



Working with faith communities

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Foreword

Britain has seen huge advances in equality for lesbian, gay and bisexual people during the last decade, as well as significant extensions of a range of protections for people of faith. People of faith, and gay people, have often experienced discrimination and therefore legislation to protect each group is essential.

There has sometimes been hesitancy amongst those working in a faith context to address issues relating to sexual orientation. It can be assumed, erroneously, that there is an irreconcilable tension between a strongly-held religious belief and equality and respectful treatment for gay people. In some cases this has meant that faith schools, or schools with large faith communities, have found it difficult to know how to approach issues relating to sexual orientation, how to respond to homophobic bullying and – crucially – how to prevent it. There has also been some concern about how best to support gay pupils.

The vast majority of people of faith do not want to discriminate against lesbian and gay people and many lesbian and gay people are themselves religious. *Living Together*, YouGov polling conducted for Stonewall of over 2,000 people in the UK, found that although more than half the respondents felt that religious attitudes were a cause of public prejudice against gay people, people of faith were no more likely to be prejudiced than anyone else.

Good faith schools work to ensure that they create an environment where all pupils are able to achieve their full potential. In an era of increasing educational competition and parental choice, it's something that schools can ill afford to ignore.

Ben Summerskill

Chief Executive, Stonewall

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Introduction

All schools, including faith schools, want all their pupils to learn and grow in an environment that is free from any kind of bullying and discrimination.

Good schools take proactive steps to create an environment where all pupils are treated with respect and can be themselves. The ethos and culture of those schools encourages and enables pupils to explore and develop their own ideas and views. Pupils learn to challenge their peers constructively and they recognise the benefits of living in a society where people hold a range of opinions and beliefs. Learning to express those beliefs with respect and challenge others without causing offence is a key feature of a successful education.

Teachers find they have to navigate a range of views amongst their pupils. Pupils come from a range of backgrounds including different faiths and nationalities. Teaching about evolution and creation can evoke strong views from pupils but that does not mean that the topic should be avoided. Discussions about asylum and grounds for seeking asylum may prompt difficult discussions but schools do not avoid discussing the issue. Teachers are skilled at enabling pupils to explore complex issues in a safe and constructive environment. This in turn helps young people to accept difference and prepares them for the wider world.

Some schools, however, are concerned about how they might

proactively take steps to discuss issues relating to sexual orientation. Many teachers tell us that they feel it is an issue they need to address, but worry about the barriers they may face from head-teachers and governors in their school, parents or even pupils themselves. This concern can lead to a reticence about responding to homophobic bullying, supporting gay pupils, working with gay parents, and teaching about sexual orientation issues in an age-appropriate and relevant context. But talking about sexual orientation in faith schools – when approached sensitively and respectfully – doesn't have to be tricky.

This guide is written for anyone who wants to know more about how to manage the relationship between faith and sexual orientation in secondary schools. It may be particularly useful for staff in faith schools and non-faith schools with large faith intakes, but can be used by anyone who wants to discuss issues relating to sexual orientation through the prism of faith.

“My current school is a strongly Catholic school, with a positive attitude towards lesbian, gay and bisexual students and their parents, and a strong anti-bullying position on all issues, including sexuality.

Pamela, teacher (Yorkshire and the Humber)

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The experiences of pupils in faith schools

Faith schools are good at enabling different communities to work together. Professor Jesson in his report *Strong schools for strong communities* (Church of England 2009) said there was 'clear evidence that faith schools were awarded substantially higher inspection gradings for promoting community cohesion than Community schools'.

However, not all lesbian, gay and bisexual pupils benefit from these strong communities. *The School Report* (2007), a Stonewall survey of over 1,000 lesbian, gay and bisexual young people, found that homophobic bullying is more prevalent in faith schools than non-faith schools. **Seventy five per cent** of young gay people in faith schools have experienced direct homophobic bullying, compared to **65 per cent** overall. **Forty seven per cent** of young gay people attending faith schools disagree that their school is an accepting, tolerant place where they feel welcome, compared to **35 per cent** overall.



Throwing books out of a window at me and my girlfriend. Only reason the school did anything was 'damage to school property'.

Laura, 13, independent single sex Catholic school (Greater London)

Seven out of ten pupils who are bullied because they are gay report that it had an impact on their school work, and half of those who have experienced homophobic bullying have skipped school because of it.

A pupil who is bullied on account of their sexual orientation does not necessarily have anyone they can talk to. Lesbian, gay and bisexual pupils who attend faith schools are **23 per cent** less likely to tell someone that they are being bullied than those who attend non-faith schools.



I go to a Catholic school. I would more likely get told off for being a lesbian.

Susan, 16, single sex catholic school (South East)

“As a Christian I believe that homosexuality is wrong... I could discuss issues with girls who claim to be gay but I would probably not be very sympathetic. Shannon, teacher, grammar school (East of England)

It's not just gay pupils who experience homophobic bullying. Teachers found that pupils who are 'suspected of being lesbian, gay or bisexual' are most likely to experience homophobic bullying. Boys who are 'academic' and girls who 'act like boys' also experience bullying.

“The majority of the anti-gay remarks are directed at students who are (probably) not gay but the remarks are intended as insults to insinuate that they are gay. Anna, librarian, secondary school (West Midlands)

Schools may be reticent to acknowledge homophobic bullying or prevent it. They may also be reluctant to talk about sexual orientation issues in the classroom. **Three quarters** of those who experience homophobic bullying have never seen lesbian and gay issues addressed in class.

“My teacher was very ignorant about gay issues and the laws about gay sex but I didn't want to correct her because I didn't want to draw attention to the fact I knew about it. Rhiannon, 17, comprehensive school (Wales)

A failure to address issues in a classroom has a negative impact on gay pupils but it also has a negative impact on pupils who may have gay family members or friends.



I got really into this project and I went and told my teacher. He said 'Well, can you stay off the gay topic?' I kind of snapped and I didn't say anything to him because you're not allowed, it's your teacher, but I started crying. All the girls knew my dad was gay so they knew gay was a sensitive topic. I spoke to him another time... I was like, so what's wrong with the gay topic, you know, I think it would be quite interesting, and he just said '... oh well, can you choose something different, you know, we're at a Catholic school blah blah blah', and I was really offended by that. I nearly went and spoke to my head of year and said I have a gay dad and I was told I wasn't allowed to do something on people being gay – can you sort that out please?

Lauren, 17, single sex catholic school (South East)

More than **nine in ten** secondary school teachers say lesbian and gay issues should be addressed in schools or in specific lessons.

A culture of homophobia is not an inevitable aspect of a faith school or community. Every school, including faith schools, want pupils to be prepared for life in 21st century Britain. All schools want pupils to fulfil their academic potential, be themselves and learn to work, live, socialise and even pray with people who are different from them. Not all pupils will agree on all things, but all pupils and teachers can recognise the importance of learning in a safe environment where everyone is treated with dignity and respect.

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The law

All schools have a 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, teacher or parent.

New government legislation including the Public Sector Equality Duty 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 eliminate discrimination, advance equality and foster good relations – this means preventing and tackling homophobic bullying and language.

It means that schools cannot discriminate against gay pupils. For example, a pupil who is gay could not be excluded from school, refused entry because of his or her sexual orientation, or denied any benefits. So, a school could not refuse to let a pupil go on a school trip because they are gay, or prevent them from being a prefect or Head Boy or Girl. A school could not prevent a pupil bringing a same-sex partner to an event if other pupils are allowed to bring someone of the opposite sex. Lesbian, gay and bisexual pupils must be treated in the same way as heterosexual pupils. This applies equally to faith schools.

Schools cannot discriminate against parents or carers who are gay either. This means that a school cannot refuse a place to a pupil whose parents are gay. Gay parents should be encouraged to be as involved in school activity as heterosexual parents. This might include being a member of the Parent Teachers' Association, joining the Governing Body or participating in school activities.

Finally, schools cannot discriminate against staff. Lesbian, gay and bisexual staff are able to apply to work at any school, including faith schools. Although faith schools may sometimes request that certain post-holders have a commitment to the faith of the school, being gay does not automatically mean that a person cannot fulfil that objective. Many gay people belong to a faith and their belief is not invalidated by their sexual orientation.

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Responding to homophobic bullying

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Prejudice and violence against lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans people are sinful and disgraceful. Rowan Williams, Archbishop of Canterbury

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I don't have an issue with that because to me, to judge somebody because of their sexuality is the same as judging them because of their colour. It's not acceptable. Unacceptable. Amir, 30, Muslim (from *Love Thy Neighbour*, Stonewall 2008)

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Gays should be protected at the same time. In the same way that racism and ethnic minorities are, because they are in a similar situation I think.

Beth, 54, Jewish (from *Love Thy Neighbour*, Stonewall 2008)

All faith communities condemn physical and verbal abuse against lesbian, gay and bisexual people and good faith schools take a zero-tolerance approach to all bullying.

The most important factor in reducing homophobic bullying is to acknowledge that it can and does occur in any school, including faith schools. A YouGov poll of 1000 primary and 1000 secondary school teachers found that nine in ten secondary school teachers and more than two in five primary school teachers generally say homophobic bullying happens in their schools, however two in five staff from faith schools say that homophobic bullying never occurs in their school.

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As I work in a Catholic school I feel the issue is ignored or actually condemned and I don't think this is right or helpful.

Ailsa, teacher, faith secondary school (London)

If schools acknowledge the problem, they are more likely to be able to address it. Lesbian and gay pupils are twice as likely to feel that their school is an accepting, tolerant school where they feel welcome if their school explicitly states that homophobic bullying is against the rules.

Teachers can sometimes be anxious about challenging homophobic bullying if pupils claim that their behaviour is motivated by their faith.

“Teaching in a school with a predominantly Asian and Somali intake, it is very difficult to combat the homophobia which many pupils feel to be an intrinsic part of their religion. Wendy, teacher, secondary school (London)

Challenging this kind of argument needn't be difficult. Whilst it is true that some religions believe that homosexuality is wrong, no religion condones bullying of any kind, including homophobic bullying. On this basis, responding to religiously-justified bullying can be very simple.

Schools have a legal duty to ensure that all bullying on the grounds of 'protected characteristics' is treated as seriously as any other form of bullying. This means that if a pupil is being bullied because they are lesbian or gay it must be taken as seriously as it would be if they were being bullied because they were Jewish, or because they had a disability. The Equality Act is clear that it would be discriminatory for a school to treat an incident of homophobic bullying less seriously because it is related to sexual orientation.

“The response from friends was supportive, but the school teachers did absolutely nothing about it. Paul, 16, Catholic secondary school (North West)

Example of an Anti-bullying policy

PRINCIPLES:

‘My commandment is this: love one another just as I love you.’ John 15:12. Our principles for good behaviour, including the prevention and management of bullying, are based on the aims of our school. In particular ‘to lead those in our care to grow in their faith and to benefit from an enriching education’ we believe that:

- Our Christian faith teaches us that each person is made in the image of God and therefore bullying is unacceptable.
- Pupils develop best in a secure environment, free from intimidation.
- Pupils who bully should be identified and challenged to make best use of their God-given talents.
- Working closely with the families of the victim and aggressor will help both parties.

OBJECTIVES:

We will achieve our aims by setting out clear guidelines for:

- Support and guidance for the victims of bullying
- Procedures for dealing with bullying
- All members of the school community to be alert for signs of bullying and to act promptly
- Recording responses to bullying
- Defining and understanding the concepts of bullying
- Publishing a school definition of bullying
- Ensuring within the wider school curriculum, we organise through reflection on and education about bullying and effective inter-personal relations.
- An understanding of the nature and offensiveness of racist, sexist and homophobic bullying as integral elements within our approach to dealing with bullying.

All members of the school community, teachers and pupils included, are entitled to their own opinions but expressing those opinions in a way that denigrates others is always unacceptable. All young people can experience homophobic bullying, regardless of their sexual orientation, religion, or views, and everyone deserves to be protected.

“It’s a tricky issue as I teach in a Catholic school. I have to be careful not to openly disagree with the church’s teachings but I can emphasise the need for mutual respect and that everyone is a valued member of the community.” Pamela, teacher, faith secondary school (Yorkshire & the Humber)

Teachers can be concerned about what they can and cannot say in response to homophobic bullying. Some mistakenly think that if they work for a faith school they cannot say anything positive whatsoever about homosexuality or condemn homophobic bullying.

“I would want to be following a clear and specific school policy regarding these issues before I addressed them in classroom to ensure I would not be left open to criticism from school senior management, governors or parents.” Nat, teacher, faith primary school (East of England)

Any kind of behaviour which involves one pupil imposing their views on another should not be tolerated in a school setting. This kind of ‘unwanted conduct’ is incompatible with an environment in which pupils are able to feel safe in being themselves. Every student needs to feel secure and protected at school, and schools must respond to incidents which compromise this.

Any pupil displaying this kind of behaviour should be told that it

is inappropriate and unacceptable, and against school policy on equality and diversity. If the school is concerned about the influence of representatives of religious communities, it may be a good idea to arrange a meeting in order to make them aware of the school's stance on homophobic bullying, and the law regarding harassment. Religious leaders need to be aware that no bullying of any kind will be tolerated in school.

Teachers should have clear guidance from their senior management team about how to address incidents of homophobic bullying. There should be a consistent policy across the school and all pupils should be made aware of the policy. Protecting all pupils from bullying, including homophobic bullying is a key aspect of any safeguarding procedure.

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Responding to homophobic language

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If a pupil expresses misunderstanding about what it means to be gay, or shows an anti-gay attitude, I confront the issue directly with the whole class so that it removes any mystery or secret. Ailsa, teacher, faith secondary school (London)

Ninety eight per cent of young gay people hear the phrases ‘that’s so gay’ or ‘you’re so gay’ in school and **four fifths** hear such comments often or frequently. **Ninety five per cent** of teachers report hearing such comments and **three in five** hear the comments often or very often.

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It is an expression used widely by pupils, not in the anti-gay sense, instead when things are not right or different. Polly, teacher, faith independent secondary school (Scotland)

The use of phrases like ‘you’re so gay’ or ‘that’s so gay’ creates an environment in which being gay is constantly being likened to something that’s negative and inferior. The use of this language creates an environment where hostility towards gay people is justified. Schools find it difficult to respond to homophobic bullying when homophobic language is used by pupils without any consequences. Challenging the use of homophobic language is a key part of creating a school ethos in which homophobia and homophobic bullying are not tolerated.

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I’m very directly challenging of uses of anti-gay language in my classroom. Whenever a pupil calls another pupil gay, I congratulate them for being supportive of their friend’s lifestyle choices. When they demur, I ask them what did they mean by the phrase; they usually look suitably embarrassed, knowing at some level that they oughtn’t to use such language. They will

typically then say something like 'I meant he was an idiot'. I will then ask them if they believe that homosexuals are idiots. They, of course, will say no, so then I conclude with the admonition that they ought not to use the two words interchangeably as it only makes them look ignorant.

Lauren, teacher, faith secondary school (South East)

Comments such as 'that's so gay' are rarely referring to sexual orientation and therefore calling a pair of trainers or an activity or homework 'gay' can never be justified on the grounds of a strongly held religious belief about homosexuality. It is as inappropriate to use the phrase 'that's so gay' as it is to use a racist term. Schools have extensive experience of challenging racist language as a means of preventing racist bullying. Similar principles should apply in relation to homophobic language.

When teachers hear homophobic language they should point out that such language is not acceptable in school. Schools should have an explicit policy stating that this is the case. The message should be repeated and reiterated and sanctions should apply if a pupil continues to use homophobic language. It may be necessary to discuss the problem with parents. Even if parents have a moral or religious objection to gay people, homophobic language cannot be tolerated at school and parents should be aware of the school's anti-bullying policy. It will not be tolerated in the workplace or in society in general.



For more information about challenging homophobic language see the Stonewall guide *Challenging homophobic language in schools*.

Example of an Anti-Bullying policy

In this Catholic School, education is part of the Church's mission to proclaim that:

- **God the Father made us**
- **God the Son redeemed us**
- **God the Spirit keeps us in His Love**

Our aim is to grow as a community in the love of God who is revealed to us through his Word in the Bible and in the traditions of the Church. We believe that:

- **We are all unique,**
- **created in God's image**
- **and called to work for the common good.**

BULLYING AND HOMOPHOBIC BULLYING

Bullying is taken seriously in our school and our active approach to dealing with the issues is detailed in our Anti-Bullying policy. Evidence of homophobic bullying suggests that young people who are, or who are perceived to be gay or lesbian face a higher risk of victimisation than their peers. It is also the form of bullying that is least likely to be self-reported. We have a legal duty to ensure that homophobic bullying is dealt with (*Education and Inspections Act 2006*)

At our school we:

- **Ensure that homophobic language by adults or young people will not be tolerated in school**
- **Invoke anti-bullying procedures appropriately**
- **Are proactive in promoting equalities and diversity**

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Preventing homophobic bullying

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It is important that students learn to treat others with respect regardless of whether they agree or disagree with their views. I expect my students to be able to discuss sexuality honestly and to listen to what others have to say about personal and religious beliefs. I especially want students to learn empathy – to understand what it feels like to be on the receiving end of abuse of any kind. Lynn, teacher, faith independent secondary school (West Midlands)

Good schools recognise that the most effective way to prevent discrimination of any kind is to ensure that all young people have the opportunity to learn and reflect about difference and celebrate diversity. Schools recognise that this cannot be achieved if all exposure to difference is only through the prism of responding to bullying.

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Schools with a religious foundation have a particular role in modelling how faith and belief can be explored and expressed in ways that bring communities together rather than driving them apart. They can minimise the risks of isolating communities for whom religious belief and practice are core parts of their identity and behaviour. In Church of England schools that means taking all faith seriously and placing a high premium on dialogue, seeking the common ground, as well as understanding and respecting difference. Jan Ainsworth, Chief Education Officer, Church of England *Strong schools for strong communities*

Exploring, understanding and respecting difference reflects the core of most faith schools. Some young people, teachers, parents and governors may have strongly held views about the morality of homosexuality and the extent to which lesbian, gay and bisexual people should be afforded the same rights as heterosexual people. Individuals may not think that same-sex couples should be afforded

partnership rights nor should they be able adopt to children. Others will take a different view and believe that gay people should be afforded all the freedoms of heterosexual people.

The point is that there are a range of views on lesbian and gay issues, just as there are a range of views on – for example – the rights of women, the rights of people who hold different faiths, the nature of relationships and conduct in relationships, the legitimacy of stem cell research, the morality of fertility treatment, and the use of contraception.

A good faith school encourages discussion and teaches its pupils to be respectful and treat others with dignity even when they disagree. Holding strong views about the rights of others does not ever justify poor treatment or discrimination. Young people, regardless of how strongly they feel about gay people, will find that they will have to study, work, socialise and perhaps even pray with people who may be gay and others who simply do not share the same views as them.

“When you are at work you’re obliged to follow our own policies which are focused on the dignity of the individual. Employees have a responsibility to uphold that dignity irrespective of what their personal beliefs might be.

Tom, public sector employer (from *Religion and Belief and Sexual Orientation in the workplace*)

“In the Orthodox there are lots of gay boys that come out and they go to our synagogue. I mean they are just accepted. Their life in the Jewish community is quite normal I think. Beth, 54, Jewish (from *Love Thy Neighbour Stonewall* 2008)



As Muslims we live in a community that isn't just Muslim, it's got other people in it... My boss; he's a Buddhist, he's a professor, and he's gay.

Taroob, 39, Muslim

Proactively celebrating the diversity of the school community sends a clear and powerful message to pupils that respecting difference is a central part of the school's vision. It also encourages them to make connections between different kinds of identity and prejudice.

It is likely that nearly every pupil in any given school will belong to a minority of some kind. By making connections between different kinds of identity, schools can help pupils to empathise with people who experience discrimination, and understand why it is important to respect difference.

Celebrating different kinds of diversity together can be particularly powerful in schools with a religious character. For example, holding a Diversity Week exploring issues of race, faith, gender, sexual orientation and disability is an ideal setting for drawing out the common ground between faith and sexual orientation as identities which should be respected. Ultimately, celebrating diversity promotes respect for religion as well as for different sexual orientations.

School assemblies and collective worship, notice boards and displays all provide excellent opportunities to make clear the school's stance on homophobic bullying, and to draw out the links between faith, sexual orientation, and other kinds of identity. Inviting faith leaders to these events can help demonstrate that this is part of the work to achieve good relations between all groups of people.

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Addressing sexual orientation in a secondary classroom

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The matter came up; I discussed the issue in terms of all human beings having differences and similarities, that some people held religious beliefs about homosexual acts, but that those beliefs also included the concepts of compassion. I finished with comments along the lines of homosexuality doesn't mean that someone should not be treated with the same respect anyone else should receive. Louis, teacher, secondary school (London)

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As I was in a Catholic school, in part of my R.E. GCSE, we had a topic about homosexuality and the Catholic church. We were basically told that being gay or bisexual isn't a sin, but the sexual act is. Thankfully our teacher was young and pretty much only saying what she was told to say. She allowed us some debate on the subject because it seemed that she didn't agree with the Vatican's view even though she was a devout Catholic herself. Ruth, 18, Catholic Secondary School (West Midlands)

Schools recognise that pupils have an understanding of family life and relationships from their own experiences. All learning and teaching builds upon those experiences with the aim of developing an understanding and awareness according to the age and maturity of the pupils. Whilst maintaining the values and ideals of any school, good schools aim to provide accurate and relevant information honestly and sensitively in an age-appropriate way. All pupils have a fundamental right to have their life respected whatever household they come from and support should be provided to help pupils deal with different sets of values.

The curriculum provides many opportunities to consider issues relating to sexual orientation including Citizenship, Sex and Relationships Education, Religious Education as well as more general subjects including English Literature and History. Handled well, schools report that pupils are able to hold mature and respectful

discussions about sexual orientation in an age-appropriate way.

Like other issues, it is possible that discussing issues relating to sexual orientation may provoke discussion and a range of views. A good school will seek to deal with all issues that arise and handle wider questions with sensitivity. Teachers should take care to answer questions in a careful and balanced way, free from sensationalism and personal bias.

In order to enable discussions to take place teachers should:

- Set ground rules for the discussion – these may reiterate the school's commitment to respecting everybody and that homophobic bullying will not be tolerated.
- A reiteration of the values of the school – this may include pupils identifying how they approach disagreements in other contexts.
- The use of 'hot seating' or characters to discuss an issue – this may enable pupils to offer different views, including those who are gay but feel unable to tell anyone.
- Remind all pupils where they can get support if they need it – this may be the school nurse, a chaplain, a head of pastoral support.
- Ensure that they feel confident with the subject.



An issue that is getting more common and no training is given!

Anne, teacher, faith secondary school (West Midlands)



As part of Continuing Professional Development, all staff should be given the opportunity to learn more about preventing and responding to homophobic bullying and explore how they may reconcile their own beliefs with the views expressed in the classroom. Lesbian and gay pupils report that negative and homophobic views from staff have a significant negative impact on their self-esteem and morale. Stonewall has produced a 17 minute DVD for staff that will help all staff consider these issues.

Discussing sexual orientation in Religious Education lessons

Whilst Religious Education is often seen as a particularly sensitive area in which to discuss lesbian, gay and bisexual issues, it is also the forum in which many misconceptions about faith and sexual orientation can be addressed most effectively.

Some pupils may have a 'homosexuality is wrong because God says so' approach to the issue. Without directly contradicting this view, it is possible to offset it with other key religious messages that are shared across all the main faiths including Christianity, Judaism and Islam – for example, loving your neighbour and not judging other people.

Hurt no one so that no one may hurt you.

Muhammad, The Farewell Sermon

One should never do that to another which one regards as injurious to one's own self. This, in brief, is the rule of dharma. Other behaviour is due to selfish desires.

Brihaspati, Mahabharata (Anusasana Parva, Section CXIII, Verse 8)

That which is hateful to you, do not do to your fellow. That is the whole Torah; the rest is the explanation; go and learn. *Talmud, Shabbat 31a*

You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against your kinsfolk. Love your neighbour as yourself: I am the LORD. *Leviticus 19:18*

Whom should I despise, since the one Lord made us all.
p.1237, Var Sarang, Guru Granth Sahib, tr. Patwant Singh

The truly enlightened ones are those who neither incite fear in others nor fear anyone themselves. *p.1427, Slok, Guru Granth Sahib, tr. Patwant Singh*

And as ye would that men should do to you, do ye also to them likewise. *Luke 6:31*

An effective way of making this point is to highlight statements made by key religious leaders on the issue of lesbian, gay and bisexual equality. For example:

We struggled against apartheid in South Africa, supported by people the world over, because black people were being blamed and made to suffer for something we could do nothing about; our very skins. It is the same with sexual orientation. It is a given. We treat [gay and lesbian people] as pariahs and push them outside our communities. We make them doubt that they too are children of God – and this must be nearly the ultimate blasphemy. We blame them for what they are.

Desmond Tutu, Anglican Archbishop of Cape Town

I want a diocese which stands in support and solidarity with all harassed minorities, whoever they are. I want a diocese that is able to show everyone, including gay and lesbian people, that they are beloved of God.

Richard Harries, Bishop of Oxford

We affirm our resolute support for... fighting fundamentalism, aggressive proselytism and homophobia, and to defending the values of tolerance, inclusiveness and respect for differences which we all cherish.

Open letter to the Archbishop of Canterbury from Muslim, Jewish, and Christian leaders

Other discussions may consider the difference that civil partnerships have made to lesbian and gay people and whether gay people of faith should be able to hold their civil partnerships in places of worship. If good ground rules are set for discussion, it is perfectly possible for classes to consider a range of views about issues relating to sexual orientation. Good teaching will encourage pupils to present a range of views, illustrating the strength of argument for and against any given proposition.

Discussing sexual orientation in Sex and Relationships Education

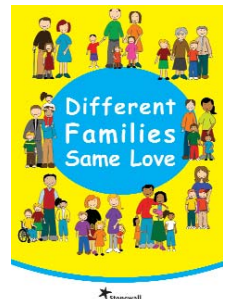
Sex and Relationships Education is an ideal forum for exploring the issues at the heart of homophobic bullying, and exploring misconceptions. Many key themes in SRE such as the importance of stable, long-term relationships and the importance of family are messages that apply to lesbian, gay and bisexual young people like everyone else. Like their heterosexual peers, lesbian, gay and bisexual pupils also need to know about issues like safer sex and domestic violence.

“Children need to be taught to value gay relationships. I worry that there may be homophobic staff because my school is Catholic and this may have a negative impact on the children. Amelia, teacher, faith primary school (North West)

Making SRE inclusive of the experiences of lesbian, gay and bisexual people is important not only for young gay people themselves, but for all students.

SRE is about helping pupils understand the society they live in, and preparing them for the realities of adult life. Regardless of sexual orientation or faith, all pupils need to understand that ours is a society in which some families have opposite-sex parents and some have same-sex parents, and that love, marriage, and relationships are issues that affect everybody, both heterosexual and gay.

SRE also provides an important opportunity for students to ask questions about issues which affect them. Teachers therefore need to be prepared to answer questions about lesbian, gay and bisexual issues in an appropriate way or at least be able to point students in the direction of others who can. Good schools encourage all pupils to ask questions in a safe and constructive environment and that includes questions about sexual orientation too.



Citizenship, English and History

There are other opportunities within a curriculum to discuss issues relating to sexual orientation and it is possible that pupils may raise questions and issues outside the traditional lessons of Religious Education and Relationships and Sex Education. All teachers should therefore be prepared to answer questions in a careful and balanced way, free from sensationalism and personal bias.

- Some schools have used the opportunity when teaching pupils about the Holocaust to highlight other groups, as well as Jewish people, who experienced persecution. This includes gay people.
- Citizenship provides a variety of opportunities to consider the implications of a range of social issues.
- Teachers who include *I know why the caged bird sings* in their lessons encourage pupils to think about why Maya has sex

outside marriage, resulting in the conception of her son, when she thinks she might be a lesbian. Some teachers use this example as an opportunity to encourage the class to consider how else a person might respond if confused about their sexuality.





Working with parents and carers

Parents and carers play the most important role when teaching their children about difference and diversity. No parent wants their child to be bullied and no parent wants their child to be a bully – regardless of the reason behind the bullying.

Some parents can be concerned about schools taking steps to prevent and respond to homophobic bullying. They may not understand what this entails and be anxious that their children will be learning something that goes against their religion or belief.

A key way to mitigate this potential anxiety is to keep parents fully informed about plans to prevent and respond to homophobic bullying. Parents should, as a matter of course, be fully consulted on, and have an opportunity to feed in to, a range of policies. These might include:

- Anti-bullying Policy
- Sex and Relationships Education Policy
- Behaviour and Attendance Policy
- Equality and Diversity Policy
- The Values, Ethos and Mission of a school

Some schools ensure that policies explicitly state the role of parents and carers and ask all parents to sign up to those policies when pupils are admitted to the schools. If these policies include specific mention of homophobic bullying, parents are more likely to understand why such issues are being raised in the classroom, during collective worship, or in response to a specific incident.

Parents may raise questions about the content of some lessons. This provides an opportunity for a school to explain how creating a culture of respect, where different and disparate views are encouraged and in keeping with the ethos of the school, is of benefit to all pupils.

Model letter to Parents/Carers

Dear Parent/Carer

As you are aware, we are a school that takes the academic achievement and the well-being of our pupils very seriously and to that end we have a range of policies that assist our pupils to learn, grow and prepare for entering the wider world outside the school gates.

Part of our responsibilities to you as the parents/carers of our pupils is to provide a safe place for our young people to learn and as part of our commitment to you we have a clear anti-bullying policy that deals with all types of bullying, including bullying based on faith, gender, disability or sexual orientation.

I am sure that no parent/carer would find it acceptable if their child was bullied at school and no parent/carer would find it acceptable if their child was regarded as a bully either by teachers or other pupils within our school.

All pupils will eventually take their place in the wider world where they will come into contact with a diverse range of people and as part of that wider community they will meet people with different attitudes and beliefs. At our school we hope that pupils will continue to apply the lessons they learn with us once they leave the school.

As part of this preparation for life we are updating our policies to reflect current government legislation, including the Equality Act 2010, to ensure we protect all our pupils from discrimination, and this will include homophobic bullying. As our anti-bullying policy explains, we will work to prevent bullying from happening in the first place, as well as tackling it in all its forms when it occurs.

As a faith-based school, we are fully aware of some of the sensitivities that this might involve. However our faith does not condone bullying, either physical or verbal, and as a supportive religious community we have a commitment to work with others to build a safe environment where all our young people can be themselves and fulfil their true potential.

We will take steps to ensure that our school fulfils our legal and moral obligations to all our pupils, parents and to the wider community; we will seek to include issues around homophobia and understanding its impact on both the victim and the perpetrator. I am more than happy to meet with you to discuss our approach, to reassure you that it reflects the ethos of our faith and the teaching of our religious leaders. If you do wish to discuss this further, please do not hesitate to contact me to make an appointment.

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Supporting lesbian, gay and bisexual pupils

Lesbian, gay and bisexual pupils – like heterosexual pupils – want to have the confidence and self-esteem that will enable them to enjoy relationships based on mutual respect, dignity and responsibility.

Lesbian and gay pupils sometimes feel unable to find the information and support they need to achieve this. Four in five lesbian and gay people say they have no access to any information at school about lesbian and gay issues. There are no books in libraries, and they do not have access to internet resources to find more information.

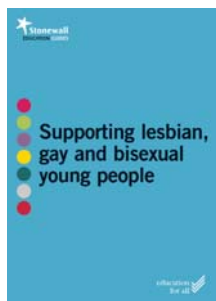
Over 60 per cent of young lesbian and gay people do not have an adult at home or at school who they can talk to about being gay. Only 15 per cent of lesbian and gay young people have attended a youth group but nearly two in five have attended a pub or a club.

A good school will create an environment where all pupils feel able to be themselves, make positive choices, and feel safe. Lesbian and gay pupils are less likely to feel supported by their school if they think their teachers will judge them, they are provided with inaccurate information, and they are not protected from bullying.

All pupils are entitled to quality information and support appropriate to their age and circumstance. Being gay or thinking that they might be gay does not constitute a safeguarding risk and does not mean a teacher has to tell anyone else about a young person's sexual orientation. Being gay is only cause for concern if a pupil's behaviour is cause for concern. Like heterosexual pupils, this may include sexual relationships if a pupil is under the age of 16.

If a young person tells a member of staff that they are, or think they might be lesbian, gay or bisexual, there is no legal obligation for the school to tell their parents. It is not a safeguarding issue. In fact, to do so without the permission of the young person in question would be a clear breach of their confidentiality.

Young people of faith may be particularly anxious about how their parents might respond to their coming out, and may turn to



other adults for support. Similarly, young people whose parents have already responded negatively to their sexual orientation may also be especially in need of support from other adults. It is therefore important that all staff know how to respond if a young person comes out, or is in need of advice and information. The Stonewall Education Guide *Supporting lesbian, gay and bisexual young people* contains lots of useful information about the ways in which you can do this.

Further information about local youth groups and lesbian, gay and bisexual faith groups can be found at www.stonewall.org.uk/whatsinmyarea

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Case Studies

case study 01

St George's School, Hertfordshire

St George's is a non-denominational Christian comprehensive school. It has its own Chapel which students have to attend three Sundays a term.

The student body is mostly Church of England, with a sizeable Catholic intake, and a mixture of Methodist, Baptist, Greek Orthodox, Russian Orthodox, and Evangelical churches. The school also has Hindu, Sikh, Muslim, Buddhist and Jewish students.

From the outset, we placed an emphasis on the bullying dimension of homophobia, not making value judgements about homosexuality or homosexual practices. Using Stonewall's *The School Report*, we presented the issue to the Headmaster and Governing Body in the Christian context of the need to treat everyone with respect. Staff were encouraged to take the simple and consistent line that 'we don't treat people like that here'. Using Stonewall materials and DVDs, staff received training to ensure that, where lesbian, gay and bisexual issues arise in the curriculum, they had the confidence to manage and challenge inappropriate comments.

We presented our anti-homophobia work as distinct, but also in the context of the need to protect all vulnerable young people. It was launched simultaneously by senior students in school, and in a Sunday chapel address by the Chaplain, which placed our anti-homophobia work in a Christian context. To maintain momentum, we kept up a constant stream of activities, including student-led chapels and assemblies.

We considered in advance which church groups or sub-groups of parishioners and parents were most likely to be hostile to anti-homophobia work, and considered how we would deal with objections.

When faced with complaints, we responded by saying that the school teaches Christian views of sexuality in R.E. and the importance of stable families and marriage as a time-tested model in P.H.S.E., taking the focus away from their theological views.

The school declines to engage with those outside the school who try to challenge our work in this area on a theological basis. Nevertheless, we did challenge those who complained to tell us what Jesus said about homosexuality: absolutely nothing. He did, however, defend all manner of marginalised people.

As a result of this work, the school has seen the near elimination of overt homophobia. The use of the word 'gay' as a derogatory term, which was the main manifestation of homophobia at the school, has almost disappeared.



Kelmscott, Waltham Forest

Kelmscott is a comprehensive secondary school serving an ethnically diverse community. The largest group of students is of Asian Pakistani heritage, and a large proportion of pupils come from Muslim backgrounds.

At Kelmscott, the ethos of putting learning first is underpinned by celebrating diversity and dealing with all forms of bullying.

Two years ago pupils were incorporating into their everyday conversations references to things that were 'so gay'. Themes were incorporated into Citizenship lessons but there wasn't a whole school approach to tackle homophobic bullying. With the setting up of an anti-bullying working party we were able to develop a program for LGBT History Month in February which is now a permanent fixture on the school calendar.

The Head teacher and the majority of staff were supportive. There were some apprehensions from some of our Muslim colleagues about our rationale so opportunities were given in staff meetings to answer any concerns. The concerns were about the promotion of homosexuality but after explaining that the focus was one of respect and acceptance of diversity of the individual, staff were fully on board. This was partly facilitated by an outside speaker from the borough.

The first step was to include homophobic bullying to the policy which was ratified by the governors. Stonewall's '*Some People are Gay. Get over it!*' posters were positioned around the school and in tutor bases to make our work more visual.

By using assemblies that focussed on real life stories, we began to create an awareness and acceptance of pupils' differences.

The effect on pupils has been very positive. Pupils bullied about being gay were confident to report it and saw the outcome resolved, at times with an exclusion. One Asian pupil recently came out and their Head of Year was able to use resources to help support them. Debates in tutor time showed that young people were comfortable talking about gay issues and on many occasions were supportive of the right to be whom you want to be and not afraid to challenge views that were derogatory.

The P.E. department permanently display a notice board of sports stars

that have come out. This always gets pupils positively discussing amongst themselves without having the issue of sexuality forced upon them.

Parents are informed of LGBT History Month through newsletters. Any concerns raised were discussed openly. We have also created links with organisations such as PACE (a London based charity which responds to the emotional, mental and physical health needs of lesbians and gay men in the greater London area) and ELOP (holistic Lesbian and Gay centre in London) to support our work.

To support trainee teachers in this area they attend a 45 minute CPD session on challenging homophobic language during their practice. They also have access to resources which are available on the staff notice board.



Preston Manor High School, Brent

Preston Manor High School is a large, oversubscribed comprehensive secondary school. The majority of its pupils are from minority ethnic groups and the

largest of these are Indian, Black African and Black Caribbean.

The behaviour panel is a group of students that tackles behaviour issues in Preston Manor High School. The students wanted to tackle homophobic behaviour within their school community. They were particularly disturbed by the language the students were using in their everyday life. The panel wanted to educate the students about the use of phrases like 'that's so gay', and help to make students understand that they were very derogatory to gay people.

The students first surveyed the whole school including staff, to find out what students felt about homosexuality. The survey asked questions like, 'What would you do if your friend told you that they were gay?'

Some of the results were disturbing with comments like 'kill them' and lots of the responses had a religious aspect to them with comments like 'God made Adam and Eve not Adam and Steve.' The survey also highlighted that many boys found it harder to accept homosexuality, and were very openly aggressive and threatening towards gay people.

The behaviour panel decided to present their results each year in assembly to highlight how unacceptable some of the attitudes were in Preston Manor, and that homophobic behaviour would not and should not be tolerated in any society. In the assembly presentation the panel used a clip from Stonewall's DVD '*Fit*' in which a lesbian explains how rubbish she feels when people say 'oh that's so gay'. The panel also used role play to show the similarities between racism and homophobia. This really helped to get the message across, because everybody watching the

role play was shocked with the language and actions used in a racist way and everybody knows that it is wrong and unacceptable to be racist.

The year nine students had a drama performance from a company called Little Fish and this performance also emphasised how homophobic language and bullying can affect a gay person.

The panel produced a leaflet that was given to every student in the school, answering key questions that somebody might want to know about being gay and hopefully dispelling rumours like you can be 'turned gay' by being around gay people.

The panel also put together a set of posters that were displayed around the whole school, in which the message was made very clear that all gay students would be respected in our school, and that any bullying or homophobic behaviour would not be tolerated.

The panel also decided to celebrate International Day Against Homophobia and Transphobia (IDAHO) on May 17th. A PowerPoint was put together and shown in every morning registration on that day, explaining what being homophobic was and also listing some famous LGBT people. Also during the day at 11.00 a minute's silence was held for all those people who had been bullied for being LGBT and a poem was read out that again expressed how somebody felt who was being bullied because they were gay. A small number of parents objected to their child being involved in the minute's silence, but the school explained that no matter what their religious beliefs were, Preston Manor would not support bullying of any type and that all students should be respected even if they did have a different point of view that conflicted with somebody else's religious beliefs.

Staff also received training on how to tackle homophobia within the classroom and around the school. Again this training brought up religious differences and one teacher said that some of the Muslim boys had expected a Muslim teacher to back up their homophobic comments, but she had explained that everybody was entitled to their own views and opinions and that she did not have the right to impose her beliefs on somebody else.

The work of the behaviour panel was reviewed at the end of the year and it was good to hear that comments like 'that's so gay' were now being challenged by both students and teachers, so the behaviour panel felt that all the work they had done throughout the year had made some impact on their school's community and hopefully made a difference for the LGBT students at our school.



County Durham Anti-Bullying Service 'Taking Action Together to promote Anti-homophobia and Respect'

The work that took place during National Anti-Bullying Week 2010 was a partnership between Durham Local Authority's Anti-Bullying Service who led the project, a cluster of eight Roman Catholic primary schools and a faith-based dance company.

It was agreed that work would be focussed on Year 5 and Year 6 pupils; Year 6 to prepare the pupils for their transition to secondary schools, and Year 5 so that as older children they could promote the positive ethos to other pupils in school.

Each school was involved in a half-day workshop based on:

- A discussion around negative words used towards others in school, within families and the wider community
- An historical perspective on how positive words have been used negatively and the subsequent consequences
- Movement exercises to demonstrate negative communication and relationships within partnerships and ways to develop these into positive partnerships
- Movement using poetry to demonstrate feelings within friendships and relationships
- A choreographed dance based upon a popular song about friendship

The workshops concluded with a session where parents/carers/guardians/school governors and members of the wider community were invited to attend along with other pupils from the school. This session comprised:

- An informative explanation of the workshop
- A clear message that it was the responsibility of everyone attending to communicate the positive messages that the pupils attending the workshop had been learning about
- A demonstration of some of the tasks carried out by the pupils
- An opportunity for those attending to ask questions in an open or private forum in order to raise concerns, or support the work with the Anti-Bullying Service Manager.

Following the project an evaluation and impact questionnaire was sent to each pupil taking part and a feedback request to the Head teacher/Staff of each school. Feedback has been positive and a request has been made to build on the work across the Cluster. The potential to use this successful model is being investigated as a positive way forward of addressing this issue across other 'natural' Clusters within County Durham.

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Top ten tips for working with faith communities in tackling homophobic bullying

1 ACKNOWLEDGE THAT HOMOPHOBIC BULLYING CAN BE A PROBLEM

Homophobic bullying affects all schools, including faith schools. Strongly held religious views are never a justification for bullying.

2 DON'T MAKE ASSUMPTIONS

Every school will almost certainly include pupils and staff who are lesbian, gay or bisexual, and some pupils may have same-sex parents/carers. They still belong to the school community, and want to belong.

3 DEVELOP CLEAR POLICIES

School anti-bullying policies should make explicit reference to homophobic bullying so that everybody, including parents, clearly understands that it is as unacceptable as any other kind of bullying, and will be treated in the same way.

4 COMMUNICATE WITH THE WIDER COMMUNITY

Schools should ensure that parents and faith leaders understand that bullying is unacceptable at school, irrespective of their beliefs about homosexuality.

5 ADDRESS STAFF TRAINING NEEDS

Staff must receive the training they need to feel confident about responding to incidents of homophobic bullying. They also need to know how to respond appropriately to questions in situations where they are likely to arise. Teachers should be able to manage the balance between debating strongly held views and bullying.

6 CELEBRATE DIVERSITY

School campaigns, collective worship, notice boards, and prospectuses are good ways to create an inclusive, tolerant environment, where all young people and their families feel welcome and able to be themselves.

7 PROMOTE COMMUNITY COHESION

By making connections between different kinds of identity, schools can help pupils to empathise with those who experience discrimination, and help them to understand why it is important to respect difference.

8 PROVIDE SUPPORT

All students need to know that there is somebody that they can talk to at school. Staff must be prepared to support pupils experiencing homophobic bullying, as well as those who are, or think they might be, lesbian, gay or bisexual. Personal views of teachers should not interfere with providing good support to all pupils.

9 KNOW THE LAW

Schools feel more confident about preventing and resolving conflicts if they know about the legal provisions which exist to support them. Staff may need reassurance that there are no legal restrictions on the inclusion of lesbian, gay and bisexual issues in the curriculum. They also need to know where the line is between expressing personal opinions and preserving an environment in which everyone feels respected.

10 SHARE BEST PRACTICE

Talk to other schools about how they are tackling homophobic bullying, and share best practice with them. If faith schools and schools with large faith intakes show that they can do it, others will soon follow.

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Further information

For further information on Stonewall's Education for All campaign, supported by over 70 organisations and 50 local authorities, or to find out more about our events, reports, materials and teaching resources please visit www.stonewall.org.uk/atschool

FURTHER RESOURCES www.stonewall.org.uk/resources

- *Education for All* A summary of our work with secondary schools
- *The School Report* (2007) The experiences of over 1,000 lesbian, gay and bisexual young people in British schools
- *The Teachers' Report* (2009) YouGov polling of over 2,000 primary and secondary teachers and other school staff
- *Different Families* (2010) The experiences of 82 children and young people from age 4 upwards who have same-sex parents
- *Celebrating difference – Challenging homophobia in primary schools* A summary of our work with primary schools including a 28 minute primary school staff training DVD
- *Spell It Out* A training DVD for secondary school teachers and staff which covers issues such as how to challenge homophobic language in the classroom and staffroom and how to react when a young person comes out
- *'Oh no! Not the gay thing!'* Lesson ideas on how to integrate lesbian, gay and bisexual issues into the curriculum for 7 subject areas at Key Stages 3 and 4
- *FIT* DVD An interactive feature length film and teaching resource on homophobic bullying for Key Stages 3 and 4. It includes a teaching resource pack and online lesson plans
- *Love Thy Neighbour* A report on the attitudes people of faith have towards lesbian, gay and bisexual people

- *Religion and Sexual Orientation: How to manage relations in the workplace* A guide about making organisations confident about responding to, and preventing, issues of perceived conflicts regarding religion and sexual orientation
- *Living Together* A YouGov poll of more than 2,000 adults on British attitudes to lesbian and gay people
- Education Guides: *Challenging homophobic language, Supporting lesbian, gay and bisexual young people and Including Different Families*
- *Different Families* posters
- *Some People Are Gay. Get Over It!* materials including stickers, posters, postcards, t-shirts and travelcard holders

STONEWALL EDUCATION EVENTS

www.stonewall.org.uk/educationevents

- Education for All Conference

FURTHER LINKS AND INFORMATION

- *What's in my area?* – database for local LGB community and youth groups www.stonewall.org.uk/whatsinmyarea
- For links on issues such as health, family and friends, faith www.stonewall.org.uk/atschool/links

STONEWALL PROGRAMMES

- Education Champions programme for local authorities www.stonewall.org.uk/educationchampions
- Information for young people and the Youth Volunteering Programme for young people 16-21 www.youngstonewall.org.uk
- Diversity Champions programme for employers www.stonewall.org.uk/diversitychampions

WE'D LIKE TO HEAR FROM YOU!

To find out how you can get more involved in the Education for All campaign, visit www.stonewall.org.uk/atschool
email education@stonewall.org.uk
or call 08000 50 20 20 (free from landlines).



Stonewall's **Education Champions** Programme provides bespoke support and guidance to local authorities in tackling homophobia and homophobic bullying with their local schools. Local authorities work with Stonewall and each other to establish ways in which they can address homophobic bullying and promote a safe and inclusive learning environment for all young people.

If you would like more information on Stonewall's Education Champions Programme please visit

www.stonewall.org.uk/educationchampions

or email **educationchampions@stonewall.org.uk**

Education for All is Stonewall's national campaign to tackle homophobic bullying

education@stonewall.org.uk

08000 50 20 20

www.stonewall.org.uk/educationforall

Working with faith communities

