

# Step 1: Preparing to Undertake this Work

This section outlines the key considerations that each school must take into account before embarking on their journey to becoming a more LGBT+ inclusive setting. It includes practical guidance on getting started, actions to avoid and an audit to enable educators to complete a baseline assessment of their setting.



## Barriers

**“I’m not comfortable talking about these issues with primary pupils, they are too young”**

Embedding LGBT+ equality and tackling HBT bullying means talking about relationships, families, love, identity and rights, not sex.

Evidence shows that children as young as three can be aware of and talk about their gender identity (Olson et al., 2015) and many people are aware of their sexual orientation whilst still in primary school. Other primary pupils may not yet be aware of their own sexual orientation or gender identity, but many will have LGBT+ family members and friends, be aware of LGBT+ people from TV shows, films and books, and see LGBT+ people in their local community. School provides a structured environment where young people can learn about themselves, the world around them and how to celebrate difference and treat others with respect.

Further, this work is not just about being inclusive of young people who are LGBT+ but is about protecting all pupils. HBT bullying is often targeted at young people who do not fit gender stereotypes, regardless of their actual sexual orientation or gender identity. Work on embedding LGBT+ equality and tackling HBT bullying will help schools create a setting that is safe, welcoming and inclusive of all young people and allows young people to be free to explore their interests and be themselves.

**“I’m worried about being seen as promoting being gay or transgender”**

It is not possible to promote a sexual orientation or gender identity. These are a core part of a person's identity and are not decisions taken.

However, sometimes, if the person undertaking the work is LGBT+ themselves, people can accuse them of pushing their own agenda, which can feel hurtful and disempowering. Therefore, it is really important that there is a joint message from the top of the school that embedding LGBT+ equality is something that the school as a whole believes in. Having a working group made up of different members of the school community, driving the work forward can help with this.

Some can be hesitant to do work on embedding LGBT+ equality and tackling HBT bullying due to a piece of legislation known as Section 28. Established in 1988 as part of the Local Government Act, this legislation outlawed the 'promotion of homosexuality' by Local Authorities. This marked a real setback for LGBT+ rights within the UK and left many young people vulnerable. However, this law was repealed in 2000 in Scotland and in 2003 across the rest of the UK. Instead, more recent legislation (see page 8) is now in place to ensure that schools are both protecting young LGBT+ people and staff from harm and that LGBT+ families and individuals are fairly represented in schools.

## **“I’m worried about the reactions of parents and carers”**

Some schools may find that when embarking on this work there is initial resistance from a minority of the wider school community. However, there are simple things a school can do to help get people on-board. The key thing is to be open and transparent about the work and respond to concerns that might be expressed.

Some schools are worried about communicating the work and so press on with implementing change without informing parents and carers. However, this can lead to a backlash when young people go home and talk about what they have learnt and can lead to the perception that the school is being underhand.

Often parents and carers object when there are misunderstandings about what this work actually entails, but when people understand that this work is about helping young people to understand difference and respect each other, keeping young people safe and making everyone feel welcome they often come on-board. It is also worth remembering, however, that the need for this work is written into law and that however much some parents and carers may object, this work is both a moral and legal duty.

There is more information about how to work with parents and carers on page 17.

## **“How do I balance rights around religion and sexual orientation?”**

A person is fully entitled to their own personal beliefs. However, no religion condones bullying or harassment. If beliefs are expressed in a way that involves criticising, harassing or berating a particular pupil or group of pupils, this is unacceptable and would be a contravention of the Equality Act 2010 and schools' duties to safeguard young people.

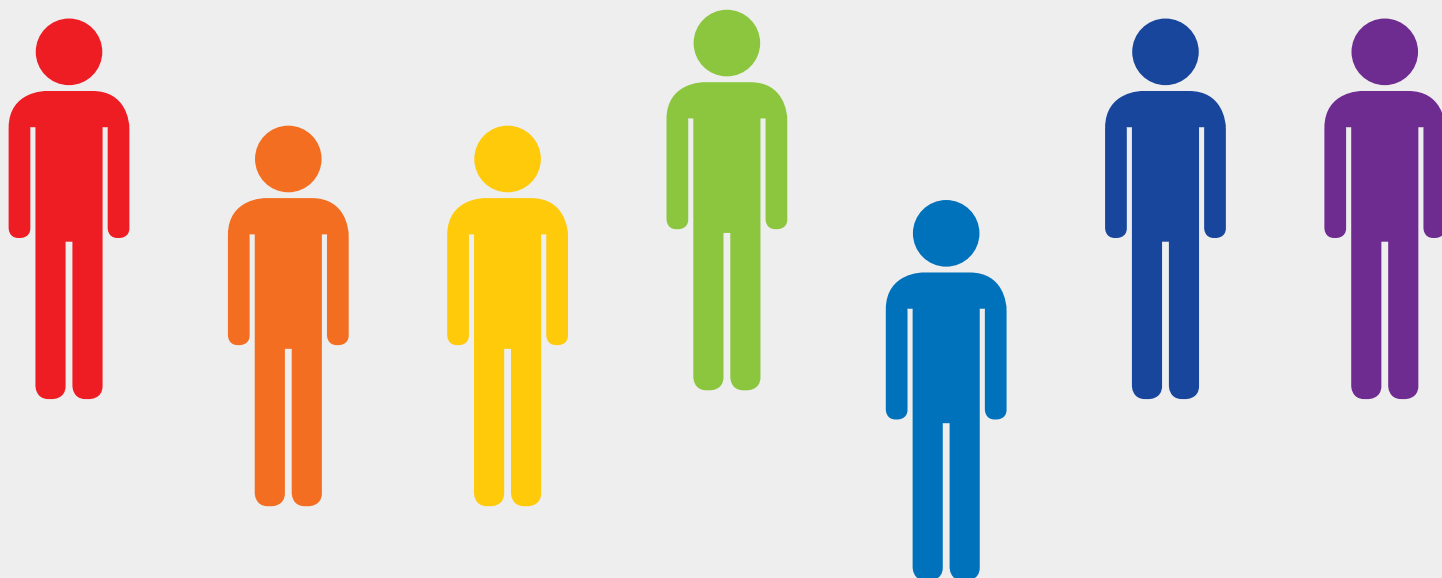
Creating a school environment where LGBT+ pupils, staff and families are included and safe from harassment is not privileging LGBT+ rights over religious rights. The school has an equal duty to create an environment where religious pupils, staff and families are included and safe from harassment.

Several religious institutions have produced guidance for schools which may be useful:

[Valuing All God’s Children Guidance for Church of England schools on challenging homophobic, biphobic and transphobic bullying](#)

[Made in God’s image Challenging homophobic and biphobic bullying in Catholic schools](#)

[The Wellbeing of LGBT+ Pupils A Guide for Orthodox Jewish Schools](#)



# Starting Points

Before beginning to implement change, it is important to consider what preliminary work must be done.

## Undertake Research

Everyone has a set of values and cultural norms that they bring to the workplace. These inform the way that people approach, plan and implement policies, teach lessons and, ultimately, create the ethos of a school.

Therefore, prior to work commencing, it is important to take the time to research the topic of LGBT+ equality and ensure any work a school does is evidence-based. Take the time to ask the following questions:

- What do I already know or believe?
- Why do I believe this?
- Do I need to do more research around this topic?
- Do I need to consult someone with experience around this topic so I may see it from a different perspective?



### Beware!

There is a growing number of resources for schools on the internet claiming to assist settings in embedding LGBT+ equality. Many of these provide excellent guidance for schools. However, sometimes groups create resources which may have the effect of undermining rights for LGBT+ people.

A group known as 'Transgender Trend' has created a guide for schools named 'Supporting gender diverse and trans-identified students in schools'. The website for this group begins by outlining that 'This site is for everyone who is concerned about the social and medical 'transition' of children, the introduction of 'gender identity' teaching into schools and new policies and legislation based on subjective ideas of 'gender' rather than the biological reality of sex.'

This group has been heavily criticised by LGBT+ campaign groups such as Stonewall and Mermaids UK. It is our opinion that the work they do encourages schools to reject the identity of transgender pupils and staff and create environments that may be unsafe for gender-questioning or transgender young people. We would therefore advise that any resources or other communications from this group are ignored.

The organisations Women's Place UK and Fair Play for Women have also issued guidance which is inaccurate and confusing about toilet provision in schools. The organisations state that according to the School Premises Regulations 2012 'separate toilet facilities for boys and girls aged 8 years or over must be provided' and informs people how to campaign against gender-neutral toilet provision. However, the full legislation actually says 'separate toilet facilities for boys and girls aged 8 years and over must be provided except where the toilet facility is provided in a room that can be secured from the inside and that is intended for use by one pupil at a time.'

If in doubt, a list of further resources from reputable groups that can be used in conjunction with this resource can be found on page 75.

## **Establish a Working Group and LGBT+ Equality Lead**

It is important that there is a lead staff member and working group to undertake this work. Without an individual or group to take the lead, there is the danger that changes from the top never get disseminated to other staff or that change is short-lived, and progress never revisited. Consider who will need to be involved in the group in order to ensure the greatest impact. It is worth considering those with a passion and interest in the topic, members of the senior leadership team who are able to implement change and lead from the top, the governor who leads on equalities, and teachers and teaching assistants who know the young people well and who can get buy-in from other members of the school community.

## **Bring Governors On-board**

If embedding LGBT+ equality and tackling HBT bullying is going to become part of the whole school ethos, it is vital that governors understand the importance of this work and fully support the school. Without the backing of governors, it is almost impossible to make a big impact in a setting. Before embarking on this work, hold meetings with governors in order to agree the school's vision and planned changes. Allow governors to ask questions and reassure them of the moral and legal obligation to do this work in order to safeguard staff, visitors and pupils and create a setting where all members of the school community feel included, safe and able to achieve. To assist with this, it can be useful to invite governors to staff training, share resources with them and invite them to take part in the auditing process.

## **Audit the Setting**

It is important to ensure that the work being carried out is personalised to the needs of individual schools. The audit available here: [www.equaliteach.co.uk/free-to-be](http://www.equaliteach.co.uk/free-to-be) provides a baseline assessment for understanding how settings can better embed LGBT+ equality and tackle HBT bullying. It can be used to assess what good practice is currently in place, where there are gaps and how the foundations can be laid for better equality provision.

## **Inform and Consult with Key Stakeholders**

Involving key stakeholders in implementing this work ensures that any work completed is responding directly to the needs of the school community. This section provides advice and guidance on how to inform and consult with parents and carers, young people and staff.

### **Work with Parents and Carers**

When attempting to make any change within a setting, particularly changes that may be controversial, it is essential to be open and transparent with parents and carers, provide opportunities for them to understand the school's approach, answer questions and concerns, and involve them in the work where possible. Some suggestions of ways to engage are outlined below:

Send communications to parents and carers explaining the work the school is planning prior to work commencing. This could be as part of a usual newsletter or curriculum overview or a stand-alone letter explaining that the school is looking to become more LGBT+ inclusive. A sample letter, similar to that used within the Free to Be project, can be found below:

Dear **[name of parent/carer]**,

As you are aware, our school takes the wellbeing of all young people and staff very seriously. I am pleased, therefore, to inform you over the next term we are focussing on tackling homophobic, biphobic and transphobic bullying within school and working to ensure that our school is inclusive of LGBT+ people.

This school is a place where every person has the right to be themselves and to be included in a safe and happy environment. Everyone at our school is equal and should be treated with respect. The safety, welfare and wellbeing of all pupils and staff is a key priority.

Therefore, we will be undertaking a whole school programme of work looking at our policies, teaching and curriculum in order to ensure that our school is an inclusive and safe environment for LGBT+ members of our school community.

We would like to offer all parents and carers the opportunity to have their opinions heard via a short questionnaire prior to the start of the work. The results of this will inform our equality action plans moving forward. The questionnaire can be accessed using the following link/is attached to this letter/can be picked up from reception. We would be very grateful if you could complete (and return) this by **[insert date]**.

We would like to offer all parents and carers the opportunity to hear more about the work we will be undertaking in school, and an opportunity to discuss any concerns they may have. We hope that parents and carers will be able to have a considerable input in this work, strengthening its impact and longevity.

This event will be held on **[insert date and time]** at school and all parents and carers are invited.

If you would like to attend, please complete the following attendance slip and submit it to your child's teacher.

We'd like to thank you in advance for your support,

Yours Sincerely,

**[Insert name]**

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I would like to sign-up to attend the consultation evening on the work that the school is doing around embedding LGBT+ equality and tackling HBT bullying.

Please sign below



Consult with parents and carers so that they can share their thoughts about how welcoming the school is of LGBT+ families and experiences of homophobia, biphobia and transphobia that have impacted on them or their children. The survey used as part of the Free to Be project can be accessed here: [www.equaliteach.co.uk/free-to-be](http://www.equaliteach.co.uk/free-to-be)

The survey that we used in the Free to Be programme asked parents and carers about how well the school was doing on all areas of equality, as this helped schools to deflect accusations that they were prioritising one area of equality over another and demonstrated the school's commitment to embedding equality and tackling prejudice across the board in order to ensure that all young people felt safe and included in school.

## Hold Meetings

Where required, hold meetings with parents and carers where the school can share the work they plan to undertake and answer questions that parents and carers may have. Schools who took part in the Free to Be programme all arranged face-to-face meetings with parents and carers. Schools were free to choose the approach that they felt would be best for them, with some equipping class teachers with responses to frequently asked questions and just holding informal chats in classrooms after school and some arranging events for parents and carers to attend.

In our experience the least effective approach was to hold a formal sit-down meeting with teachers delivering a PowerPoint from the front of the room and parents and carers arranged in rows. This created a power dynamic and put a barrier between the school and families, which made natural discussion difficult.

The most successful approach was when schools ran coffee mornings or after school events where parents and carers could come and have coffee and cake and chat more informally with staff. Schools arranged books and resources on tables so that parents and carers could look through them and see the materials that would be used and several members of staff were on hand to have one-to-one discussions or small group chats. When given the opportunity to look at resources many of the responses were "Oh, is that all it is? That's fine!" or "I teach my kids at home that they need to be respectful of others who are different to them, so this is the same message."



Staff waiting for parents and carers to arrive at Bangabandhu Primary School, Tower Hamlets



A display from Redriff Primary School's (Southwark) parents and carers meeting.

## Case Study:

Grafton Primary School, Islington works hard to include parents and carers in every aspect of school life. After holding a parents and carers coffee morning, where the Free to Be project was explained and the school disseminated their updated Equality and Diversity Policy and equality objectives, they invited an EqualTeach representative to their early years parent/carer and child reading morning. A variety of LGBT+ reading books were showcased, and parents/carers could ask questions about which books were appropriate for which age group books and take a list of book recommendations to bolster their libraries at home.



When schools are transparent about the work they are doing, most parents and carers will be supportive and welcome the changes that are being made to benefit their children. In some cases, where this does not happen, schools should highlight both the moral need and the legal requirement placed on them to do this work (more information on these can be found on page 5 and 8 respectively).

## The Experience of the Free to Be Schools

A snapshot of some of the questions parents and carers asked included:

**“Being gay is against our religion, I don’t want my children to be taught that it is OK to be gay”**

Whilst respecting the beliefs of individuals, in these cases school's shared with parents and carers that there was both a moral and legal duty to do this work. Schools shared key statistics about HBT bullying and prejudice in primary schools and stressed that this work is about understanding diversity, respecting others and protecting all pupils at the school. There are no religions that advocate harming others or that object to schools working to keep young people safe and included.

**“I heard about a school which got children to write love letters to other children of the same sex. Is this the kind of material that you are using?”**



Where misinformation such as this was spread during the Free to Be project, schools shared their approach and the resources they would be using and reiterated the fact that embedding equality is not about forcing a sexual orientation or gender identity onto a child but simply recognising the diversity of sexual orientations and gender identities that exist.

**“I have seen books designed for very young children which show graphic images of sex, is this the kind of thing that you will be doing?” or “Children are too young to learn about LGBT people -shouldn’t we wait till they are in secondary school?”**

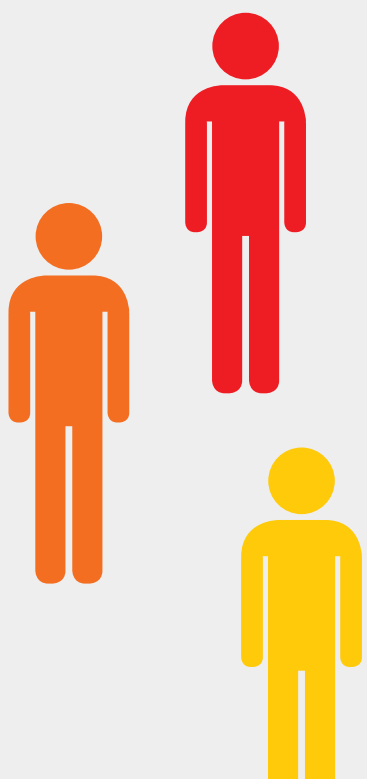
Much of the misinformation regarding LGBT+ equality in schools is related to sex and the notion that being LGBT+ inclusive means talking about sex. Schools reiterated that this is not the case at all and that Sex Education is an entirely separate issue to LGBT+ equality.

**“Children are already aware that LGBT+ people and families exist, so why do we need to teach it on the curriculum?”**

It is in large part because young people are aware that LGBT+ people exist that it is important to do this work. To ignore the existence of the diversity of sexual orientations and gender identity would send a very worrying message to young people. Further, young people who witness this diversity in places such as the TV or social media may have questions. It is important that schools are safe places for young people to ask these questions and receive appropriate responses.

**“Can we pull our children out of LGBT+ education?”**

The simple answer to this question is ‘no’. Embedding LGBT+ equality means fair representation in books, displays, facilities, policies and the wider curriculum, not necessarily discreet lessons. In addition, there is no right to withdraw from Relationships Education or wider PSHE curriculum where lessons about different families, combating gender stereotypes and talking about HBT bullying would fall.





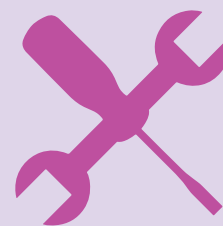
## Young People

Before beginning work on embedding LGBT+ inclusion and tackling HBT bullying, it is helpful to consult with young people to find out their existing level of understanding, the questions that they have, their experiences of HBT bullying and what they would like the school to do. Below are the techniques that were used during the Free to Be project to investigate the views of young people.

### Circle Time: Suitable for EYFS and Key Stage 1

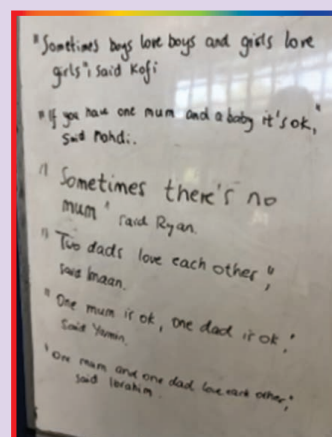
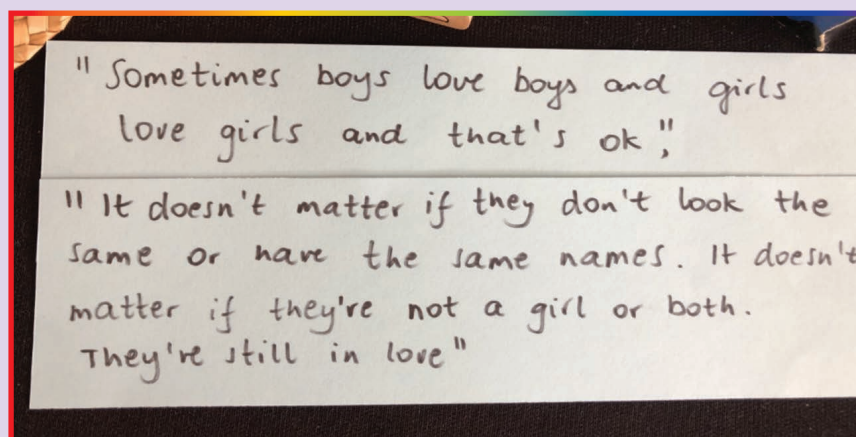
Using circle time can be a quick and easy way to collect young people's opinions and ideas. As young people might be nervous about sharing their thoughts and experiences it is important to take time to create a safe space before the session starts. Some considerations are listed below:

- Ensure all pupils have equal opportunity to contribute
- Only one person to speak at a time – using a talking object can help
- Ensure that pupils know that they can ask questions and share their thoughts and that no-one will be angry or laugh at anything that they say
- Remind the pupils to treat each other kindly
- Let pupils know that they don't have to speak if they don't want to
- Let pupils know what they can do if they feel upset by anything that is said during the conversation



Ways to elicit useful information from the young people include:

- Asking young people to vote on a few simple 'yes' or 'no' questions and recording their responses. A suitable question for this work might be, 'do you know what to do if you see someone being mean to someone else?'
- Getting young people to help you with a mini classroom audit. This can be done by asking young people if there are any things in the classroom that are only used by boys or by girls, asking for reasons why and recording their responses.
- Using boy and girl puppets or persona dolls and asking young people what toy each would like to play with and the reasons why. This type of question can help us understand the sort of gender stereotypes young people are internalising.
- Asking young people to vote on what makes a family. For example, showing images of different types of families and asking them to vote as to whether they think these are families or not and asking for the reasons why.

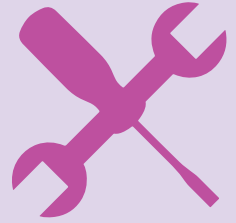


Examples of comments made by key stage 1 at Globe Primary School in a circle time discussion after reading the storybook 'And Tango Makes Three' by Justin Richardson and Peter Parnell

## Observations: Suitable for EYFS, Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2

Another possible tool is to observe pupils over a specified amount of time. In that time, keep a diary of relevant interactions between pupils. These could include:

- Use of homophobic language or statements that imply homophobia.
- Use of language or styles of play that assume heteronormativity or are based on gender stereotypes.
- Pupils talking about their gender or sex.
- Pupils talking about their families or what makes a family.



## Focus Groups: Suitable for EYFS, Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2

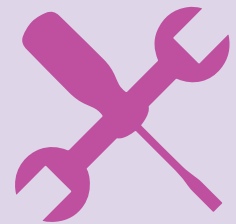
Bring together 6-8 pupils from across the year group or class.

For pupils in EYFS and key stage 1 pictures can be used to elicit conversations within the group. For instance, showing young people pictures of different clothes or toys and asking whether these clothes are for 'boys', for 'girls' or for anyone. Once pupils have discussed their answers, ask them if they have ever seen anyone being mean to someone because of their clothes or the toys they choose to play with. The same can be done with pictures of different types of families.

Using a book as a prompt, such as 'Dogs don't do Ballet' by Anna Kemp, ask questions as to why the characters act in certain ways, why some people think certain things are for girls or boys and if it is true.

For pupils in key stage 2 provide more open questions and allow young people to discuss the answers within the group. Example questions might include asking young people how far they agree with the following statements and why:

- This school teaches us about different types of families and relationships, including families with one parent, adoptive parents or gay parents.
- In this school we learn about the terms; gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender.
- In this school everyone understands it is unacceptable to use the word 'gay' to mean rubbish or bad.
- In this school everyone knows that it is wrong to be mean to someone who is gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender.
- In this school everyone feels comfortable telling a teacher if they see someone being bullied.

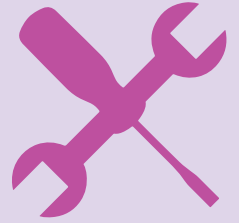


## Ask-it Basket: Suitable for Key Stage 2

Talk to pupils about the work the school is going to be doing to create a school in which everyone feels safe and valued, including people who are LGBT+ and where nobody is bullied for being LGBT+.

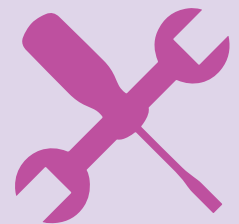
Inform the pupils that before work begins, the school would like to know if they have any questions that they would like answering or topics they would like you to cover. Provide pupils with a basket or box to write their suggestions in.

These questions can then be read prior to creating an action plan and the pupils' suggestions incorporated into the work. Alternatively, the basket can be kept in the classroom so that pupils can post questions or ideas at any point throughout the year.



## Questionnaires: Suitable for Key Stage 2

One of the easiest ways to collect a large amount of data is to hand out a questionnaire to pupils. A questionnaire created by EqualiTeach that can be used for this purpose is available here: [www.equaliteach.co.uk/free-to-be](http://www.equaliteach.co.uk/free-to-be). Prior to pupils completing the questionnaire, it is important to reassure pupils that the questionnaire is anonymous and that nobody will get in to trouble for anything they write. Pupils should be as honest as possible.



**Note:** It is best to inform parents and carers prior to undertaking any consultation with young people, so that parents and carers are prepared if young people go home and talk about the discussions that they have had or questionnaires that they have completed. During the Free to Be project, parents and carers at Ambler Primary School in Islington requested a pamphlet which included frequently asked questions from young people and some sample answers so that they felt confident to have these discussions at home. A sample pamphlet for parents and carers can be found here: [www.equaliteach.co.uk/free-to-be](http://www.equaliteach.co.uk/free-to-be).



The recurring themes that emerged from consultation with pupils across the Free to Be schools were:

- Gender stereotyping was the most prevalent issue, with young people reporting that they had experienced or witnessed being left out or told they couldn't join in an activity as it wasn't for girls/boys.
- Where terms had not specifically been spoken about in school, there was confusion amongst some young people as to what they meant, particularly bisexual and transgender.
- Young people reported that they often heard the word 'gay' being used to mean something bad.
- Some young people do not report incidents as they worry that they won't be believed or don't think that they will be taken seriously.



### **Case Study:**

William Davis Primary School, Tower Hamlets conducted questionnaires with young people in key stage 2, asking them what words are used to 'put down' or bully someone in school. A list of words was collated by the school, which included homophobic, racist, disabilist and sexist terms, and work was then planned to discuss and tackle the use of these words in school. Carrying out questionnaires in this way ensures that work is fully tailored to the needs of the young people.

### **Staff and Volunteers**

In order for LGBT+ equality to be embedded, staff need to be on board to implement policies and procedures, consistently tackle HBT incidents and embed LGBT+ equality throughout their practice. The school also needs to provide a safe and inclusive environment for LGBT+ staff and volunteers. Consulting with staff and volunteers allows SLT to identify how well staff think the school is doing with regards to LGBT+ equality, any issues they have experienced and concerns they may have in implementing the work.

This information can inform the school's action plan and the content of staff training.

**Here are some of the concerns staff members had at the beginning of the Free to Be project:**

Is the word queer appropriate or not?

What are effective ways of promoting equality in school?

How to embed understanding and pitch learning for all ages

How to confidently respond to children about same sex relationships?

What does a LGBT+ curriculum look like?

If a child talks about gender identity, is it ok to discuss or should it be passed on to someone else?

Is it ok to speak to children about gay marriage (when asked)?

How do you explain transgender to children?

For a template questionnaire see here: [www.equaliteach.co.uk/free-to-be](http://www.equaliteach.co.uk/free-to-be)



## Engage with External Agencies or Groups

Where possible, consult with local or national organisations with expertise in embedding LGBT+ equality, tackling HBT bullying and supporting young people who are LGBT+.

It may be that they can offer additional insight into issues impacting on young people from a perspective that may not be apparent to staff within schools.

Please see 'Further Resources' on page 75 for more information.

Free2B is an organisation based in Wandsworth, which provides youth clubs and mentoring for LGBT+ young people aged 9-18 and support for parents of LGBT+ young people. Young people from the project have produced their own films and resources to support schools to embed LGBT+ equality and tackle HBT bullying: [www.free2b-alliance.org.uk](http://www.free2b-alliance.org.uk)

## Ensure Staff Receive Appropriate Training

Before changes are made, staff need to receive training to allow them to confidently implement policies and procedures and embed LGBT+ equality throughout their practice.

Training should be provided to all staff, including teaching assistants, administrative staff and midday supervisors. Support staff are more likely to witness HBT incidents and it is important that there is a consistent, holistic approach to tackling HBT bullying and embedding LGBT+ equality throughout the school.

The results of the staff consultation will highlight what support staff may require to implement this work.



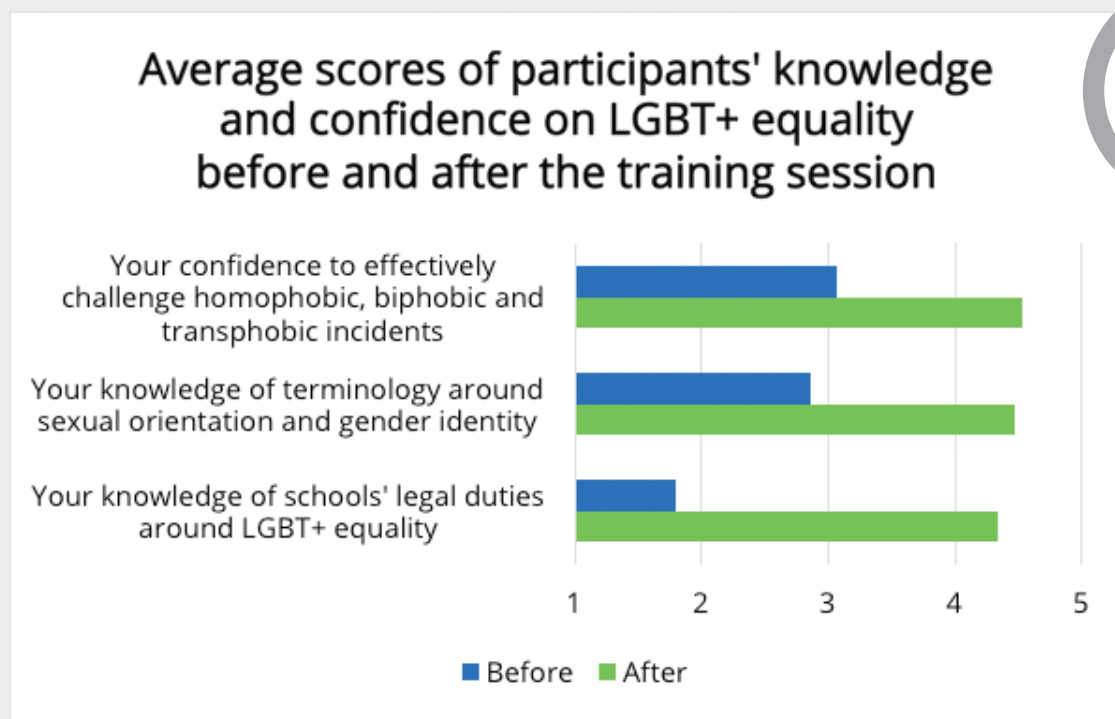
## Case Study:

William Ford Junior School is a Church of England school in Dagenham. The school was keen to tackle HBT bullying but wanted to ensure that the work had the support and confidence of the staff and governing body and was compatible with its Christian context. The school was able to use Valuing All God's Children, guidance produced by the Church of England, to ensure that their work was in line with their values. Before any work commenced, the school invited EqualiTeach to come and meet with the governing body to talk through the programme and answer any questions and concerns. The school then surveyed staff and found a large swell of support for undertaking work to embed LGBT+ equality and tackle HBT bullying, but a lack of knowledge and confidence as to what that would look like in practice. EqualiTeach then visited the school to provide training for the whole staff team in two twilight sessions.

EqualiTeach took time at the start of the training to create a safe, non-judgemental space where people felt able to ask questions and raise their concerns and the group was able to work together to think about the practical changes they could make to their practice.

Participants took away a reflective audit to undertake between training sessions, so that they could bring real-life scenarios into the second training session to work through. Participants brought back reflections on the language that they used, how gender roles could be reinforced in things such as dancing if boys and girls were always partnered together and some had heard the word gay being used in a derogatory way in the time between sessions.

Participants rated their knowledge and confidence on LGBT+ equality before and after the training sessions with 1 being the lowest and 5 being the highest. The averages of their answers are shown on the graph below.



Participants really appreciated the opportunity to discuss LGBT+ equality with colleagues and reflect upon what could be improved. With this baseline in place, the school then felt able to move on to the next step of informing parents and carers and implementing change.

It will also be necessary to consider how to disseminate updates to staff as this project evolves. Staff meetings, newsletters, briefings and allotted CPD time are useful for ensuring staff remain on-board and that LGBT+ equality remains high on the agenda.