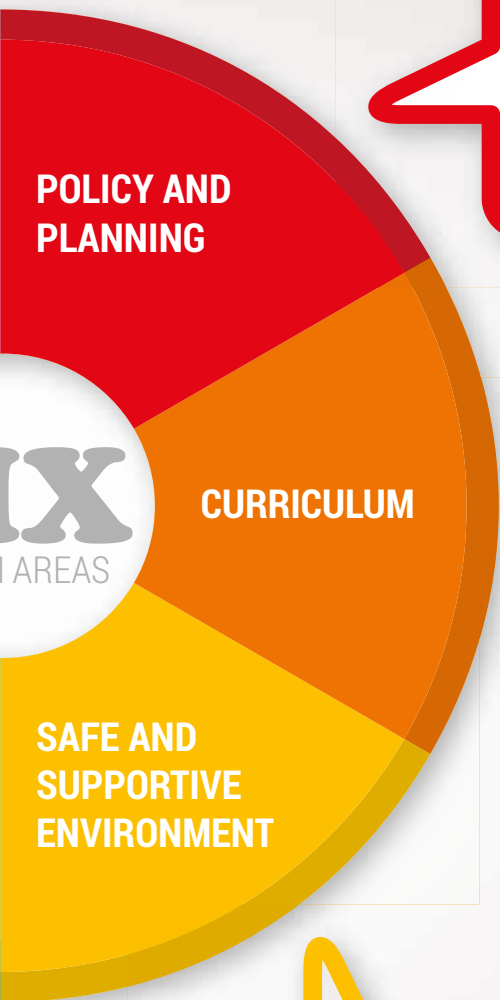**Inform** visitors to school of expectations around LGBT issues

Support parents/guardians through Home-school links

STAFF ORGANISATION AND DEVELOPMENT

DIRECT SUPPORT TO YOUNG PEOPLE

COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIP

SI
ACTION

POLICY AND PLANNING

CURRICULUM

SAFE AND SUPPORTIVE ENVIRONMENT

1

SAMPLE ACTIONS

Include homophobic/transphobic bullying in the anti-bullying policy

Publicise the policy to staff, students and parents/carers

Create a specific team of interested staff to respond to LGBT issues

2

SAMPLE ACTIONS

Ensure all staff challenge homophobic/transphobic language

Encourage staff to incorporate LGBT identity into all areas of the curriculum

Deliver a comprehensive RSE/SPHE programme

3

SAMPLE ACTIONS

Display information about national and local supports for LGBT youth

Participate in Stand Up! LGBT Awareness Campaign

Monitor the environment outside the classroom including school yard, bathrooms, school trips, etc

Remove homophobic/transphobic graffiti

Policy and Planning Actions:

What your school can do

- **Review the Anti-Bullying Policy in line with the DES Action Plan on Bullying (2013) and the Anti-Bullying Procedures, ensuring that:**
  - :: **Homophobia and transphobia are explicitly named as identity-based bullying in the policy definition.**
  - :: **All staff are aware of the policy and their role in implementation, particularly in relation to homophobic/transphobic language and name-calling.**
  - :: **A 'no tolerance' approach is taken by all staff in relation to homophobic/transphobic language and homophobic/ transphobic name-calling throughout the school and in all aspects of school life.**
  - :: **Students, including the Student Council, and Parents and the Parents Association have had an opportunity to input into the Anti-Bullying Policy and other relevant policies to promote ownership and awareness.**
  - :: **The policy is openly discussed and communicated with students and parents, ensuring that everyone is aware of the school procedures for discussing and reporting bullying should a concern arise.**
  - :: **Ensure that homophobic/transphobic bullying is recorded as such in the DES Anti-Bullying Procedures 'Template for Recording Bullying Behaviour' and monitor related trends.**
- **Encourage a specific team of interested staff members to progress the school's response to LGBT issues to ensure that they are embedded in policy and practice, including responding appropriately to a student who 'comes out'.**
- **Ensure that policies are communicated to all staff and the rest of the school community.**
- **Make explicit reference to the 9 grounds of Equality Legislation, including sexual orientation and gender identity, in the school policies and school mission statement.**

Focus:
Transgender Students

Transgender young people are students in schools across Ireland. The members of IndividualiTy (BeLonG To's trans youth group) helped develop these five ideas for how schools can be safe and inclusive.

Trans young people told us:

1. **We feel more respected and included if school staff use the name/pronoun we choose.**

2. **Please be flexible about which uniforms we wear including hair length, jewellery, etc.**

3. **Ask us what we need for bathrooms/changing rooms – a unisex bathroom may be best.**

4. **It's very important to respect our confidentiality (including if we need to transfer schools.)**

5. **Please fully implement your school's Anti-Bullying Policy.**

Curriculum
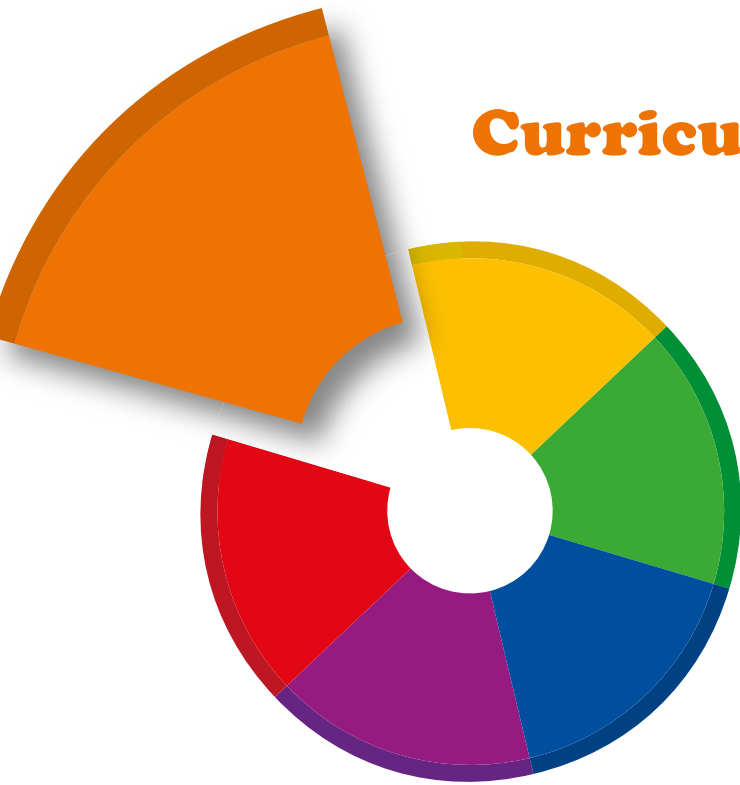
The absence of opportunities to discuss LGBT issues in a respectful way can perpetuate negative beliefs and attitudes; whereas raising the issue in class in a positive way provides opportunities for teachers to challenge negative beliefs and attitudes, and promote respect and dignity for all.

It is acknowledged that there are varied experiences of RSE in schools. Research into the implementation of Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) and Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) highlighted that SPHE is not implemented consistently in all schools with RSE implementation being even less consistent[14]. An Irish study[15] conducted in 2010 highlighted that almost three quarters of young people did not have RSE classes the previous year. When asked, "What was the least emphasised theme?", students reported that it was "understanding sexual orientation". The full report which accompanies this toolkit 'LGBT Safe and Supportive Schools: An interim evaluation', highlights that consideration should be given as to how LGBT content, as well as existing within the SPHE curriculum, can be embedded in other curriculum areas.

In 2013, the DES, in partnership with BeLonG To, the HSE and GLEN launched '*Growing up Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender',* a groundbreaking resource for SPHE and RSE, which includes a DVD and teacher manual with a series of lesson plans for *all* post-primary years that can be integrated into the SPHE/RSE curriculum. It covers topics such as respectful communication on LGBT issues, coming out, friendship, discrimination, homophobic and transphobic bullying, relationships and supports available to LGBT young people. The resource includes helpful materials for teachers such as teaching notes, background information and a detailed glossary of terms related to LGBT issues. Teacher Training on this resource is available through the Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST).   The 'Lifeskills Series' for Junior Cycle SPHE also has a comprehensive RSE section that includes relevant lesson plans on respectful relationships, sexual orientation, prejudice and discrimination, gender and the diversity of families.[16]

In all subjects and in the wider school environment, hearing staff promote respect for diversity is affirming for *all* students, not just those identifying as LGBT.

Curriculum Actions:

What your school can do

- Ensure that sexual orientation and gender identity is included in the SPHE/RSE policy and curriculum.

- As per DES Action Plan on Bullying (2013), ensure delivery of a comprehensive SPHE/RSE programme that includes specific lessons on sexual orientation, gender identity and bullying, as well as promoting respect for diversity in general.

- Ensure that teachers of SPHE/RSE have availed of training to support the delivery of "Growing up Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender: A resource for SPHE and RSE."

- Encourage all staff to attend general LGBT Awareness training that will equip them with the knowledge, skills and comfort levels to discuss LGBT issues in the classroom [17].

- Encourage staff to respond positively when references to LGBT arise in the classroom and wider school environment.

- Encourage staff to proactively consider ways to make LGBT people and issues visible in all areas of the curriculum.

Safe and Supportive Environment

School connectedness and a sense of belonging to a school community are fundamental to the well-being of all students. Students who are LGBT have been described as an 'invisible' minority and one of the most significant at-risk groups of adolescents[14]. Many feel that they do not belong to or are not accepted by their school community and find school an intimidating environment where they face continuing challenges.

By creating an LGBT supportive physical and social environment (e.g. displaying posters and information relating to LGBT or actively taking part in LGBT awareness campaigns), schools are acknowledging the existence of an LGBT community, in and out of school, as well as promoting respect and acceptance of diversity that goes beyond sexual orientation.   Promoting diversity sends a message that everyone is welcome, accepted and supported in the school, including LGBT students, LGBT parents/guardians and LGBT staff. There is evidence that addressing this form of bullying also has a positive impact on all forms of bullying in the school.

Safe and Supportive Environment Actions:

What your school can do

Promote a supportive physical and social school environment by:

- **Creating a safe space where everyone is valued and treated with respect.**

- **Displaying LGBT affirming posters and provide information about local and national supports for LGBT young people, which young LGBT students can access confidentially outside of the school environment if desired.[18]**

- **Encouraging whole school participation in the BeLonG To annual 'Stand Up!' Campaign.**

- **Encouraging all staff members, including ancillary and support staff, to challenge homophobic and transphobic language in the wider school environment, including the school yard, school events, sporting events and field trips.**

- **Ensuring ongoing monitoring and supervision of toilets for the occurrence of bullying incidents. This isolated environment, as well as the vulnerability of LGBT young people, can result in dangerous situations.**

- **Remove homophobic/transphobic graffiti immediately. If appropriate, remind perpetrators of school policy on homophobic/transphobic language as well as the Code of Behaviour for destruction of property.**

Show Your Support For Your
Lesbian Gay Bisexual & Trans Friends

STAND UP!

We Stand Up
Against
Homophobic &
Transphobic
Bullying

www.belongto.org

BeLonG To Poster circulated to schools as part of the STAND UP! Campaign

Community Partnership

Proactively linking with those outside of the school environment in relation to LGBT issues, including parents/guardians and other organisations, will help to raise awareness that the school is an inclusive community that respects and embraces diversity.

Parents and Guardians

Parents and guardians of 'out' LGBT youth may have specific worries about their child's safety in school. As per section on policy and planning, it is important to reassure parents that homophobia/transphobia will not be tolerated in the school and ensure they know who to approach with any concerns. Informing the wider group of parents and guardians of the school's participation in the 'Stand Up!' Campaign and of how LGBT is addressed in school policy and the curriculum can help to promote LGBT awareness, as well as supporting a culture of openness within the school community.

Local Youth and Community Organisations

Developing and maintaining links with local youth and community organisations allows a wider approach to be taken in making LGBT young people feel safe, supported and welcome in the area where they attend school and often where they live. Many staff members in youth and community organisations have undertaken training in diversity and LGBT awareness. Developing links with local LGBT and non-LGBT organisations may provide a more cohesive approach that goes beyond creating a safe and supportive *school* to creating a safe and supportive *community* for all young people.

Visitors to the school including outside facilitators

It is important to ensure that any visitor to the school, including outside facilitators and sports coaches, are aware of school policy relating to LGBT, including the use of homophobic/transphobic language and the expectation that LGBT issues will be discussed with respect. All visitors to the SPHE classroom should be within the context of a comprehensive SPHE/RSE programme. Specific guidelines on this are included in the DES Circular 0023/2010: "*Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) & Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE): Best Practice Guidelines for Post-Primary Schools*".

Further supports for LGBT students with additional needs

Mental Health and other support services for young people in the area may provide an important referral pathway for LGBT young people within the school that may need additional support. A variety of supports are outlined in the Post-Primary Well-being Guidelines[19]. It is important that care teams within the school are aware of referral pathways and personnel in their locality. A strong relationship with local community Gardai may prove to be invaluable if an unfortunate situation of criminal bullying arises.

Community Partnership Actions:

What your school can do

- Make explicit reference to the grounds of Equality Legislation, including sexual orientation and gender identity, in the school policies and mission statement.
- Use induction evenings and parent/guardian information evenings to highlight the anti-bullying policy.
- Articulate that homophobia/transphobia will not be tolerated and affirm that the school supports all, including LGBT students, families and staff.
- Display LGBT inclusive posters in a visible area where visitors to the school can see them.
- Provide information on LGBT support groups and other supports to families on request.

Direct Support to Young People

LGBT young people may disclose their sexual identity to any member of staff, so all staff need to be aware of how best to support a young LGBT person should the need arise.

It is a huge step for someone to 'come out' and because they have disclosed their sexual orientation or gender identity to one person does not necessarily mean that they are ready to tell everyone. Their first worry may be about the reaction of the person they are telling so this should be a positive and supportive experience for them. "A positive experience in coming out to others when they are met with acceptance is critical to safeguarding the young person's mental health and well-being; it can also lessen the fear of the young person eventually disclosing to his/her family or friends."[14] The young person's next worry may be about "What happens next?" so it is important to reassure the student that they are under no pressure to disclose their sexual orientation or gender identity until they are ready*. The young person should guide this process and be supported in the decisions that they make around this. They may request direct support in talking to family members or friends. The young person may not want to disclose their sexual orientation or gender identity to anyone else and this should also be respected. The needs of LGBT students are often on a case-by-case basis and the supports required by these students should be guided by the needs and desires of the young people themselves.

Identifying key members of staff for further support

It would be proactive for the school to have identified key members of staff, such as the Student Support Team or Care Team, to provide additional support to LGBT students. *All* staff should be aware of who these key people are, but it is important to check with the young person before making contact or discussing their details with other staff*. Support needs may vary amongst LGBT students, though at a minimum it is likely that access to information and resources will be important.   It is therefore important that that the school has the contact details of support services and local/national LGBT supports to give to the young person[20]. The young person might need initial support in making contact with the support groups so it may be useful if the Pastoral Care Team proactively establishes links with the support organisations.

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* It is important not to assume that because a student is coming out as LGBT that they are at risk and their parents need to be informed. Staff should use the same principles to assess risk as they would for any student who informs them of something of a personal nature, all the while respecting that student's privacy. "Only if school authorities have legitimate cause for concern for the student's safety should engagement with the student's parents/guardians be made without consulting the student." [11]

Direct support to Young People Actions:

What your school can do

- Ensure that Student Support staff and teams can provide additional support to LGBT students.

- Ensure that all students are aware of key staff members whom they can approach for support.

- Highlight to all staff that they may be the person to whom a LGBT student discloses their identity and ensure that they can respond sensitively and appropriately. This includes:

  :: Acknowledging that the disclosure of LGBT identity takes significant courage on the part of the young person.

  :: Giving the young person adequate time to talk, including setting aside a specific time/appointment if it is more convenient. This appointment should be the same day if possible.

  :: Being guided by the young person as to their support needs.

  :: Signposting the young person to additional supports (internal and external) if requested.

  :: Recognising that the LGBT young person's right to privacy and confidentiality should be the same as that of non-LGBT young people (in keeping with Child Protection Guidelines).

- Consider that Trans students may have particular needs around bathroom spaces, uniforms, preferred names and pronouns.[21] See the Focus section on transgender students on Page 14. Schools should be guided by each young person as to their support needs.

Staff Training and Development

Fundamental to progressing the school's response to LGBT issues, is the willingness of staff to be open to creating an environment that acknowledges LGBT identity and is supportive of diversity. LGBT awareness training allows staff, in a safe environment, to explore their attitudes to LGBT, examine the origin of these attitudes, inviting the individual to challenge them, if willing.

Training also provides information about LGBT lives and looks at practical ways that schools can create inclusive environments to support LGBT students.

In the absence of training and clear policy, staff can often be apprehensive about addressing LGBT issues for "fear of doing or saying the wrong thing"[22]. If the school does not collectively develop a 'whole school response' to LGBT, staff can be unwilling to advocate on LGBT issues as they are unsure of the response from other colleagues, students and parents/guardians. Even interested staff can feel isolated in this regard. Board of Management and/or Parents Association members could be included in training and can be useful champions when developing the school's response to LGBT issues. At a minimum, key members of staff with a role in directly supporting young people e.g. Student Support Teams, should have participated in LGBT Awareness Training so that they are equipped to support LGBT students. Teachers of SPHE/RSE should avail of continuous professional development opportunities.

Staff Training and Development Actions:

What your school can do

- **Source whole-staff LGBT awareness training and include ancillary staff.**
- **Source specific LGBT awareness training and development opportunities for staff, particularly senior staff and staff with a role in providing direct support to students and teachers of SPHE/RSE.**
- **Ensure that trained members of staff disseminate the main points and recommendations from training if not all staff can attend.**
- **Training should be practical in nature and include role-play e.g. responding to incidents of homophobic/transphobic name-calling; responding to a young person 'coming out'.**

Further Reading

- BeLonG To **Stand Up!** Pack including posters, guide and information on national network of LGBT youth services.

- BeLonG To Stand Up! Videos, especially: **Stand Up! Don't stand for homophobic bullying** (2011) **and Stand Up! Let's support our LGBT friends** (2012) **www.belongto.org**

- BeLonG To (2005). **Submission to national strategy for action on suicide prevention**. Dublin, Ireland: BeLonG To

- BeLonG To and Equality Authority (2006). **Making Schools Safe for LGBT Students** booklet

- BeLonG To and Equality Authority (2006). **Stop Homophobic Bullying in Schools** posters

- BeLonG To (2010). **Addressing Homophobia, Guidelines for the Youth Sector in Ireland**

- BeLonG To (2010). **Parents and Young People** booklet

- Department of Children and Youth Affairs (2014). **Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures: The National Policy Framework for Children and Young People 2014-2020**, DCYA, Dublin.

- Department of Education and Skills (2012). **Action Plan on Bullying**, DES, Dublin.

- Department of Education and Skills (2013). **Anti-Bullying Procedures for Primary and Post Primary Schools**, DES, Dublin.

- Department of Education and Skills: School Development Planning Initiative and Equality Authority (2010). **Guidelines for second level schools on embedding equality in school development planning**

- Department of Education and Skills and GLEN (2009). **Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Students in Post-Primary Schools: Guidance for School Leaders**

- Equality Authority (2008). **Schools and the Equal Status Act**

- Equality Authority (2004). **Diversity at School: Sexual Orientation**

- Equality Authority (2002). **Implementing Equality for Lesbians, Gays and Bisexuals**.

- GLEN (2015). **Being LGBT in School. A resource for post-primary schools to prevent homophobic and transphobic bullying and support LGBT students**. **www.glen.ie**

- Higgins et al (2016). **The LGBTIreland report: National study of the mental health and wellbeing of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender & intersex people in Ireland**. Dublin: **www.glen.ie** , **www.belongto.org**

- National Association of Principals and Deputy Principals, GLEN and the Department of Education and Skills (2011). **Including Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Students in School Policies: Guidelines for Principals**

- National Centre for Guidance in Education and GLEN (2010). **Supporting Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Students: The Role of Guidance Counsellors**

- National Office for Suicide Prevention (2005 – 2014). **Reach Out: National Strategy for Action on Suicide Prevention**

- Pobal: Local Development Inclusion Programme (2006). **More than a Phase: A Resource Guide for the Inclusion of LGBT Learners in Formal and Non-formal Education**.

- Transgender Equality Network Ireland (TENI, 2010). **Transgender and gender diversity: Information for Guidance Counsellors**.

- UNESCO (2012), **Education sector responses to homophobic bullying**, United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation, Paris.

In addition, a range of Irish Toolkits, Resources and Policy Documents are available in the resources section of **www.belongto.org**

References

1   Higgins et al (2016). *The LGBTIreland report: National study of the mental health and wellbeing of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender & intersex people in Ireland.* Dublin: GLEN and BeLonG To Youth Service. www.glen.ie, www.belongto.org

2   Address by Mr John Lyons TD on behalf of Mr Ruairi Quinn TD Minister for Education and Skills at the launch of Stand Up! LGBT Awareness Week Friday 2nd March 2012 at The Rotunda, City Hall, Dublin.

3   Lynch, K. and Lodge, A. (2002). *Equality and Power in Schools: Redistribution, Recognition and Representation.* London: Routledge Falmer.

4   M. Moore (1997) http://abc.tcd.ie/school.html

5   Norman, J. & Galvin, M. (2006). *Straight Talk: An Investigation of Attitudes and Experiences of Homophobic Bullying in Second-Level Schools.* Dublin City University: Centre for Educational Evaluation, p.10.

6   Minton, S, J., Dahl, T., O' Moore, A, M., & Tuck, D. (2006) *A report on an exploratory survey of the experiences of homophobic bullying amongst lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgendered young people in the Republic of Ireland.* Dublin: Anti-Bullying Centre, TCD.

7   Government of Ireland (2000). Education (Welfare) Act (2000) Part 2: 10 -1a

8   *Making Schools Safe for LGBT Students* booklet, BeLonG To and Equality Authority (2006).

9   Department of Education and Skills, Health Service Executive, BeLonG To Youth Services (2011). *Growing Up Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender: A Resource for SPHE and RSE.*

10   Department of Education and Skills (2013). *Anti-Bullying Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools.*

11   Department of Education and Skills and GLEN (2009). *Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Students in Post-Primary Schools: Guidance for Principals and School Leaders.*

12   Stonewall (2012). *The School Report: The experiences of gay young people in Britain's schools.* University of Cambridge: Centre for Family Research.

13   GLEN (2016). *Being LGBT in School: A Resource for Post-Primary Schools to Prevent Homophobic and Transphobic Bullying and Support LGBT Students.* Available from www.glen.ie

14   Mayock, P., Kitching, K., Morgan, M. (2007). *RSE in the Context of SPHE: An Assessment of the Challenges to Full Implementation of the Programme in Post-Primary Schools.* Crisis Pregnancy and Department of Education and Skills.

15   Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs - Dáil nanÓg (2010). *Life skills matter – not just points: A survey of implementation of Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) and Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) in second-level schools.*

16   Available to order from HSE - Health Promotion and Improvement (Donegal Office 0749104693)

17   Contact Belong To for details on LGBT awareness training. The DES Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST) deliver specific training for SPHE staff in relation to teaching about sexual orientation as part of RSE, as well as whole staff training in relation to Sexual Orientation.

18   For more information and a list of support groups see www.belongto.org

19   Department of Education and Skills, Health Service Executive and Department of Health (2013). *Well-being in Post-Primary Schools Guidelines for Mental Health Promotion and Suicide Prevention.*

20   www.belongto.org provides information on sexual orientation, gender identity and available support services in Ireland.

21   www.teni.ie provides information on trans identity and available support services in Ireland.

22   A comment made at LGBT Awareness Teacher Training in Donegal (2012)