

Step 3: Considering the School Environment



Trans youth, like most young people, spend the majority of their time at school. If you spent Monday to Friday from 8 to 3 being told that you weren't okay, that you were wrong, how are you meant to think otherwise?

Nicole Maines, American actor and transgender rights activist

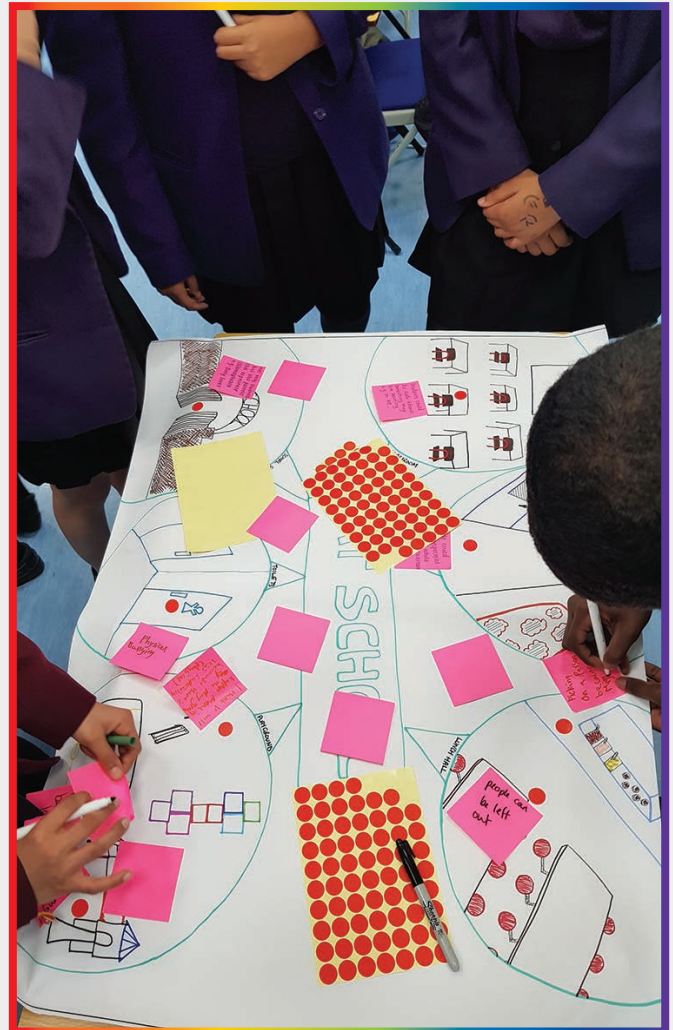
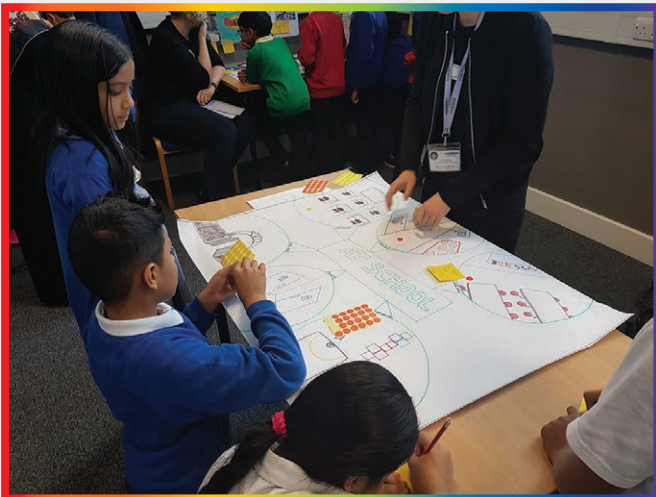


When embedding LGBT+ equality and tackling HBT bullying throughout a school, it is essential to review all elements of school life to consider the adaptations that can be made. This can be done by taking a learning walk through the school, noting every area that can impact on inclusion and safety. However, it can be difficult to recognise potential issues as a member of SLT, so asking young people and parents and carers to carry out a learning walk can highlight issues that might not otherwise be picked up. Some changes can be made quickly and easily, whilst others may take time and resources. Not everything needs to happen at once, it is fine to create a short, medium and long-term action plan that the school works towards.

Consulting with pupils about bullying and harassment 'hotspots':

Use a large sheet of paper and create a map of the whole school. Include areas such as toilets, classrooms, the playground and corridors.

Invite pupils to place stickers on the areas where bullying or harassment is most likely to take place. Pupils can add post-it notes to explain why bullying or harassment is more likely to take place in those areas, and what they think could be done to help.



Some of the key areas are considered below.

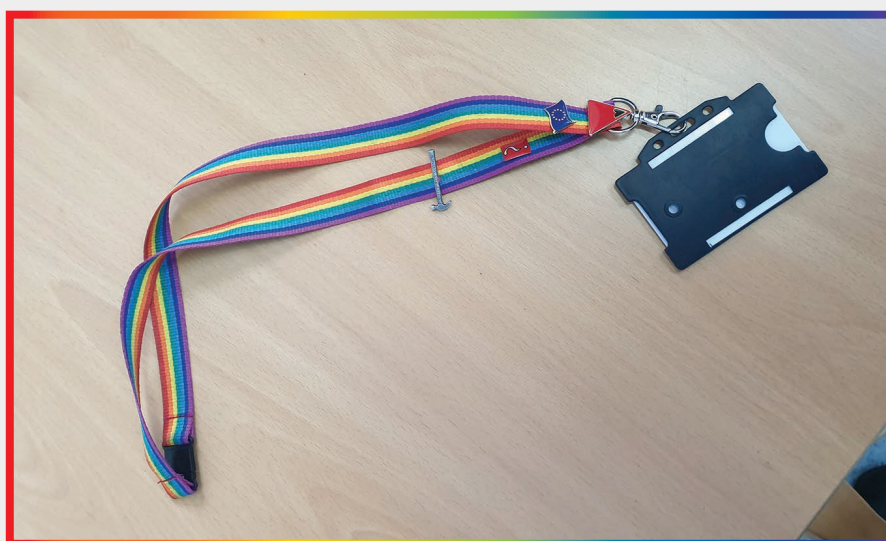
Preventing and Tackling HBT Bullying

Young people should feel safe and protected from HBT bullying wherever they are in the school. This includes both inside and outside spaces and playgrounds. It can be useful to work with pupils to find out where bullying or harassment may be more likely to take place, and what could be implemented to make these areas safer.

Some potential initiatives or solutions that could be implemented based on the findings include:

- **Safe Zones:** It can be helpful to indicate to pupils who may experience HBT or other kinds of identity-based bullying where they can go around the school to be safe and supported. Designated safe zones may include a classroom or outside area which is always supervised by staff, or the office of a member of staff who pupils can talk to and report their concerns to, or where pupil 'buddies' may keep an eye out for more vulnerable peers. Making a school community aware of these designated spaces not only provides a clear message to those who may need to access support, but to the whole community that these types of behaviours are not acceptable, and that the school is working to eradicate them.
- **Staff Supervision:** Based on the findings, schools may choose to increase or relocate supervising staff in order to improve the safety of the school environment.
- **Equality Allies:** Many young people don't report HBT incidents or bullying as they don't know who is a safe person to talk to, and if that person is going to be understanding and supportive or be homophobic, biphobic or transphobic themselves. Some schools have introduced rainbow lanyards or badges worn by teachers to show that they are supportive of LGBT+ equality, other schools have nominated young people who have received training and whom other pupils know it is safe to talk to.

Rainbow lanyards introduced at Sir Thomas Abney Primary School, Hackney



Case Study:

Globe Primary School, Tower Hamlets has FAB (Friends Against Bullying) Ambassadors in Year 6 who are there to support other young people with bullying. They have created Fab corners in the playground where a Fab Ambassador will be, and other pupils can go there if they need help with an issue. Fab is overseen by a member of staff who then picks up issues to make sure that young people receive the necessary support.

Displays

Whether in classrooms, the reception area or through the halls, school walls are often filled with displays. These are a great opportunity to demonstrate a school's commitment to equality and diversity by considering what content to display and the language and imagery used.

Some helpful questions to consider when creating a display are:

- Does this display represent a diverse range of people, topics and ideas?
- Are examples of LGBT+ role models included in this display?
- Does this display reinforce gender stereotypes or challenge them?
- Is this display reflective of the diversity within the school's pupil population and local community?

Displays can be impactful in a number of ways; both demonstrating an explicit commitment to equality (such as a display celebrating LGBT+ awareness month or challenging gender stereotypes); or through subtle additions to subject-based boards in which colours are changed to show a commitment to equality in all areas of school life. This consistent approach across a school can indicate to pupils that all members of the school community are equally welcomed and valued.



Display Examples – Sir Thomas Abney Primary School, Hackney

Focus – Different Families, Same Love





Grafton Primary School, Islington

Focus – All You Need is Love



Case Study:

Grafton Primary School, Islington explained the importance of the rainbow flag in LGBT+ equality to pupils and then used the flag as a basis for multiple displays including a mathematics one about 3D shapes, a Black History Month display and a corridor-hanging model about Fundamental British Values.



Posters: Posters can be a useful addition to the classroom environment for providing key information such as how to report HBT bullying, or to illustrate different types of families. These need to be child-friendly, with easily accessible information. Pupils can be involved in creating posters or leaflets highlighting that these sorts of behaviours are unacceptable, and what pupils can do if they see or experience them.

Facilities

The facilities offered in a school can have a large impact when promoting LGBT+ equality and tackling HBT bullying. Toilets and changing rooms are regularly reported as being targeted areas for HBT bullying, while three in five transgender pupils (58%) are not allowed to use the toilets they feel comfortable in (Stonewall, 2017).

Toilets: Young people have the right to access the toilet that corresponds to their gender identity. This approach is underpinned by the Equality Act (2010) whereby refusing a child or young person access to the changing room or toilet of their gender identity would constitute an act of discrimination (UK Government, 2010).

Any young person who has a need or desire for increased privacy, regardless of the underlying reason, should be provided access to a single stall toilet, such as an accessible toilet, if no other single stall toilets are available. However, no young person should be required to use such a toilet if they are not disabled. Ideally schools would provide single stall toilets that can be used by all, alongside or instead of single gender toilets (Brighton and Hove City Council and Allsorts Youth Project, 2019). Alongside supporting transgender young people, gender-neutral toilets can be helpful in reducing the number of bullying incidents, as an open plan design can ensure that teachers can supervise and reduce the spaces in which groups can congregate unseen (Department for Education and Skills, 2007). Furthermore, gender-neutral toilets can be far more cost effective and space-saving than single gender toilets.

Where gendered toilets are in place, the décor should remain neutral, avoiding gender stereotypes such as painting the girls' toilets pink and the boys' blue. Adequate sanitary provision should be available for all who require it. Rules around toilet usage should place the best interests of the child first, ensuring no detrimental impact to a young person's dignity or health.

Case Study – Low Cost Example:

As part of the Free to Be project, Sir Thomas Abney Primary School, Hackney have changed their staff toilets into gender-neutral toilets.

Dulwich Hamlet Junior School, Southwark have reconsidered toilet provision in their school. They have designated an existing gender-neutral staff toilet for pupils instead, alongside single-sex toilets. In addition, they are also looking into re-labelling girls' and boys' toilet on the upstairs floors so that they are all gender-neutral.



Case Study – Financed Example:

Barrow Hall Primary School, Warrington removed the gender designation of their toilet blocks. They have floor-to-ceiling doors and panels and can be locked from the inside. Washing and drinking facilities are in open areas clearly visible from the corridor and classrooms.

As a result of these changes, the school have said: 'the behaviour of children in the KS2 toilets has significantly improved compared to when the school had gender specific blocks in the previous school building [...] pupils report that they feel much safer than they did in the gender specific blocks in the old school building.'

The school's recent Ofsted report stated: "Pupils have a good awareness of what it is like to be, or to feel, different. They say everyone is welcome and 'no-one is made to feel uncomfortable for being who they are' at Barrow Hall. They proudly told me about the school's new gender-neutral toilets."



Changing Rooms: When pupils are required to change their clothes for sports, gender-neutral facilities should be provided where possible for people who might wish to use them.

The use of changing rooms by transgender young people should be decided in discussion with the individual. The goal should be to "maximise social integration and promote an equal opportunity to participate in physical education classes and sports, ensuring the safety and comfort, and minimising stigmatisation of the child or young person" (Brighton and Hove City Council and Allsorts Youth Project, 2019). Transgender young people should have access to the changing room that corresponds to their gender identity. There are times where a child may feel more comfortable changing on their own or with a small group of friends – if this is the case, discussions should take place with the young person to find the best solution. Any pupil who has a need or desire for increased privacy should be provided with a reasonable alternative changing area such as the use of a private area (such as a nearby toilet stall with a door, an area separated by a curtain or a nearby office) or with a separate time to change (e.g. using the changing room that corresponds to their gender identity before or after other pupils), regardless of the underlying reason.



Barrier: 'What about the safety of our pupils if we change the facilities?'

There can be a fear about the safety of pupils if facilities are made gender neutral. However, evidence suggests that bullying incidents are reduced when gender neutral toilets are used (Department for Education and Skills, 2007). By having single cubicles and an open hand-washing area, there are no closed doors where pupils can congregate without being seen. A reduction in fear of bullying can increase the safety and wellbeing of all pupils.

Staff Interactions

The language used by staff around the school plays an important part in creating an inclusive environment. Staff should think carefully about the language they use and where possible attempt to use language which does not reinforce a binary approach to gender to avoid excluding those who do not see themselves as a boy or a girl and reinforcing gendered thinking. Changing the morning greeting to "Good morning children!" rather than "Good morning boys and girls!" is a small change which supports inclusion of non-binary members of the community and avoids reinforcing gender difference. Similarly, breaking children up into boys and girls may be a quick way to create two groups, but it is exclusive of and uncomfortable for non-binary pupils and reinforces the assumptions that boys and girls are inherently different and cannot work together. Use other, more imaginative ways to break the class up and help young people of different genders build relationships and work together.

Case Study:

SIAL, Kensington and Chelsea decided to focus on their use of language to avoid perpetuating gender stereotypes. They decided to initially address the use of gendered praise (such as 'good boy' or 'good girl'), ensuring that the language they used was neutral. They now plan to consider the wider use of pronouns within the school environment, to ensure that all pupils feel included and accepted.



Encourage discussion and reflection on assumptions and expectations made about gender:

- Consider nicknames given to young people such as 'hero' and 'sweetheart'
- Are 'strong boys' asked to move furniture and 'helpful girls' to hand out books?
- Are boys who express emotion told to 'Man Up', or girls who enjoy football called 'tomboys'?

What implicit messages are being sent out to the young people through these coded terms?

Consider the language used around relationships and families. Is it assumed that young people will have a mum and dad at home?

When a boy and girl play together, are jokes made about them being boyfriend and girlfriend? These kinds of jokes embarrass young people and reduce the chances of boys and girls playing together as well as sending out messages about expectations around romantic relationships.

Case Study:

Towards the end of the Free to Be project, there was an incident in the playground at Bangabandhu Primary School, Tower Hamlets where two girls wanted to play 'mummies and daddies' but neither of them wanted to be the daddy. The playground supervisor told them that both could be the mummy as there are families who have two mums and the girls skipped off happily to play. The supervisor shared this story with the lead member of the project saying that she would not have felt confident to do this had she not had the staff training that EqualITeach had provided.



In and around the school, staff must also role model appropriate and inclusive behaviour and language amongst themselves. For example, communicating respectfully, and not engaging in 'banter' around people's sexual orientation or gender identity.

If a transgender young person wishes to change their name and pronouns, this must be respected, and changes implemented as necessary. Failure to use a child's preferred name and pronouns can be tantamount to harassment under the Equality Act 2010.

A legal name change is not required for the school to refer to the pupil by their preferred name and pronouns. The 'preferred to be known' option can be used in the Schools' Information System (SIMS).

If the child is not out at home, care must be taken to ensure that interactions with parents/carers and documents sent home do not use the child's preferred name.

Resources

Library

When looking at the books available in the school consider the following:

- **LGBT+ authors:** Are the available resources written by a range of authors of different genders, sexual orientations and backgrounds, bringing a variety of experiences and perspectives?
- **LGBT+ characters:** Can young people easily access books and resources where they can see themselves and their families reflected, and where they can find perspectives and experiences that are different to their own? Do the stories used reflect different family types, relationships and characters?
- **Non-stereotypical storylines:** Books can also be useful for challenging and breaking away from stereotypes. By choosing stories which feature characters in non-stereotypical gender roles, we can help to usualise those ideas for young people.
- **Not organised/separated by gender:** Books can be organised by topic, by author, by title, but shouldn't be organised by gender (as in 'boys' books/'girls' books). Young people can then make the decision as to which stories they are interested in based on the merits of the book. This is essential for promoting LGBT+ inclusion, as it sends the message that pupils are free to show interest in any genre of book, regardless of gender.

A book list of LGBT+ inclusive texts is available here: www.equaliteach.co.uk/free-to-be.

Letterbox Library is a not-for-profit social enterprise which specialises in providing inclusive children's books: www.letterboxlibrary.com

Home Corners and Role Play Areas

Young people pick up messages about what they can and can't do as a girl or a boy from a very early age and from around 3 years old, young people start policing each other with regards to gender. It is important that the school does not reinforce these ideas but takes active steps to allow young people to explore what they enjoy and who they are.

Ensure that things such as dressing up boxes are not divided by gender, but that all young people are free to choose the items that they wish to wear and to mix and match outfits if they desire – a police ballerina or a dinosaur princess allow for more creativity and exploration than standard gendered choices!

A school may find that despite not gendering activities, some pupils gravitate to particular toys, for example, girls always choosing to play with the kitchen and boys with the tool set. Mixing and matching things in the home corner, for example adding a screwdriver in the kitchen, can encourage children to be more imaginative in their play and try new things.

Case Study:

A primary school in Cambridgeshire, who are working towards a Gold Equalities Award with EqualTeach uses early years role play areas as an opportunity to challenge stereotypes. For example, when learning about families, the area will include photos of lots of different family types, dolls and books challenging gender and family stereotypes.



External Visits and Visitors

One common way to enhance the curriculum and learning experiences of pupils is to include external visits and visitors. These provide a great opportunity to expose pupils to different people and experiences, but also require consideration with regards to safety and inclusion.

Consider the facilities available when making external trips. It is recommended to only work with organisations who are LGBT+ inclusive, as it is the school's responsibility to provide a safe environment for all pupils. For example, are gender-neutral toilets and if required, changing facilities available on site?

To exclude transgender pupils from residential trips would be discriminatory and contravene the Equality Act (UK Government, 2010). As far as possible, transgender young people should be able to sleep in dorms appropriate to their gender identity, although some transgender young people may not feel comfortable doing this and in such cases alternative sleeping arrangements should be made in advance of the event. Risk assessments can be carried out prior to residential trips in order to make reasonable adjustments which would enable the participation of transgender young people (Brighton and Hove City Council and Allsorts Youth Project, 2019).

If travelling abroad, schools should consider and investigate the laws regarding LGBT+ people in countries considered for school visits. The International Lesbian and Gay Association (ILGA) have information on their website about countries on their website about countries that pose a risk to LGBT+ people: www.ilga.org

Finally, when inviting external visitors into the school, the following considerations should be made:

- Are a diverse range of guest speakers regularly invited into school? Do they represent different sexual orientations, as well as different cultures, religions and nationalities? Can this opportunity challenge gender stereotypes?
- Will the visitor's session/content be in line with the school's values?

External Communications

External communications should demonstrate a school's commitment to LGBT+ equality and the work being done to tackle HBT bullying. When reviewing external communications:

- Use gender-neutral language where possible.
- Avoid talking about mums and dads and making any other assumptions about who is caring for young people. Use parents and carers to be inclusive of different family make-ups.
- Include explicit messaging about the school's commitment to equality and the work that it is done to work towards this.
- Ensure that young people and families see themselves reflected in the website, prospectus and other communications and recognise that they will be welcomed and included at the school.

