

Why Do We Need to Challenge Homophobia in Primary Schools?

What the law says:

Schools have the duty to prevent and tackle all forms of bullying, including homophobic bullying and they cannot discriminate on grounds of sexual orientation or perceived sexual orientation against a student or teacher.

New Government legislation means that schools have to be proactive in preventing homophobic bullying and make all children and young people feel included. The Public Duty requires all public bodies, including schools and academies, to eradicate discrimination, advance equality and foster good relations - this means preventing and tackling homophobic bullying and language and talking about different families in school.

Education and Inspections Act 2006 Teachers have a legal duty to ensure homophobic bullying is dealt with in schools. Under the **Education and Inspections Act 2006** head teachers must, with the advice and guidance of governors and the assistance of school staff, identify and implement measures to promote good behaviour, respect for others and self-discipline amongst pupils and to prevent all forms of bullying.

Single Equality Act 2010 and Public Duty The **Single Equality Act** and the **Public Duty** mean that schools and other public bodies have to be more proactive and to go beyond non-discrimination by advancing equality.

Single equalities policy - promote attitudes and values that will challenge discriminatory behaviour; ensure that the whole curriculum covers issues of equality and diversity; reflect the reality of an ethnically, culturally, and sexually diverse society; creates and enhances positive images of particular groups identified at the beginning of this document; uses accurate language in referring to particular groups or individuals and challenges in instances where this is not the case; Staff take account of gender, ethnicity, disability, religion or belief, sexual orientation, age or any other recognised area of discrimination and the experience and needs of particular groups such as Gypsy, Roma and Traveller, refugee and asylum seeker pupils.

What does the DfE (Department for Education) say?

The DfE lays out advice in its 'Preventing and Tackling Bullying' document. In tackling bullying (including homophobic), it specifically says that schools should:

- 'openly discuss differences between people that could motivate bullying, such as religion, ethnicity, disability, gender or sexuality. Also children with different family situations, such as looked after children or those with caring responsibilities. Schools can also teach children that using any prejudice based language is unacceptable
- provide effective staff training. Anti-bullying policies are most effective when all school staff understand the principles and purpose of the school's policy, its legal responsibilities regarding bullying, how to resolve problems, and where to seek support. Schools can invest in specialised skills to help their staff understand the needs of their pupils, including those with special educational needs and/or disability (SEND) and lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGB&T) pupils

- create an inclusive environment. Schools should create a safe environment where pupils can openly discuss the cause of their bullying, without fear of further bullying or discrimination.'

What does Ofsted say?

In the Ofsted guidance (*Exploring the school's actions to prevent and tackle homophobic and transphobic bullying - January 2014*), it states that at primary school level inspectors might explore whether:

- pupils ever hear anyone use the word 'gay' when describing something, or whether they have been told by teachers that using the word 'gay', to mean something is rubbish, is wrong, scary or unpleasant and why it is wrong
- pupils ever get picked on by other children for not behaving like a 'typical girl' or 'typical boy'
- pupils have had any lessons about different types of families (single parent, living with grandparents, having step-parents, having two mums or two dads)
- pupils think if there is someone born a girl who would rather be a boy, or born a boy who would like to be a girl, they would feel safe at school and be included.

School Inspection Handbook 2015

'[Inspectors will request the following is available] records and analysis of bullying, discriminatory and prejudicial behaviour, either directly or indirectly, including racist, disability and homophobic bullying, use of derogatory language and racist incidents'

'Inspectors must take advantage of opportunities to gather evidence from a wide range of pupils, both formally and informally. During informal conversations with pupils, inspectors must ask them about their experiences of learning and behaviour in the school, including the prevention of bullying and how the school deals with discrimination and prejudiced behaviour, if they happen.'

'[Inspectors will consider] how well leaders and governors promote all forms of equality and foster greater understanding of and respect for people of all faiths (and those of no faith), races, genders, ages, disability and sexual orientations (and other groups with protected characteristics), through their words, actions and influence within the school and more widely in the community'

'Teachers are quick to challenge stereotypes and the use of derogatory language in lessons and around the school. Resources and teaching strategies reflect and value the diversity of pupils' experiences and provide pupils with a comprehensive understanding of people and communities beyond their immediate experience.'