

Proposed Education Measure (Wales)

Response from Stonewall Cymru

Background

Stonewall Cymru is the all-Wales lesbian, gay and bisexual (LGB) equality charity. It is in this context that we are responding to this consultation as a representative of sexual orientation issues throughout Wales. We are happy to discuss any of the issues raised in this response further and/or to provide copies of evidence in relation to the issues we raise.

One of Stonewall Cymru's priority campaigns and areas of work is the Education for All campaign, which works to reduce homophobic bullying and its impacts in schools across Wales and to improve support for lesbian, gay and bisexual pupils, those pupils with parents who are LGB and pupils affected by homophobic bullying and sexual orientation issues in schools and further and higher education in Wales.

This campaign has produced a wealth of resources to assist teachers, education and youth work professionals to tackle these important and often overlooked issues.

These include a 17 minute bilingual training DVD (Spell it out!, Stonewall Cymru, 2007) aimed at teachers and education professionals, including governors, working in schools, to assist them in tackling homophobic bullying in their schools in addition to a recent feature-length film on the subject (Fit, Stonewall, 2010) and ground-breaking research (The School Report, Stonewall, 2008) into the extent and affects of homophobic bullying in Britain's schools with recommendations applicable to all secondary schools in Wales and more widely. This research indicates that homophobic bullying is endemic in Britain's schools with 97% of young LGB people having heard phrases like 'dyke, poof an queer' at school, yet only 1/3 of teachers tackle the issue (The School Report, Stonewall, 2006.) Homophobic bullying can affect anyone who is thought to be lesbian, gay or bisexual, whether or not they are actually LGB people. The consequences of such bullying include truancy and school absence; lower academic achievement; mental health issues and low self esteem; and an unwillingness or fear to re-enter education, in whatever setting, later in life.

Overview

As a representative of sexual orientation issues throughout Wales we do not have any specific comments on collaboration or federation of

schools, as we feel that the curriculum, teacher and support staff training, support services such as schools-based counselling, access to relevant resources, and school policies on supporting LGB pupils and pupils affected by homophobic bullying in addition to proactive work to prevent homophobic bullying are the essential components to support pupils and ensure that all young people are able to achieve their full potential and to promote understanding and tolerance within schools.

We are responding to this consultation as we feel that the training that everyone involved in designing and delivering the education system in Wales receives is critical to each school's ability to tackle homophobic bullying and provide opportunities for each young person to reach their full potential.

Both teachers and school governors do not currently receive specific training in sexual orientation issues, supporting young people who think they may be LGB or are LGB or tackling homophobia. As a consequence of this lack of training many teachers, governors and other education professionals feel that sexual orientation and homophobic bullying are either not an issue in their school, as they do not have the training to correctly identify incidents; not relevant to young people; they do not have the training and knowledge themselves to feel confident in tackling incidents; or that the school should not or need not take proactive steps to tackle homophobic bullying, which is endemic in Britain's schools.

School governors are often responsible for setting and/or overseeing school policies and procedures and exert a considerable influence over both policies and curriculum within a school. In order to tackle homophobic bullying it is essential that schools have clear zero tolerance policies on homophobic bullying; that homophobic bullying is explicitly mentioned in these policies and that students are aware of both what homophobic bullying is and the potential consequences. Many school policies do not mention homophobic bullying at present. Additionally it is essential to incorporate sexual orientation into the curriculum across all subjects, not purely in PSE, in order to address the wider implications of sexual orientation and to promote understanding and tolerance amongst young people.

As school governors exert a great deal of influence over these decisions we feel it is therefore essential that mandatory training for school governors should include training on equality and diversity issues, which covers each of the equality characteristics, including sexual orientation, specifically and individually.

We feel that if school governors do not receive any training in sexual orientation issues and how they affect schools specifically, the current situation where some schools are proactively tackling homophobic bullying and others are not responding appropriately even to incidents when they occur will continue. Therefore it is essential that all school governors receive mandatory training in sexual orientation issues, in

order to ensure that they are aware of the issues when planning school policies, procedures and practices.

Summary

In general Stonewall Cymru has no specific comments in relation to Part 1, Part 3 or Chapter 1 of Part 2 of this proposed Measure. We are concerned that mandatory training for school governors in Chapter 2 of Part 2 of this proposed Measure must include mandatory training in sexual orientation issues as they affect schools in order to ensure that governors have the knowledge and awareness to be able to incorporate sexual orientation issues and tackling homophobic bullying into school policies, practices and procedures.

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