'BEING **LGBT** IN SCHOOL'

A Resource for Post-Primary Schools to Prevent Homophobic and Transphobic Bullying and Support LGBT Students

glen =
gay + lesbian equality network

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National Centre for Guidance in Education

Teachers' Union of Ireland

Transgender Equality Network Ireland

TUSLA – Child and Family Agency

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This document is an updated compilation of a series of resources developed by GLEN (Gay and Lesbian Equality Network), the Department of Education and Skills and the education partners to assist schools in addressing homophobic bullying and supporting lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) students. This resource is intended to replace the four publications named below.

1. **Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Students in Post-Primary Schools: Guidance for Principals and School Leaders.** Published by the Department of Education and Skills and GLEN.
2. **Including Lesbian, Gay & Bisexual Students in School Policies: Guidelines for Principals.** Published by the Department of Education and Skills, National Association of Principals and Deputy Principals and GLEN.
3. **Supporting Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Students: The Role of Guidance Counsellors.** Published by the National Centre for Guidance in Education and GLEN in consultation with the Institute of Guidance Counsellors.
4. **Supporting Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Students: The Role of Teachers.** Published by the Association of Secondary Teachers of Ireland, the Teachers' Union of Ireland and GLEN.

The additional content in this resource reflects the specific requirements of the 2013 Department of Education and Skills *Anti-Bullying Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools*, along with relevant policy changes, including:

- **Well-Being in Post-Primary Schools: Guidelines for Mental Health Promotion & Suicide Prevention** (Department of Education and Skills et al, 2013b)
- **Student Support Teams in Post-Primary Schools – A Guide to establishing a team or reviewing an existing team** (Department of Education and Skills, 2014).

The updated content in this edition includes a section addressing the specific support needs of students who identify as transgender. The assistance of the non-governmental organisation, Transgender Equality Network Ireland (TENI), was sought to ensure that the information presented is both practical and respectful to the needs of young people who are transgender.

The updated content was circulated to all the education partners, whose attention to detail in providing feedback on earlier drafts has greatly enhanced this publication. We would like to express our appreciation to all those who supported the development of this resource, including the officials in the Central Policy Unit at the Department of Education and Skills.

For further information on any content within this resource please contact:
Sandra Irwin-Gowran
Director of Education Policy, GLEN
Email: education@glen.ie

GLOSSARY

Bisexual: A man or woman who is romantically, sexually and/or emotionally attracted to people of either sex.

Coming Out: A term used to describe the process through which a person realises that they are lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender and may begin to disclose this aspect of their identity to others.

Gay: A man or woman who is romantically, sexually and/or emotionally attracted to people of the same sex. Many gay men prefer to be called 'gay' rather than homosexual. Many women who are gay prefer to be identified as 'lesbian'.

Gender: A term that is often used to refer to ways that people act, interact or feel about themselves, which are associated with boys/men and girls/women. The term 'gender' is distinct from 'sex', see definition below.

Gender Dysphoria: Refers to strong persistent feelings of identification with the opposite gender and discomfort with one's own assigned sex that results in significant distress.

Gender Expression: This refers to the way a person expresses gender to others through behaviour, clothing, hairstyles, mannerisms, voice, physical characteristics, social interactions, etc.

Gender Fluid: This refers to a gender identity which varies over time. A gender fluid person may at any time identify as male, female, gender neutral, or any other non-binary identity, or some combination of identities. Some individuals refer to themselves as gender fluid, gender queer, or gender non-binary.

Gender Identity: A person's internal feeling of being male or female, regardless of the sex listed on their birth certificate (assigned birth sex). Some individuals may have a sense that they are some other gender, or a combination of genders.

Gender Non-binary / non-binary: An umbrella term for gender identities that fall outside the gender binary of male or female. This includes individuals whose gender identity is neither exclusively male nor female, a combination of male and female or between genders. Similar to the usage of transgender, people under the non-binary umbrella may describe themselves using one or more of a wide variety of terms.

Gender Recognition Certificate: This is provided for in the Gender Recognition Act (2015) and issued by the state to an individual who requests to have his/her preferred gender recognised. The Gender Recognition Certificate can be used to retrospectively and prospectively amend all official certificates to reflect the preferred gender. For further information on the specific requirements necessary to apply for a Gender Recognition Certificate see section 8.1.

Gender Transition / Transition: These are terms to describe the experience by which a person goes from living in the gender assigned at birth to living and identifying in their preferred gender. For most young people this transition does not involve medical intervention but does involve a process of 'social transition' whereby the young person begins to live and identify as the gender consistent with their preferred gender identity. Transition might include social, physical or legal changes such as coming out to family, friends, co-workers and others; changing one's appearance; changing one's name, personal pronoun and sex designation on legal documents (e.g. birth

certificate, driving licence or passport); and medical intervention (e.g. through hormones or surgery).

Heterosexual: A person who is romantically, sexually and/or emotionally attracted to people of the opposite sex, colloquially known as 'straight'.

Homophobic Bullying: Refers to bullying of any form that has the added dimension of being based on actual or perceived sexual orientation.

Homosexual: The formal or clinical term that was coined in the field of psychology to describe a person who is romantically, sexually and/or emotionally attracted to people of the same sex.

Intersex: An umbrella term used for a variety of conditions in which a person is born with a reproductive or sexual anatomy that does not fit the typical definition of the female or male sex. Although intersex individuals do not always identify as transgender, or do not consider themselves to be covered by the transgender umbrella, many of the issues experienced by transgender people are common to intersex people and for this reason the guidance in this resource can be applicable to students who are intersex.

LGBT: An acronym for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender.

LGBTI: An acronym for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex.

Lesbian: A woman who is romantically, sexually and/or emotionally attracted to women.

Preferred Gender: Refers to an individual's deeply held internal gender identity, as distinct from the sex assigned at birth.

Sex: Refers to the biological status accorded at birth as male or female. The designation of a person at birth as male or female is based on their anatomy (genitalia and/or reproductive organs) or biology (chromosomes and/or hormones).

Sexual Orientation: Refers to an enduring pattern of emotional, romantic, and/or sexual attractions to men, women or both sexes. Three sexual orientations are commonly recognised – heterosexual (straight), homosexual (gay or lesbian) and bisexual. Some people do not experience attraction to either men or women and define themselves as asexual.

Transgender : An inclusive term describing people whose gender identity, or gender expression, is different from the sex listed on their birth certificate (i.e. their assigned birth sex). People under the transgender umbrella may describe themselves using one or more of a wide variety of terms – including transgender. It is always best to be led by the individual's preferred adjective. The word 'trans' is commonly used by transgender people and it is acceptable to use this shortened term when referring to a person who identifies as transgender. Some transgender people who live in their preferred gender simply see themselves as a man or a woman, rather than a trans man or a trans woman. Some transgender people may be under the care of doctors in undergoing hormone treatment to change their bodies, some undergo surgery as well. But not all transgender people can or will take those steps, and a transgender identity is not dependent upon medical procedures.

Transphobic Bullying: Refers to bullying of any form that has the added dimesion of being based on actual or perceived gender identity.

Transsexual: This is an older term that has its origins in the medical and psychological communities. It is still preferred by some people who have permanently changed, or seek to change, their bodies through medical interventions. However, many transgender people don't like the term transsexual and instead use trans man or trans woman to indicate their preferred gender identity. It is best to use the term which an individual prefers.

Trans man: A person who was identified as female at birth but who lives as a man or identifies as male.

Trans woman: A person who was identified as male at birth but who lives as a woman or identifies as female.

1. INTRODUCTION

In recent years Ireland has become a more inclusive and open place for all people; as a nation we've been challenged to grow in our understanding and appreciation of difference in many areas of life. The past two decades in particular have brought about unprecedented change for Ireland's lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) population.

Today more and more LGBT people are 'coming out' at a younger age and are living openly with the support of their family, friends, school, community, workplace and neighbourhoods. Despite these progressive leaps life can still be quite difficult for many lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people, including young LGBT people who are not 'out' or who are not supported by family, friends and their communities. Being affirmed and respected for who one is, is critically important to the formation of a positive self-identity.

Bullying in schools and elsewhere can have potentially serious consequences for many young people.

This important issue was highlighted in the Action Plan on Bullying which was published by the Department of Education and Skills in January 2013. The Action Plan acknowledges that, while there is variation in the prevalence rates of bullying reported in studies, *'it is clear from the available data that many children and young people will encounter bullying and unfortunately for a minority it will have a very negative impact on their lives.'*[1]

> **For many LGBT young people homophobic and transphobic bullying are serious issues that not only limit and prevent the formation of a positive identity but hinder them from feeling safe, supported and affirmed for who they are in school.**

- In 2010 just under a **quarter** of young people aged between 10-17 years reported that they were bullied at school at least once in the previous couple of months (Kelly et al, 2012).
- A 2016 study funded by the National Office for Suicide Prevention found that **50%** of the lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender (LGBT) people who participated had been bullied as a consequence of their LGBT identity, or their perceived LGBT identity, while at school (Higgins et al, 2016).

The Action Plan on Bullying noted that bullying behaviour can have a serious impact on those involved, both personally and educationally, with potentially tragic consequences for young people, families, school communities and wider society. Recent research demonstrates some of these serious impacts on lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) young people in Ireland (Higgins et al, 2016). Of the LGBTI respondents:

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1   Department of Education and Skills (2013c). *Action Plan on Bullying: Report of the Anti-Bullying Working Group* to the Minister for Education and Skills. The Action Plan set out twelve actions aimed at preventing and tackling bullying in schools. The actions focus on support for schools and teachers, professional development, research and awareness-raising to ensure that all forms of bullying, including homophobic and transphobic bullying, are addressed.

- **56% of 14-18 year olds had self-harmed. Most said the self-harm was related to their LGBTI identity**
- **70% had seriously contemplated suicide**
- **32% had attempted suicide.**

As set out in the Action Plan, a positive school culture is pivotally important for the prevention of bullying behaviour and the provision of a safe environment for learners who are supported and affirmed in their holistic development. Creating and maintaining such a culture is the responsibility of every member of the school community and is central to the ethos of all schools; some individuals have a greater role to play and at times that role requires additional support.

1.1 ABOUT THIS RESOURCE

This resource is intended to provide support to key individuals as they fulfil their responsibilities in ensuring that their school is safe, supportive and affirming of all students, including lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) students, students perceived to be LGBT and students who have close family members (parents, siblings, etc.) who are LGBT.

Further support for schools in addressing bullying is provided *inter alia* through the *Well-being in Post-Primary Schools Guidelines for Mental Health Promotion and Suicide Prevention* (Department of Education and Skills et al, 2013b), which outline how to develop a positive whole-school environment that includes structures to support students who are experiencing difficulties. Additionally, the HSE, *Schools for Health in Ireland Framework for Developing a Health Promoting School (Post-primary)* (2013) sets out the essential elements of a whole-school approach to health in its broadest sense.

Following the Department of Education and Skills publication of *Anti-Bullying Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools* in September 2013, it was considered important to update existing resources to reflect the new requirements on schools and to outline clearly the role of key school personnel in preventing and addressing homophobic and transphobic bullying. This resource contains additional advice from GLEN that is based on good practice; this good practice is highlighted clearly within the document in tables denoted by this symbol: ⭐

The resource is divided into colour-coded sections for ease of access by people according to their specific role in the school community.

1.2 DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION ANTI-BULLYING PROCEDURES FOR PRIMARY AND POST-PRIMARY SCHOOLS

In September 2013, following extensive consultation with relevant education partners, the Department of Education and Skills issued *Anti-Bullying Procedures for Primary and Post-primary schools.* These new procedures replaced the existing 1993 *Guidelines on Countering Bullying Behaviour in Primary and Post-Primary Schools.*

The purpose of the procedures, as outlined in the accompanying Departmental circular *Anti-Bullying Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools (45/2013d),* is to give direction and guidance to school authorities and school personnel in

- preventing and tackling school-based bullying behaviour amongst students, and
- dealing with any negative impact within school, of bullying behaviour that occurs elsewhere.

The procedures make clear that the definition of bullying includes cyber-bullying and identity-based bullying (such as homophobic bullying and racist bullying).

2. BULLYING: DEFINITIONS

All students need a stable, secure learning environment to achieve their maximum potential. Bullying behaviour, by its very nature, can undermine that environment. The existence and implementation of a school policy preventing and tackling bullying has been borne out internationally as crucial in countering bullying behaviour, particularly when developed and implemented across the school community.

- The Department of Education and Skills' Anti-Bullying Procedures define bullying as unwanted negative behaviour, verbal, psychological or physical, conducted by an individual or group against another person (or persons), and which is repeated over time. The definition includes relational bullying, cyber-bullying and identity-based bullying (such as homophobic bullying, racist bullying and bullying of those with special educational needs).

- Placing a once-off offensive or hurtful public message, image or statement on a social network site or other public forum where that message, image or statement can be viewed and/or repeated by other people, is regarded as bullying behaviour in the context of the procedures. Cyber-bullying is increasingly common, is continuously evolving and facilitates many forms of bullying. For example, a student may be sent homophobic text messages, or pictures may be posted with negative comments about a person's sexuality, gender or appearance.

- A single incident of intentional negative behaviour does not fall within the definition of bullying but the procedures note that such an incident may constitute harassment, which is legally prohibited in schools under equality legislation. See the Equality Authority, *Schools and the Equal Status Acts* (2005) for more information.

2.1 IDENTITY-BASED BULLYING: HOMOPHOBIC AND TRANSPHOBIC BULLYING

A significant proportion of bullying is rooted in a lack of respect for difference and in social inequality, both of which have their foundation in wider society. This understanding has led to a large body

When schools specifically address sexual orientation and gender identity in policies, LGBT students are less likely to experience harassment at school; are far more likely to report incidents of harassment when they occur; and are twice as likely to have a teacher intervene in incidents of homophobic bullying (Kosciw et al, 2014; Hunt & Jensen, 2006).

of international work on 'prejudice-based bullying' or 'identity-based bullying'. The term 'identity-based bullying' takes into account the significant extent to which students may be more vulnerable to bullying because of prejudice, stereotyping and stigmatising people with particular identities.

The Department of Education and Skills' Anti-Bullying Procedures require that prevention must be an integral part of a school's anti-bullying policy. The education and prevention strategies that the school implements must be documented in the anti-bullying policy and must explicitly deal with the issue of cyber-bullying and identity-based bullying, including in particular, homophobic and transphobic bullying.

2.2 WHY FOCUS ON HOMOPHOBIC AND TRANSPHOBIC BULLYING?

Bullying that is based on actual or perceived sexual orientation is known as homophobic bullying; bullying that is based on gender identity is known as transphobic bullying. Both types can take many forms, including all those listed in the Department of Education and Skills Anti-Bullying Procedures (i.e., physical aggression, intimidation, isolation/exclusion and other relational bullying, cyber-bullying, name-calling, damage to property and extortion). While there are many commonalities between those who experience transphobic and homophobic bullying, transgender young people often have specific support needs (see Section 4).

While homophobic or transphobic bullying is most commonly experienced by young people who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender, all learners are potential targets, particularly those who don't conform to expected gender behaviour norms.

Irish research consistently reveals that many young people who identify as LGBT have negative experiences of school, and the stress this causes puts them at greater risk of:

- Not achieving their full potential
- Developing poor self-esteem
- Leaving school early
- Experiencing mental health problems
- Becoming involved in self-harming behaviour (Higgins et al, 2016; Mayock et al, 2009; Minton et al, 2008 and Norman & Galvin, 2006).

3. LESBIAN, GAY, BISEXUAL & TRANSGENDER (LGBT) STUDENTS

It is highly likely that every school and classroom in Ireland has LGBT students. A recent survey of 8,000 young people found a sizeable minority did not identify as heterosexual - 8% identified as lesbian, gay or bisexual, while a further 3% were unsure of their sexual orientation (Dooley & Fitzgerald, 2013). Applying the 8% figure to the current enrolment in second level schools amounts to approximately 29,000 young people who identify as LGBT, whether they are out or not; this is a sizeable minority. Despite the size of these numbers, LGBT students are still largely invisible in many of our schools and many LGBT young people will wait until they leave school before 'coming out' (Mayock et al, 2009). However, the age at which young people come out is getting lower and many will now come out during their second level years (Higgins et al, 2016).

Research in Ireland reveals that many young LGBT people, or those perceived to be LGBT, have a negative experience in school due to homophobic and transphobic bullying and harassment, which affects their life chances and often has negative mental health impacts (Higgins et al, 2016; Mayock et al, 2009; Norman et al, 2006; Minton et al, 2008; Lynch & Lodge, 2002).·

3.1 EXPERIENCES OF SCHOOL AMONG LGBT YOUNG PEOPLE

The *LGBTIreland* study is the most comprehensive study of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) people in Ireland (Higgins et al, 2016). The study, which was funded by the HSE's National Office for Suicide Prevention, had a special emphasis on young people. Over 2,250 people participated in the research, of these almost 50% were 25 years or under and therefore were either in school or had left school within the recent past. Key findings in relation to school experiences include:

Safety

- 67% had witnessed LGBTI bullying in their school
- 48% had personally experienced LGBTI bullying by fellow students
- There is a strong statistical link between experiencing LGBTI school bullying and depression, anxiety, stress, self-harm, suicidal thoughts and attempted suicide.

Support

- 4.43 was the mean score out of 10 when asked to rate their school's LGBTI-friendliness
- Only 25% rated their school's LGBTI-friendliness at 7 out of 10 or higher
- Just 1 in 5 felt they completely belonged in their school as an LGBTI student
- Only 44% said they received positive affirmation of their LGBTI identity in school

Participation

- 1 in 4 missed or skipped school or school events to avoid negative treatment due to being LGBTI
- 1 in 4 considered leaving school early (before final state examinations) because of negative treatment they had received as an LGBTI student and 5% did leave early.

3.2 AWARENESS OF LGBT IDENTITY

The years that coincide with post-primary education are critical for young people in developing an understanding of themselves and the formation of their identity, including cultural and ethnic identity, sexual orientation and gender identity. This can be a challenging but exciting period. For some it can be very difficult, especially but not exclusively, for those who identify their sexual orientation to be other than heterosexual, or their gender identity to be different to the one they were assigned at birth. For all young people, this time of formative psychological development impacts on future well-being and life achievements.

The LGBTI Ireland research carried out by Higgins et al (2016) confirmed the findings of Mayock et al (2009) that the most common age of realisation of LGBT identity is 12 years. Higgins et al also found that the age of coming out to at least one other person is lower by one year than that found by Mayock et al in 2009, i.e. the age has come down from 17 years of age to 16 years of age. Higgins et al (2016) found that people are coming out at a younger age and the gap between 'knowing and telling' is narrowing.

The age of realisation of trans identity is generally much younger than sexual orientation identity. Kennedy & Hellen (2010) found that the majority of transgender respondents were aware that they were trans before they left primary school.

3.3 COMING OUT AND BEING OUT AT SCHOOL

'Coming out' is the term used to describe the process through which a person realises that they are lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender and begins to disclose their sexual orientation or gender identity to others. The process also involves developing a positive identity as an LGBT person. The level of support available to young people from family, friends and school is a major determinant of how easy or difficult it is for them to navigate this process (Higgins et al, 2016; Mayock, et al, 2009).

Mayock et al (2009) also found that the period between initial awareness of one's sexual orientation or gender identity and coming out was generally experienced as difficult, daunting and traumatic; many people attributed this to fear of rejection, isolation

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12 Years: The most common age to know one's LGBT identity.

16 Years: The most common age to 'come out'.

Young people are coming out at a younger age. (Higgins et al, 2016)

and/or harassment in school. Consequently, if a young person comes out whilst still at school it is important that they receive support, understanding and respect.

3.4 WHY DO LGBT PEOPLE COME OUT?

Being recognised and affirmed for who you are is critical to feeling included and developing a sense of belonging and positive self-esteem. Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people come out in order to express who they are and be authentic about themselves as individuals. For most, coming out is a staged process involving a period of self-discovery that one's sexual orientation or gender identity is different to that of the majority, and a further phase of disclosing this to others. The final phase of coming out is when the individual is able to live openly and comfortably with this aspect of their identity.

Research has found that there is a gap of years between 'knowing and telling' one's LGBT identity (Higgins et al, 2016; Mayock et al, 2009). For many, this period spans their time at second level and intersects with critical milestones such as state examinations and preparation for working life or continued studies. This has implications for schools to ensure the learning environment is safe, supportive and affirming for LGBT young people.

> **It is critical that a young LGBT person discovering their sexual orientation or gender identity feels supported and valued, regardless of whether or not they come out.**

3.5 HOW SHOULD THE SCHOOL RESPOND IF A YOUNG PERSON COMES OUT?

Most young people come out to a friend or another trusted individual before coming out to family. Sometimes this trusted individual is a teacher or a Guidance Counsellor. All staff members need to be prepared for the possibility of a student coming out and the following points will support preparations:

- Schools should communicate a message to all students that diversity is welcomed and respected. LGBT young people and other minority groups should be clear that they are valued, and that the school leadership will ensure their safety and support. It is critical that a young LGBT person discovering their sexual orientation or gender identity feels supported and valued, regardless of whether or not they come out.
- 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. Often a young person experiences intense fear of rejection by his/her family and consequently finds it easier to come out to others first. A positive experience of coming out to others, where they are met with acceptance, is critical to safeguarding the young person's mental health and well-being; it can also lessen the young person's fear of disclosing to his/her family and friends (Mayock et al, 2009).

A 'Buddy Bench' initiative was introduced in many schools in Ballymun, Dublin

When a young person comes out as lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender they are disclosing their sexual orientation or gender identity. It is a statement about an aspect of the student's identity and should not be interpreted as an indication of sexual behaviour.

- The requirements under the *Children First Guidelines* (Department of Children and Youth Affairs, 2011, s7.16.2) and the *Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post Primary Schools* (Department of Education and Skills, 2011) relating to sexual activity apply to all students, regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity. Note the legal age of consent to sexual activity is 17 years.
- The school should also consider other aspects of identity that might be relevant to a student coming out, for example culture, religion or disability.

- Individual teachers have a significant role in responding to a student who comes out to them. For more detailed information on how an individual teacher can be most effective and supportive if a student comes out to them see section 5.3.3.
- See also section 4 on supporting students who are transgender.

Allow students the freedom to come out if they choose. Don't ask someone if they are LGBT before they've come out to you. Many LGBT young people come out without any difficulties, don't assume they should be troubled.

3.6 WHAT ABOUT THE STUDENT WHO IS PERCEIVED TO BE LESBIAN, GAY, BISEXUAL, OR TRANSGENDER?

Central to a school's response should be a holistic and integrated approach where the student is the key consideration.

In many schools today anti-gay name-calling is a regular occurrence and students frequently use expressions such as 'you're so gay' or 'that's so gay' in derisive and pejorative ways. Many students, regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity, are vulnerable to such name-calling because some aspect of their identity is deemed to be objectionable, such as their appearance, interests, physical characteristics or family background. This does not mean that they are lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender. Regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity, all students have a right to participate in a safe, supportive and affirming learning environment. The impact of such name-calling for all students is damaging, for LGBT young people or those questioning their sexual orientation or gender identity it is particularly harmful to their self-esteem and self-worth.

Some students may be targeted for such harassment, bullying and name-calling because of an assumption that they are lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender. Unlike other aspects of identity, sexual orientation is not necessarily a visible or apparent attribute; as with transgender identity, it is up to the individual to come to an understanding of his/her identity. Therefore, it is important that students are not asked about their sexual orientation or gender identity unless they volunteer such information themselves. Equally it should not be assumed that a young person who is lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender is necessarily troubled by their sexual orientation or gender identity.

It is essential to address the behaviour of the student(s) targeting a vulnerable student and to protect the student being bullied from further harassment. Responding to such bullying presents an opportunity to provide leadership to the whole-school community by reinforcing the school's Code of Behaviour and Anti-Bullying Policy (see section 6 for school policies).

4. SPECIFIC GUIDANCE IN RELATION TO TRANSGENDER STUDENTS

4.1 THE SPECIFIC NEEDS OF TRANSGENDER STUDENTS

Over the last two decades, Ireland has witnessed significant social change and increasing levels of awareness and acceptance of diversity. However, transgender people remain among the most vulnerable members of Irish society and experience high levels of stigmatisation and marginalisation (Higgins et al, 2016; TENI, 2014; Mayock et al, 2009).

There has been an increase in awareness of gender identity issues and a growing capacity to understand the issues experienced by transgender people; and in 2015 the Oireachtas passed the Gender Recognition Act (2015). A positive consequence of this increased awareness is that more young people are coming out as transgender and seeking the support they need. In the school context this growing awareness needs to be matched with accurate information and responses that are based on good practice in addressing the needs of transgender young people.

A school's response should be holistic and integrated, where the support of the student is the key consideration in every response. A key strategy in supporting students and preventing transphobic bullying in school is to promote a climate of acceptance and respect for all. School principals may feel that they should respond immediately with practical supports. However, it is good practice to take time with the student, and his or her parents/guardians, to find the right solutions for their particular context rather than rushing into a standard response.

This section addresses questions and issues that may arise when students who are transgender come out while at school. The following information is offered as a way of ensuring that a pupil who comes out is supported and that it is clear to the entire school community that a climate of respect and an anti-bullying culture mean that all students should be supported. Given the higher risk of transgender young people experiencing transphobic bullying the guidance is provided to support a positive school climate and culture that is supportive of difference and diversity and that prevents transphobic bullying.

Suggestions are based on good practice and offer some guidance in this area. It is noted however that the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Education and Social Protection (Houses of the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Education and Social Protection, 2013) recommended that comprehensive guidelines be developed in this regard.

It is crucially important to the well-being of a young person that his or her gender identity is treated with dignity, respect and fairness.

4.2 YOUNG PEOPLE COMING OUT AS TRANSGENDER

The term 'transgender' refers to people whose gender identity or gender expression is different to the sex assigned to them at birth. A transgender boy, for example, was registered as female at birth but has a clear and persistent identity as male. A transgender girl was registered as male at birth but has a clear and persistent identity as female.

Gender identity is an innate, largely inflexible characteristic of each individual's personality which is generally established by the age of four, although the age at which individuals come to understand and express their gender identity may vary based on each person's social and familial development (Mallon, 2009; Brill & Pepper, 2008).

Some people identify as gender non-binary, meaning that they do not fit into either the female or male gender identity. These guidelines were written primarily to give schools guidance on how they can best support individuals who are transgender and work to avoid transphobic bullying; they will also have relevance for supporting students who identify as non-binary, gender fluid or intersex.

Self-determination is an important principle, in that the responsibility for determining a person's gender identity rests with the individual themselves, or in the case of a young person who is not yet able to advocate for themselves, with their parents/guardians.

4.3 HOW SHOULD THE SCHOOL RESPOND?

Whilst the school community may find the transition of a transgender student initially challenging, it is critically important to the physical, psychological and emotional well-being of that young person that they are treated with dignity, respect and fairness for his or her preferred gender identity. For

In general, it is extremely important to ensure that the correct gender, name and pronoun are used to address transgender or intersex people. Using the correct name, pronoun and gender is a mark of respect against which individuals will measure the level of safety and inclusion for them within the school. While adjustment to a new name may take time, and accidents in misuse of original names may happen, the school should be alert to the use of the original name and pronoun as a means of name-calling and harassment.

example, where a student who says she is a girl and wishes to be regarded that way throughout the school day and other areas of her life, should be respected and treated like a girl. So too with a student who says he is a boy and wishes to be regarded that way throughout the school day and other areas of his life. Such a student should be respected and treated like a boy.

Students who identify as intersex or gender non-binary will have varying needs of support. It is good practice to ascertain what supports they need on an individual basis and, where possible, to negotiate those supports between the student, their family and the school to try to reach an agreement that is fair and respectful to all.

If relevant, the school should work with the student and his or her parents/guardians to devise a 'transition plan' (for more on transition plans see section 4.5.3). To prevent transphobic bullying this plan should be communicated sensitively and appropriately to the school community. It presents an opportunity to engage in awareness-raising educational activities that build understanding and empathy (see section 7 for ideas on education and prevention strategies on homophobic and transphobic bullying).

To support the prevention of transphobic bullying the following sections provide guidance on how to deal with the practical support arrangements when a student comes out as transgender and expresses the wish to be known and addressed in his or her preferred gender.

4.4 PRACTICAL ARRANGEMENTS

As stated previously, it is better to take time to ensure that practical supports that are relevant and suitable are made available for the student.

4.4.1 Terminology and language

In line with the Department of Education and Skills' Anti-Bullying Procedures and the SPHE and RSE curriculum the school should provide education and awareness-raising opportunities to broaden understanding of gender and transgender identity, and to ensure clarity on the distinction between the concepts of sexual orientation (being heterosexual, bisexual, gay or lesbian) and gender (being male or female). Education and awareness-raising strategies should be aimed at increasing understanding and respect for difference; central to this is the use of correct terminology and appropriate language. *Growing Up Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender: A Resource for SPHE and RSE* (Department of Education and Skills, HSE, GLEN and BeLonG To, 2011) was developed with the aim of providing a practical resource for such awareness raising education.

When transgender people come out they often choose to change their first name to match their preferred gender. School personnel should discuss with the student,

> **It is crucially important to the well-being of a young person that his or her gender identity is treated with dignity, respect and fairness.**

and his/her parents/guardians where appropriate, how the school should refer to the student; relevant areas for discussion include the day to day use of a preferred name, appropriate pronoun, and clarification in relation to written communications to the student's parents/guardians. Consultation with the student is very important, especially as some young people may not have support in their home circumstances and consequently may require additional school based support. The example at the end of this section contains a case study of how one school approached a situation where the parents of a student were not in agreement with the wishes of the student to have his preferred gender recognised.

4.4.2 School register and official documents

Each school must maintain a register of students attending the school (Education (Welfare) Act (2000, Section 20 (2)).

The Board of Management/Patron of each school is ultimately responsible for decisions regarding a name change of a student and consequently there is nothing to preclude a school from using a student's preferred name in day to day interactions, regardless of the name used officially on the school register. All decisions should be done with the welfare of the student as the primary consideration and, where possible, in consultation with the parents/guardians of the student.

A school may change the name of a student on the Post-Primary Online Database (P-Pod). Currently it is not possible for a student without a gender recognition certificate to have his/her gender marker amended on this online database. Where a student has a gender recognition certificate it is not necessary for a school to obtain the certificate in order for the gender on the online database to be changed

In the case of a student in a state examination year (Junior or Leaving Certificate) it may be necessary for the principal to contact the State Examinations Commission (SEC) to request a name change on his/her behalf in order that the state examination certificate that is issued reflects the preferred name of the student. The SEC deals with each case individually in consultation with the principal. It may also be necessary for a student in Leaving Certificate year to have his/her Central Applications Office (CAO) form amended in order to ensure consistency of name usage.

Change of name by deed poll

It is possible for a young person under the age of 18 years to change their name by deed poll with the consent of their parents/guardians. A change of name by deed poll provides official documentary evidence that a person has changed their name legally and the deed poll, along with a birth certificate, is a legal document and acceptable for most administrative purposes.

Specific accommodations may be necessary for a student who transitions in a single-sex school

4.4.3 Single-gender activities

To the extent possible, best practice suggests schools should reduce or eliminate the separation of students by gender during school activities. In situations where this is necessary, such as for certain SPHE classes, transgender students should be included in the group that corresponds with their preferred gender identity. In single-sex schools it is good practice to avoid gender stereotyping in relation to planning the content of programmes. For example, providing only sporting activities in all-boys settings or providing dance and music activities in all-girls settings. Where feasible, and within the resources available, schools should offer varied programmes which address a wide range of interests and aptitudes.

4.4.4 School uniforms

Many schools require students to wear a school uniform. All students, including transgender students, should be expected to follow the school uniform policy and to comply with set policies on use of make-up, appropriate dress, jewellery, etc. Students who are transgender or intersex should be permitted to wear a uniform that is consistent with their gender identity. For some schools this will present more of a challenge than others.

For many schools variation in the uniform is available (i.e. trousers, skirts and tracksuits). In a single-sex school context, varied uniform options may not be readily available and consequently specific accommodations will be necessary for a student who transitions to their preferred gender. Any special accommodations should be worked out with the student and his/her parents/guardians. At a minimum a gender neutral option should be offered. For example

single-sex girls' schools may need to consider allowing trousers to be worn. Single-sex boys schools may need to consider a variation in uniform options.

In settings where there is no uniform it should not be assumed that clothing is not an issue. Regardless of whether the school has a uniform the issue of clothing can be included in discussions on the transition plan with the student and his/her parents/guardians.

The main consideration is that each student should feel safe and supported to express themselves through their clothing whilst maintaining school uniform/dress code regulations. The following section also addresses uniforms in the context of sports.

4.4.5 Physical Education and sport

Physical Education (PE) is an important area of the second-level curriculum. It is intrinsically linked with maintaining physical and mental health and overall well-being. All students, including transgender students have the same right to physical education and sport as other young people and should be encouraged to participate in sport and physical education.

Research in the USA (GLSEN, 2013) has found that many LGBT students reported

> When physical education and sports are separated according to gender, students should be permitted to participate according to their gender identity.

that discrimination prevented them from participating in sports fully and safely. According to this research interest shown by trans students to participate in sport according to their preferred gender was often seen as 'disruptive' by school officials. Additionally, the research identified practices that particularly hindered transgender students' participation, such as requiring students to use changing rooms based on a student's sex assigned at birth.

The nature of contact and physicality of sports such as rugby, soccer or GAA may require some schools to consider individual cases separately. All schools should encourage and facilitate all students to participate in sports according to their interests and without impediment according to their gender identity. Where a student, or a team in which the student is a member, is competing at a very high level the school may need to consider individual cases separately with

due regard for player safety. A useful online reference resource lists policies from a wide range of sports and international sporting bodies. The URL for the website is *www.transathlete.com*

Where a school has a gender specific sports uniform, a transgender student should be able to wear the uniform of their preferred gender. In some schools consideration may need to be given to the swimwear worn by students when participating in swimming lessons or water based activities. Exploring alternative swimwear options may avoid potential issues that could develop due to the revealing nature of this type of clothing. For example, skirted swimsuits, baggy shorts or short wetsuits are alternatives to traditional swimming costumes. See preceding section 4.4.4 for more on school uniforms.

4.4.6 Toilets and changing rooms

All students should feel safe and supported when accessing toilet and changing facilities. Transgender students should be able to access toilet and changing facilities that correspond with their gender identity. If a student transitions during the course of their time in school a member of the student support team or equivalent should consult with the student as to how he or she wishes to access these facilities. The transition plan (see section 4.5.3) should include reference to toilet and changing facilities. Being able to access gender neutral toilets may be particularly important during transition; gender neutral toilets might be provided by re-naming a disability toilet as a unisex toilet/changing facility.

While some transgender students will want this arrangement, others will not be comfortable with it and consequently these students should be provided with a safe and adequate alternative, such as a single 'unisex' toilet facility where this is possible. This should not be a staff toilet facility.

The use of toilet and changing facilities often causes most debate around the inclusion of transgender students. Other students and their families may feel uncomfortable with a transgender student using the same gender-specific facilities. This discomfort may be rooted in an unfounded assumption of inappropriate behaviour on the part of the student who is transgender and consequently it is not a reason to deny access to the transgender student. However, it is important to address this discomfort and to foster understanding of gender identity in order to create a school culture that respects and values all students and prevents transphobic bullying.

4.5 SUPPORT ARRANGEMENTS

The student support team will play a central role in providing relevant supports to transgender students who require such support.

4.5.1 Staff training

Growing visibility of transgender people, and awareness of the issues that many transgender people experience as they live in their preferred gender identity, has revealed a knowledge gap among the general public and education and health sector personnel. Many of the difficulties experienced by transgender people are related to a lack of understanding which could easily be avoided through appropriately targeted professional development programmes.

The Professional Development and Support Training services of the Department of Education and Skills provide such education opportunities to SPHE teachers, on the topics of sexual orientation and gender identity. SPHE coordinators are core members of student support teams. Additionally, there are also a small number of external organisations that can help in identifying and supporting the school's training needs (see section 8). At a

One large school created gender neutral toilets in one section of the school which any student may use. This has prevented anyone from feeling singled out for using a specific toilet facility.

minimum, school personnel can increase their knowledge of transgender identity and related issues by becoming familiar with the terminology involved and by reading background information about transgender young people (such information may be sourced from organisations identified in section 8).

4.5.2 Student education

Given the experiences of homophobic and transphobic harassment and bullying among LGBT young people in schools and society it is important to educate all students about transgender people and related issues (Higgins et al, 2016 and Mayock et al, 2009). While an integrated approach within the curriculum is recommended, stand-alone lessons are also important and are contained in the resource *Growing Up Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender: A Resource for SPHE and RSE* (Department of Education and Skills et al, 2011).

4.5.3 Transition plan

When a student expresses the wish to attend school in his or her preferred gender it is advisable that a plan for the transition process is set out in line with the student's wishes, needs and concerns. A transition plan should be set out by the student and a member of the student support team or equivalent. The staff person will ideally be someone who the student is comfortable with; examples include the class tutor, year head, and guidance counsellor or school chaplain. Where possible, parents/guardians should also be involved in setting out the transition plan.

The transition plan should address precise details for each aspect of transition, including an exact timeframe for when each transition will take place. It may be appropriate to invite an expert on transgender identity from an external group to provide support to the student and school in devising and implementing the transition plan (see section 8). It is also important to consider how the transition will be communicated to the school community to prevent transphobic bullying.

When a student seeks support from school for their gender transition the primary consideration is the welfare and well-being of the student. Every other consideration may be solved through consultation, collaboration and creativity.

Essential elements of a transition plan for a school context

Regardless of how the plan is devised, the following areas should be addressed:

1. How the plan fits with relevant school policies and procedures, especially the Anti-Bullying Policy and Code of Behaviour.
2. How the transition will be communicated with the remainder of the school community, this is particularly important to prevent transphobic bullying and create a positive school climate and culture.
3. Whether it is necessary to communicate with parents/guardians of other students.
4. The date of the transition, i.e., the first day of the change of gender presentation, pronoun usage and name. This date will be driven primarily by the student.
5. The expected plan for the use of toilets and changing facilities.
6. Make advance arrangements for name changes to be effective on the day of transition, so that the preferred name appears on attendance sheets, nameplates on lockers and badges on the first day of transition.
7. What are the arrangements for staff education/training?
8. How fellow class members and other students will be informed of the change. Before the announcement, the student may choose to talk to some of his or her classmates to disclose his or her plans on a one-on-one basis.
9. What provision will be made for education of the wider student community?
10. If relevant, how the uniform code will be followed.

4.5.4 Changing schools

Changing schools presents an opportunity for a new start and this may be the point at which a young transgender person decides to transition to their preferred gender. The management of a move between schools needs consideration, and good communication between the original and the new school is important. The student should be referred initially to the student support team or equivalent within the new school. Close consultation with the student and his or her family is required. It is particularly important to ascertain the student's wishes around confidentiality in the new school, for example some students will not want to reveal their transgender identity, choosing to simply present in their preferred gender.

4.5.5 Gender transition in a single-sex school

At first glance it may seem that the challenges facing single-sex schools (including single-sex boarding schools) in supporting their trans student(s) may be more complex than those of a co-ed school. However, increasing numbers of single-sex schools are supporting students in making a transition. Examples of how two schools approached it follow.

Regardless of the setting, the key goal is to ensure the safety and support of the student in question so that they may be free from harassment and victimisation and in a position to reach their full educational potential.

It is possible for a student to transition and remain in a single-sex school. The school's single-sex status will not be altered by the continued enrolment of a transgender student whose gender is not that of the remainder of the student population.

CASE-STUDY OF GENDER TRANSITION IN A SINGLE-SEX SCHOOL

The following is based on real situations in a single-sex school in Ireland. The approaches taken by the school were decided following discussions involving two students, their parents, the school principal and guidance counsellor with support from external organisations. To protect identity the following section has been anonymised and presented as a composite narrative of the two students' individual stories.

BACKGROUND

The principal of a single-sex school first became aware that a student was transgender during the first year of senior cycle. The particular student was already under the care of the student support team due to unrelated issues.

- The student came to the principal with a request in relation to the school uniform. At this stage the parents were not involved. In discussion with the student it was agreed to involve the parents.
- Once the parents became involved the principal met with them many times and all changes were made with the consent of all involved.
- In the single-sex context an initial concern for the principal related to practical arrangements, such as the school uniform. The actions that follow were essentially led by the individual student and his parents, who led the timing and approach to be taken by the school.

SCHOOL UNIFORM:

The school has a PE uniform that could be considered unisex. It was agreed that the student would wear the PE uniform as the day to day uniform.

TOILETS AND CHANGING ROOMS:

The school has a stand-alone toilet facility which was agreed as being the toilet the student would use. This would also act as a changing facility where necessary. This was the decision that the student was most comfortable with.

NAME & PRONOUN:

It was agreed that the school would adopt the new pronoun and first name requested by the student.

DEALING WITH OTHER STUDENTS:

In agreement with the parents of the student, the school suggested that the student stay at home on a particular day to provide an opportunity for class tutors in that year group to speak with the other students and explain the changes that were taking place. The absence of the student meant the class tutor could encourage other students to ask questions without feeling inhibited. The school felt this was a very important step in order to build awareness and understanding and prevent transphobic bullying.

EXTRA-CURRICULAR ACTIVITIES & INTERACTIONS WITH OTHER SINGLE-SEX SCHOOLS:

During the course of the school year the school had an occasion to have an overnight stay which required shared sleeping accommodation. As in all other matters, with the agreement of the parents the Centre in question was notified that the group included a student who identified as transgender. This was to ensure that the Centre were fully aware should any issue arise during the course of the stay. Following discussions with the student and his parents it was agreed that, like the other students, he would share accommodation.

This school also has an annual get-together with another single-sex school of the opposite sex. There were some issues arising when the student presented in his preferred gender, the principal asked the guidance counsellor to speak sensitively to the relevant students in the other school. Following this intervention all future get –together events went off without incident. In this context communication was considered an essential component to ensure a positive school climate and culture that prevents transphobic bullying.

WHEN A STUDENT REMAINS IN THE SINGLE-SEX SCHOOL:

At the time of writing one student had decided to stay in this single-sex school. This school takes the view that upon enrolment the student was legally the gender which they were registered at birth. Therefore the principal takes the view that the school's responsibility to this student remains unchanged even after a social transition. Consequently the principals' approach is if the student chooses to stay in the school after transition, they will be accommodated and assigned support if necessary through the student support team.

WHEN THE STUDENT CHOOSES TO LEAVE THE SINGLE-SEX SCHOOL:

At the time of writing there was a possibility that a second student might choose to move to another school. The school's approach was to acknowledge their responsibility to ensure that the student has appropriate access to education if they decide to leave their original school. In this example the single-sex school continued to support the student through the guidance counsellor after the student had left the school. The school envisages this support continuing until such time as the student has an alternative place in an appropriate education centre or school.

ISSUES IDENTIFIED BY THE SCHOOL FOR FUTURE CONSIDERATION:

Having gone through the above experience school leaders in this school reflected on the situations in the context of existing policies and procedures. The review identified areas for consideration to contribute to a positive school climate and culture relevant to the full student cohort and where difference and diversity are welcomed and homophobic and transphobic bullying prevented:

Extra-curricular activities: Upon reviewing the extra-curricular activities offered school leaders identified some extra-curricular activities as quite gendered in their focus. This school has found that they made assumptions about the appeal of extra-curricular activities based on the gender of the student body and not necessarily on the specific interests of students. For example, an overemphasis of extra-curricular activities on the arts, rather than sport as may be the reverse case in an all-boys setting. This school has decided to review activities and how they are presented, to ensure that they appeal to as many students as possible.

Romantic relationships between students: This single-sex school has identified a policy gap in relation to romantic relationships between students. They may look for examples from other school contexts, for example some co-educational schools have such a policy and in such contexts the policy is applied uniformly, whether the relationship is opposite or same-sex.

CASE STUDY OF HOW A SCHOOL DEALT WITH A SITUATION WHEN PARENTS' AND STUDENT'S WISHES WERE NOT ALIGNED.

Sometimes the wishes of a student to socially transition while they are in school are not supported by their parents. The following is an example of a school where this was the case and outlines the approach taken by the school.

The principal of a single-sex school found herself supporting a student who wanted to socially transition in the school using his preferred name and pronoun.

- The student had for some time been receiving additional support in the school due to personal issues. It was not known during this time that the student was transgender.
- The student was sent to the principal on a number of occasions for missing school, on one occasion the principal probed further and the student came out at that point as transgender and stated his request to be known in his preferred name and pronoun.

- The principal assured the student that the school would be as supportive as possible and during the conversation enquired as to the situation at home with his parents'. The student told the principal that neither of his parents was supportive of his gender identity and that there was a lot of disagreement and tension at home. The principal assured the student of her support, but asked him to wait until such time as she spoke to his parents. She referred the student to the Guidance Counsellor for support.
- The principal sought a wide range of advice from external supports, including the State Examinations Commission (SEC). The advice received was that it was a decision for the school Board of Management in consultation with the student and his/her parents/guardians.
- Senior staff in the school discussed how best they could keep the welfare of the student at the core of any decisions that were made in line with a stated policy. They, along with the Patron, agreed that they would present a solution to the student and his parents. In this instance the solution was to:

1. Respect the request of the student to have his preferred name and pronoun used in general day to day dealings in the school.
2. Respect the student's parents' wishes of not changing the official name on the school register.

- The parents were given time to consider the proposal and returned after a number of days in agreement with the proposals. The parents and principal agreed a wording for the student and this was communicated formally to the student in a letter and in person. The school continues to provide support to the student.
- In line with the school's anti-bullying policy to prevent transphobic bullying, general training was provided to all staff (including teaching, administrative and caretaking staff), and representatives of the Board of Management. All were informed of the specific situation.

5. KEY ROLES IN SUPPORT OF LGBT STUDENTS

5.1 THE ROLE OF PRINCIPALS AND OTHER SCHOOL LEADERS

Since the publication of the Department of Education and Skills' Anti-Bullying Procedures there are new requirements on principals and school leaders, particularly in relation to addressing homophobic and transphobic bullying. Many school leaders are meeting the challenges of ensuring their school is safe, supportive and affirming of all students, including LGBT students.

Principals and other school leaders play a key role in creating a positive school climate within which bullying is unacceptable.

Much of the content in the other sections of this resource will support principals in overseeing the formulation of school policy; supporting staff members in the implementation of effective education and prevention strategies, and liaising with Boards of Management and parents/guardians.

5.1.1 Working with parents/guardians

Parents/guardians have a particularly important role and responsibility in helping the school to prevent and address school-based bullying behaviour, and to deal with any negative impact within school of bullying behaviour that occurs elsewhere. This important role is reflected in the Department's anti-bullying procedures at section 6.8.9 point (v) *"Parents [/guardians] and pupils are required to co-operate with any investigation and assist the school in resolving any issues and restoring, as far as is practical, the relationships of the parties involved as quickly as possible".*

5.1.2 Parents/guardians of LGBT students

Sometimes issues related to sexuality and gender can be difficult for parents/guardians to address and this may be especially so if their child is lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender. Parents/guardians of LGBT children have understandable concerns for their safety in school, particularly in relation to bullying and isolation. It may benefit the school to engage with these parents/guardians in the development and promotion of the school's Anti-Bullying Policy and the Code of Behaviour. If such parents/guardians are not known to the principal, the Parents' Association may help to address these concerns through surveying the general parent/guardian body.

The Principal has a key role in dealing with bullying behaviour because he/she provides leadership to both staff and students in developing and implementing a vision of the school where diversity is accepted and respected.

5.1.3 Parents/guardians of other students

Many principals fear a negative reaction from parents/guardians when issues related to sexual orientation or gender identity are raised in schools. For many principals the Departmental requirement on all schools to adopt preventative strategies to address all forms of bullying, including homophobic and transphobic bullying, provides a policy rationale to support the existing curriculum requirements within SPHE/RSE. By necessity, preventative education strategies will be focused on increasing respect and understanding of difference and diversity, including different sexual orientations and gender identities.

Parents/guardians will always have the right to remove their child from any class if they have an objection to the content of a lesson. If such a request is made the principal should remind the relevant parents/guardians of the school's responsibility to implement the Department's Anti-Bullying Procedures and to provide education and prevention strategies to prevent identity based bullying, including homophobic and transphobic bullying. The following points may be useful for framing discussions with other staff members or parents/guardians.

Information in relation to school-based education and prevention measures to address homophobic and transphobic bullying. This information may be of assistance for discussions with parents/guardians and/or staff.

Schools must promote the Anti-Bullying Policy. The Department of Education and Skills' *Anti-Bullying Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools* state that the Board of Management must ensure that the anti-bullying policy is regularly highlighted and promoted on a school-wide basis, with particular attention being given to informing incoming students and their parents/guardians.

School practice is related to laws and policies. A few key laws govern what schools must do; the Education Act (1998) and the Education (Welfare) Act (2000) are overarching laws, while equality is embedded by the Equal Status Acts (2000 to 2012). Schools are required to prepare a Code of Behaviour, along with other policies, that specify the standards of behaviour which must be observed by students. Schools have a responsibility to address homophobic and transphobic bullying in their anti-bullying policies and to ensure education and prevention strategies are in place to prevent and tackle such bullying. Parents/guardians of incoming students are provided with the school's Code of Behaviour prior to registering their child in the school.

Sexual orientation and gender identity are normal aspects of human identity. Lesbian, gay and bisexual young people follow the same developmental challenges and pathways as those of their heterosexual peers. Young people who are transgender often have a number of barriers to overcome until their preferred gender is accepted by others and accommodated. Additionally LGBT students may have to cope with negative attitudes, discrimination and harassment directed towards LGBT people. The school must ensure a positive school climate and culture where difference is welcomed and where homophobic and transphobic bullying is prevented. Fear of victimisation may reduce the willingness of an LGBT young person to seek support or come out. A positive school climate and culture will provide an appropriate environment of support where an LGBT person may choose to come out.

Many parents want schools to positively address sexuality. Research has shown the value that parents/guardians place on Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) (Mayock et al, 2007). Further research reveals the vast majority of parents/guardians (82%) felt that issues related to sexual orientation should be addressed, while 90% of parents/guardians felt that negative attitudes to LGBT people should be addressed in schools (Gleeson & McCormack, 2010).

Education and prevention strategies benefit everyone. Even if LGBT people are not out, it is highly likely that every school and every classroom has LGBT students. Homophobic and transphobic bullying and anti-gay name-calling are serious issues that impact greatly on LGBT students. They also impact on any student who is considered different and who is targeted by this type of bullying. The whole-school population benefits when inclusion and respect for difference are promoted and issues related to sexual orientation, gender identity, homophobic and transphobic bullying are addressed.

Schools need the support of parents/guardians. No parent/guardian wants his or her child, or any young person, to be bullied or to be involved in bullying behaviour. The support and involvement of parents/guardians is critical to support the school in carrying out its legal obligations to protect all students and to eliminate all forms of bullying.

5.1.4 Different family forms

School leaders are very aware that family forms have changed considerably in the past few decades. In addition to the more common family unit of mother, father and children, most schools now acknowledge and respect different forms of family including:

- One parent families (either mother or father)
- Trans-generational families (one or two grandparents as the main care givers)
- Step-family arrangements (sometimes known as 'blended families')
- Foster families
- Two parents/guardians of the same-sex
- Siblings from different families (as in the case of 'blended families')
- Families where parents/guardians live apart
- Young people in care
- Children with adoptive parents/guardians.

Acknowledging, respecting and affirming the family background of every student is important to their overall well-being and subsequent ability to derive maximum benefit from their education. The language used by a school, and the respect afforded to parents/guardians and family structures, is critical to a young person's sense of belonging, this can be demonstrated by:

- Using inclusive language in any communications, written or oral, in relation to home situations
- Addressing letters for home to parents/guardians and where known, to other care givers
- Promoting respect for different family forms, for example through ensuring the availability of a variety of books with representations of different family forms.

5.1.5 Relationships between students

Adolescence is a period when many young people have their first romantic relationships and this is no different for young people who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender. In many instances school leaders have to deal with a variety of issues related to romantic relationships between students.

Graduation balls and other social events are often occasions when school leaders may have to deal directly with same-sex relationships, for example if a young person expresses a wish to invite a person of the same-sex to the event. Schools committed to a positive school climate and culture, which is inclusive of difference, will be prepared for such eventualities.

School policies on relationships between students, whether opposite sex or same-sex, are individual school matters. Consideration of such matters could be included within the school policy on Relationships and Sexuality Education, or the school code of behaviour following consultation with teachers, parents/guardians, management and students.

Schools committed to a positive school climate and culture, which is inclusive of difference and diversity, will be prepared for the eventuality of relationships between students.

Statements such as 'staff will not be discriminated against in employment and promotions on any ground, including sexual orientation or gender identify', can provide much needed reassurance.

5.1.6 Staff members who are LGBT

Schools that are inclusive and supportive of LGBT students are also supportive and inclusive of all LGBT people in the school community, including teachers and other staff members. The school culture and ethos will determine how open staff can be about their personal lives. Research with LGB teachers has shown that they often feel limited in their ability to be open about their personal lives in the staff room due to fears in relation to job security and advancement (Neary, 2013; Gowran, 2004).

The support of principals and school management can make a significant difference to LGBT teachers. Such support can be demonstrated by reference to LGBT people in all policy and staffing issues, for example by the inclusion of a statement such as **'staff will not be discriminated against in employment and promotions on any ground, including sexual orientation or gender identity'.** Where a Dignity at Work policy exists, this may provide a very relevant framework for such a statement.

Teachers' union organisations provide supportive networks for LGBT teachers (see section 8 for details). Displaying this information on staff notice boards has the double impact of providing information and offering implicit support to LGBT staff members.

5.2 THE ROLE OF THE 'RELEVANT TEACHER'

All teachers play an important role in supporting the holistic development of young people in schools and promoting a positive school climate and culture that is welcoming of difference and diversity. Depending on their specific role some teachers have a greater responsibility than others, and especially if they are also a member of the student support team (Department of Education and Skills, 2014). Outlined in the following sections are the distinct roles of the 'relevant teacher' (as outlined by the Department's anti-bullying procedures), guidance counsellors and others working one-to-one with students, and the general class teacher.

The 'relevant teacher' must communicate his/her openness and eagerness to receive reports of all bullying behaviour. Homophobic and transphobic bullying need to be explicitly mentioned.

5.2.1 The role of the 'relevant teacher' in the anti-bullying policy

A 'relevant teacher', as outlined in the Department of Education and Skills' Anti-Bullying Procedures, is a member of staff who has responsibility for investigating and dealing with bullying (Department of Education and Skills, 2013; section 6.8.3). The school's anti-bullying policy must identify (but not necessarily name) the relevant teacher. It is possible, and highly likely, that some schools will identify more than one person to fulfil the role of the relevant teacher.

At post-primary level the school will determine who the relevant teacher should be, it is likely that this role will frequently be held by class tutors, guidance counsellors or school chaplains. Specific information is provided for teachers in these roles later in this section. The relevant teacher is likely to be a member of the student support team or have a formal way of linking with the team when carrying out the functions of the role.

5.2.2 Responsibilities of the relevant teachers as outlined by the DES anti-bullying procedures

The primary aim of the relevant teacher in investigating and dealing with bullying is to resolve any issues and to restore, as far as is practicable, the relationships of the parties involved. He or she must also;

- Investigate and deal with all reports of bullying, including anonymous reports
- Keep appropriate written records for each case where bullying has occurred, according to the procedures outlined in the school's anti-bullying policy
- Adhere to the Department's anti-bullying procedures which provide a reporting form for use by the relevant teacher in cases where he/she considers the bullying behaviour has not been adequately or appropriately addressed within 20 days after he/she has determined that bullying behaviour has occurred; and where a school has decided as part of its anti-bullying policy that, in certain circumstances, bullying behaviour must be recorded and reported immediately to the Principal or Deputy Principal (Department of Education and Skills Anti-Bullying Procedures, 2013, Section 6.8.9).

5.2.3 The relevant teacher and homophobic and transphobic bullying

The teacher with responsibility for investigating and dealing with bullying is vitally important to the successful implementation of a school's anti-bullying policy. In order for bullying to be adequately and effectively dealt with it needs to be reported. All students need to be confident that the report they make will be treated seriously and promptly. The relevant teacher must communicate his/her openness and eagerness to receive reports of all bullying behaviour. Homophobic and transphobic bullying must be explicitly mentioned. This will create the confidence amongst students that they are acting responsibly, and in their own and other students' best interests when they make a report.

> The casual demeaning of gay identity through improper language can contribute to a student not feeling safe or empowered to report bullying.

5.2.4 How to encourage reporting amongst vulnerable students

Reporting bullying behaviour is not easy for any student, particularly if they have been the target of bullying behaviour. There can be a heightened degree of difficulty when the bullying is rooted in lack of respect for difference, prejudice, stereotypes or stigma, as is the case with homophobic and transphobic bullying. Many young people are targets of this type of bullying, some are LGBT but many are not. While many LGBT young people are very comfortable with this aspect of their identity some are still in the process of coming out and are not at the stage of telling someone else. For a young person in this situation reporting homophobic or transphobic bullying in person to the relevant teacher may be very difficult. The Department of Education anti-bullying procedures require that all reports of bullying, including anonymous reports, must be investigated and dealt with by the relevant teacher. Students who are vulnerable to such identity-based bullying should be provided with the opportunity to report the bullying anonymously, at least initially, so that the school can begin to take action.

In many schools anti-gay name-calling is a regular occurrence and students frequently use gay related expressions in a derisive or derogatory manner, for example a student mocking an image being used as part of a lesson as 'gay', or a student disparagingly deeming another student's response in class as being 'gay'. Such occurrences are harmful to all students but they can have a very negative impact on LGBT students regardless of whether they are out or not. LGBT young people who have experienced homophobic or transphobic bullying are more likely to experience depression, anxiety, self-harm, consider ending their own life and attempt suicide than those who have not experienced such bullying (Higgins et al, 2016).

The relevant teacher should explore with the school community how students can report bullying, including through anonymous reporting. Student councils provide an excellent mechanism for such consultation. In addition to those suggestions that may be made by students a number of options based upon good practice are suggested below.

Good practice aimed at supporting reporting of bullying by vulnerable students

- Use a **reporting form** such as the sample provided in section 5.2.7 whereby students are given the opportunity to identify the type of bullying, e.g. bullying based on identity, such as homophobic or transphobic bullying.
- Some schools have created a **dedicated school email address** through which students or parents/guardians can report bullying. Such email accounts require regular monitoring to ensure any messages are reponded to promptly.
- Ensure that there is a **regular space/ time provided for students to voice concerns** about bullying, etc. This space can be created during tutor time for example. Students will come to expect this and rely on it as an opportunity to report bullying behaviour.
- Support the formation of a **buddy system** in the school, or **'safe space'**, where students are encouraged to support other students.
- Carry out **regular anonymous data collection** amongst students to assess their experience in relation to bullying behaviour. Provide an opportunity for students to state their experience of how LGBT people and issues are treated in the school, see suggested questions in the sample that follows.

SUGGESTED QUESTIONS FOR DATA COLLECTION IN RELATION TO HOMOPHOBIC AND TRANSPHOBIC BULLYING

In my school... (tick all that apply)

- ☐ There is an anti-bullying policy that clearly includes lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender students.

- ☐ There are books and/or posters in the school with lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people or characters included.

- ☐ There is often discussion about lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people and or issues in class. It's mostly positive.

- ☐ There is often discussion about lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people and or issues in class. It's mostly negative.

- ☐ Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people are not talked about.

- ☐ I hear homophobic or transphobic comments (these are disrespectful comments about lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender people)

  - ☐ I hear students make these comments

  - ☐ I hear teachers make these comments

  - ☐ I hear other staff members make these comments

- ☐ I see homophobic or transphobic bullying (this is bullying based on prejudice against lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender people – although it can happen to anyone)

  - ☐ I see this type of bullying by other students

  - ☐ I see this type of bullying by teachers

  - ☐ I see this type of bullying by other staff members

- ☐ I know what homophobic and transphobic bullying are.

- ☐ I know how/where to report bullying behaviour.

5.2.5 Advantages of providing for anonymous reporting

Anonymous reporting can mean that no names are provided but students are encouraged to make a statement about bullying behaviour that they have witnessed or experienced, limiting the information to the class in which it occured or the location in the school environment. Anonymous reporting can give students who would otherwise be reluctant to report bullying an opportunity to do so without negative consequences, in fact there are a number of advantages:

- It allows students who do not want to be identified to report bullying behaviour that they witness or experience.
- It allows the school authorities to be made aware of a situation, which they can then monitor closely.
- Staff are made aware of 'hot spots' and 'hot times' where behaviour can be monitored and supervised more closely, and targeted education and prevention strategies employed to address future bullying.
- Staff have information to start investigations into specific bullying situations.

5.2.6 Responding to reported incidents of homophobic and transphobic bullying

Having investigated a report of bullying, the relevant teacher uses his/her professional judgement to determine whether bullying has occurred and how best the situation can be resolved.

The Department of Education and Skills outlines in detail the procedures for investigating and dealing with bullying in *Anti-Bullying Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools* (2013, page 30). When bullying is homophobic or transphobic the following approaches will be useful for a school to pursue:

Good Practice in responding to reports of homophobic or transphobic bullying

- In communicating the school's anti-bullying policy to the school community all students should be encouraged to report bullying behaviour as a means of improving the school community for everyone. If students know that the school understands that homophobic and transphobic bullying can be experienced by people who are not LGBT they may be less afraid of being labelled LGBT. The school needs to communicate that, while being LGBT is perfectly normal and accepted, sometimes people can fear being judged for being different or being perceived to be different.
- Don't assume that a person who reports homophobic or transphobic bullying is LGBT.
- The bullying behaviour, and the impact of that behaviour, should be the focus of the investigation and not whether the student concerned is LGBT or not.

- Sensitivity should be applied in relation to the involvement of parents/guardians in the case of a young person who has experienced homophobic or transphobic bullying. For example, a young person who is LGBT may not have come out to his/her parents/guardians and may feel very vulnerable when parents/guardians become involved. It should be emphasised that anyone can be targeted with this type of bullying. In dealing with specific instances of homophobic or transphobic bullying the focus should be on the actual bullying behaviour and the impact on the students, not on whether or not the student is LGBT. Follow-up work can be done with the wider year group more generally to address prejudice and discrimination against LGBT people.
- A student who reports homophobic or transphobic bullying should be asked if they would like support. If one-to-one support is not available within the school, external support through organisations such as BeLonG To Youth Services and TENI can be sought (see section 8).

5.2.7 GLEN Sample form for students to report bullying behaviour

Our school deals with all bullying seriously as we believe every student should have a safe place to learn. We need your help with this. Teachers can't see everything that happens in school; sometimes you see things that make other students feel bad. You don't have to give your name here but you may if you prefer. If you don't, it would help if we knew your year or class group. It helps everyone if you use this form truthfully and honestly.

1. Tell us everything you saw and what happened.

2. Where did this happen? *These are examples - junior school toilets, behind the tree in the car park, on the bus on the way to school, on Facebook, somewhere else.*

3. How does what you told us about involve you? Are you:

☐ The student being targeted?
☐ A student who is involved in the bullying?
☐ A student who saw the bullying?
☐ A student who heard about the bullying?

4. Can you tell us who else was involved? If you don't want to give names it would be really helpful if we knew the class or the year of the people involved.

5. Tell us about the bullying by using these lists? You may tick as many boxes as you wish.

☐ Physical (by hand) *For example, aggression, hurting someone, hitting, damage to property*
☐ Verbal (by word) *For example, name-calling, gossip, spreading rumours*
☐ Exclusion (leaving someone out) *For example, leaving someone out of a group activity, isolating a person from other classmates*
☐ Cyber-bullying (on a computer or phone) *For example, sending nasty text messages or comments on Facebook, Twitter or other such forums, or uploading video/photos to humiliate someone*
☐ Extortion (forcing someone) *For example, forcing someone to give money or possessions to other people, or forcing them to behave in a way they don't want to*
☐ Gesture (mocking someone) *For example, giving someone threatening or 'dirty' looks, using body language to intimidate*

Identity-based bullying

☐ Homophobic *About someone's sexual orientation*
☐ Transphobic *About someone's gender identity*
☐ Disability/Special needs *About someone's physical or intellectual ability*
☐ Racist *About someone's race or ethnicity*
☐ Traveller *About someone being a member of the Traveller community*

Anything else you think would be useful for us to know?

Your name:

If you don't feel able to tell us your name at this stage it would help use to deal with this information better if we knew your year or class group.

5.3 THE ROLE OF GUIDANCE COUNSELLORS

Guidance counsellors are core members of student support teams or equivalent. The role of such teams is to ensure the resources of the school benefit all students and in particular those presenting with additional support needs. Students who are LGBT, questioning their sexual orientation or gender identity or perceived to be LGBT, may require additional support at times. Guidance counsellors and other members of the student support team who work on a one-to-one basis with such students may find the following guidance useful.

Often a young person may experience intense fear of being rejected by his/her family and finds it easier to come out to others first.

5.3.1 Working with individual students

The guidance counsellor is often the person a student may choose to tell that they are lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender. The guidance counsellor should consider the following points and responses:

- Start by acknowledging that coming out is a very positive step and state that you are pleased that they chose to share this information with you.
- Reassure the student that you will treat information confidentially as long as he/she is not at risk of harm, or of harming someone else. Risk of harm should be assessed and dealt with in accordance with *Children First Guidelines* (Department of Children and Youth Affairs, 2011) and the Department of Education and Skills', *Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post Primary Schools.* Reassure the student that they are a valued member of the school community and that the school respects and affirms all students in all aspects of their individual identity. State that it is an important goal of the school that each member of the school community feels safe, supported and affirmed.
- Recognise that when a young person comes out as lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender they are disclosing their sexual orientation or gender identity. It is important that this is not interpreted as a statement of engagement in sexual behaviour. However, the advice given in the Children First Guidelines and the Department of Education and Skills' *Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post Primary Schools* relating to sexual activity applies to all students regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity. The legal age of consent

in Ireland is 17 years for boys and girls, for both heterosexual and homosexual sex.

- The student may have concerns about telling his/her parents/guardians. Reassure the young person that only if school authorities have legitimate cause for concern for the student's safety would contact be made with the student's parents/guardians. Often a young person experiences intense fear of rejection by his/her family and consequently finds it easier to come out to others first. A positive experience of coming out to others, where they are met with acceptance, is critical to safeguarding the young person's mental health and well-being; it can also lessen the fears about disclosing to his/her family and friends (Mayock et al, 2009).

5.3.2 General points for guidance counsellors in working with LGBT students

- Some guidance counsellors may believe that they are not expert enough on LGBT issues if they have never participated in education/training in this area. However, LGBT issues are like all other issues which involve a person's life experience and as each person's life experience is unique to them it is that particular experience that ought to guide the counselling situation, rather than a standardised approach. The general skills of counselling apply here as in any other situation. That said, a broad understanding of any issue is always beneficial and there are many sources of information and supports listed in section 8 and 9.

Good Practice Suggestions for Guidance Counsellors

- Willingness to talk about LGBT issues can be demonstrated by displaying posters and LGBT related information. Most LGBT students will see this as an indication that you are positively disposed to LGBT people.
- Guidance counsellors should be aware of bias and its potential impact. They should provide support sensitively and ensure the following forms of bias are challenged:

  - *Pathologising*, seeing someone's LGBT identity as a disorder or a problem, as opposed to a normal part of that person's identity
  - *Stereotyping*, for example, assuming someone is LGBT because they look, act or speak in a certain way
  - *Stigmatising*, implying that an LGBT identity is somehow shameful, for example by saying that the individual may be going through a phase that they will eventually grow out of, or suggesting that the student should not talk about their LGBT identity.

- People come to a realisation of their LGBT identity at all ages, sometimes they are quite young. Consequently, do not assume that an individual is too young to know that they are lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender.
- Ensure that you have up-to-date contacts and information available which will enable you to provide constructive and meaningful support. Organisations such as BeLonG To Youth Services and TENI provide such professional support (see section 8).

- If you are unsure of something ask an LGBT person, most will be happy to answer your questions. It is acceptable to say 'I don't know, but I'll try to find out' or 'I may not be saying this in the most appropriate way, so please correct me if I'm wrong…'
- If a young person is referred to you because they have experienced homophobic or transphobic bullying do not assume they are LGBT, but focus on the bullying and its impact on the young person - not on the implied identity. However, you should provide opportunities for the student to tell you that they are LGBT if this is the case. For example, tell the young person that lots of people are bullied in this way because they are perceived to be different. Reassure the student that the school treats all bullying very seriously.
- In relation to career planning do not assume that an LGBT young person who has come out to you will have career planning difficulties because of their LGBT identity. Approach career planning in the same way as you would with all students, based on their interests and abilities.

5.3.3 If a student comes out in a one-to-one situation

Coming out is an important time for many LGBT people and asking a student about their experience of coming out demonstrates your understanding of this importance. Respond initially by thanking the student for sharing this information with you; continue by asking about their experience in telling others. Suggested questions are provided below.

Questions to ask when a student comes out in a one-to-one situation

- 'Do any of your friends know you are lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender?' (Use whichever term the student uses to identify themselves)
- 'Have you come out to your family?'
- 'How have things been since you came out?'
- 'Who/what has helped you in the coming out process?'
- 'Have you had any positive/negative experiences since coming out?'
- 'Are there any issues you would like to discuss with me related to your sexual orientation or gender identity?'

Further areas that could be explored in the one-to-one setting include:

- What the student may have heard others say either directly/indirectly about being LGBT; explore positive, negative and neutral messages.

- How the student feels about their sexual orientation or gender identity.
- Explore the level of acceptance of LGBT identity; the student may be in the very initial stages of coming out and may not be fully comfortable with their sexual orientation or gender identity, it is important therefore that this is dealt with sensitively by giving the student space and time to discuss their questions and reassurance that no one is going to label them.
- Discuss what supports/social networks the student has, including other LGBT people. It may be appropriate to refer the student to external support organisations such as BeLonG To Youth Services (see section 8).
- Explore ways that the student can be supported by the school for example, many transgender people will ask to be identified in their preferred gender and by their preferred name (see section 4.4.1).

5.3.4 Working with students who are questioning their LGBT identity

While many young people are very certain about their sexual orientation or gender identity some question their identity and may seek support in doing so. The following suggestions may support guidance counsellors in working with such students:

- Explain that your role is to support students in all aspects of their experience in school, for example, personal, social and educational.
- Reassure the student that they can talk to you about anything that is affecting them. Tell the student that the service you provide is confidential and you would only need to inform the principal or parents/guardians if you believe his or her safety to be at risk.

- Reassure the student that you try not to judge anyone and you have a lot of experience working with students around lots of different issues.
- Assure the student that if you are not able to offer support you will find the appropriate support.
- If you judge it appropriate you might make an open ended statement, such as 'many young people go through difficult times when they are confused about different issues, my job is to provide them with the support they need'.
- If the student does not open up, even after you have provided the opportunity to do so, do not ask the student about their LGBT identity unless they first come out.

5.4 THE ROLE OF CLASS TEACHERS

All teachers, regardless of their role or subject area, have a leading part to play in contributing to a positive school climate and culture that is accepting of difference and diversity.

LGBT young people may choose a class teacher to come out to, therefore the good practice suggestions provided in section 5.3 may be just as relevant to general subject class teachers.

The suggestions below were developed in consultation with teachers, as a means of outlining actions that all teachers can adopt to contribute to a positive school culture and climate that is inclusive of LGBT students and those perceived to be LGBT.

GOOD PRACTICE FOR CLASS TEACHERS

Recognise that there are LGBT people in your school

- **Include LGBT people and families** in the language that you use. In doing so you are acknowledging that there are LGBT people within the school community, these might be students, teachers, parents/guardians or family members of the students.
- Remember there are quite likely to be LGBT students in every classroom. They might not be open about their LGBT identity; however it is not about identifying individuals, it is about generally **recognising this minority group.** Many LGBT people often feel excluded and invisible, by acknowledging that you expect LGBT people to be part of the school community you are creating a sense of inclusion and recognising LGBT people as a normal part of the school community.
- Where possible, **talk about** and include LGBT people and issues into the subject matter that you teach.

Demonstrate that you are a teacher who supports LGBT students

- The most supportive thing you can do is to not allow homophobic/transphobic name-calling in any situation. **The use of the term 'gay' as a derogatory term is frequent, widespread and largely unchallenged in many schools.** Students need to be made aware that using such language is offensive to people who are gay or LGBT even if offence was not intended.
- Name-calling and improper use of language such as in the previous example, if unchecked, can lead to homophobic/transphobic bullying. **By addressing the name-calling and improper language** you are demonstrating that you will not accept any student being treated badly, and that it is in everyone's interest to have a respectful learning environment.
- **Be familiar with the school's policies**, especially the anti-bullying policy and other policies that directly include homophobic/transphobic bullying and references to LGBT people. Refer to these policies where possible. This will not only support the implementation of the policies, but will also communicate to LGBT students that their safety and inclusion is important.
- **Consider how you can support students** to report bullying behaviour or other behaviour that is disrespectful and unwelcome, this is particularly important for teachers who are in the role of class tutor or year head.

- **Put an LGBT related poster up** in your classroom, for example the poster might be providing information about appropriate support services for LGBT young people, such as BeLonG To Youth Services (see section 8).
- **Encourage students to seek support** where relevant. Make students aware of the supports available in the school or externally. Explain that students may speak to you and to members of the school's student support team or equivalent.

Provide affirmation to LGBT young people

- **Model the kind of behaviour** you would like to see students and others demonstrate. For example, show that you respect lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people when the issue arises in your teaching.
- **Use opportunities**, such as news stories or events to provide respectful messages about LGBT people.
- **Discourage stereotyping**, including stereotypes related to gender or sexual orientation. When stereotypes arise encourage students to think critically about what stereotypes are and the impact they may have. Pay special attention to stereotypes that may be rooted in prejudice.

Be a role model for promoting positive behaviour & challenging homophobic and transphobic behaviour and attitudes

- Inform your professional practice by **reflecting on your understanding** of and attitudes towards LGBT people and issues.
- Do not let improper use of language or homophobic /transphobic comments by other members of the school community go unchallenged.
- **Request time at staff meetings** for the whole staff to discuss how the school is meeting the needs of LGBT students and other students affected by homophobic and transphobic bullying. In particular, discuss what measures the school is using to prevent such bullying.
- **Request training** that will build your confidence in responding effectively to the needs of LGBT students and others affected by homophobic and transphobic bullying. Share your learning with other teachers.

5.5 THE ROLE OF COORDINATORS OF THE HOME SCHOOL COMMUNITY LIAISON SCHEME AND SCHOOL COMPLETION PROGRAMME

Schools that have additional support schemes, such as the Home School Community Liaison (HSCL) Scheme or School Completion Programme (SCP), should consider how coordinators might best support LGBT students and their parents/guardians.

The purpose of the **HSCL Scheme** is to promote an inclusive partnership, build relationships and establish excellent communication between parents/guardians, schools and the community. The scheme is targeted at educational disadvantage and the purpose of this partnership is to enhance students' learning opportunities and to promote their retention in the education system.

The School Completion Programme (SCP) focuses on targeting and providing supports to young people identified to be most at risk of early school leaving through such initiatives as homework clubs, afterschool supports, mentoring programmes, etc.

Many LGBT young people are at risk of early school leaving due to negative experiences in school (Higgins, et al, 2016; Mayock et al, 2009).

Coordinators need to be aware of, and sensitive to, the needs of LGBT students and their parents/guardians. 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 their LGBT identity impacts negatively on their school experience due to the behaviour of others. Others may not be comfortable with their LGBT identity but may be at risk of not reaching their educational potential. The HSCL coordinator will need to deal with individual situations differently depending on the circumstances.

Engage with parents/ guardians on LGBT issues

It may be difficult, and at times inappropriate, to raise LGBT issues with the parents/guardians of an individual if that person's identity is not supported at home. However, opportunities may arise in a general way when discussing the school policy on anti-bullying, substance abuse and the code of behaviour with parents/guardians. HSCL and SCP coordinators may also have an opportunity to signpost additional support organisations for parents/guardians.

Build staff capacity on LGBT issues

HSCL and SCP coordinators should be facilitated to attend LGBT awareness training to develop competence in dealing with LGBT identity and homophobic and transphobic bullying in the school context, and issues related to LGBT identity in the home context, e.g. parents/guardians who are LGBT themselves, or parents/guardians dealing with a child who comes out as LGBT.

6. LGBT PEOPLE IN SCHOOL POLICES: CREATING A POSITIVE SCHOOL CLIMATE AND CULTURE

Inclusive school policies that recognise difference and diversity help LGBT people and other minorities to feel confident that they are welcome, included and respected, and that any related concerns they might have will be addressed. Inclusive policies are the basis of a positive school climate and culture that is welcoming, supportive and encouraging of all students.

6.1 INCLUSIVE POLICIES SHOULD START WITH EQUALITY LAWS

All key school policies should acknowledge difference and diversity within the school community. The Equal Status Acts (2000 to 2012), and the nine grounds identified therein, provide a useful and relevant framework.

Ensuring all school policies are inclusive of LGBT people and other minorities does not have to entail rewriting all existing policy. Schools should 'proof' existing policies to ensure that they are inclusive of LGBT people and other minorities. Suggestions for what might be examined and inserted are set out below under the relevant policy area.

Welcoming difference and diversity

'The school acknowledges the right of each member of the school community to enjoy school in a secure environment. The school acknowledges the uniqueness of each individual and his/her worth as a human being'

(Department of Education and Skills, 2013a, 22)

THE NINE PROTECTED GROUNDS OF THE EQUAL STATUS ACTS

PROTECTED GROUND	DEFINITION AND EXAMPLES
Gender	Being male, female or transgender.
Civil (marital) status	People who are single, married, civil partnered, widowed or divorced.
Family Status	A person who is the parent/guardian, or a person acting in loco parentis of a young person under 18 years, a full-time carer or a pregnant woman.
Sexual orientation	A person who is heterosexual, homosexual or bisexual.
Religion	A person with religious beliefs or none e.g. Buddhist, Catholic, Jew, Muslim, Protestant, Humanist, Atheist.
Age	Everybody over 18 years.
Disability	The Act broadly defines the term 'disability'. It covers a wide range of impairments and illnesses. It covers all physical, sensory and intellectual disabilities.
Race	A person's colour, nationality, ethnic or national origins.
Membership of the Traveller Community	People who are commonly called Travellers, who are identified by both Travellers and others as people with a shared history, culture and traditions, identified historically as having a nomadic way of life on the island of Ireland.

6.2 ANTI-BULLYING POLICY

In accordance with the Department of Education and Skills' Anti-Bullying Procedures the anti-bullying policy should;

- Define bullying as unwanted negative behaviour, verbal, psychological or physical, conducted by an individual or group against another person (or persons) and which is repeated over time. The Department's anti-bullying procedures make clear that this definition includes cyber-bullying and identity-based bullying (such as homophobic and transphobic bullying and racist bullying).
- The policy must also outline education and prevention strategies that the school employs to explicitly address identity-based bullying, in particular homophobic and transphobic bullying.
- The procedures outline key principles of best practice for both preventing and tackling bullying and require all schools to commit to these principles in their anti-bullying policy, one such principle is that of a positive school climate and culture. The anti-bullying policy should refer to the role of the student support team in the development and implementation of the policy, including accessing relevant support where necessary.

Encouraging students to report and address bullying

The Department's anti-bullying procedures state that schools should provide appropriate opportunities for students to raise concerns about bullying.

In practical terms the procedures encourage the concept of the **'telling school'**, that is, where students are able to report bullying without negative consequences; where bullying is addressed fairly, speedily and effectively. The Department's anti-bullying procedures acknowledge the difficulty that some LGBT students may have in reporting bullying behaviour (Department of Education and Skills Anti-Bullying Procedures, 2013, section 4.3.3). The anti-bullying policy may provide for a number of reporting mechanisms to ensure that students can report bullying in confidence.

Challenging the inappropriate use of words, such as 'gay' helps LGBT young people feel safer at school.

Good practice: Mechanisms for reporting bullying behaviour

- Some schools have created a **dedicated school email address** through which students or parents/guardians can report bullying. Such email accounts require regular monitoring to ensure any messages are reponded to promptly.
- Ensure that there is a **regular space/ time provided for students to voice concerns** about bullying, etc. This space can be created during tutor time. Students will come to expect this and rely on it as an opportunity to report bullying or other unacceptable behaviour.

- Support the formation of a **buddy system** in the school or **'safe space'** where students are encouraged to support other students. Carry out **regular anonymous data collection** amongst students to assess their experience in relation to bullying behaviour. Provide an opportunity for students to state their experience of how LGBT people and issues are treated in the school, see section 5.2.4 for suggested questions.
- Use a **reporting form** such as the sample provided in section 5.2.7, whereby students are given the opportunity to identify the type of bullying e.g. bullying based on identity, such as homophobic or transphobic bullying.

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 to 2012).

School-wide approach to improper use of language

Name-calling should be addressed within the anti-bullying policy. It is also advisable to include improper use of language. Commonly used anti-gay language such as phrases like 'those trainers are gay' imply a tolerance for anti-gay attitudes and behaviours that can lead to homophobic and transphobic bullying. The anti-bullying policy, along with the code of behaviour, provides an opportunity to adopt a school-wide approach to how inappropriate use of language such as this will be addressed.

> Harassment is when a person is subjected to any unwelcome act, request or conduct, including words, gestures or materials which could be reasonably regarded as offensive, humiliating or intimidating to the person.

6.3 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 (National Educational Welfare Board, 2008).

The Code of Behaviour is a requirement of all schools under the Education (Welfare) Act (2000). *The Guidelines for Schools on Developing a Code of Behaviour* (NEWB, 2008) state that bullying is unacceptable and that bullying behaviour will be dealt with in accordance with the school's anti-bullying policy.

The Code of Behaviour operates in the school alongside the student support system for student well-being as core elements of the behaviour management system.

A school's code of behaviour must specify, amongst other content, the standard of behaviour to be observed by each student attending the school; that the standard is underpinned by the value of respect for self and others. Name-calling and improper use of LGBT related language that goes unchecked can lead to bullying behaviour. Consequently, by challenging such language LGBT students feel safer (Kosciw et al, 2014; Hunt & Jensen, 2006).

Good Practice suggestions for schools in relation to anti-gay name-calling and other negative behaviour

- Identify unacceptable behaviour that has relevance to LGBT people
- The list of unacceptable behaviours in the Code of Behaviour should include all forms of bullying and harassment, including identity based bullying. **Homophobic and transphobic bullying should be named** as types of identity based bullying.
- 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 (sexism), gender identity (transphobia) or sexual orientation (homophobia), amongst the other grounds which include religion, age, disability, race, membership of the Traveller Community, family status or civil status.
- Disrespectful behaviour should be defined to include **untargeted name-calling** and examples provided to illustrate the point e.g. using 'gay' as a general pejorative term, for example 'this subject is gay'.
- As disrespectful and derogatory language left unchecked can lead to identity-based bullying, the code of behaviour should **articulate what is acceptable and unacceptable in relation to language.** The following is a suggested framework for such a distinction:

✓ It is acceptable for individuals to use words to describe themselves or someone else (for example, gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender).

✗ It is not acceptable for words or phrases to be used to wrongly imply an individual's membership of a group and /or refer to that particular group in a derogatory way (for example, 'that's so gay', 'sure he's gay', 'queer', 'lezzie', etc.).

✗ It is not acceptable for an individual to intentionally use a name or pronoun to identify a transgender student in the gender assigned at birth as a means of intending to hurt that person.

6.4 ADMISSIONS POLICY & MISSION STATEMENT

Often the first external communication with a parent/guardian or a student is through a school's mission statement and/or admissions policy. This offers an ideal opportunity to transmit a message that difference and diversity across the nine grounds of the equality legislation are welcome.

In particular the admissions policy of a school is often the first official document that prospective parents/guardians will view. Schools are legally permitted to limit admissions according to certain grounds. The Education (Admission to Schools) Bill, (2015) states that the admission policy of a school shall include a statement that the school does not discriminate in its admission of a student to the school on the gender or sexual orientation ground amongst other grounds, subject to certain exemptions.

6.5 SOCIAL, PERSONAL AND HEALTH EDUCATION (SPHE) POLICY

The Department of Education and Skills specifies that Relationships and Sexuality Education is taught in the context of SPHE, and all schools are required to teach all aspects of the RSE programme, including the topic of sexual orientation.

The Department also requires all schools to have an RSE policy, and 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.

In order to enhance provision for LGBT students, schools are advised that their RSE policy should expressly include this group of students.

Including sexuality and other LGBT related matters in the RSE curriculum

- The Department of Education and Skills states that schools are required to teach all aspects of Relationships and Sexuality Education, including sexual orientation and related areas (there is an option for parents/guardians to withdraw their child from aspects of the school RSE programme). It is not permissible to omit elements of the programme; however the Department states that all aspects of the programme can and should be taught within the ethos and value system of the school, as expressed in the RSE policy (Department of Education and Skills, 2008).
- Relationships and Sexuality Education, and SPHE in general, have an important role to play in the prevention of bullying. The Department's anti-bullying procedures state that *'initiatives such as teaching with the SPHE/RSE resource Growing Up LGBT, and participating in LGBT awareness events are just some of the ways in which a school can address homophobic and transphobic bullying'* (Department of Education and Skills, Anti-Bullying Procedures, 2013a; 26).

Sexuality education should be taught age-appropriately with each year group

It should be noted that most young people discover they are LGBT at a young age, 12 years being the most common age (Higgins et al, 2016 and Mayock et al, 2009). Therefore, **addressing LGBT issues should start from first year.**

The Department of Education and Skills, along with the HSE, GLEN and BeLonG To, have developed a teaching resource for use in every year of post-primary, the resource is titled *'Growing Up Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender: A Resource for SPHE and RSE'* (2011). The resource should be used in conjunction with other materials such as the *Teaching Relationships, Understanding Sexuality Teaching Resource* (TRUST) (Department of Education and Skills et al, 2009) resource at Senior Cycle. The aim of the resource is to increase awareness and understanding about sexual orientation and gender identity, and to reduce levels of prejudice and discrimination against people who are LGBT.

In order to ensure that all students, regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity, relate to the RSE curriculum, good practice suggests that a school's SPHE/RSE policy should state that all aspects of RSE are taught with the understanding that it is likely that there are students who identify as LGBT in the classroom, or students who have LGBT people in their families, as parents/guardians, siblings or other relatives. In order to reflect this teachers can use statements such as the following:

Inclusive statements for use within Relationships and Sexuality Education

- 'This topic/subject applies to **everyone** regardless of their sexual orientation or their gender identity.'
- '**Most people** are attracted to people of the opposite sex, some are attracted to people of the same sex and **some** are attracted to people of either sex.'
- When referring to romantic relationships the terms 'boyfriend' and 'girlfriend' should be used regardless of the gender composition of the class.
- **Gender stereotypes** should be avoided and it should be acknowledged that men and women express their gender in a variety of ways.

Highlight the school's commitment to increasing capacity to support LGBT students

The RSE policy can be used to highlight the student support team's commitment to supporting LGBT students. Resources may be committed to in-service training for RSE teachers and, in particular, commitment to training aimed at increasing the capacity to address LGBT issues and support LGBT students. The following are some questions that could be explored during an RSE policy review:

- Are teachers released to attend LGBT themed RSE training?
- Do all teachers of SPHE/RSE have access to the SPHE and RSE teaching materials related to LGBT identity?

6.6 GUIDANCE PLAN

The Guidance Plan sets out the components of the student support system that encompass a range of supports catering for the learning, social, emotional, behavioural, careers education and vocational needs of students. It describes how the resources of the school can be organised to benefit all students and in particular those presenting with additional support needs.

The Guidance Plan should be drawn up in reference to the following key documents:

1. The Department of Education and Skills' *Guidelines for Second Level Schools on the Implications of Section 9 (c) of the Education Act 1998* (Department of Education and Science, 2005) relating to students' access to appropriate guidance suggest that the guidance plan should, where possible, be led by the guidance counsellor/s. The Guidelines highlight that the school guidance service has a major preventative role in helping young people at risk to remain in the formal education system.

2. NCGE's (2004) publication *Planning the School Guidance Programme* provides the guidance counsellor, school management and interested parties with a comprehensive aid to understanding, developing and implementing a school's guidance plan.

3. *Student Support Teams in Post-Primary Schools: A Guide to Establishing a Team or Reviewing an Existing Team* (Department of Education and Skills, 2014).

4. *Well-Being in Post-Primary Schools Guidelines for Mental Health Promotion and Suicide Prevention* (2013) provides information for post-primary schools on addressing students' mental and general well-being.

5. The National Educational Psychological Services (NEPS), *A Continuum of Support for Post-Primary schools: Guidelines for Teachers* and *Resource Pack for Teachers* (2010) provides a framework for schools to support students with social, emotional or academic needs.

The Guidance Plan should include LGBT students in order to enhance provision and address the risk of early school leaving

- Review all existing policies to ensure they adequately address LGBT inclusion
- Continuous Professional Development on LGBT issues for staff along with information and inputs for parents/guardians and student councils
- Provision of information on relevant supports for LGBT young people
- Provision of relevant information to support educational, vocational and career planning to encourage the student to complete their school education and make future career plans

Develop a 'coming out' response for inclusion in the guidance plan.

The guidance plan provides an opportunity for the school to outline a general response when students come out as lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender. The student support team provides an opportunity for that response to be tailored to the needs of specific students. Suggestions for how the school guidance plan might be amended to reflect this include:

- **Identifying relevant resources** and supports such as information leaflets and organisations (local and national) that could be of assistance, for example BeLonG To Youth Service and affiliated youth groups.
- Identifying members of the students support team or equivalent that could be of support to the student, such as the guidance counsellor, year/form head, chaplain or social, personal and health education (SPHE) coordinator. The plan should also outline the school's **commitment to building capacity** within these roles to provide such support.
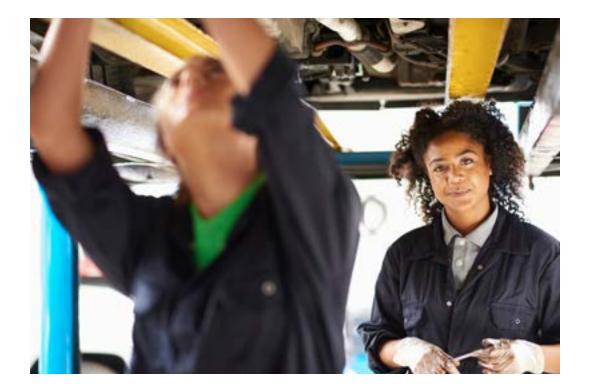
- A commitment to c**onsulting with the young person** on how they would like the school to deal with their coming out or transition.
- A section providing advice to staff members on what they should do if a student tells them he or she is questioning their sexual orientation or gender identity or that they are LGBT. Include advice outlined in section 5.3.
- The guidance plan can also address how 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 SPHE, CSPE, RE and guidance.
- Additionally, this is an opportunity to promote the health and well-being of young people through the **Health Promoting School continuum**, and **school self-evaluation** through a whole-school approach to mental health promotion (Department of Education and Skills, Health Service Executive and Department of Health, 2013b).

6.7 PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN

"Schools are advised to prepare a professional development plan covering a three to five year period, taking into account teachers' individual needs, the needs of the school and the needs of the system" (Teaching Council, June 2011).

State the school's commitment to equality training

- The professional development plan outlines the school's plan for continuing professional development based on the three pillars of innovation, integration and improvement. The plan should also be based on a number of key principles, including that it be directed towards the learner, and based on a broad understanding of the practice of teaching as one involving complex relationships and requiring different types of professional knowledge, attitudes and dispositions.

- Good practice suggests that the plan should include a commitment to continuous professional development (CPD) in equality and identity related issues, such as LGBT issues and addressing homophobic and transphobic bullying.

- The professional development plan 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 plan could identify relevant CPD courses, such as that on sexuality and sexual orientation provided by the PDST and from outside bodies such as LGBT organisations. The plan could also identify the school's commitment to facilitating the sharing of learning experiences and competencies between staff members, particularly in relation to issues such as sexual orientation and gender identity.

6.8 SCHOOL ATTENDANCE STRATEGY

Schools are required to have an attendance policy which sets out the school's overall goals and objectives in relation to attendance, in line with its vision and mission. The school must also adopt school attendance strategies to promote a culture of high levels of attendance; to prevent poor attendance; to intervene early where attendance difficulties emerge and, to provide intensive support to students whose attendance is a cause of serious concern. Further guidelines on school attendance strategy will be provided in TUSLA's forthcoming publication of that title.

A student's attendance pattern is bound up with what is happening in their lives – at school, in class, at home, with their peers, in

their community and within themselves. Research shows that some LGBT students are at risk of irregular school attendance and early school leaving (Higgins et al, 2016 and Mayock et al, 2009). Not all LGBT students will experience attendance problems leading to educational disadvantage but it is essential to raise awareness of the potential risks so that all LGBT students can maximise their educational outcomes.

When the school has made every reasonable effort to resolve individual student attendance issues, a referral should be made to the **TUSLA Educational Welfare Services**[1]. As part of the referral, schools complete a pre-referral checklist which documents the school's efforts to resolve the attendance issues with the student and the parents/guardians. This includes speaking with, writing to, and meeting with the student and parents/guardians in order to address the issue of poor attendance.

Good practice in the school attendance policy

- The school attendance strategy should highlight the importance of attendance, participation and retention and the impact of poor attendance on educational and personal outcomes. The school may choose to highlight particular initiatives that are targeted at **students who are at risk of poor attendance, for example LGBT students** who experience homophobic or transphobic bullying (Higgins et al, 2016; Mayock et al, 2009).
- Where appropriate, schools should **provide additional needs-led resources to LGBT students** to support their attendance, participation and retention. Schools and families should work together, to identify and resolve barriers to attendance. Where schools have access to the additional resources of Home School Community Liaison and School Completion Programme, there will be additional opportunities to support parents/guardians and students.
- Schools should also be familiar with the LGBT voluntary and community organisations that provide support to young people and their families across a broad range of needs. Where strong links have been established with such organisations the school will have an additional expertise and support to draw on.

1   Educational Welfare Services of Tusla Child and Family Agency (formerly the NEWB) has a role around supporting student attendance, participation and retention. The educational welfare officers (EWOs) and school support services (School Completion Programme and Home School Community Liaison Scheme) work together with schools and other relevant services to secure better educational outcomes for students. When the school has made every effort to resolve individual student attendance issues, a referral should be made to Tusla's Educational Welfare Services. The referral checklist can be accessed at *http://www.tusla.ie/services/educational-welfare-services/information-for-schools-inc-absence-reporting/download-reporting-documentation/*

7. EDUCATION AND PREVENTION STRATEGIES ON HOMOPHOBIC AND TRANSPHOBIC BULLYING

'The prevention of bullying must be an integral part of the written anti-bullying policy of all schools. Every school must document in its anti-bullying policy the specific education and prevention strategies that the school will implement. They must include documenting the measures being taken by the school to explicitly address the issues of cyber-bullying and identity-based bullying including in particular, homophobic and transphobic bullying' (Department of Education and Skills Anti-Bullying Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools, 2013a, page 26).

Bullying as a result of real or perceived differences between young people can be due to a poor understanding of diversity and difference. Consequently, preventative measures need to focus on building understanding and respect for difference between students.

The following are suggested measures schools might take to ensure that education and prevention strategies specifically address homophobic and transphobic bullying. These complement the section in the procedures on developing a shared understanding of what bullying is and on its impact. Listed below are examples of themed week-long school programmes, curriculum interventions and a note about guest speakers.

Preventative measures need to focus on building understanding and respect for difference between students.

Note: the first stage should always be to ensure the schools' anti-bullying policy is fully implemented.

7.1 THEMED WEEK-LONG SCHOOL PROGRAMMES

7.1.1 Stand Up! National Awareness Week Against Homophobic and Transphobic Bullying

'Stand Up!' is the national awareness week tackling homophobic and transphobic bullying which takes place each November. It is part-funded by the Department of Education and Skills and endorsed by key education partners, such as the JMB, ACCS, ETBI, NAPD, ASTI, TUI, NPCpp, the Institute of Guidance Counsellors and Educate Together. It is an initiative of BeLonG To Youth Services which is the national youth organisation for LGBT young people, with

affiliated youth services in many parts of Ireland. The week is focused on addressing homophobic and transphobic bullying by building friendship between LGBT students and other young people.

During the dedicated week teachers are provided with educational awareness raising activities aimed at:

- Increasing awareness of homophobic and transphobic bullying and their impacts
- Building supportive links between young people, including encouraging young people to become 'allies' in relation to homophobic and transphobic bullying
- Reducing the incidence of homophobic and transphobic bullying and name-calling

The Educational Pack for Stand Up! includes a poster, DVD and educational activities.

See *www.belongto.org* for more information.

7.1.2 Friendship Week

Many schools already hold a week of activities themed around exploring the value of friendship and friends. Activities vary from school to school but all are aimed at encouraging students to relate in a healthy way with their peers, to promote friendship, care, tolerance and understanding between individuals. They serve as a very useful means of promoting respectful relationships across the school community by celebrating the diversity within the school community.

Some schools will follow a particular theme and explore issues such as human rights and or bullying. Friendship Week is an opportunity to implement awareness raising strategies that address identity-based bullying – having a specific focus on homophobic bullying and transphobic

bullying will ensure that your school is fulfilling its commitment to the principle of building a positive school community and climate based on inclusiveness. In this respect the materials for Stand Up! LGBT Awareness Week would be a useful addition to a school's existing programme for Friendship Week.

Other materials that can be used in this context can be found in the *Growing Up LGBT* resource and DVD, in particular lesson 4 on the theme of friendship (aimed at building understanding of the positive impact that supportive friends can have), and lessons on the theme of prejudice and discrimination dealing specifically with homophobic bullying.

7.1.3 Anti-Bullying Week

Many schools hold an Anti-Bullying Week with similar elements to that of a Friendship Week. While an Anti-Bullying Week is, as the name implies, focused on building understanding amongst the school community of bullying, including the school's anti-bullying policy and code of behaviour, many schools plan the week from a holistic approach and include activities that build awareness, understanding and respect for difference.

Awareness raising strategies that are aimed at preventing homophobic and transphobic bullying can be easily slotted into an existing programme, thereby fulfilling the school's commitment to building a positive culture and climate that is built on inclusiveness.

The Anti-Bullying Week is an important opportunity to make the school's anti-bullying policy and code of behaviour into living documents by allowing all members of the school community (students, parents/guardians, staff and members of Boards of Management) the space and time to reflect on what the policy contains, how it is used and exploring how it could be improved. The activities identified under Friendship Week above would complement such an approach.

The Anti-Bullying Week can provide the Board of Management with useful information and feedback for consideration as part of its annual review of the Anti-Bullying Policy and its implementation, as per Department of Education and Skills requirements.

7.2 CURRICULUM INTERVENTIONS

The Department's anti-bullying procedures highlight the role of class teachers in influencing attitudes to bullying behaviour in a positive manner through a range of curricular initiatives. A number of curriculum components and programmes, which are particularly relevant to the prevention of bullying and the promotion of respect for diversity and inclusiveness, are outlined here.

7.2.1 Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE)

SPHE at post-primary level makes specific provision for exploring bullying, as well as the interrelated areas of belonging and integrating, communication, conflict, friendship, personal safety and relationships.

NEPS[1] promote the use of the Friends for Life Programme as a support for the implementation of the SPHE curriculum. This is a school-based anxiety prevention and resilience building programme for young people. The World Health Organisation cites Friends for Life as the only evidence-based programme effective at all levels of intervention for anxiety among young people (WHO, 2004). The programme can be run by teachers as a whole class programme or small group intervention. NEPS psychologists are trained to train teachers to deliver the programme in schools.

Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE)

RSE at post-primary is an integral part of SPHE. RSE provides opportunities to explore and discuss areas such as human sexuality and relationships that have particular relevance to identity-based bullying and in particular homophobic and transphobic bullying.

7.2.2 Growing Up Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender: A Resource for SPHE/RSE

Of particular relevance is the resource *Growing Up Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender: A Resource for SPHE/RSE*, which was developed by the Department of Education SPHE Support Service in response to many requests from teachers and students. The former SPHE Support Service has since been integrated into the health and well-being team of the Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST[2]).

This comprehensive resource aims to increase understanding and awareness about sexual orientation and gender identity, and to reduce stigma and discrimination against people who are LGBT. Teaching about sexual orientation, gender identity and related issues such as homophobia and transphobia can prove very effective in addressing homophobic and transphobic bullying.

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1   The National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) is a support service of the Department of Education and Skills. NEPS psychologists work with schools and are concerned with learning behaviour and social and emotional development. Each psychologist is assigned a group of schools and works in a developmental way according to a shared planning process with the school. NEPS promotes the continuum of support and student support teams as a focus for the support of individual students who may be experiencing difficulties or challenges. *www.education.ie*

2   The Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST) is a support service of the Teacher Education Section, Department of Education and Skills. The service encompasses the previous SPHE support service and provides training to teachers on SPHE and RSE, including sexual orientation and gender. *www.pdst.ie*

The PDST health and well-being team provide support for teachers at primary and post-primary level in Physical Education (PE) and Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE), which includes anti-bullying, child protection, mental health and well-being, relationships and sexuality education (RSE), and other SPHE related areas. Supports offered to schools include in-service training for principals, co-ordinators, teachers of SPHE, whole staff groups; programme planning; school policy development; and school visits. More information is available on the website *www.pdst.ie*.

7.2.3 Transition Year & Young Social Innovators

Transition Year (TY) is a one-year programme that forms the first year of a three-year senior cycle in many schools. **Young Social Innovators (YSI)** is a programme particularly suitable to Transition Year.

YSI aims to give everybody an opportunity to use their creativity to respond to social issues and contribute to a fairer, more caring and equal society. The sole aim of the programme is to empower and support young people to realise their potential as social innovators and to give them the skills and confidence to tackle the social issues facing them, their communities and wider society.

See *www.youngsocialinnovators.ie* for more information.

Students from Largy College in Clones, Co. Monaghan were awarded the national title of **Young Social Innovators of the Year 2015** for their project: **The LGBT - Let's Get By Together project.** The team aimed to raise awareness in their own school and in the broader community about issues facing lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people, especially LGBT teens. They wanted to ensure their school and community was a more inclusive environment for their LGBT friends. The team organised a number of activities for their YSI project which included a 'Random Acts of Kindness' Week; a 'Rainbow Day'; having their local film festival include an LGBT themed film and many other initiatives.

7.3 EXTRA-CURRICULAR INITIATIVES

7.3.1 Student Councils

A Student Council is a representative structure for students only, through which they can become involved in the affairs of the school, working in partnership with school management, staff and parents for the benefit of the school and its students.

Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures: The National Policy Framework for Children and Young People 2014-2020 (DCYA, 2014) identifies the importance of listening to and involving young people in matters that impact them. A stated goal of this policy is to create mechanisms to provide children and young people with the opportunity to be heard in schools, through Student Councils or other age-appropriate mechanisms.

The Education Act 1998 states that Boards of Management must encourage and give all reasonable assistance to students in the formation and running of student councils.

Many Student Councils identify issues to work on at school level. Often student councils are drivers of awareness campaigns such as Stand Up! Anti-Bullying Week. Student Councils should be encouraged to ensure LGBT students and their issues are represented, either directly or indirectly, on the Student Council.

7.3.2 Student Run LGBT Support Clubs

There are a small number of schools in Ireland that support students in running LGBT support clubs as extra-curricular initiatives. The idea came from the USA where these clubs are now widespread in the US equivalent to Irish post-primary schools. They are known as Gay-Straight Alliances (GSA). The clubs are student run, normally with a liaison teacher, and the purpose is to provide a safe place for students to meet, support each other, talk about issues related to sexual orientation and gender identity and carry out projects aimed at ending homophobia and transphobia. The clubs are open to anyone to join who is interested in the issues; they are not confined to young people who identify as LGBT.

7.4 EXTERNAL SPEAKERS AND PROGRAMMES

Many schools already use external speakers and trainers to provide anti-bullying awareness-raising inputs. Department of Education and Skills circular (0023/2010), Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) & Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) Best Practice Guidelines for Post-Primary Schools sets out guidance in relation to external speakers. The circular states that all visitors to the school, and particularly those engaging directly with students, should be aware of relevant school policies. Further advice on the use of external agency support is provided in *Well-Being for Post-Primary Schools: Guidelines for Mental Health Promotion and Suicide Prevention (2013b, 71).*

Speakers/trainers providing anti-bullying awareness raising inputs should be made aware that the school's anti-bullying policy specifically addresses homophobic and transphobic bullying as examples of identity-based bullying, and any input which they provide should also include content to address this.

7.4.1 ShoutOut Workshops

ShoutOut is an organisation composed of university students and recent graduates that provide free workshops to young people in schools. The workshops focus on developing knowledge about LGBT issues, understanding of homophobia and transphobia and building awareness of how to support LGBT peers.

See *www.shoutout.ie* for more information.

7.4.2 Regional LGBT organisations

Regional LGBT organisations are located in many urban areas and frequently provide excellent support to local schools in adressing LGBT issues.

8. RESOURCES AND SUPPORTS

8.1 POLICY AND GUIDANCE

Key Documents

- *Student Support Teams in Post-Primary Schools: A Guide to Establishing a Team or Reviewing an Existing Team.* Department of Education and Skills/National Educational Psychological Service (2014). The guidelines promote the development of sustainable student support teams in post-primary schools. *www.education.ie*
- *Action Plan on Bullying, Department of Education and Skills (2013c).* Provides comprehensive support and advice in relation to bullying and addresses identity-based bullying, including homophobic and transphobic bullying. *www.education.ie*
- *Department of Education and Skills Anti-Bullying Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools* (2013b). The procedures, and the associated Department Circular 0045/2013, apply to all recognised primary and post-primary schools and to centres for education (as defined in the Education Act 1998).
- *Well-Being for Post-Primary School: Guidelines for Mental Health Promotion and Suicide Prevention,* Department of Education and Skills/Health Service Executive/Department of Health Ireland (2013b). The well-being guidelines assist schools in supporting and responding to the mental health and well-being needs of young people. They also provide support to all post-primary schools in addressing mental health promotion and suicide prevention.
- *Developing a Code of Behaviour: Guidelines for Schools* (NEWB, 2008). The guidelines set out a framework of good practice to assist schools in developing their code of behaviour for the first time, or in strengthening an existing code. The guidelines are issued under section 23 (3) of the Education (Welfare) Act 2000.

- *Schools and the Equal Status Act, 2nd Edition (Equality Authority, 2005).* A booklet for schools outlining school obligations under the Equal Status Acts (2000 to 2004).

- The Gender Recognition Act (2015) provides for a person over the age of 18 years of age to have his or her preferred gender legally recognised by the state. The Act is based on a human rights approach to gender recognition and moves away from a medical approach. The human rights approach means that a person over the age of 18 years may self-determine their gender identity without recourse to medical interventions or diagnosis.
- Section 10 of the Act outlines the requirements necessary to apply for a gender recognition certificate, which include a *"statutory declaration declaring that he or she*
  (i) has a settled and solemn intention of living in the preferred gender for the rest of his or her life,
  (ii) understands the consequences of the application, and
  (iii) makes the application of his or her free will" *(Section 10.1 (f)).*
- *Section 12 makes more limited provisions for a court order following applications for a gender recognition certificate to be made on behalf of a child who has attained the age of 16 years but is not yet 18 years.*
- *Section 12 (4) The court shall only grant an application under this section if –*
  (a) subject to subsection (5), the court is satisfied, that, as appropriate, the child's parents, surviving parent or guardian consent or consents to the making of the application under this section,
  (b) in relation to an application for a gender recognition certificate under section 8 or 11-
  (i) a certificate in writing of a medical practitioner is furnished to the court certifying-
  (I) that he or she is the child's primary treating medical practitioner,
  (II) that in the professional medical opinion of the medical practitioner-
  (A) the child has attained a sufficient degree of

maturity to make the decision to apply for gender recognition, (B) the child is aware of, has considered and fully understands the consequences of that decision,

(C) the child's decision is freely and independently made without duress or undue influence from another person, and

(D) the child has transitioned or is transitioning into his or her preferred gender, and

(ii) an endocrinologist or psychiatrist, who has no connection to the child, furnishes to the court a certificate in writing certifying that his or her medical opinion concurs with the medical opinion referred to in subparagraph (i), and

(c) in relation to an application to revoke a gender recognition certificate under section 15

Such an application requires a court order preceded by:

- *Parent/guardian consent*
- *A certificate from a medical practitioner and,*
- *A certificate from an endocrinologist or psychiatrist.*

8.2 NATIONAL AND REGIONAL LGBT SUPPORT ORGANISATIONS

- **GLEN – Gay and Lesbian Equality Network**. 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 LGBT people may benefit from education on an equal footing with their peers. **Contact: Tel. 01 6728650 Email. education@glen.ie Web. www.glen.ie/education**

- **BeLonG To Youth Service** is the national youth service for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender young people aged between 14 and 23. BeLonG To's training and advocacy services also provides support to teachers and principals. The service began with the support of the Department of Education and Skills and is now funded partly by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs. There is a large network of affiliated youth services located in most areas of the country, see BeLonG To website for exact locations and contact information. **Contact: Tel. 01 6706223 Email. info@belongto.org Web. www.belongto.org**

- **Transgender Equality Network Ireland (TENI)** provides information and support to transgender people and their families and advocates for transgender equality in Ireland. **Contact: Tel. 01 8733575 Email. info@teni.ie Web. www.teni.ie**

- **Loving Our Out Kids (LOOK),** is an organisation run by parents/guardians who have lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender children of all ages. The organisation supports other parents/guardians whose children are LGBT. **Contact: Telephone for different regions on web. www.lovingouroutkids.org**

- There are **LGBT groups** in many parts of the country that work with schools in addressing LGBT issues. Contact GLEN for details.

- There are **LGBT young people's groups** in most parts of the country. Contact BeLonG To Youth Services for details.

9. REFERENCES

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