# Belong To Primary 2024

## New Foundations for LGBTQ+ Inclusivity in Primary Schools

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# Foreword

Despite an overwhelming desire to be LGBTQ+ inclusive in their practice, the clear message from the Belong To Primary research is that our primary school staff are missing the training, confidence and support needed to make this a reality.

In December 2022, Belong To welcomed the publication of *Cineáltas: Action Plan on Bullying* and, within it, a number of commitments relevant to LGBTQ+ inclusion in primary schools. This included updating the primary SPHE/RSE curriculum to include LGBTQ+ identities, and further measures to address identity-based bullying, including homophobic and transphobic bullying, in schools.

However, it is clear from this research that LGBTQ+ inclusivity cannot be done in isolation.

For LGBTQI+ young people aged 14-25 in Ireland today, the most common age to realise their LGBTQI+ identity is 12, and the most common age to tell another person about their LGBTQI+ identity for the first time is 14.[1] Within this context, primary school emerges as a crucial time for young people in the development of their self identity, and perceptions and understandings of others.

Belong To – LGBTQ+ Youth Ireland has partnered with the University of Limerick to understand the knowledge levels, views and professional needs of primary school staff in Ireland regarding LGBTQ+ inclusivity. With a final sample of 1,031 primary staff, including principals, deputy principals, class teachers, special needs assistants and support staff, this report encompasses a broad range of views across a wide sample of primary-level educators.

The results of this research are heartening – 9 in 10 primary staff believe it is important for others working in primary schools, including principals and deputy principals, to know about LGBTQ+ inclusivity. Some 80% feel comfortable with a pupil coming out to them as LGBTQ+.

However, a clear gap has emerged between primary school staff's desire to be inclusive, and the level of confidence and knowledge required to put this into practice.

When we look at the relationship between willingness and practice, the answer is clear – confidence is key. Our findings show that primary staff who feel very confident in planning LGBTQ+ inclusive sessions are more likely, by a margin of 65%, to use LGBTQ+ inclusive books and resources.

Where survey respondents gave additional written feedback, three key themes emerged time and time again: guidance, support and training. For primary staff to feel sufficiently confident and comfortable in being LGBTQ+

inclusive in their practice, they are asking for guidance on procedures and better-practice measures to ensure that all LGBTQ+ pupils feel safe and supported in their school, whether they are out as LGBTQ+ or not.

Primary staff have also asked for support from the Department of Education and patronage bodies. They are looking for leadership and clarity as to what the characteristics of an LGBTQ+ inclusive school are. Finally, primary staff repeatedly and strongly called for training on the above areas, primarily in teaching an LGBTQ+ inclusive curriculum, LGBTQ+ identities and experiences, and supporting a pupil coming out as LGBTQ+.

This report highlights the urgent need for primary school staff to be resourced with the knowledge, skills and confidence needed to ensure that every primary school in Ireland is a safe and supportive environment for all pupils, including LGBTQ+ pupils. At the end of this report, a number of recommendations are included for policymakers and schools to make this a reality.

For us at Belong To, Belong To Primary not only sheds new light on the experience, attitudes, knowledge levels, practices and professional needs of primary school staff regarding LGBTQ+ inclusivity. This research also marks the next step in our journey towards ensuring that LGBTQ+ young people in every corner of Ireland can feel safe and supported in their homes, schools and communities.

I would like to take the opportunity to thank the research team from the University of Limerick, Dr. Aoife Neary (she/her) and Dr. Jason Power (he/him), for their dedication and careful consideration of this research project over the past 18 months.

Together, we can create a brighter, safer Ireland for LGBTQ+ youth - an Ireland where every young person feels equal, safe and valued.

*Moninne Griffith*

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# Acknowledgements

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The full report is available in the University of Limerick Repository and at www.belongto.org

# Glossary of Terms

| Term | Definition |
| --- | --- |
| Sexual orientation | This is a term used to describe someone's emotional, romantic, and sexual attraction to other people. |
| LGBTQ+ | This stands for lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and queer people. The plus sign includes people with other minority sexual orientations and gender identities. |
| Lesbian | A woman who is mainly attracted to other women. Some non-binary people may also identify with this term. |
| Gay | Someone who is mainly attracted to people of the same gender. |
| Bisexual | Someone who is attracted to more than one gender. |
| Heterosexual or straight | Someone who is mainly attracted to people of a gender different to their own. |
| Gender identity | Our personal sense of our own gender. |
| Transgender or trans | A term describing a person's gender identity that does not match their assigned sex at birth. This word is also used as an umbrella term to describe some groups of people who transcend conventional expectations of gender identity or expression. |
| Sex assigned at birth | The designation of a person at birth as male or female based on their anatomy (genitalia and/or reproductive organs) or biology (chromosomes and/or hormones). |

| | |
|---|---|
| Non-binary | Someone whose gender identity is neither exclusively woman or man or is in between or beyond the gender binary. |
| Pronouns | The words used to refer to a person other than their name, e.g. he/she/they. |
| Cisgender | Someone whose gender identity matches the sex they were assigned at birth. |
| Gender expression | How we show our gender through our clothes, hair etc. This is different to gender identity. Gender identity refers to how we feel inside, and gender expression is how we present ourselves outside. |
| Queer | An umbrella term used to describe people who are not heterosexual and/or cisgender. Queer was used as a slur against the LGBTQ+ community for many years and still can be. However, the word has been reclaimed by LGBTQ+ communities and many now embrace the term. Check if someone is comfortable with this term before referring to them as queer. |
| Coming out | For LGBTQ+ people, coming out is the process of sharing your sexual orientation and/or your gender identity with people in your life. |
| Social transition | A process in which trans people begin to live as the gender with which they identify, rather than the sex they were assigned at birth. This can involve using a different name and/or pronouns, changing how they dress or certain mannerisms. This will be individual for every trans person, not every trans person will socially transition. |

| | |
|---|---|
| Homophobia | Discrimination against and/or fear or dislike of lesbian and gay people (including those perceived to be gay or lesbian). This also includes the perpetuation of negative myths and stereotypes through jokes and/or through personal negative thoughts about lesbian and gay people. |
| Biphobia | Discrimination against and/or fear or dislike of bisexual people (including those perceived to be bisexual) or of bisexuality. This also includes the spreading of negative myths and stereotypes through jokes and/or through personal negative thoughts about bisexual people. |
| Transphobia | The fear or dislike of someone based on the fact they are trans, including denying their gender identity or refusing to accept it. Transphobia can result in individual and institutional discrimination, prejudice and violence against trans, non-binary, or gender variant people. Transphobia maybe targeted at people who are, or who are perceived to be, trans. |
| LGBTQ+ bullying | A form of 'identity-based bullying' based on prejudice or discrimination towards someone who is LGBTQ+, or is perceived to be LGBTQ+. |
| Outing | The deliberate or accidental sharing of another person's sexual orientation or gender identity without their permission. Outing is disrespectful and presents a danger for many LGBTQ+ individuals. |

# Introduction and Rationale

In 2019, the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA), conducted a review of Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) in primary and post-primary schools in Ireland (NCCA, 2019). Their report, following a widespread national consultation process, confirmed that LGBTQ+ lives are very often invisible in primary schools. Indeed, the most prominent issue highlighted in the survey with 650 young people was the need to represent and include LGBTQ+ lives in schools.

Since 2013, Circular 45/2013 has required primary and post-primary schools in Ireland to ensure that homophobia and transphobia are explicitly named in their anti-bullying policies (Department of Education, 2013). Furthermore, schools should provide information on their education and prevention strategies for all types of bullying. More recently, *Cineáltas: Action Plan on Bullying* (Department of Education, 2022) reiterates the necessity to tackle LGBTQ+ based bullying alongside the other types of bullying in schools.

The largescale lack of visibility and representation of LGBTQ+ lives in primary schools is a critical societal challenge that is holding back progress and affecting the welfare of all children in the following ways. Firstly, primary schools are extremely formative places of socialisation. Such silences and hidden curricular lessons are the very early conditions for hierarchy and discrimination where children typically receive predominant messages of silence and negativity about LGBTQ+ lives (DePalma & Atkinson, 2010). Secondly, many children who have LGBTQ+ parents and family members are not seeing their identities or families positively reflected or meaningfully included at school (Formby, 2015). Thirdly, primary school-aged children who are articulating diversity of attraction, gender expansive expressions and/or identifying as LGBTQ+ have limited and sometimes negative frames for understanding these fundamental aspects of their identities and lives (Neary & Cross, 2018). As Adrienne Rich (1986, 199) explains, 'when someone with the authority of a teacher, say, describes the world and you are not in it, there is a moment of psychic disequilibrium, as if you looked into a mirror and saw nothing'.

Belong To - LGBTQ+ Youth Ireland receive regular requests for advice from primary school staff and parents on how to support LGBTQ+ children. Furthermore, many young people who use the services of Belong To share their retrospective experiences of primary school life and their awareness of their identities in primary school. It is in this context that Belong To launched their strategic plan, *All Different All Together*, in 2022 (Belong To, 2022). This includes expanding support services to 10-13 year-olds and the adults who support them, including parents, guardians, caregivers, family members and primary school staff. This work, of course, needs to be research-informed and, up until now, there has been a dearth of research on primary school

staff needs as well as LGBTQ+ parents' and children's experiences of everyday life in primary schools in Ireland.

To this end, in 2022, a partnership was formed between the School of Education, University of Limerick, and Belong To - LGBTQ+ Youth Ireland. Irish Research Council 'New Foundations Engaging Civic Society' funding was secured to produce a new evidence base about how primary school staff, LGBTQ+ parents and LGBTQ+ identifying children are navigating primary school communities. The following aim and objectives were identified and guided this study:

**Aim**

To provide new foundational evidence on LGBTQ+ inclusivity in primary schools.

**Objectives**

• To provide large-scale insight into primary school staff experiences, attitudes, knowledge levels, practices and professional needs with regard to LGBTQ+ inclusivity via a survey disseminated to all primary schools in Ireland.

• To yield new in-depth insight into how families with LGBTQ+ members are navigating primary schools.

All the key education stakeholders were sent an invitation to be part of the advisory board for the study and this advisory board shared their advice and feedback at key stages of the study.

This report is organised in the following way. A synthesis of relevant literature is first presented. Following this, the report is divided into two main parts.

Part A presents the methodological approach as well as the results of the survey with primary school staff (n=1031). Survey results are presented under the four areas of wellbeing promotion in schools in the following order: 1. Policy and Planning 2. Relationships and Partnerships 3. Culture & Environment 4. Curriculum (Teaching and Learning).

Part B presents the methodological approach and the findings from 23 interviews with families who have LGBTQ+ parents and/or pupils. A discussion of the study as a whole, as well as key recommendations arising, are then presented.

**Culture & Environment**
- Mission and ethos
- School & classroom climate & culture
- Quality & use of school buildings & grounds

**Curriculum (Teaching & Learning)**
- Extra-curricular learning
- Co-curricular learning
- Planning supports
- Monitoring

**KEY AREAS OF WELLBEING**

CULTURE
CURRICULUM
RELATIONSHIPS
POLICY & PLANNING

**Relationships & Partnerships**
- Student & staff relationships
- Peer relationships
- Student voice
- Partnership – staff, children and young people, parents/carers
- Partnerships with other schools
- Community partnerships
- External supports

**Policy & Planning**
- All policies relevant to wellbeing
- All plans relevant to wellbeing
- School & centre self-evaluation
- Continuing professional development

*Figure 1. Four key areas of Wellbeing Promotion*

# Review of Literature

## Primary School Staff and LGBTQ+ Inclusivity

A small body of research internationally has focused specifically on teachers' and school leaders' professional needs around LGBTQ+ inclusivity.

A lack of teacher education and associated discomfort is identified as a significant barrier to ensuring that LGBTQ+ lives are meaningfully included and reflected in everyday primary school life. Bartholomaeus, Riggs and Yarrow (2017) surveyed 180 primary school and pre-service teachers in Australia about their attitudes, confidence and comfort in working with trans and gender diverse students. They found a lack of comfort and confidence amongst primary school staff and found that those who had access to education, support and expertise were more confident in their ability to be LGBTQ+ inclusive. On this basis, they argue for further education, training and resourcing of professional programmes and initiatives for primary school staff in the area of LGBTQ+ inclusivity. Van Leent (2017) identifies the different ways that teachers respond when students talk about, share ideas and use words that might be described as LGBTQ+ related, again, underlining the need for comprehensive teacher education so that teachers can be LGBTQ+ inclusive in their teaching and learning. Leonardi and Staley (2018) argue that in order to be truly LGBTQ+ inclusive in primary schools, there needs to be attention also on the emotional and intellectual dimensions of professional development work with teachers.

On the whole, international research shows that primary school staff have positive dispositions towards enacting LGBTQ+ inclusivity, given the right conditions. Leonardi and Staley (2018) and Mangin (2019) explicate the transformative work being done by many school leaders in the US, while Carlile's work in the UK illustrates how policy and legislative frameworks gave teachers the confidence and courage to deliver LGBTQ+ inclusive programmes in primary schools. Bochiccio et al.'s (2019) research with pre-service teachers in Italy confirms a positive and supportive disposition to LGBTQ+ pupils. In the US, Payne and Smith (2014) interviewed twelve primary school teachers, finding that while they largely felt unprepared and fearful, they saw themselves as having a professional responsibility to 'accommodate' trans and gender diverse children, albeit with a resistance to changing school culture. Some researchers found that factors such as gender, religious conviction and political orientation had a negative impact on teacher attitudes to LGBTQ+ inclusivity (Bartholomaeus, Riggs and Yarrow, 2017; Amigo-Ventureira, Duran and DePalma, 2023).

The literature internationally also highlights the crucial role played by school leaders in relation to LGBTQ+ inclusivity in primary schools. In their provision of gender and sexuality-focused professional learning for primary school leaders in the US, Leonardi and Staley (2018) underline the crucial and

transformative role that school leaders play in effecting real change in this area. This is echoed in research by Farrelly et al. (2017) in the Irish context who underscore the critical role that school leaders play in terms of LGBTQ+ inclusive policy implementation and school organisation.

Currently, across the globe, bullying frameworks are the central way that LGBTQ+ lives become visible in primary schools. However, some researchers have identified that primary school staff can lack education and consensus around what exactly constitutes LGBTQ+ based bullying (Farrelly et al. 2017). Anti-bullying measures are crucial, however, several scholars note how there is a fundamental problem when bullying is the only frame of reference through which children are coming to understand LGBTQ+ lives (Ging & Neary, 2019; Formby 2015; Gilbert et al., 2018). In the Irish context, in one study with staff and parents in six primary school communities, there was a certain comfort amongst primary school staff in dealing with LGBTQ+ based bullying as part of anti-bullying frameworks but there was discomfort and reluctance in relation to educating about or representing LGBTQ+ inclusivity (Neary & Rasmussen, 2020; Neary et al., 2017). Such work draws attention to how anti-bullying work can fail to disturb the very conditions which give rise to the bullying in the first place (Payne and Smyth 2013; DePalma and Atkinson, 2010).

Vague ideas about age-appropriateness can constrain the inclusivity work that primary school staff do. There is no evidence base, consensus or detail on what exactly constitutes 'age-appropriateness' with regard to the visibility of LGBTQ+ lives in primary schools and yet this concept commands a powerful common-sense appeal (McClelland and Hunter 2013) tightly regulating and causing staff to be reluctant in relation to being LGBTQ+ inclusive (Robinson, 2013; Neary and Rasmussen 2020). Martino & Cumming-Potvin (2016) and Ryan et al. (2013) explain the productive effects of using texts with LGBTQ+ characters in primary schools, countering claims that children 'are not ready' for such content. This work echoes the seminal *No Outsiders* study in the UK, which illustrated the positive impact of LGBTQ+ inclusive pedagogy and resources on children's attitudes to LGBTQ+ people (Atkinson, 2021).

## LGBTQ+ Parents and Primary Schools

There is a small body of research emerging on how LGBTQ+ parented families are navigating primary schools. Carlile & Paechter (2018) illustrate how parents are open and broadly welcomed at school, but highlight some difficulties and barriers related to the presumption of heterosexuality, and silences around LGBTQ+ lives more broadly. Parents described the necessity to do extra layers of work to be involved in the school community and come out to other parents to ensure that their child's life was represented at school and to help build their confidence. McDonald & Morgan (2019) found that the parents in their study chose their primary school carefully, with attention to

how LGBTQ+ inclusive they might be. They expected that their children might be bullied or excluded because of their family form. To combat this potential outcome, they proactively prepared their children in terms of their 'resilience' and, echoing the work of Carlile and Paechter (2018), these parents had a heightened involvement in school life. They also found various administrative school practices to presume a heterosexual nuclear family.

## LGBTQ+ Pupils and Primary Schools

All children are processing their own and others' gender and sexuality identifications from early childhood (Sundaram & Saunston, 2016; Osgood et al., 2015; Lamb & Gilbert, 2019; Huuki, 2019; Kehily & Nayak, 2013; Renold & McGeeney, 2017; Robinson & Davies, 2015; Horton, 2020).

The most recently available research from Ireland indicates that the age of knowing one's LGBTQI+ identity and of first telling another person about their LGBTQI+ identity or 'coming out' has changed in recent years. In 2016, the average age for an LGBTQI+ person in Ireland to know their LGBTQI+ identity was 15 years, and the average age of first telling someone they identified as LGBTQI+ was 19 (Higgins *et al.,* 2016). In 2024, the average age of knowing one's LGBTQI+ identity had decreased to age 14, and the average age of first telling someone they identified as LGBTQI+ remained unchanged at age 19 (Higgins *et al.*, 2024).

However, among the younger cohort of LGBTQI+ people living in Ireland, the age of realising one's LGBTQI+ identity and first coming out to another person as LGBTQI+ is lower (Higgins *et al.*, 2024). The average age of both knowing and telling of their LGBTQI+ identity was lowest among people aged 14-18 years. For this group, age 12 was the average age at which 14–18-year-olds first knew their LGBTQI+ identity, and age 13 was the average age at which 14-18-year-olds first came out, or told another person about their LGBTQI+ identity. Within this context, primary school emerges as a crucial time for children in the development of their self-identity. Research in Ireland also documents how children as young as three years old are clearly and vehemently articulating a gender identity that is different from their birth-assigned gender (Neary, 2021a, 2021b, 2019, 2018; Neary & Cross; 2018).

It is in light of this reality that many researchers assert the need for a proactive approach to LGBTQ+ inclusivity, highlighting the many problems with merely reacting in individualised ways to children coming out as LGBTQ+ (Horton, 2020;  Martino, Kassen and Omercajic, 2022; Neary 2021, 2018). However, research in the Irish context has found that, currently, the onus is very much on the parents of LGBTQ+ primary school pupils to advocate and even educate primary school staff about LGBTQ+ inclusivity (Neary, 2021; Neary and Cross, 2017).

# Part A: Primary School Staff Survey

## Methodology

### Survey Design

The survey instrument was designed to explore primary school staff experiences, attitudes, knowledge levels, practices, and professional needs with regard to LGBTQ+ inclusivity in their primary schools. It was designed using Microsoft Forms and was housed online on the secure University of Limerick Microsoft platform. It included a combination of Likert scale, closed and open questions under the following section titles: 'About You', 'About Your School', 'Your School's Approach to LGBTQ+ Inclusivity', 'Your Opinion Regarding LGBTQ+ Inclusivity in Schools' and 'Your Professional Knowledge and Practice'. The survey was first piloted and refined with our Primary Education Sector Advisory Group[1] and a convenient sample of four primary school teachers.

### Survey Distribution

The survey was then distributed via the Department of Education database of contact point email addresses to all 3,231 primary schools in Ireland. It was distributed twice via email to the major primary school management bodies: the Catholic Primary School Management Association, Educate Together, An Foras Patrúnachta, and the Education and Training Board. The survey was also advertised three times via the Irish National Teachers' Organisation (INTO) Bi-Weekly E-zine. Posters with the survey QR code were also displayed at the INTO Congress in Killarney during the Easter School Break in April 2023. Data collection occurred between the 27th of March and the 9th of May 2023.

### Survey Analysis and Results

All data were downloaded from Microsoft Forms and cleaned in Microsoft Excel. Data were then inputted into SPSS analysis software. Basic frequencies and descriptives are reported for each survey question. Open questions were thematically analysed (Braun and Clarke 2006). Findings relating to respondent demographics and school demographics are detailed under the following section entitled 'survey sample'. Descriptive statistics and thematic analysis of open items for all other questions are detailed in the findings section, arranged in accordance with the four key areas of Wellbeing Promotion as per the Department of Education Policy Statement and

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[1] All major education stakeholders were invited to become a member of the advisory group. The group included representatives from those organisations who expressed willingness to take part: Educate Together, the Education and Training Board, the Irish National Teachers' Organisation, and the National Parents' Council.

Framework for Practice, namely: Policy and Planning, Relationships and Partnerships, Culture and Environment, and Curriculum (Teaching and Learning). The results of a selection of cross-analyses are detailed in the analysis section, along with thematically analysed open items.

## Survey Sample

Based on most recent available national data relating to total primary teaching posts (*n*= 40,540) (Department of Education, 2022b) and SNA posts (*n* = 17,556) (Forsa, 2021), a minimum acceptable sample size of 382 was calculated based on a confidence level of 95% and margin of error of 5%. The final sample size comfortably exceeds this limit (*n*=1031).

Figures 1-11 below outline the demographic characteristics of the participants who completed the survey (age, gender, sexual orientation, religion/worldview, role category, length of career in primary schools) and school in which they work (school type, school size, school location, gender profile of school).

### *Respondent Demographics*

As Table 1 illustrates, a spread of age groups responded to the survey. The majority of respondents were in the 40-49 age bracket (35%; n=361), with the 30-39 (27.5%; n=284) and 50-59 (21.8%; n=225) age brackets falling relatively closely behind.

*Table 1. Age Groups*

| What is your age? (n=1031) | | |
|---|---|---|
| | N | % |
| 20-29 | 108 | 10.5% |
| 30-39 | 284 | 27.5% |
| 40-49 | 361 | 35.0% |
| 50-59 | 225 | 21.8% |
| 60+ | 41 | 4.0% |
| Prefer Not to Say | 12 | 1.2% |

As illustrated in Table 2, the majority of survey respondents were women (76.1%; n=785). This is reflective of the population of primary school staff nationally.  In 2022/2023, 84.5% of all primary school teachers (including principals) were women.

*Table 2. Gender of Participants*

| What is your gender? (n=1031) | | |
|---|---|---|
| | N | % |
| Woman | 785 | 76.1% |
| Man | 222 | 21.5% |
| Non-Binary | 5 | 0.5% |
| Prefer not to say | 15 | 1.5% |
| Other | 4 | 0.4% |

As Table 3 shows, 0.4% (n=4) of respondents reported that their gender did not match the sex they were assigned at birth.

*Table 3. Gender identity and assigned sex at birth*

| Does your gender match the sex you were assigned at birth? (n=1031) | | |
|---|---|---|
| | N | % |
| Yes | 999 | 96.9% |
| No | 4 | 0.4% |
| Prefer Not to Say | 9 | 0.9% |
| I Do Not Understand the Question | 19 | 1.8% |

As illustrated by Table 4, 14.9% (n=154) of respondents identified as having a sexual orientation other than heterosexual or straight. These included gay, lesbian, bisexual, pansexual, queer. Of those who ticked 'other', two respondents identified as asexual, one respondent identified as asexual/aromantic and one respondent identified as heteroflexible.

*Table 4. Sexual orientation*

| What is your sexual orientation? (n=1031) | | |
|---|---|---|
| | N | % |
| Straight | 848 | 82.3% |
| Gay | 63 | 6.1% |
| Lesbian | 37 | 3.6% |
| Bisexual | 30 | 2.9% |
| Pansexual | 7 | 0.7% |
| Queer | 13 | 1.3% |
| Prefer not to say | 24 | 2.3% |
| Other | 9 | 0.9% |

As outlined in Table 5, of those respondents who themselves identified as LGBTQ+ (n=158), 20.9% (n=33) were not 'out' at school. 27.2% (n=43) were open with some school staff while 61.4% (n=97) were open with all school staff. 15.2% (n=24) were open with some parents/guardians while 13.3% (n=21) were open with all parents/guardians. Just 16.4% (n=26) were open with pupils.

*Table 5. Level of Openness of LGBTQ+ Staff*

| If you identify as LGBTQ+, what is your level of openness? (n=158)[2] | | |
|---|---|---|
| | N | % |
| LGBTQ+ but not open | 33 | 20.9% |
| Open with some school staff | 43 | 27.2% |
| Open with all school staff | 97 | 61.4% |
| Open with some parents/guardians | 24 | 15.2% |
| Open with all parents/guardians | 21 | 13.3% |
| Open with pupils | 26 | 16.4% |

Table 6 illustrates that the majority of survey respondents identified as Roman Catholic (53.5%; n=552). This figure falls somewhat short of the 69% of the general population who reported that they were Roman Catholic in the 2022 census. However, the number of people who reported to be atheist in this survey (13.8%; n=142) could be said to be reflective of the overall population as the 'no religion' category in the 2022 (14%).

*Table 6. Religion/Worldview*

| Please state if you affiliate or identify with any of the following religious or world views (n=1031) | | |
|---|---|---|
| | N | % |
| Roman Catholic | 552 | 53.5% |
| Church of Ireland | 24 | 2.3% |
| Presbyterian | 4 | 0.4% |
| Methodist | 1 | 0.1% |
| Islam | 1 | 0.1% |
| Atheist | 142 | 13.8% |
| Agnostic | 111 | 10.8% |
| Prefer not to say | 83 | 8.1% |
| Other | 93 | 9.0% |
| Multiple | 20 | 1.9% |

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[2] The percentages in Table 5 do not add up to 100% because participants could select multiple responses to this question.

As Table 7 shows, there was a spread of career stage amongst the respondents to the survey. The largest cohort of respondents had been working in schools for 16-20 years (20.4%; n=210). This was closely followed by the 11-15 year career bracket (19.2%; n=198), the 5-10 year career length bracket (16.5%; n=170) and the 21-25 year career bracket (14%; n=144).

*Table 7. Career Length*

| How long have you been working in primary schools? (n=1031) | | |
|---|---|---|
| | N | % |
| Less than 5 years | 144 | 14.0% |
| 5-10 years | 170 | 16.5% |
| 11-15 years | 198 | 19.2% |
| 16-20 years | 210 | 20.4% |
| 21-25 years | 144 | 14.0% |
| 26-30 years | 51 | 4.9% |
| 31-35 years | 58 | 5.6% |
| 35+ years | 56 | 5.4% |

Table 8 shows that the majority of respondents were mainstream class teachers (40.1%; n=413). It is important also to note, however, that this mainstream class teacher category is somewhat underrepresented in Table 8. Many principals and deputy principals are also mainstream class teachers, but if they ticked the principal/deputy principal category, they are recorded as such in Table 8.

*Table 8. Professional Role*

| What is your role in your school? Please tick all that apply and provide clarification in the 'other' box if needed (n=1029) | | |
|---|---|---|
| | N | % |
| Mainstream Class Teacher | 413 | 40.1% |
| Principal/Deputy Principal | 240 | 23.3% |
| Special Class Teacher/Special Education Teacher | 206 | 20.0% |
| Support Staff: SNA, Admin/Sec, Language Support, Home School Liaison | 150 | 14.5% |
| BoMm, Sub, Care Taker/Cleaner, Retired, Student Teacher, Other | 20 | 1.9% |

As can be seen in Table 9 there was a very good spread of respondents across those teaching class groups.

*Table 9. Class Group Taught*

| If you teach or work in a class, what class are you teaching or working in? Please select all that apply. (n=1031) | | |
|---|---|---|
| | N | % |
| Junior Infants | 58 | 5.6% |
| Senior Infants | 52 | 5.0% |
| 1st Class | 53 | 5.1% |
| 2nd class | 43 | 4.2% |
| 3rd class | 61 | 5.9% |
| 4th class | 71 | 6.9% |
| 5th class | 64 | 6.2% |
| 6th class | 64 | 6.2% |
| Special class | 86 | 8.3% |
| I do not teach or work in a class | 241 | 23.4% |
| Other | 33 | 3.2% |
| Multiple classes | 205 | 19.9% |

### School Demographics

As Table 10 illustrates, the spread of school types in which the respondents worked somewhat aligns with the spread of school types in the country, in that the majority of respondents were working in Catholic schools (59.2%; n=610). However, the population of those in Catholic schools is somewhat underrepresented when compared with the population of Catholic primary schools in the country (88.5%) (Department of Education, 2022). Furthermore, respondents from multi-denominational schools (23.8%; n=245) are overrepresented in the survey as 4.8% (n=150) of primary schools in Ireland are multi-denominational.

*Table 10. School type*

| How would you characterise your school type? (n=1031) | | |
|---|---|---|
| | N | % |
| Catholic NS | 610 | 59.2% |
| Educate Together NS | 245 | 23.8% |
| Catholic Gaelscoil under religious patron | 22 | 2.1% |
| Catholic or Inter Gaelscoil under An Foras Patrunachta | 10 | 1.0% |
| Multi-denominational Gaelscoil under An Foras Patrunachta | 14 | 1.4% |
| Community National School | 19 | 1.8% |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Church of Ireland Primary School | 36 | 3.5% |
| Presbyterian School | 1 | 0.1% |
| Catholic Special School | 36 | 3.5% |
| ETB Special School | 13 | 1.3% |
| Other | 15 | 1.5% |
| Multiples | 10 | 1.0% |

As Table 11 illustrates, there was a good spread of school size represented in this survey. The majority category school has 250-499 pupils (39.8%; n=410). The vast majority of the schools fall in the category of having more than 100 pupils (83.2%; n=858), which is reflective of the general population as 86.6% of primary schools in Ireland have 4 or more teachers (Department of Education, 2022).

*Table 11. School size*

| How many pupils are enrolled in your school? (n=1031) | | |
|---|---|---|
| | N | % |
| Less than 100 | 173 | 16.8% |
| 100-249 | 327 | 31.7% |
| 250-499 | 410 | 39.8% |
| 500+ | 121 | 11.7% |

The respondents to this survey were located in a spread of locations across city, suburban, town and rural locales (Table 12). The largest category of respondents came from suburban locations (32.4%; n=334).

*Table 12. School location*

| In what type of location is your school? (n=1031) | | |
|---|---|---|
| | N | % |
| City | 206 | 20.0% |
| Suburban | 334 | 32.4% |
| Town | 279 | 27.1% |
| Rural | 212 | 20.6% |

Reflecting the population of primary schools in Ireland wherein 91.8% of schools are mixed gender schools (Department of Education 2022), Table 13 illustrates that a large majority of respondents to the survey were working in mixed gender schools (91.1%; n= 941).

*Table 13. Gender profile of school*

| What is the gender profile of your school? (n=1031) | | |
|---|---|---|
| | N | % |
| Boys | 47 | 4.6% |
| Girls | 43 | 4.2% |
| Mixed | 941 | 91.3% |

### *Estimates of LGBTQ+ Population in Schools[3]*

## LGBTQ+ Parents and Guardians Estimates

When asked how many families in their school have same-gender parents or guardians, the majority (46.3%; n=477) selected 'Don't Know', 28.4% (n=293) selected '0', 15.8% (n=163) of respondents selected '1-2', 6% (n=62) selected '3-4' and 3.5% (n=36) of respondents selected '5+'.

When asked how many families in their school have a transgender parent or guardian, the majority (60.9%; n=628) selected 'Don't Know', 36.7% (n=378) selected '0', 2% (n=21) selected '1-2', 0.3% (n=3) selected '3-4' and 0.1% (n=1) of respondents selected '5+'.

When asked how many families in their school have a non-binary parent or guardian, the majority (72.4%; n=746) selected 'Don't Know', 0.8% (n=8) respondents selected '1-2', 0.1% (n=1) selected '3-4' and 0.1% (n=1) of respondents selected '5+'.

## LGBTQ+ Staff Estimates

When asked how many staff members in their school are 'out' to fellow school staff about being gay, lesbian, bisexual, or a sexual orientation other than heterosexual, the majority (44.3%; n=457) selected '0', 31.8% (n=328) of respondents selected '1-2', 6.6% (n=68) selected '3-4' and 2.7% (n=28) of respondents selected '5+'. A further 14.5% (n=150) selected 'Don't Know'.

When asked how many staff members in their school are 'out' to fellow school staff about being transgender the majority (81.8%; n=843) selected '0', 0.9% (n=9) of respondents selected '1-2' and 0.2% (n=2) of respondents selected 5+. A further 17.2% (n=177) selected 'Don't Know'.

When asked how many staff members in their school are 'out' to fellow school staff about being non-binary, the majority (79.4%; n=819) selected '0', 1.1% (n=11) of respondents selected '1-2' and 0.1% (n=1) of respondents selected 5+. A further 19.4% (n=200) selected 'Don't Know'.

## LGBTQ+ Pupils Estimates

When asked to estimate how many pupils openly expressed that they feel attracted to their own gender and/or describe themselves as being lesbian, gay or bisexual, the majority of teachers reported none (38.2%; n=394), while a considerable number of respondents reported that they did not know (34.6%; n=357). 13.8% (n=142) of respondents estimated 1-2 pupils (0.28%-

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[3] These estimated population statistics are impacted by the fact that more than one staff member in each school may have taken the survey.

0.56%[4] of pupils overall), 7.1% (n=73) estimated 3-4 pupils (0.85%-1.13% of pupils overall), 3.2% (n=33) estimated 5+ pupils (1.41%-2.82% of pupils overall), and 3% (n=3) estimated 10+ students (2.82%+ of pupils overall).

When asked to estimate the number of pupils who openly expressed that they feel they are a gender other than the gender they were assigned at birth, the majority of teachers reported 'none' (39.9%; n=411), while a considerable number of respondents reported that they did not know (29%; n=299). 24.4% (n=252) of respondents estimated 1-2 pupils (0.28%-0.56%[5] of pupils overall), 4.8% (n=49) estimated 3-4 pupils (0.85%-1.13% of pupils overall), 1.4% (n=14) estimated 5+ pupils (1.41%-2.82% of pupils overall), and 0.5% (n=5) estimated more than 10 pupils (2.82%+ of pupils overall).

When asked to estimate the number of pupils in their school who have taken steps to socially transition, the majority of teachers reported none (56%; n=577), while a considerable number of respondents reported that they did not know (20.9%; n=215). 20.3% (n=209) of respondents estimated 1-2 pupils (0.28%-0.56% of pupils overall)[6], 2.4% (n=25) estimated 3-4 pupils (0.85%-1.13% of pupils overall), 0.3% (n=3) estimated 5+ pupils (1.41%-2.82% of pupils overall) and 0.1% estimated more than 10 pupils (2.82%+ of pupils overall).

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[4] Based on average school size of 355 pupils taken from Department of Education 2022 data.
[5] Based on average school size of 355 pupils taken from Department of Education 2022 data.
[6] Based on average school size of 355 pupils taken from Department of Education 2022 data.

# Findings

## (A) Policy and Planning

### 1. Equality and Anti-Bullying Policies

Participants **were asked questions about the policies related to LGBTQ+ inclusivity in their schools.** As illustrated in Table 14, 7.7% of staff reported that they had an equality policy independent of their anti-bullying policy.

*Table 14. Equality Policy Independent of Anti-Bullying Policy*

| Does your school have an equality policy, independent of your school's Anti-Bullying Policy, Code of Behaviour and other mandatory policies? (n=1031) | | |
|---|---|---|
| | N | % |
| Yes | 389 | 37.7% |
| No | 400 | 38.8% |
| Don't know | 242 | 23.5% |

As illustrated in Table 15, of those staff that had an equality policy, 49.1% reported that their school's equality policy mentioned sexual orientation, gender identity and/or LGBTQ+ people. 50.6% reported that their school's policy mentioned sexual orientation, 57.8% reported that their equality policy explicitly mentioned gender; 39.1% stated that it explicitly mentioned gender identity; and 43.2% explicitly mentioned LGBTQ+ people.

*Table 15. Items Included in Equality Policy*

| Your equality policy mentions (n=389) | | |
|---|---|---|
| | N | % |
| Gender | 225 | 57.8% |
| Sexual orientation | 197 | 50.6% |
| Gender identity | 152 | 39.1% |
| LGBTQ+ people | 168 | 43.2% |

**Participants were also asked questions about whether their anti-bullying policy mentioned homophobic/biphobic and transphobic bullying.** As Table 16 outlines, 65.8% (n=256) reported that their anti-bullying policy mentioned homophobic/biphobic bullying. 15.4% (n=60) reported that their anti-bullying policy did not mention homophobic/biphobic bullying and 18.8% (n=73) reported that they did not know. A total of 34.2% of respondents (n=133) either did not know whether their school's anti-bullying policy mentioned homophobic/biphobic bullying, or reported that this was not included in the policy.

*Table 16. Anti-Bullying Policy Mentioning Homophobic/Biphobic Bullying*

| Does your Anti-Bullying Policy mention homophobic/bi-phobic bullying? (n=389) | | |
|---|---|---|
| | N | % |
| Yes | 256 | 65.8% |
| No | 60 | 15.4% |
| Don't know | 73 | 18.8% |

As Table 17 outlines, 30.8% (n=120) reported that their anti-bullying policy mentioned transphobic bullying. 32.4% (n=126) reported that their anti-bullying policy did not mention transphobic bullying and 36.8% said that they did not know. A total of 69.2% of respondents (n=269) either did not know whether their school's anti-bullying policy mentioned transphobic bullying, or reported that this was not included in the policy.

*Table 17. Anti-Bullying Policy Mentioning Transphobic Bullying*

| Does your Anti-Bullying Policy mention transphobic bullying? (n=389) | | |
|---|---|---|
| | N | % |
| Yes | 120 | 30.8% |
| No | 126 | 32.4% |
| Don't know | 143 | 36.8% |

**Respondents were also asked whether their anti-bullying policy included information on education and/or prevention strategies in relation to homophobic, biphobic and transphobic bullying.** As Table 18 outlines, 52% (n=536) reported that their policy included information on education and/or prevention strategies in relation to homophobic, biphobic and transphobic bullying, 20.9% (n=215) reported that their anti-bullying policy did not include information on education and/or prevention strategies in relation to homophobic, biphobic and transphobic bullying and 27.2% (n=280) reported that they did not know.

*Table 18. Anti-Bullying Policy Mentioning Education and Prevention Strategies Related to Homophobic, Biphobic and Transphobic Bullying*

| Does your school Anti-Bullying Policy include information on education and/or prevention strategies in relation to homophobic, biphobic and transphobic bullying?  (n=1031) | | |
|---|---|---|
| | N | % |
| Yes | 536 | 52.0% |
| No | 215 | 20.9% |
| Don't know | 280 | 27.2% |

## 2. Staff Knowledge Levels About Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity

Participants were asked to **rate their knowledge levels about sexual orientation,** such as straight, gay, lesbian, bisexual and queer and about different **gender identities,** such as cisgender, transgender, non-binary and gender non-conforming.

As Table 19 outlines, 34.2%[7] of staff reported that they felt very confident in their knowledge about sexual orientation and gender identity, 37[8] reported that they felt somewhat confident in their knowledge about sexual orientation and gender identity and [9] of staff rated themselves as either not very confident or not at all confident overall in their knowledge levels about sexual orientation and gender identity.

Within this, there was a significant gap between participants' knowledge levels of sexual orientation when compared with gender identity.

45.8% (n=472) of staff rated themselves as very confident in relation to sexual orientation while 22.6% (n=233) rated themselves as very confident in their knowledge about gender identity.

5.8% (n=59) of staff rated themselves as either not very confident or not at all confident regarding sexual orientation while 26.8% (n=276) of primary school staff rated themselves as either not very confident or not at all confident in their knowledge levels about gender identity.

*Table 19. Knowledge Levels About Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity*

| Confidence in knowledge levels: | Very Confident | Somewhat Confident | Neutral | Not Very Confident | Not at All Confident | I Don't Know |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| about sexual orientation and gender identity[10] | 34.2% | 37.0% | 11.4% | 12.0% | 4.3% | 1.2% |
| about sexual orientation | 45.8% (472) | 38.6% (398) | 8.8% (91) | 4.3% (44) | 1.5% (15) | 1.1% (11) |
| about gender identity | 22.6% (233) | 35.3% (364) | 14% (144) | 19.7% (203) | 7.1% (73) | 1.4% (14) |

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[7] This is an average of sexual orientation and gender identity question results
[8] This is an average of sexual orientation and gender identity question results
[9] This is an average of sexual orientation and gender identity question results
[10] These figures are averages of sexual orientation and gender identity question results

### 3. Staff Knowledge Levels About and Supports Available if a Pupil Comes Out as LGBTQ+

**Quantitative Results**

Participants were asked questions about **their knowledge levels about what to do if a pupil came out as LGBTQ+.**

As Table 20 outlines, 30.7%[11] of staff reported that they felt very confident about what to do if a pupil comes out as LGBTQ+ while 37.5% felt somewhat confident of what to do if a pupil came out as LGBTQ+. 17.9% reported that they were either not very confident or not at all confident in what to do if a child came out as LGBTQ+.

Again, there was a significant difference when it came to knowing what to do if a pupil came out as lesbian, gay, bisexual or a sexual orientation other than straight, when compared with a pupil coming out as trans or non-binary, or identifying as a gender other than the gender they were assigned at birth, or a pupil wanting to socially transition at school.

75.5% (n=778) of staff reported that they were either very confident or somewhat confident in knowing what to do if a child came out as lesbian, gay, bisexual or a sexual orientation other than straight, while 60.6% (n=625) were either very confident of somewhat confident if a pupil came out as trans or non-binary or as identifying as a gender other than the gender they were assigned at birth.

12% (n=124) of primary school staff were not very confident or not at all confident in knowing what to do if a pupil came out as lesbian, gay, bisexual or a sexual orientation other than straight while 23.8% (n=245) of primary school staff reported they were either not very confident or not at all confident in knowing what to do if a pupil says that they feel they are a gender other than the gender they were assigned at birth and/or describes themselves as being trans or non-binary.

23.1% (n=238) of staff rated themselves as not very confident or not at all confident in knowing what to do if a pupil wanted to socially transition at school.

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[11] This and the following figures in this paragraph are an average of questions regarding knowing what to do if a pupil comes out about their sexual orientation and gender identity

*Table 20. Confidence levels regarding a pupil coming out as LGBTQ+*

| | Very Confident | Somewhat Confident | Neutral | Not Very Confident | Not at All Confident | Don't know |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Confidence in knowing what to do if a pupil comes out as LGBTQ+[12] | 30.7% | 37.5% | 11.8% | 13.1% | 4.8% | 2.3% |
| Confidence in knowing what to do if a pupil comes out as lesbian, gay, bisexual | 37% (381) | 38.5% (397) | 10.6% (109) | 9.4% (97) | 2.6% (27) | 1.9% (20) |
| Confidence in knowing what to do if pupil comes out as trans or non-binary | 24.3% (251) | 36.3% (374) | 13% (134) | 16.8% (173) | 7% (72) | 2.6% (27) |
| Confidence in knowing what to do if a pupil wants to socially transition at school | 26% (268) | 33.9% (350) | 14.2% (146) | 15.4% (159) | 7.7% (79) | 2.8% (29) |

## Qualitative Findings

All respondents (n=1031) were required to answer the question: **'What supports does your school provide if a pupil comes out as LGBTQ+?'**. A thematic analysis produced the following key findings:

Over half of the respondents (56.3%; n=580) to this question were unsure of, weren't aware of ("I don't know"), or stated that there were no formal supports in place for a pupil who comes out as LGBTQ+ in their schools.

**Many respondents stated that there are no supports in place in their school if pupils were to come out as LGBTQ+, with many responses simply stating "none" or "no supports".**

Responses from primary staff included:

> Very little supports. Not really prepared for what is an inevitability. (339, female, straight, SET, Catholic school)

> Nothing!! Some Stay Safe homophobic bullying is discussed and anti bullying taught, that's it! (123, female, straight, class teacher, Catholic school)

> We listen and accept what they say and, in our classes we do our best to help them feel included and to ensure they are looked after. However officially there is no support. (1004, female, straight, class teacher, Catholic school)

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[12] These figures are an average of questions regarding knowing what to do if a pupil comes out about their sexual orientation and gender identity

*Many respondents noted that the support given to a pupil coming out would largely be dealt with in a private way via the teacher, and that it wasn't part of whole-school planning.*

Responses from primary staff included:

> None. When issues are raised, we're told it's nothing to do with the school and parents can sort it. Support can only be offered quietly from teacher to parent. Whole school support is simply not there. (346, male, straight, deputy principal, Catholic school)

> There is no support structure in place. It would be down to the teacher involved (243, female, straight, class teacher, Catholic school)

> Not any specific supports. At the discretion of the teacher. (199, female, straight, SET, Catholic school)

> Nothing specific. Up to teacher to take it upon themselves, discuss with parents etc. (636, female, bisexual, deputy principal, Catholic school)

*Many respondents stated that support would be given to any pupil who comes out as LGBTQ+ in their school community but didn't go into detail on what these supports were.*

Responses from primary staff included:

> All children are treated equally, whether they come out or not, we respond at any time that a child feels unhappiness or anxiety irrespective of whether it is connected to their sexuality or not. (41, male, straight, principal, Catholic school)

> We are an inclusive school, it's not a big deal if anyone comes out as LGBTQ+ and we treat everyone equally. We celebrate Pride each year (8, female, straight, principal, Church of Ireland school)

*Many respondents elaborated on the kind of support that they gave, emphasising a child-led approach.*

Responses from primary staff included:

> We have decided to take the lead from the children in that some children make an announcement to the class and others mention it that they are gay in conversation which is becoming more of the norm. The class teachers have been supportive by dealing with any comments or negativity. (167, female, straight, principal, Educate Together)

> The support is child-led with the cooperation of staff and may include; group discussions among peers, exploration of media relating to the topic, support with appropriate language for engaging in discussion (615, female, straight, SET, Educate Together)

> We check the child is ok, ask how they want classmates/staff to act - some do not want much attention but want the staff - or some staff - to know. Different identities are discussed as part of our RSE programme. (70, female, lesbian, principal, Catholic School)

*Many responses also stated that parents would play an important role in how a child is supported.*

Responses from primary staff included:

> Our management and policies are experienced with dealing with these scenarios - the parents play a huge part in the experience of child coming out in our school. Some children receive SET supports as a priority to provide a safe space for them to navigate the classroom and their identity. (240, male, gay, class teacher, Educate Together)

> If a child "comes out as LGBTQ+" our school will foremost be guided by the child's parents/guardians, as the primary educators of the child (the exception being where there is a Child Protection concern). (159, male, straight, principal, Catholic school)

> It very much depends on the class teacher and the child's parents. If parents aren't on board, there are very few supports. If they are, we've had a child change his name and pronouns. When a child came out as binary trans, we changed to gender neutral toilets, but this didn't happen for a nonbinary child a couple of years before. (91, non-binary, queer, SET, Educate Together)

***Several respondents also said that they would seek advice and support from external agencies*** such as NEPS, Belong to, TENI, youth projects in the community, psychologists, and a GP.

Responses from primary staff included:

> We liaise with BelongTo and provide relevant staff with methods and advice to support that child. We encourage whole class education on LGBTQ+ topics so that children are equipped to talk to each other when someone does come out as LGBTQ+. We also liaise with parents in order to support them through their child's coming out journey. (115, male, gay, class teacher, Educate Together)

> Our school will be guided by NEPS in order to seek advice, training and support on how best to cater for the individual needs of the child, under the oversight and guidance of the child's parent/s &/or guardians. (159, male, straight, principal, Catholic school)

***Some respondents felt constrained by the ethos of the school while others noted that they felt supported by management and the inclusive school ethos*** (made in reference to both religious and multi-denominational schools).

Responses from primary staff included:

> This is a situation we have not had the opportunity to openly deal with. We know that a proportion of our pupils identify as LGBTQ+ but they don't publicly and openly come out when they are in primary school. There are a myriad of reasons for this. The only supports that we have to offer is the openness of staff, but our ethos prevents us from providing information or indeed talking to pupils during RSE regarding gender identity. (14, male, straight, principal, Catholic school)

### 4. Knowledge Levels About Homophobic, Biphobic and Transphobic Bullying

Respondents were asked to rate their **knowledge levels with regard to homophobic, biphobic and transphobic bullying.**

As Table 21 outlines,[13] of staff reported that they felt very confident and 36.9% felt somewhat confident in their knowledge levels with regard to LGBTQ+ identity-based bullying. 17.9% were either not very confident or not at all confident.

As Table 21 also outlines, 34.4%[14] reported that they felt very confident and 36.8% reported that they felt somewhat confident when it came to dealing with an incident of LGBTQ+ based bullying. 14.2% were either not very confident or not at all confident in knowing what to do in the case of incident of LGBTQ+-based bullying.

Significantly, 71.2%[15] of staff were very confident or somewhat confident in dealing with an incident of LGBTQ+ based bullying, while only 57.4%[16] of staff felt very confident or somewhat confident teaching about LGBTQ+ identity-based bullying. Similarly, more staff did not feel confident in teaching about LGBTQ+ identity-based bullying (21.3%), compared with dealing with incidents of LGBTQ+ based bullying (14.2%).

*Table 21. Confidence levels regarding homophobic, biphobic or transphobic bullying*

| Knowledge Levels | Very Confident | Somewhat Confident | Neutral | Not Very Confident | Not at All Confident | Don't Know |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| LGBTQ+ Identity-Based Bullying[17] | 29.7% | 36.9% | 13.5% | 13.4% | 4.5% | 2.0% |
| Homophobic and biphobic bullying | 33.0% (340) | 37.1% (383) | 12.4% (128) | 11.8% (122) | 3.6% (37) | 2.0% (21) |
| Transphobic bullying | 26.5% (273) | 36.6% (377) | 14.5% (150) | 15% (155) | 5.3% (55) | 2.0% (21) |
| What to do if incident of LGBTQ+ identity-based bullying involving a pupil[18] | 34.4% | 36.8% | 12.8% | 10.8% | 3.4% | 1.8% |
| What to do if incident of homophobic or biphobic bullying involving a pupil | 35.7% (368) | 36.9% (380) | 12.5% (129) | 9.8% (101) | 3.4% (35) | 1.7% (18) |

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[13] This and the following figures in this paragraph are an average of knowledge levels regarding homophobic/biphobic and transphobic bullying question results

[14] This and the following figures in this paragraph are an average of the results from questions regarding knowledge levels of homophobic/biphobic and knowledge levels about transphobic bullying

[15] This is an average of the results from questions regarding dealing with incidents of homophobic/biphobic and dealing with incidents of transphobic bullying

[16] This is an average of the results from questions regarding teaching about homophobic/biphobic and teaching about transphobic bullying

[17] This is an average of the results from questions regarding knowledge levels on homophobic/biphobic and knowledge levels on transphobic bullying

[18] This is an average of the results from questions regarding dealing with homophobic/biphobic incidents and dealing with transphobic bullying incidents

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| What to do if incident of transphobic bullying involving a pupil | 33.1% (341) | 36.8% (379) | 13.1% (135) | 11.8% (122) | 3.3% (34) | 1.9% (20) |
| About teaching about LGBTQ+ identity-based bullying[19] | 23.6% | 33.8% | 17.4% | 15.1 | 6.2% | 4.0 |
| About teaching pupils about homophobia and biphobia | 26.4% (272) | 34.8% (359) | 15.9% (164) | 13.7% (141) | 5.3% (55) | 3.9% (40) |
| About teaching pupils about transphobia | 20.8% (214) | 32.7% (337) | 18.8% (194) | 16.6% (171) | 7.0% (72) | 4.2% (43) |

## 5. CPD

Participants were asked **how often they participate in professional development opportunities related to LGBTQ+ inclusivity.**

As Table 22 outlines, 56.6% (n=479) of primary school staff reported that they never participate in professional development opportunities related specifically to LGBTQ+ inclusivity. 29.4% (n=249) sometimes participate and 14% (n=119) always participate in professional development opportunities specifically related to LGBTQ+ inclusivity.

*Table 22. LGBTQ+ Inclusivity CPD*

| How often do you participate in professional development opportunities related specifically to LGBTQ+ inclusivity? (Applicable staff n=847) | | |
|---|---|---|
| | N | % |
| Always | 119 | 14% |
| Sometimes | 249 | 29.4% |
| Never | 479 | 56.6% |

## 6. Perceptions of Overall Preparedness to be LGBTQ+ Inclusive

**Participants were asked to rate their overall level of preparedness to be LGBTQ+ inclusive in their practice.**

As Table 23 illustrates, the largest portion of staff rated themselves as 4 stars (30.3%; n=312), 26.3% (n=271) rated themselves as 3 stars and 20.1% rated themselves as 5 stars (n=207), 11.8% (n=122) rated themselves as 2 stars, and 11.5% (n=119) rated themselves as 1 star.

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[19] This is an average of the results from questions regarding teaching about homophobic/biphobic bullying and teaching about transphobic bullying

Significantly, almost half of primary school staff (49.6%, n=512) rated themselves as 3 stars or less in terms of their preparedness to be LGBTQ+ inclusive in their practice.

*Table 23. Overall preparedness to be LGBTQ+ inclusive*

| Rate your overall preparedness to be LGBTQ+ inclusive in your practice (n=1031) | | |
|---|---|---|
| | N | % |
| 1 star | 119 | 11.5% |
| 2 stars | 122 | 11.8% |
| 3 stars | 271 | 26.3% |
| 4 stars | 312 | 30.3% |
| 5 stars | 207 | 20.1% |

## Summary of Policy and Planning Findings

It is promising that over a third of the staff in this study reported that they have an equality policy independent of their bullying policy, with half of these policies mentioning either sexual orientation, gender identity or LGBTQ+ people as protected grounds. It is also positive that half of staff in this study reported that their equality policy included information on education and/or prevention strategies in relation to homophobic, biphobic and transphobic bullying. On the other hand, a significant number of staff either reported that their anti-bullying policy did not include information on education and/or prevention strategies in relation to homophobic, biphobic and transphobic bullying or reported that they did not know.

There is also significant room for improvement in the basic knowledge levels of staff with regard to LGBTQ+ inclusivity and there was a significant gap between participants' knowledge levels of sexual orientation when compared with gender identity. Striking too was the fact that over half of the respondents were unsure of, weren't aware of, or stated that there were no formal supports in place for a pupil who comes out as LGBTQ+ in their schools. There was also a sizeable gap between staff confidence in dealing with an incident of LGBTQ+ based bullying compared with their level of confidence in teaching about LGBTQ+ identity-based bullying. These knowledge gaps and the fact that half of the staff who took the survey rated themselves as 3 stars or less might be somewhat explained by the fact that more than half of the staff never participate in CPD related to LGBTQ+ inclusivity.

## (B) Relationships and Partnerships

### 1. Attitudes to and Comfort Levels with LGBTQ+ Staff and Parents/Guardians 'Coming Out'

Participants were asked to **rate how comfortable they would feel if a colleague and a parent/guardian told them they were LGBTQ+.**

As Table 24 outlines, 95.3%[20] were either very comfortable or somewhat comfortable in relation to a colleague coming out as LGBTQ+. Similarly, 93.9%[21] were either very comfortable, or somewhat comfortable with regard to a parent/guardian coming out as LGBTQ+.

As Table 24 also outlines, there were a very low level of discomfort with colleagues and parents/guardians being LGBTQ+. 2.9% (n=30) were either somewhat uncomfortable or very uncomfortable with a colleague coming out as LGBTQ+ while 3.8% (n=40) were either somewhat uncomfortable or very uncomfortable with a parent/guardian coming out as LGBTQ+.

*Table 24. Levels of comfort regarding colleagues and parents/guardians coming out as LGBTQ+*

|  | Very Comfortable | Somewhat Comfortable | Neutral | Somewhat Un-comfortable | Very Un-comfortable | Unsure |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Colleague coming out as LGBTQ+[22] | 75% | 10.3% | 8.8% | 1.5% | 1.4% | 1.7% |
| Colleague coming out as lesbian, gay, bisexual | 86.8% (895) | 4.2% (43) | 7.1% (73) | 0.6% (6) | 0.5% (5) | 0.9% (9) |
| Colleague coming out as trans or non-binary | 66% (680) | 16.4% (169) | 10.5% (108) | 2.3% (24) | 2.3% (24) | 2.5% (26) |
| Parent/Guardian coming out as LGBTQ+[23] | 73% | 10.9% | 10.4% | 2.1% | 1.7% | 1.7% |
| Parent/Guardian coming out as lesbian, gay, bisexual | 80.7% (832) | 6.2% (64) | 9.3% (96) | 1.6% (17) | 1.1% (11) | 1.1% (11) |
| Parent/Guardian coming out as trans or non-binary | 65.5% (675) | 15.5% (160) | 11.5% (119) | 2.6% (27) | 2.4% (25) | 2.4% (25) |

[20] This is an average of results from questions regarding a colleague coming out about their sexual orientation and gender identity.

[21] This is an average of results from questions regarding a parent coming out about their sexual orientation and gender identity.

[22] These figures are an average of results from questions regarding a colleague coming out about their sexual orientation and gender identity.

[23] These figures are an average of results from questions regarding a parent coming out about their sexual orientation and gender identity.

## 2. Staff Attitudes to and Comfort with LGBTQ+ Pupils Coming Out

### Quantitative Results

Participants were also asked **to rate how comfortable they would feel if a pupil told them they were LGBTQ+.**

As Table 25 outlines, 79.8%[24] of staff reported that they were either very comfortable or somewhat comfortable regarding the idea of a pupil coming out as LGBTQ+. 8.8% reported they were neutral and 8.2% were either somewhat uncomfortable or very uncomfortable about a pupil coming out as LGBTQ+.

Within this, 84.6% (n=872) were either very comfortable or somewhat comfortable with the idea of a pupil coming out as lesbian, gay, bisexual or a sexual orientation other than straight, and 75% (n=774) were either very comfortable or somewhat comfortable with the idea of a pupil saying that they feel they are a gender other than the gender they were assigned at birth or describe themselves as trans or non-binary. 68.2% (n=703) were either very comfortable or somewhat comfortable with the idea of a pupil wanting to socially transition at school with the support of a parent or guardian.

*Table 25. Comfort levels with pupils coming out as LGBTQ+*

|  | Very Comfortable | Somewhat Comfortable | Neutral | Somewhat Uncomfortable | Very Uncomfortable | Unsure |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Pupil coming out as LGBTQ+[25] | 57.9% | 21.9% | 8.8% | 5.9% | 2.3% | 3.20% |
| Pupil coming out as lesbian, gay, bisexual | 65.6% (676) | 19% (196) | 8.1% (84) | 4.1% (42) | 1.3% (13) | 1.9% (20) |
| Pupil not conforming to gender norms | 63.7% (657) | 18.6% (192) | 9.4% (97) | 3.7% (38) | 1.9% (20) | 2.6% (27) |
| Pupil identifying as trans or non-binary/not identifying as birth-assigned gender | 50.2% (518) | 24.8% (256) | 9.4% (97) | 7.7% (79) | 3.4% (35) | 4.5% (46) |
| Pupil wanting to socially transition at school with support of parent/guardian | 43.5% (448) | 24.7% (255) | 9.2% (95) | 10.1% (104) | 7.2% (74) | 5.3% (55) |

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[24] This and the subsequent figures in this paragraph are an average of results from questions regarding comfort with a pupil coming out about their sexual orientation and gender identity.
[25] These figures are an average of results from questions regarding comfort with a pupil coming out about their sexual orientation and gender identity.

## Qualitative Findings

Respondents were asked **'If you would like to provide any additional information about your answers to the previous statements about your comfortability, please include it in the box below.'** The vast majority of respondents wrote commentaries in relation to pupils rather than staff.

Many respondents used this opportunity to re-emphasise the inclusivity of their school community, stating that full support would be given to all staff and student members.

***Many respondents referred to how their own experience of LGBTQ+ lives impacts on their comfortability***.

Responses from primary staff included:

> Having a transgender member of family had really helped in my understanding, so I feel quite comfortable talking about these issues to both staff and children, should they confide. (406, female, straight, SNA, Catholic school)

> I have taught one pupil in the past who was born male but felt and wished to live as female and this was accepted by their parents, teachers and classmates. I know their classmates were exceptional (this shouldn't have to be noted) but I found their acceptance and maturity to be inspiring. (218, female, straight, Classroom teacher, Catholic school)

> I only feel comfortable about it now because a child came out as being non-binary. Prior to that, I would have been nervous about how to deal with this correctly while being fair and respectful toward the child in question. (962, female, straight, principal, Catholic school)

***Several respondents noted how their own LGBTQ+ identity had a positive influence on their comfortability with supporting LGBTQ+ students/parents/staff members:***

Responses from primary staff included:

> As a lesbian teacher I would feel I could have a lot of empathy for the children involved going off of my own life experience. (265, female, lesbian, Classroom teacher, Educate Together)

> As a member of the LGBTQ+ community myself I know how important it is that I accept people for who they are without question and listen to them and have open and normal conversations about their lives. (271, male, gay, Classroom teacher, Educate Together)

Conversely though, ***some respondents felt that their positionality as LGBTQ+ had a negative influence on their comfortability in supporting LGBTQ+ children.***

Responses from primary staff included:

> If a child approached me about any of the above topics, I would be apprehensive that I would be seen as influencing the child due to being gay, that is why I couldn't say I would be very comfortable. (883, female, lesbian, SET, Catholic school)

Many respondents noted that while they may feel comfortable in supporting LGBTQ+ students, they would feel apprehensive about how others in the school community would react to the child. ***They expressed worry about how other children in the class would react; how the child's parents and other parents in the class would react; and how staff and the wider school community would react; and what supports they would get.***

Responses from primary staff included:

> I would feel comfortable with all of the above but I would worry for the child in our school as other members of staff are not as comfortable, understanding or inclusive (446, female, straight, Classroom teacher, Church of Ireland school)

> I would worry for the pupil's safety with their family support if they came out as non-binary or not conforming to gender roles as I think this is less accepted in Irish society. I would worry about the child potentially being 'in the spotlight' during a difficult time. (237, male, straight, Classroom teacher, CNS)

> The reason why I would feel somewhat comfortable and not fully comfortable is because I know our school is not set up to support a child effectively in this situation. I would be very concerned for the child's welfare and their needs going forward as there is no structure in place for this and our school is very religious. I would be concerned about the attitudes of other children and some staff members towards the child. We do not have initiatives in place or training. (441, female, straight, SET, Catholic school)

***Many respondents referred to the important role that the parent/s play in how an LGBTQ+ child is supported.*** Some respondents noted that their comfortability in supporting an LGBTQ+ child would be dependent on the parents' opinions and wishes.

Responses from primary staff included:

> I've chosen very comfortable for the questions around children coming out. I think that this is true so long as their parents aren't actively against them being LGBT+. If they are, as a queer and trans teacher I think that I would be very vulnerable to reactions of the parents. I have heard from a queer teacher who was accused of "making a child gay" by the child's parent. (91, non-binary, queer, SET, Educate Together)

> The only part that would make me feel uncomfortable is if what the child identifies as is not being accepted in the home. I would feel very comfortable otherwise, but if the child is receiving no support from home it would make my job very difficult as the guardians of the child would need to be on board and supportive for the school to help. (659, female, straight, principal, Gaelscoil)

***The role of school ethos and school management in how LGBTQ+ children are supported was mentioned frequently by respondents:***

Responses from primary staff included:

> I wrote somewhat comfortable in relation to pupils as I am personally comfortable and supportive of my pupils, but I would be unsure in how I would support them and what kind of support would be tolerated in a Catholic ethos school. (636, female, bisexual, deputy principal, Catholic school)

> The only lack of comfort I would have around the above is being unsure how school leadership and class teachers would like me to react, I have encountered push back when trying to support a child who identifies as non-binary (their parents are on board) but class teacher is anxious about opening the discussion with the class. (152, female, straight, SET, Educate Together)

**_Several respondents also talked about the age of the pupil as having an impact on their comfortability in these situations._**

Responses from primary staff included:

> The age profile of pupils in this school would determine the way I would react to pupils expressing desires for actions in relation to their gender identity. I would be apprehensive about their own agency and ability to fully understand the process and consequences and how we could navigate the process together with them while they attend the school. (14, male, straight, principal, Catholic school)

> I would say my level of comfort would depend on the class level and age of pupil. If it was an older pupil in 6th class I feel I would be more comfortable in dealing with this than a younger pupil, if this makes sense. I refer to my level of comfort in terms of dealing with the situation, on a personal level I'd have no issues with that person! (837, male, straight, Classroom teacher, Educate Together)

> I'm still not convinced that every child has the emotional maturity and self-knowledge to understand and know for certain who or what they are in the pre-teen years. Surely they could be enabled to explore themselves (and their gender preferences) in a more safe and secure environment (such as home) before putting themselves out there in front of their peers and exposing themselves to possible bigotry, (when they are not sure) As peers can be v. judgemental and it could possibly ostracise the child further if the child is only questioning their sexuality. (160, female, straight, Classroom teacher, Catholic school)

> If a child told me they were going to marry or were in love with someone of the same gender, I'd be fine with that, because they say those things about the other gender all the time. They'd get the same answer of "oh will you?" or "you're too young to have a xfriend!" If they were to take me aside, and feel they were confiding a serious thing I'd be less comfortable with that, just because the children I work with are so young (4-9). It would be less to do with the gender aspect of it and more a worry about them thinking about sexuality so young. (372, female, queer, Classroom teacher, Catholic school)

**_Many respondents noted how their lack of comfortability in supporting LGBTQ+ pupils was directly related to their lack of experience with and/or knowledge of LGBTQ+ issues._** Many respondents mentioned feelings of **_apprehension, fear, worry and feeling ill-equipped_** as contributing factors to their comfortability.

Responses from primary staff included:

> I marked very uncomfortable because while I want every student to feel safe, welcome and supported to be who they are I am well aware that I do not have the training or experience in how to properly support the student, it is something that I can't personally relate too, I've never that this arise before and I would be worried that I would inadvertently say/do the 'wrong' thing.

> I wouldn't be uncomfortable about the information, I would be uncomfortable about how to support the person/ what to say next/ the best steps forward for

them. I would be worried that through ignorance/lack of training/information that I would inadvertently end up saying or doing the wrong thing. (173, female, straight, Classroom teacher, Educate Together)

I don't personally know anyone close to me who is nonbinary or trans so I'm saying I'd feel somewhat comfortable as I'm not 100% sure as to how they would want or expect me to react or if a child wanted more information or guidance on it I'm not sure I'm educated enough on the matter to offer the best guidance and support other than a listening ear. (402, female, straight, Classroom teacher, Catholic school)

***An apprehension regarding language and saying 'the wrong thing'*** was also a common thread within the responses. Several respondents referred to being afraid of saying something that might hurt or offend the LGBTQ+ person and having difficulty with pronouns.

Responses from primary staff included:

My concern is the challenge of using the pronouns when it's all most of us have known and what we are taught - how is this to be taught in relation to grammar as well esp. to young children? As it is teachers can say ' good man ' to a girl in error don't want to be crucified for errors (233, prefer not to say, Classroom teacher, Educate Together)

I would be uncomfortable about any gender transitioning issue as I would feel vulnerable myself around the correct language, getting something wrong and being accused of being transphobic or homophobic or a bigot.   (395, female, straight, language, Catholic school)

***A significant number of respondents stated that they would like proactive additional support and guidance to know how best to support a child "coming out" or socially transitioning.*** Many stated how they would need guidance and referred to the need for a multi-disciplinary, multi-sectoral approach.

Responses from primary staff included:

If a pupil wished to transition, the reason I wouldn't feel fully comfortable is I wouldn't be sure how to support them fully and how to help them best and make the transition as smooth as possible for them (726, female, straight, SET, Educate Together)

While I fully wish to support any child or adult in their coming out and assertion of their identity I do not feel enough guidance, support or instruction is there for staff on how to handle it in a way that is both supportive and crucially does not leave them liable in any way if people with opposing  or ignorant views disagree. (263, female, straight, Classroom teacher, Educate Together)

If a child came to me with any of the information detailed above in 43 I would seek the advice of NEPS. The child is central to all I do and what is best for the child. I would follow the advice of NEPS. I am a teacher. That is my area of expertise. While I would be comfortable with listening to any of the information in the previous question and would be comfortable giving a 'listening ear' I would need direction as to how to respond to the child in such a situation. (54, female, straight, principal, Catholic school)

*Although many respondents spoke about their feelings of discomfort, fear and apprehension in responding to these issues/situations, a sentiment of wanting to improve was evident in a large proportion of the responses.* Respondents were aware of the limits to their knowledge and experience, and expressed a desire to expand their knowledge, so that they can best support the needs of their students.

Responses from primary staff included:

> I am aware of my own socially constructed homophobia and transphobia but I would really like to fight against these. I suppose I think we are all homophobic and transphobic to some extend because we grew up in a society that had those deeply engrained in it's very fibre so I think I have to work hard to undo those deep rooted feels of fear or disgust around the LGBTQI+ community in the same way that I see I have my fears of people from other minorities who I told been conditioned to fear or hate. (629, female, straight, SET, Educate Together)

### 3. Observing Homophobia, Biphobia and Transphobia Amongst Staff

### Quantitative Results

Respondents **were asked about their observations on homophobia, biphobia and transphobia amongst staff in their school.**

As Table 26 outlines, 81.5%[26] of staff reported that they never hear staff making subtle derogatory comments about LGBTQ+ people. Nevertheless, a total of 18.5% of staff heard other primary school staff make subtle derogatory comments or jokes regarding LGBTQ+ people either every few months (12.1%), every month (3.6%), every week (2.3%) or every day (0.5%).

*Table 26. Observing homophobia/biphobia and transphobia amongst staff*

| How often do you come across: | Every day | Every week | Every month | Every few months | Never |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Staff making subtle derogatory comments or jokes about LGBTQ+ people[27] | 0.5% | 2.3% | 3.6% | 12.1% | 81.5% |
| Staff making subtle derogatory comments or jokes regarding people who are gay, lesbian, bisexual, or a sexual orientation other than heterosexual. | 0.4% (4) | 2.4% (25) | 2.7% (28) | 10.5% (108) | 84% (866) |

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[26] This and the subsequent figures in this paragraph are an average of results from questions regarding staff making subtle jokes about lesbian, gay and bisexual people and staff making subtle jokes about trans and non-binary people.

[27] These figures are an average of results from questions regarding staff making subtle jokes about lesbian, gay and bisexual people and staff making subtle jokes about trans and non-binary people.

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Staff making subtle derogatory comments or jokes regarding people who are trans, or non-binary, or who express their gender in a way that is not gender typical. | 0.6% (6) | 2.2% (23) | 4.4% (45) | 13.9% (143) | 79% (814) |
| Staff making statements like 'that's so gay'? | 0.4% | 0.7% | 1.9% | 4.8% | 92.2% |
| Staff engaging in or being the target of name-calling using words like 'faggot' or 'tranny'? | 0.2% (2) | 0.3% (3) | 0.8% (8) | 1% (10) | 97.8% (1008) |
| Staff engaging in or being the target of homophobic/biphobic bullying? | 0.4% (4) | 0.4% (4) | 0.9% (9) | 1.6% (17) | 96.7% (997) |
| Staff engaging in or being the target of transphobic bullying? | 0.4% (4) | 0.2% (2) | 0.1% (8) | 1.4% (14) | 97.3% (1003) |

As Table 27 and

Table 28 below outline, there was a difference between heterosexual and LGBTQ+ staff responses regarding hearing staff make subtle or derogatory comments about LGBTQ+ people. 15.9% (n=57) of heterosexual staff reported that they hear subtle or derogatory comments or jokes regarding LGBTQ+ people from other staff either every day, every week, every month or every few months while 35.8% (n=134) of LGBTQ+ staff reported that they hear subtle or derogatory comments or jokes regarding LGBTQ+ people from other staff either every day, every week, every month or every few months. 84.1% (n=714) of heterosexual staff said they never hear subtle derogatory comments or jokes regarding LGBTQ+ people from other staff while just 64.2% (n=102) of LGBTQ+ staff said they never hear subtle or derogatory comments about LGBTQ+ people.

*Table 27. Heterosexual staff hearing subtle derogatory comments about LGBTQ+ people*

| | Frequency | Percent |
|---|---|---|
| Every day | 4 | 0.5% |
| Every week | 14 | 1.7% |
| Every month | 23 | 2.7% |
| Every few months | 93 | 11% |
| Never | 714 | 84.1% |
| Total | 848 | |

*Table 28. LGBTQ+ staff hearing subtle derogatory comments re LGBTQ+ people*

| | | Frequency | Percent |
|---|---|---|---|
| | Every day | 2 | 1.3%. |
| | Every week | 9 | 5.7% |
| | Every month | 14 | 8.8% |
| | Every few months | 32 | 20% |

| | Never | 102 | 64.2% |
|---|---|---|---|
| | Total | 159 | |

## Qualitative Findings

Following the previous questions on staff homophobia, biphobia and transphobia respondents had the option to elaborate**: 'If there is anything you would like to add in relation to the previous staff-related questions [regarding homophobia, biphobia and transphobia], please do so here'.** There were 308 (29.9% of total cohort) responses to this question. Following a thematic analysis, the following key findings emerged:

***Many respondents used this opportunity to reiterate how their school community is one which promotes respect for others and is open and welcoming to all.***

Responses from primary staff included:

> The school culture is happily such that anyone doing such bullying or 'joking' would be immediately isolated from everyone else and, I imagine, plenty of people would report it to the Principal who, I am ultra confident, would at the very least give the staff member a warning, possibly immediately going to an official warning, while highlighting it goes against our school ethos. (539, Male, straight, SET, Catholic school)

> Ireland has moved on. It would be in very poor taste if people were to joke about these things and would not be tolerated. If people are bigoted they have enough cop on to keep it to themselves and be professional (763, female, straight, classroom teacher, Educate together)

***Many respondents referred to several mediating factors in the approach to LGBTQ+ inclusivity such as the location of the school, the lack of diversity in the staffroom, the age of staff, the gender of staff, the role of the church and/or ethos of the school.***

Responses from primary staff included:

> I feel so invisible and inauthentic. Please. Anything the INTO can do to help change this culture in schools outside of Dublin. (326, female, bisexual, classroom teacher, Catholic school)

> The priest in my school is in the staff room everyday and he is openly homophobic. He said that the next referendum will be voting on beastiality. He is on the BOM so I couldn't say anything and just left the staffroom. My school teaches the CSMPA's Flourish programme which doesn't recognise LGBT+ relationships as being on the same level as heterosexual relationships. I put up a Different Families Same Love Poster and it was quickly taken down. (358, female, bisexual, SET, Catholic school)

> I feel younger staff members are much more inclusive. At times older staff members who are less familiar with the LGBTQ+ community can seem ignorant and can make comments that they don't understand are inappropriate. (168, female, straight, classroom teacher, Gaelscoil)

***Many respondents reported overhearing subtle and overt comments which were made in staffrooms about LGBTQ+ identities.***

Responses from primary staff included:

> Casualised homophobic remarks about gay men (57, gay, classroom teacher, Catholic school)

> Subtle derogatory remarks "how many genders are there" (264, woman, bisexual, SET, Catholic school)

***A small minority of respondents voiced concern about the appropriateness of LGBTQ+ topics for primary schools.***

## *4. Observing Homophobia, Biphobia and Transphobia Amongst Pupils*

### Quantitative Results

Participants (n=1031) were also asked questions about **their observations of homophobia, biphobia and transphobia amongst pupils.**

As Table 29 illustrates, 56%[28] of staff never heard pupils make subtle derogatory comments or jokes about LGBTQ+ people. Nevertheless, a total of 43.9% staff hear pupils make subtle derogatory comments or jokes about LGBTQ+ people either every few months (31.1%), every month (8.3%), every week (3.7%) or every day (0.8%).

55% of staff hear pupils making statements like 'that's so gay' either every few months (39%; n=402), every month (9.7%; n=100), every week (4.7%; n=48) or every day (1.6%; n=17).

Overt incidents of bullying were less prevalent. Nevertheless, 14.7%[29] of staff reported that they observe pupils being the target of, or engaging in, LGBTQ+ based bullying every few months (11.2%), every month (1.8%), every week (1.2%) or every day (0.5%).

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[28] This and subsequent figures in this paragraph are an average of results from questions regarding staff overhearing pupils making subtle derogatory comments/jokes about lesbian, gay and bisexual people and trans/non-binary people.

[29] This and subsequent figures in this paragraph are an average of results from questions regarding staff witnessing pupils being the target of or engaging in homophobic/biphobic and transphobic bullying

*Table 29. Observing homophobia, biphobia and transphobia amongst pupils*

| | Every day | Every week | Every month | Every few months | Never |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Pupils making subtle comments or jokes about LGBTQ+ people[30] | 0.8% | 3.7% | | 8.3% | 31.1% | 56.0% |
| Pupils making subtle derogatory comments or jokes regarding people who are gay, lesbian, bisexual, or a sexual orientation other than heterosexual? | 1% (10) | 4.4% (45) | 9.6% (99) | 38.6% (398) | 46.5% (479) |
| Pupils making subtle derogatory comments or jokes regarding people who are trans, or non-binary, or who express their gender in a way that is not traditionally 'masculine or feminine' | 0.7% (7) | 3.1% (32) | 7.1% (73) | 23.7% (244) | 65.5% (675) |
| Pupils making statements like 'that's' so gay'? | 1.6% (17) | 4.7% (48) | 9.7% (100) | 39% (402) | 45% (464) |
| Pupils engaging in or being the target of name-calling using words like 'faggot' or 'tranny'? | 0.4% (4) | 2.2% (23) | 3.1% (32) | 12.6% (130) | 81.7% (842) |
| Pupils engaging in or being the target of LGBTQ+ bullying[31] | 0.5% | 1.2% | 1.8% | 11.2% | 85.3% |
| Pupils engaging in or being the target of homophobic or biphobic bullying? | 0.5% (5) | 1.9% (20) | 1.8% (19) | 15.2% (157) | 80.5% (830) |
| Pupils engaging in or being the target of transphobic bullying? | 0.5% (5) | 0.5% (5) | 1.8% (19) | 7.2% (74) | 90% (928) |

## Qualitative Findings

Following the questions related to homophobia, biphobia and transphobia above, respondents were asked**: 'If there is anything you would like to add in relation to the previous pupil related questions, please do so here'.** 284 (27.5% of the total cohort) chose to answer this question. A thematic analysis produced the following key findings:

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[30] These figures are an average of results from questions regarding staff overhearing subtle derogatory comments/jokes about lesbian, gay and bisexual people and trans/non-binary people.
[31] These figures are an average of results from questions regarding staff witnessing homophobic, biphobic and transphobic bullying among pupils.

***Many respondents believed that children were generally more accepting of LGBTQ+ issues than adults and noted a decline in such behaviours in recent years.***

Responses from primary staff included:

> From working with our student council I have found our older children to be very open and inclusion in their discussion of LQBTQ+ people and gender diversity. They have not reported any use of negative language or negative experiences to me this year, and have mainly been concerned with the treatment of LGBTQ+ people in wider society and in other schools (292, female, straight, classroom teacher & deputy principal, Educate together)

> I notice the children respond very well to jokes/comments e.g. 'that's gay' - they usually say something like 'so what, who cares, there's nothing wrong with being gay so how is that an insult' (752, female, asexual, Classroom teacher, Educate together)

> seen a huge decline in any use of derogatory terms such as 'that's gay' in recent years (638, Female, Straight, Classroom teacher, Catholic school)

***On the contrary, many other respondents saw this as a prevalent issue and noted that children often engage in this when staff can't hear.***

Responses from primary staff included:

> It's getting significantly worse in the past two years. The conversation is getting more and more polarising. I'm worried for what will come next. (346, male, straight, deputy principal, Catholic school)

> Homophobia and transphobia are prevalent in bullying behaviour especially as they become older. Despite a lot of education and an open and inclusive staff pupils are still targeted with homophobic and transphobic remarks and comments. (702, female, bisexual, classroom teacher, Educate together).

***Several respondents noted that name-calling using LGBTQ+ terms happen but that children don't always think about what the terms mean.***

Responses from primary staff included:

> Gay will sometimes be used as an insult by pupils when engaging in name calling in the same way that they might use the words ugly, fat or weird. (381, female, straight, special class teacher, Catholic school)

> They easily throw the words gay or faggot freely but the targeted recipients of those words are very much heterosexual. (511, male, gay, special class teacher, Catholic special school)

***Many respondents cited key mediating factors in homophobia, biphobia and transphobia: location of the school, age and gender of the pupils, role of religion, role of media and/or social media, and the role of parents, guardians, and/or community.***

Responses from primary staff included:

> I work in a small rural school. While I haven't heard such homophobic comments where I currently work, I can say I have witnessed such behaviour in a city school

amongst children in 6th class (866, Female, Straight, classroom teacher, Catholic School)

particularly 4th class up with males (231, Male, Gay, Special Education Teacher, Catholic School)

***A minority of respondents articulated that children in primary school are too young to engage in transphobic/homophobic behaviour and/or they are too young to understand it.***

### Summary of Relationships and Partnerships Findings

In the main, respondents were very comfortable with the idea of a colleague or a parent coming out or being openly LGBTQ+. While the majority of staff never hear derogatory comments regarding LGBTQ+ people, some staff still hear casualised homophobia, biphobia and transphobia from other staff. Significantly, LGBTQ+ staff were three times more likely than heterosexual staff to report hearing subtle or derogatory comments or jokes about LGBTQ+ people.

While the vast majority of staff were either very or somewhat comfortable with the idea of a pupil coming out as LGBTQ+, there was a somewhat lower level of comfortability with regard to the idea of a pupil coming out as trans or non-binary or social transitioning at school. Qualitative findings further explained the issues of comfortability. Comfortability was related to other mediating factors such as knowing somebody who was LGBTQ+ in their own lives. Some staff worried about the reactions of other children, parents, school ethos and had specific considerations related to the age of child. Many respondents stated that they would like proactive additional support and guidance to know how best to support a child who was 'coming out' as trans or non-binary, or socially transitioning at school.

While more than half of staff never hear subtle derogatory comments or jokes about LGBTQ+ people, almost a third of staff hear this kind of commentary every few months. Overt homophobic, biphobic and transphobic bullying were rarer, but many staff reported that this still occurred every few months. The qualitative findings on this issue mirrored the mixed quantitative results. Many respondents believed that children were generally more accepting of LGBTQ+ issues than adults and noted a decline in such behaviours in recent years. However, many others felt the opposite, and that homophobia, biphobia and transphobia were on the rise and are more prevalent now, especially as children become older.

## (C) Culture and Environment

### 1. Perception of the Impact of School 'Ethos' on LGBTQ+ Inclusivity

### Quantitative Results

Respondents were asked **whether they thought that their school 'ethos' had an impact overall on LGBTQ+ inclusivity.** As illustrated by Table 30, 39.9% (n=411) of staff said yes; 37.2% (n=384) of staff said no and 22.9% (n=236) said that they didn't know.

*Table 30. Impact of School 'Ethos' on LGBTQ+ Inclusivity*

| Do you think your school's ethos impacts upon LGBTQ+ inclusivity? | | |
|---|---|---|
| | N | % |
| Yes | 411 | 39.9% |
| No | 384 | 37.2% |
| Don't know | 236 | 22.9% |

As Table 31 illustrates, 80.5% (n=309) of all staff who said their ethos *did not* affect their inclusivity were identifiable as religious schools and 15.6% (n=60) were identifiable as multi-denominational.

Of those who said their ethos *did* affect their LGBTQ+ inclusivity, 54.3% (n=223) were identifiable as religious schools and 40% (n=171) were identifiable as multi-denominational.

*Table 31. School Type Cross Tabulated with 'ethos' Impact on LGBTQ+ Inclusivity*

| | | Do you think your school's ethos impacts upon LGBTQ+ inclusivity? | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | Yes | No | Don't Know | Total |
| How would you characterise your school type? | Catholic NS | 191 | 263 | 156 | 610 |
| | Educate Together NS | 164 | 52 | 29 | 245 |
| | Catholic Gaelscoil under religious patron | 6 | 10 | 6 | 22 |
| | Catholic or Inter Gaelscoil under An Foras Patrunachta | 1 | 6 | 3 | 10 |
| | Multi-denominational Gaelscoil under An Foras Patrunachta | 5 | 3 | 6 | 14 |
| | Community National School | 9 | 6 | 4 | 19 |
| | Church of Ireland Primary School | 13 | 17 | 6 | 36 |
| | Presbyterian School | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| | Catholic Special School | 12 | 12 | 12 | 36 |
| | ETB Special School | 2 | 5 | 6 | 13 |
| | Other | 6 | 5 | 4 | 15 |

| | Multiples | 2 | 4 | 4 | 10 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Total | | 411 | 384 | 236 | 1031 |

## Qualitative Findings

Following this question about the impact of school ethos on LGBTQ+ inclusivity, respondents had the option to elaborate, prompted by the question: **'In what way does your school's ethos impact upon LGBTQ+ inclusivity?'.** 379 staff chose to answer this question (36.8% of total cohort). Following a thematic analysis, the following key findings emerged:

***Many respondents reported that the ethos of the school impacted LGBTQ+ inclusivity positively.***

Responses from primary staff included:

> While we do not have adequate resources as yet, our schools ethos (while Catholic in nature) is an open, positive, safe space for all pupils. The children in our school are appreciated as individuals, and we have a holistic approach to education. Inclusivity of all kinds is respected and practiced, and as awareness of the LGBTQ+ develops, I'm confident we can support any children or parents in this community. We need training and resources as we go. (476, female, straight/hetero, Special ed teacher, Catholic school)

> We speak openly about LGBTQ+ inclusivity issues. We use resource materials such as Different Families, Same Love to promote diversity and inclusivity. A teacher who identifies as LGBTQ+ gives talks each year to children in senior classes about his own experiences of homophobic bullying as a preventative effort. (522, female, Straight/hetero, classroom teacher, Educate Together)

***Many staff noted that their schools were safe environments for staff and pupils to come out as LGBTQ+.***

Responses from primary staff included:

> We have had many children over the past number of years who have been comfortable to have come out as gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender. The ethos of the school from junior infants promotes inclusivity and celebration of difference. We purposely ensure that different types of families are represented in picture books and other classroom resources from junior infants to 6th class. We celebrate Pride every year and fly the LGBTQ+ flag. The other children in the school demonstrate a very open and accepting attitude towards LGBTQ+ children, teachers, and parents. Furthermore, the LGBTQ+ adults who have previously worked in our school have articulated how comfortable they are to be themselves. (154, female, straight/hetero, classroom teacher, Education Together)

***However, many staff in Catholic schools noted ethos as a barrier with regards to LGBTQ+ inclusivity.***

Responses from primary staff included:

> Our school's ethos states that we are an inclusive school which enables us to challenge parents who are in opposition to the teaching of LGBTQ+ themes. It also means that children and staff that are LGBTQ+ can comfortably express themselves

knowing they are included within the school ethos. (115, female, straight/hetero, SET, Catholic School)

At a recent staff meeting where we were discussing books to purchase for the school library, a staff member suggested purchasing books that included characters who identify as LGBT and other staff members felt we couldn't as it went against the Catholic ethos of the school. (383, female, straight/hetero, classroom teacher, Catholic school)

I think at staff level, we are a very open and inclusive staff, but I feel we cannot fully be/do what we want to do, due to the Catholic ethos of the school. While we don't have books and programmes featuring LGBQI+ people, it is due the constraints of the ethos rather and because we don't want to. In terms of RSE in 6th class, we cannot talking about being gay or lesbian etc., so we say that sex takes part between two people who love each other and respect each other. This is our attempt at including all sexual orientations, when really we would love to be able to speak more openly. (560, female, straight/hetero, Classroom Teacher, Catholic school)

Many LGBTQ+ staff members, and other staff members whose beliefs around LGBTQ+ inclusivity were at odds with Catholic teachings, articulated ***caution and fear related to the religious ethos of their school.***

Responses from primary staff included:

As a Catholic school we must uphold the teachings and ethos of the Catholic patron and this prevents people from expressing themselves truly and stops children getting the opportunity to learn about LGBTQ+ inclusivity. It is also hard for myself as an openly gay staff member to bring suggestions of materials and programs relating to LGBTQ+ inclusivity as I am fearful that people will think I am "pushing" my own agenda and also that it will negatively affect my chances of promotion and progression within the Catholic schools structure. (271, Male, Gay, classroom teacher, Catholic School)

It's a very catholic, traditional school. I personally have been told to remember I am teaching in a catholic school and parents choose to send their kids here for religious reasons. Obviously LGBTQ+ clashes with this. I think we don't do enough for kids in this regard. We tip toe around these topics to keep management & some parents happy. (123, female, straight/hetero, Classroom Teacher, Catholic school)

### *2. Facilities*

Respondents were asked **whether pupils and staff had access to gender neutral bathrooms.**

As Table 32 illustrates, 43% (n=443) of staff indicated that no classes in their school while 31.9% (n=329) of staff reported that all classes had access to a gender-neutral bathroom for pupils.

Within this, the largest majority class groups with access to gender neutral bathrooms were Infants and First Class (6.2%; n=64).

*Table 32. Pupil Access to Gender Neutral Bathrooms*

| Which of the following class groups have access to a gender-neutral bathroom? (n=1031) | | |
|---|---|---|
| | N | % |
| Junior Infants | 12 | 1.2% |
| Senior Infants | 3 | 0.3% |
| First Class | 2 | 0.2% |
| Second Class | 1 | 0.1% |
| Third Class | 2 | 0.2% |
| Fourth Class | 1 | 0.1% |
| Fifth Class | 3 | 0.3% |
| Sixth class | 3 | 0.3% |
| Special Class | 25 | 2.4% |
| All of the above | 329 | 31.9% |
| None of the above | 443 | 43.0% |
| Don't know | 59 | 5.7% |
| Other | 54 | 5.2% |
| Random Multiple | 23 | 2.2% |
| Infants and First Class | 64 | 6.2% |
| 4th/5th/6th | 6 | 0.6% |

As Table 33 illustrates, 76% (n=781) of respondents reported that staff had access to a gender-neutral bathroom while almost a quarter of schools said that their staff no access to a gender-neutral bathroom (24.2%; n=250).

*Table 33. Staff Access to Gender Neutral Bathrooms*

| Do school staff have access to a gender-neutral bathroom? | | |
|---|---|---|
| | N | % |
| Yes | 781 | 75.8% |
| No | 250 | 24.2% |

### 3. Current Practices of Staff with Regard to Intervening and Reporting Homophobia, Biphobia and Transphobia

Respondents were asked **questions related to intervening and reporting homophobia, biphobia and transphobia.**

As Table 34 illustrates, of the staff who hear derogatory comments or jokes about LGBTQ+ people, name-calling and/or see such incidents of homophobia, biphobia or transphobia, 67.4% (n=524) of staff always intervene when they hear subtle derogatory comments about LGBTQ+ people; 75.2% (n= 607) of staff always intervene when they hear statements like 'that's so gay'; 90.5% (n=561) always report when they hear LGBTQ+

name-calling and 85.6% always report when they come across LGBTQ+ based incidents of bullying.

While rates of intervening in LGBTQ-based name-calling and reporting of LGBTQ+ based bullying incidents are high, it is significant that 30.9% (n=204) of staff only sometimes intervene when they hear subtle, derogatory comments about LGBTQ+ people and 18.2% (n=147) of staff only sometimes intervene when they hear statements like 'that's so gay'.

*Table 34. Interventions of Staff When They Hear LGBTQ+ based name calling and bullying*

| How often do you: | Always | Sometimes | Never | I have not heard this (% of total respondents) | Not applicable (% of total respondents) | Total Staff Who Heard |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| intervene when you hear subtle, derogatory comments or jokes about LGBTQ+ people? | 67.4% (524) | 30.9% (204) | 6.3% (49) | 16% (165) | 8.6% (89) | 777 |
| intervene when you hear statements like 'that's so gay'? | 75.2% (607) | 18.2% (147) | 6.6% (53) | 13.5% (139) | 8.2% (85) | 807 |
| intervene when you hear name-calling using words like 'faggot' or 'tranny'? | 90.5% (561) | 11.5% (71) | 6.1% (38) | 22% (227) | 13.0% (134) | 620 |
| report LGBTQ+ based incidents of bullying[32] | 85.6% | 7.4% | 7% | 22.7% | 23.7% | 599 |
| report incidents of homophobic and biphobic bullying when you see them? | 85.7% (538) | 7.3% (46) | 7% (44) | 21.4% (221) | 17.7% (182) | 628 |
| report incidents of transphobic bullying when you see them? | 85% (487) | 7.5% (43) | 7% (40) | 24.1% (248) | 20.7% (213) | 570 |

## 4. Perceptions of School Inclusivity Overall

### Quantitative Results

Participants were asked to **rate how LGBTQ+ inclusive they perceive their school to be overall.** Table 35 illustrates that almost half of primary school staff rate their school as 3 stars or less with regard to LGBTQ+ inclusivity (49.6%).

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[32] This figure is an average of results from questions regarding how often staff report incidents of homophobic/biphobic and transphobic bullying when they see them.

Table 35. LGBTQ+ Inclusive School Ratings

| Overall, rate how LGBTQ+ inclusive you think your current school is. | | |
|---|---|---|
| | N | % |
| 1 star | 111 | 10.8% |
| 2 stars | 118 | 11.4% |
| 3 stars | 283 | 27.4% |
| 4 stars | 265 | 25.7% |
| 5 stars | 254 | 24.6% |

Whilst 50.3% (n=519) of staff rated their school as 4 or 5 stars in terms of LGBTQ+ inclusivity, there was a discrepancy between these ratings and their reporting on their practice in other questions.

For instance, as Table 36 illustrates, of those staff who rated their school as 5 stars, 19.8% (n=35) of staff reported that they never mentioned and 36.7% (n=65) said they only sometimes mentioned same-gender parented families when they talked about families in general.

Of those staff who rated their school as 4 stars, 11.8% (n=25) of staff said they never mentioned same-gender parented families and 44.3% (n=94) said they just sometimes mentioned same-gender parented families when talking about families.

Table 36. Applicable Staff Inclusion of Same-Gender Parented Families Cross-Tabulated with Ratings of School LGBTQ+ inclusivity overall

| | | How often do you ensure that same-gender parented families are mentioned when you talk about families? | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | Always | Sometimes | Never | Total |
| Overall, rate how LGBTQ+ inclusive you think your current school is | 1 star | 24 | 35 | 31 | 90 |
| | 2 stars | 28 | 49 | 25 | 102 |
| | 3 stars | 59 | 124 | 42 | 225 |
| | 4 stars | 93 | 94 | 25 | 212 |
| | 5 stars | 77 | 65 | 35 | 177 |
| Total | | 281 | 367 | 158 | 806 |

As illustrated in Table 37, of those staff who rated their school as 5 stars, 28.7% (n=50) never used books and resources with LGBTQ+ people represented.

*Table 37. Staff ratings of school LGBTQ+ inclusivity cross-tabulated with frequency in use of LGBTQ+ inclusive books and resources*

| | | How often do you use books and resources with LGBTQ+ people represented? | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | Always | Sometimes | Never | Total |
| Overall, rate how LGBTQ+ inclusive you think your current school is | 1 star | 7 | 30 | 50 | 87 |
| | 2 stars | 10 | 37 | 53 | 100 |
| | 3 stars | 12 | 118 | 89 | 219 |
| | 4 stars | 34 | 130 | 38 | 202 |
| | 5 stars | 45 | 79 | 50 | 174 |
| Total | | 108 | 394 | 280 | 782 |

As illustrated by Table 38, of those staff who rated their school as being 4 or 5 stars, 52.2% (n=271) reported that their school never provides or participates in any LGBTQ+ inclusivity activities.

*Table 38. Staff ratings of school LGBTQ+ inclusivity cross-tabulated with organisation of proactive or reactive LGBTQ+ inclusive activities in their school*

| | | Does your school ever provide or participate in the following? Please select all that apply. | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | An LGBT Inclusion Campaign | Proactive guest speakers | Experts re sexuality responsive | Experts re gender responsive | All of the above | None of the above | Multiple | Other | Total |
| Overall, rate how LGBTQ+ inclusive you think your current school is. | 1 star | 3 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 103 | 0 | 4 | 111 |
| | 2 stars | 8 | 3 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 102 | 1 | 3 | 118 |
| | 3 stars | 27 | 6 | 0 | 2 | 2 | 226 | 14 | 6 | 283 |
| | 4 stars | 54 | 9 | 1 | 2 | 4 | 130 | 42 | 23 | 265 |
| | 5 stars | 42 | 7 | 0 | 3 | 5 | 141 | 35 | 21 | 254 |
| Total | | 134 | 25 | 2 | 8 | 11 | 702 | 92 | 57 | 1031 |

## Qualitative Findings

Following the question asking respondents to rate the overall LGBTQ+ inclusivity of their school, respondents were asked the question: **'Please use this box to expand on any aspects of your school's approach to LGBTQ+ inclusivity.'** There were 386 (37.4% of the overall cohort) responses to this question. Following a thematic analysis, the following key findings emerged.

***Many respondents spoke generally about how their school is an inclusive place, accepting of all individuals regardless of religious beliefs, ethnicity or***

*sexuality.* **without going into details** on the specific approach to inclusivity. Many respondents stated that LGBTQ+ issues are covered as part of SPHE and/or the RSE programme, again without elaborating on other approaches to inclusivity.

***Many respondents spoke of an active or visible approach to LGBTQ+ inclusivity in their schools.*** These included the inclusion of books in the library with LGBTQ+ characters, the flying of a pride flag, involvement in Pride month celebrations, INTO initiatives, an annual Pride Parade, and the availability of gender-neutral toilets in the school.

Responses from primary staff included:

> We have a Pride Parade each year, we engage in different families same love competition and we just generally normalise two mammies or daddies and different kind of family make up. (122, female, straight, principal, Educate Together)

> We have a very open and accepting school. We have an inclusivity committee to help build an inclusive atmosphere in our school. I am out and have never really experienced any negative comment or even feeling towards myself or my wife as a gay couple. I asked my principal if we could apply for the LGBTQ+ flag the INTO are offering and was very quickly given a thumbs up. (344, female, lesbian, Classroom teacher, Catholic school)

***Several responses highlighted that although they felt their school was inherently inclusive, their approach to LGBTQ+ inclusivity was not proactive or explicit.***

Responses from primary staff included:

> In principle we are inclusive but have shied away from celebrating pride month, discussing transgenderism in class, ensuring all teachers are using inclusive texts etc. (152, female, straight, SET, Educate Together)

> I give my school 1 star. I'm the principal of the school but I know that we are not proactive in our inclusivity of LGBT members of the community. We're not out in our support, even though knowing the staff I think they would be very supportive and inclusive of LGBT members of the community. (418, male, gay, principal, Catholic school)

***A large number of respondents understood inclusivity in reactive terms, stating that they have yet to have a staff member and/or a pupil in the LGBTQ+ community in their school.*** While many felt that their school community would be accepting of all, some respondents felt that it is "difficult to say" (99, female, straight, Classroom teacher, Catholic school) how the school community would respond in terms of inclusivity, or not that their school has not had to "test the inclusivity" (809, woman, straight, Special Ed teacher, Gaelscoil school) yet.

Responses from primary staff included:

> I think philosophically people want to support kids and colleagues and make everyone feel welcome. How ever we are a small country school and there have been almost no occasion where we have had an person associated with the school in any significant

way that would identify themselves as LGBTQ+.  (89, male, straight, Classroom teacher, Catholic school)

While the majority of responses to this question indicated that schools are inclusive places, *a large number of respondents stated that more needs to be done.* While many respondents just stated more generally that there is a need for improvement in terms of the approach to LGBTQ+ issues in their schools, some respondents referred to *specific areas of improvement including language, proactive engagement with young people themselves, policy and resources.*

Responses from primary staff included:

Our language (oral and written) needs to stop dividing the children into girls and boys all the time. I try to use more gender-neutral terms like folks or páistí when addressing the children, but it would be nice to see something similar throughout the community. We also need to stop dividing the children on the basis of gender for sports / jobs / assembly seating / prizes. As far as I can tell, it's mostly habit without any good reason to keep it that way. I think an explicit welcome from the cis/het members of the school community would also make it feel like a safer place for queer family members. I've no doubt that there are queer parents, but I don't know if any. Even having a small flag on the notice board beside reception would be a small way to say "you're valid and you're welcome here". (372, female, queer, Classroom teacher, Catholic school)

Parents need more information from primary school age pupils!! Maybe 5th class need to talked to from there as a lot can't understand their own feelings either. Secondary school needs more influential people to come in and give their experience and how they feel when someone criticises them when they were growing up. (LGBTQ) community maybe or family members that can talk to teenagers to help and guide them that have had family members with any of the above experiences. We need to stop children getting bullied it's happening too regularly I see it from my own personal experience with a family member something has to change! Action needs to happen in classrooms (Talks, videos, influencers) come to school classrooms . (450, female, straight, SNA, Catholic school)

As a staff I am very lucky that I have incredibly open and supportive colleagues who have never made me feel less than or excluded because of my sexual orientation however as a school there are no inclusive policy's or practices in place for our students or any opportunities for them to learn about relationships and gender other than straight cis gender roles. (271, male, gay, Classroom teacher, Catholic school)

Many respondents again mentioned *school ethos, religion, parents, and school management were mentioned as factors which can be a barrier to a schools' approach to LGBTQ+ inclusivity.*

Responses from primary staff included:

My school is very much governed by its Catholic ethos. It is such a pity as I know the majority of staff are extremely inclusive in their personal viewpoints including my principal. (100, female, straight, SET, Catholic school)

I think we, like many Catholic primary schools, have a HUGE way to go to make our LGBTQ+ pupils feel safe, seen, heard and feel comfortable with being their true selves or even to feel comfortable to ask the questions they need to.  The Department of Education really need to step up and provide schools with clear, unbreakable guidelines (regardless of their ethos!!) that get rid of the fear of repercussions for 'saying the wrong

thing during RSE' that many staff hold. I have several close family members and best friends who identify as LGBTQ+, and I feel like many Catholic primary schools are almost in the same state as regards embracing discussing LGBTQ+ rights and issues, as they were 20 years ago. (320, female, straight, special class teacher, Catholic school)

We should be more inclusive. Management is afraid of conservative parents who push back against inclusion. (274, female, straight, SET, Educate Together)

Many respondents also noted that there was a *fear of repercussion if LGBTQ+ issues were discussed in the classroom, or if a more visible/proactive approach was taken to LGBTQ+ inclusivity.*

Responses from primary staff included:

Principal bought LGBT+ inclusive books for the class library and then backtracked and said she'd have to think more about it and put them in her cupboard and that was probably about 10 years ago now and they are still there. (415, female, lesbian, SET, Catholic school)

I would love to promote LGBTQ+ inclusivity more but I fear that there'll be backlash. I've seen a lot of nasty comments online and have heard a lot about how parents don't want their children to have knowledge about LGBTQ+ as they see it as promotion of LGBTQ+ and have a fear around it, rather than seeing it as empowering knowledge to help with inclusion (509, male, gay, principal, Catholic school)

Many respondents acknowledged that although they/their school is inclusive, *the level of inclusivity and the approach taken to LGBTQ+ inclusivity largely is individual to staff members.*

Responses from primary staff included:

Inclusivity hugely depends on each individual teacher. Some are genuinely fantastic and try really hard. Plenty don't have an LGBT+ inclusive practice. Supports etc is fairly reactive, a teacher waits for a child to say something and then it's panic stations rather than following the policies. (91, non-binary, queer, SET, Educate Together)

I think individual teachers are currently incorporating inclusive elements into their practices. I have made an effort to create a diverse library in our classroom to reflect the needs/lives of the children in my class. This is something I'm interested in however, Not all teachers are doing this. I feel it depends on the teacher and certainly there is more we could do as a school to Incorporate more inclusive practices. (168, female, straight, Classroom teacher, Gaelscoil)

*Many respondents noted that the topic of LGBTQ+ inclusivity was never mentioned in their schools.*

Responses from primary staff included:

It has never been discussed and therefore I do not think there is a school approach to LGBTQ+ inclusivity. (143, female, straight, SET, Catholic school)

While LGBTQ inclusivity is included in our policies we haven't had any open discussions or meetings about the topic. It is taken for granted. We have never had an openly LGBTQ+ member of staff. (312, female, straight, Classroom teacher, Gaelscoil)

It's little more than a wilful ignorance and a head in the sand approach. A lack of acknowledging the lives of LGBTQI+ people means you don't do anything to provide them any inclusivity or identity. (346, male, straight, deputy principal, Catholic school)

> It doesn't exist! Some of our Croke Park hours were recorded as inclusivity and we spoke about subject areas instead. Nothing mentioned about true inclusivity or how that could look in our school. I have mentioned about flying the LGBTQ+ flag and was ignored. (378, female, straight, SET, Catholic school)

**_Several respondents felt that their school was not LGBTQ+ inclusive._**

Responses from primary staff included:

> previous school meeting where a project on LGBT history/rights was proposed in a staff meeting. Principal's response was very cautious/unenthusiastic and warned staff to be conscious of "being sensitive" to and not "offending" a certain religious group.

> During the referendum for Equal marriage- one teacher had put up a poster display. A parent rang in to complain and the principal told the teacher to take down the display.

> The anti-bullying policy references the prevention of homophobic bullying in writing, but this is really only lip service within the broader ethos. No pride flag is shown, no reference to LGBT issues in whole-school assemblies etc. (57, gender – prefer not to say, gay, Classroom teacher, Educate Together)

> Atrocious. One gay sub teacher was moving but also getting married. We gave her a wedding card from the staff but she was congratulated for her move at the presentation; not her wedding as everyone else had and continues to be (390, female, bisexual, Classroom teacher, Catholic school)

> Our school hides behind its "religious ethos" to avoid mentioning or addressing LGBTQ+ topics. Teachers who openly discuss are reprimanded and talked about by other members of staff. (446, female, straight, Classroom teacher, Church of Ireland school)

While a number of respondents spoke about the inherently inclusive nature of their schools, **_some said they believe LGBTQ+ identities to a be private matter that should not be spoken about in school._** Rather it should be in the home.

Responses from primary staff included:

> Everyone is treated equally in this school and a person's sexuality is seen as it should be, a private matter. (24, female, straight, secretary, Catholic school)

> All are welcome - a person's sexual orientation is of no business to the school. (54, female, straight, principal, Catholic school)

> These issues should be dealt with in the home (594, female, straight, Classroom teacher, Catholic school)

As with other questions, **_a small number of respondents felt that discussing LGBTQ+ issues is not suitable for primary-aged children._**

Responses from primary staff included:

> I've ticked 5 stars because we don't need to push this on our kids (468, "this question offends me as there are only 2 genders", straight, principal, Catholic school)

**_A need for further guidance and education for staff was also highlighted by many respondents._** Some called for additional guidance from the Department of Education and the INTO on how to approach LGBTQ+ issues in primary

schools and/or support LGBTQ+ staff/pupils and many others stated that many teachers lack much-needed education on the topic.

Responses from primary staff included:

> We need proper training as teachers to talk to children with appropriate language and training that shows teachers the negative impact that not being accepted in school has on people's lives. What is happening in schools is tragic for all LGBQT+ people in my experience. (440, female, straight, Classroom teacher, Catholic school)

> I have been in scenarios where older staff have commented on people who are trans saying 'they just don't get it'. Which, is not necessarily their fault as how would they 'get it' if this is not something they are exposed to, nor have they been educated in. I think sometimes people that don't get it are targeted as transphobic etc when actually they just aren't educated enough to understand. I think in an ever-growing society especially working in the public sector it should absolutely be prioritised for teachers to feel confident in teaching and discussing this topic with students. On a personal note I have many friends who are gay / non binary however still I would not feel I have the knowledge or confidence to educate others on these topics. (657, female, straight, Classroom teacher, Catholic school)

> Schools need guidance of what is appropriate language to use at each level. Otherwise, some teachers do not feel confident talking about LGBTQ and therefore it is not used or spoken about in the younger classes. Schools need to step up to the reality of our children in 2023 and frankly many teachers are not equipped, and many are transphobic. School management hide behind things not being appropriate when it is simple straightwashing (836, female, bisexual, SET, Educate Together)

> We would like to avail of outside experts who can engage with pupils with special needs in a meaningful way. We would really appreciate more supports to ensure our school is an inclusive as possible. We invited the Equality Authority into our school some years ago for a review on all aspects of inclusion. We have been implementing any recommendations given since then. We wish to continue to improve and would appreciate more CPD for staff in special schools. (893, female, straight, principal, Catholic special school)

### *Summary of Culture & Environment Findings*

A third of staff believed that their school ethos impacted LGBTQ+ inclusivity while a third did not. Within this, 8 in 10 staff from religious schools said that their ethos *did not* impact their school, while there was an even split in the school types of the staff who believed that ethos *did* impact inclusivity. The qualitative findings again provide deeper insight into the topic of school ethos and its impact on LGBTQ+ inclusivity. Across all types of schools, many staff reported that their ethos positively impacted on LGBTQ+ inclusivity. However, many staff members in Catholic schools explained that their ethos was a significant barrier with regard to LGBTQ+ inclusivity. In terms of facilities, 4 in 10 staff across all school types reported that their pupils did not have access to gender neutral bathrooms while 7 in 10 staff reported that they did. Strikingly, almost a third of staff only sometimes intervene when they hear subtle, derogatory comments about LGBTQ+ people.

Overall, half of primary school staff rated their school as 3 stars (out of 5) or less in terms of their level of its overall LGBTQ+ inclusivity. Whilst half of staff rated their schools as 4 or 5 stars, there was a discrepancy between their 4 and 5 star ratings and what they reported on their practice, indicating a lack of understanding of what good LGBTQ+ inclusive practice looks like. For instance, of those staff who rated their school as 5 stars, 2 in 10 never mentioned same-gender parented families when they talked about families in general and over a third said they only sometimes mentioned same-gender parented families when they talked about families in general. Furthermore, of those staff who rated their school as 5 stars 3 in 10 staff never used books and resources with LGBTQ+ people represented. Of those staff who rated their school as 4 stars, almost half of staff said they just sometimes mentioned same-gender parented families when talking about families in general. Finally, of those staff who rated their school as being 4 or 5 stars, half of these staff reported that their school never provides or participates in any whole school LGBTQ+ inclusive activities such as inclusive campaigns, bringing guest speakers to staff or securing external support.

Qualitative data about overall LGBTQ+ inclusivity was particularly insightful here. Many respondents spoke of an active or visible approach to LGBTQ+ inclusivity in their schools but most emphasised that more needs to be done. Furthermore, a large number of respondents understood inclusivity in reactive terms rather than proactive terms, stating, for instance, that they had yet to encounter an LGBTQ+ staff member and/or a pupil in their school. Many respondents mentioned too the role of school ethos, religion, parents and school management as mediating factors that can be a barrier to a school's approach to LGBTQ+ inclusivity. Many respondents also noted that there was a fear of repercussion if LGBTQ+ issues were discussed in the classroom, or if a more visible/proactive approach was taken to LGBTQ+ inclusivity. Many respondents also stated that although they or their school was inclusive, the level of inclusivity and the approach taken to LGBTQ+ inclusivity largely was individual to staff members. There were also many staff members who noted that the topic of LGBTQ+ inclusivity was never mentioned in their school and many who felt that their school was not LGBTQ+ inclusive. Perhaps fitting with such experiences, there were some respondents who articulated the belief that sexuality was a private matter and indicated that LGBTQ+ inclusivity should not be spoken about in school.

## (D) Curriculum (Teaching and Learning)

### 1. Perceived Importance Level in Knowing About LGBTQ+ Inclusivity

Participants were asked to **rate the level of importance for different role categories in knowing about and understanding LGBTQ+ inclusivity.**

As illustrated in Table 39, the vast majority of primary school staff said it was very important or somewhat important for every school staff role type category to know about LGBTQ+ inclusivity and the rates were similar across role types. 89.9% of respondents believed it was very important or somewhat important for principals and deputy principals, class teachers, and SNAs and support teachers to know about LGBTQ+ inclusivity.

Within this, 77% of respondents (n=790) stated it was very important while 12% of respondents (n=123) stated it was somewhat important for school principals and deputy principals to know about LGBTQ+ inclusivity. 76.7% of respondents (n=784) said it was very important and 12.2% of respondents (n=125) said it was important for class teachers to know about LGBTQ+ inclusivity. 75.7% of respondents (n=774) said it was very important and 13.3% of respondents (n=13.3%) said it was important for SNA and support teachers to know about LGBTQ+ inclusivity.

*Table 39. Staff Ratings of Importance Levels of Knowing About LGBTQ+ Inclusivity*

| Rate how important it is for: | Very Important | Somewhat Important | Neither Important Nor Unimportant | Not Important | Not at All Important | I Don't Know |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Principals and Deputy Principals to know about LGBTQ+ inclusivity. | 77% (790) | 12% (123) | 5.7% (59) | 1.4% (14) | 2.9% (30) | 1% (11) |
| Class Teachers to know about LGBTQ+ inclusivity. | 76.7% (784) | 12.2% (125) | 5.5% (56) | 1.6% (16) | 3% (31) | 1% (10) |
| Special Needs Assistants and Support Teachers to know about LGBTQ+ inclusivity. | 75.7% (774) | 13.3% (136) | 5.7% (58) | 1.3% (13) | 3% (31) | 1% (10) |
| Non-teaching staff (including school secretaries and those who work with pupils for specific activities e.g. sports) to know about LGBTQ+ inclusivity. | 69.8% (717) | 17.2% (177) | 7.1% (73) | 1.6% (16) | 3.1% (32) | 1.2% (12) |

### 2. Opinions Regarding LGBTQ+ Visibility in Teaching and Learning

**Quantitative Results**

Respondents were **asked questions about LGBTQ+ visibility in teaching and learning.**

As Table 40 illustrates, 86.6% (n=893) of staff believed that class groups should have lessons that include same-gender parented families in the same way as different gender parented families. However, 12.1% (n=125) of the overall cohort qualified this by age. 74.5% (n=768) believed that all class groups should have lessons that include same-gender parented families in the same way as different-gender parented families. 2.8% (n=29) said 6th class only; 5% (n=52) said 4th-6th inclusive; and 4.0% (n=41) stated 2nd-6th inclusive. 10.3% of staff stated that no class should represent same-gender parented families in the same way as different gender parented families.

As Table 40 illustrates, 84.8% (n=874) of staff stated that class groups should have lessons with LGBTQ+ characters included in the same way as heterosexual characters. However, 14.7% (n=151) of the overall cohort of staff qualified this by age. 70.1% (n=723) asserted that all class groups should have lessons with LGBTQ+ characters included in the same way as heterosexual characters. 3.8% (n=39) said 6th class only; 6.6% (n=68) said 4th-6th classes inclusive; and 3.4% (3.4%) said 2nd - 6th inclusive. 11.5% (n=119) of staff stated that no class should have lessons with LGBTQ+ characters included in the same way as heterosexual characters.

As Table 40 illustrates, 90.7% (n=936) of respondents stated that pupils should learn about LGBTQ+ based bullying. 39.8% (n=442) qualified this by age. Within this, 5.8% (n=60) said 6th class only; 14.6% (n=151) said 4th-6th inclusive; and 18.7% (n=193) said 2nd-6th inclusive. 6.0% said that no classes should learn about homophobic and transphobic bullying. While there is a much reduced number who stated that 'all classes' should learn about these bullying topics, this may be explained by the time periods when bullying is introduced in the primary school curriculum.

*Table 40. Staff perceptions on class groups learning about LGBTQ+ inclusivity*

| Which of the following groups should: | All of the above | None of the above | 6th only | 4th/5th/6th | 2nd/3rd-6th | All except infants | Other comments |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Have lessons that include same-gender parented families in the same way as different gender parented families? | 74.5% (768) | 10.3% (106) | 2.8% (29) | 5.0% (52) | 4.0% (41) | 0.3% (3) | 3.1% (32) |
| Have lessons with LGBTQ+ people or characters included in the same way as straight/heterosexual characters are included? | 70.1% (723) | 11.5% (119) | 3.8% (39) | 6.6% (68) | 3.4% (35) | 0.9% (9) | 3.7% (38) |
| learn about homophobic and transphobic bullying? | 47.9% (494) | 6.0% (62) | 5.8% (60) | 14.6% (151) | 18.7% (193) | 3.7% (38) | 3.2% (33) |

## Qualitative Results

After the previous questions, respondents had the option to elaborate and were asked: **'Please use this box to add any comments about your own opinion regarding LGBTQ+ inclusivity in primary schools.'** There were 302 responses, representing 29.3% of the overall cohort.

***A large number of respondents reiterated the need for full LGBTQ+ support and inclusivity in primary schools.***

Responses from primary staff included:

> Exposing infants to inclusive stories will help normalise it for them, therefore preventing a large amount of bullying/prejudice later on, most of which is often due to ignorance (52, male, straight, principal, Catholic school)

> When teaching about LGBTQ+...we don't choose an appropriate age to teach or discuss heterosexuality, LGBTQ+ should be the same. I don't believe it's something for older classes only. I think it should be normalised and discussed from the get-go (123, female, straight, classroom teacher, Catholic school)

> I believe that we should educate children on all ways of life as equal, starting when they are younger to make the children aware that these other ways of living exist and then to normalise them more and more during the following years by not having to mention it when it comes up (237, male, straight, classroom teacher, Community National School)

***Many respondents emphasised the need for LGBTQ+ representation in resources.***

Responses from primary staff included:

> Representation is very important - inclusion in stories, pictures seeing people in LGBTQ+ communities in their lives in junior years. Introduction of more targeted support and role models for the children to speak to in middle and later years. (169, female, straight, classroom teacher, Educate Together)

> I think that examples of families of all kinds should appear in textbooks from junior infants, as a natural part of life. Inclusivity is not something that can only be introduced or made conscious after a certain age. (355, female, straight, special class teacher, Catholic school)

Perhaps in part explaining the amount of respondents in the quantitative questions who reported that LGBTQ+ inclusivity should happen but qualified this by age, ***several respondents made reference to the age of the children involved and explained that LGBTQ+ inclusivity should happen in an age-appropriate way.***

Responses from primary staff included:

> I think all class levels should be informed of all of the above-mentioned themes in an age appropriate manner. You're never too young to learn about kindness or about how our differences make us all special. (379, female, straight, classroom teacher, Catholic school)

> I think a huge issue that we face is the inclusion of the word 'sexual' in a lot of the terminology, people hear sexual and conclude it is inappropriate for young children, where the reality is that the concept of love is easy for children to understand and a person's sexuality can easily be summarised for young children as the person they love (633, female, pansexual, deputy principal, Church of Ireland school)

***Many respondents felt that significant improvement is needed in their own schools and within the wider school community and echoed again the need for additional support and guidance when teaching/dealing with LGBTQ+ issues.***

Responses from primary staff included:

> I feel that until LGBT+ issues and topics are outlined in the curriculum we can't teach them safely yet. Teachers won't teach something that's not on the curriculum. Principals won't put themselves out there unless they have to. (367, non-binary, queer, classroom teacher, Catholic school)

> Unless it is a mandatory program it may not be delivered or CPD done on it. If the right direction or emphasis does not come from the top down, then any changes will be poorly implemented if at all. If the teachers are not equipped properly and given the tools and time to train fully and their wellbeing protected, they won't be able to give of themselves any more to meet the increasing expectations. (421, female, straight, SET, Catholic school)

Perhaps in part explaining the approximately 10% of staff who did not think that LGBTQ+ parented families should be explicitly mentioned or LGBTQ+ characters included in resources, ***many respondents referred to how their***

***schools are inherently inclusive and/or how the focus should be on teaching and nurturing respect in general, rather than explicitly referring to LGBTQ+.*** Others specified that inclusivity refers to everybody, and that there is ***no need to differentiate between inclusivity and LGBTQ+ inclusivity.***

Responses from primary staff included:

> Inclusivity includes everyone and treats everyone equally regardless of gender, race, ability, disability, religion, beliefs. LGBTQ is not distinct from any other difference. The individual is treated equal. (428, male, straight, classroom teacher, Catholic school)

> The staff don't need to know about LGBT+ inclusivity as we include all children equally. (559, female, straight, classroom teacher, Educate Together)

> I believe all students and staff should be respected and supported as individuals. I think schools should be inclusive of all students and I don't think we need to make a big deal out of it if someone is LGBT the same way that we include people who come from different cultures or people with different learning abilities (948, female, straight, SET, Catholic school)

Mirroring other questions, a large number of respondents mentioned that their approach to LGBTQ+ inclusivity is often influenced by parents, other staff members, the church, and the school management/ethos.

Responses from primary staff included:

> Children are very open and they don't discriminate. The problems arise from home and the parents' opinions being enforced on the children. (71, female, straight, special class teacher, Catholic school)

> Important to note that this topic can clash with cultural and religious beliefs and an explicit focus on it may alienate some parents and lead to a more segregated school system. Indeed, we had a child leave our school due to an explicit focus on LGBT lessons during Pride, which clashed with religious beliefs. I don't think it is in the best interests of society for such children to feel forced out of non-denominational schools and worry that it could lead to breeding grounds for opposing extreme views. (78, female, straight, SET, Educate Together)

> I have worked in both religious-run and non-denominational schools and feel that children and teachers in religious-run schools do not feel comfortable to discuss LGBTQ+ issues because of their schools' religious ethos and culture. I feel this is an injustice to all children and teachers, not just those that identify as LGBTQ+. I feel that removing religious patronage from schools would help with this issue. (481, prefer not to say, SET, Educate Together)

> My opinion is that the Church needs to be removed from schools. I believe religious ethos' are a barrier to LGBTQ+ inclusivity and I think we are doing a disservice to our LGBTQ+ colleagues and children by continuing with things as they are. (362, female, straight, SET, Catholic school)

> There is a lot 9f work to be done and there is the possibility of significant push back from board of management and parents and some staff. (269, male, straight, SET, Catholic school)

***There were also a minority of staff who believed that LGBTQ+ should not be mentioned in primary schools at all.***

### 3. Confidence in Knowledge Levels on LGBTQ+ Inclusive Teaching and Learning

**Confidence in Knowledge Levels on LGBTQ+ Inclusive Teaching and Learning: Quantitative Results**

Participants were asked to **rate their knowledge levels on LGBTQ+ inclusive teaching and learning.**

As illustrated by Table 41, just 26.6% (n=274) of respondents were very confident in using LGBTQ+ inclusive language. 36.3% (n=374) were somewhat confident, 16.7% (n=172) were neither confident or unconfident, 12.2% (n=126) were not very confident and 5% were not at all confident. 3.2% (n=33) said they didn't know.

Just 19.4% (n=200) were very confident in knowing how to plan LGBTQ+ inclusive lessons. 29.2% (n=301) were somewhat confident, 20.9% (n=215) were neither confident or unconfident, 17.2% (n=177) were not very confident and 9.1% (n=94) were not at all confident in planning for lessons that were LGBTQ+ inclusive.  Significantly, this means that over a quarter of staff were not very confident or not at all confident about planning lessons that were LGBTQ+ inclusive (26.3%; n=271).

Just 20.8% of respondents (n=213) were very confident in teaching SPHE/RSE in an LGBTQ+ inclusive way. 30.9% (n=319) were somewhat confident and 19.4% (n=200) were neither confident nor unconfident. Significantly, almost a quarter of staff 24.2% of staff (n=249) were not very confident or not at all confident in teaching SPHE/RSE in an LGBTQ+ inclusive way.

*Table 41. Staff Confidence Levels in LGBTQ+ inclusive language and teaching and learning*

| Confidence in knowledge levels about: | Very Confident | Somewhat Confident | Neutral | Not Very Confident | Not at All Confident | I Don't Know |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Using LGBTQ+ inclusive language. | 26.6% (274) | 36.3% (374) | 16.7% (172) | 12.2% (126) | 5.0% (52) | 3.2% (33) |
| Planning lessons that are LGBTQ+ inclusive. | 19.4% (200) | 29.2% (301) | 20.9% (215) | 17.2% (177) | 9.1% (94) | 4.3% (44) |
| Teaching SPHE/RSE in an LGBTQ+ inclusive way. | 20.8% (214) | 30.9% (319) | 19.4% (200) | 16.6% (171) | 7.6% (78) | 4.8% (49) |

## 4. Whole-School Activities (Proactive and Responsive)

Respondents were asked a question with regard to **their whole-school LGBTQ+ inclusive activities in their school.**

As illustrated in Table 42, 68.1% (n=702) of respondents reported that they never either proactively or reactively organised any of the LGBTQ inclusive activities listed.

13% (n=134) of staff reported that their school had organised or participated in an LGBTQ+ inclusive campaign. 8.9% (n=92) of staff reported that their school had organised multiple activities while 1.1% (n=11) of staff reported that their school had organised all of the activities listed in their school. 2.4% (n=25) of staff had organised guest speakers proactively, while 0.8% (n=8) and 0.2% (n=2) respectively had organised gender and sexuality themed speakers responsively.

*Table 42. School Provision of reactive or proactive LGBTQ+ inclusive activities*

| Does your school ever provide or participate in the following?  (n=1031) | | |
|---|---|---|
| | N | % |
| An LGBT Campaign | 134 | 13.0% |
| Proactive guest speakers | 25 | 2.4% |
| Experts re sexuality (responsive) | 2 | 0.2% |
| Experts re gender (responsive) | 8 | 0.8% |
| All of the above | 11 | 1.1% |
| None of the above | 702 | 68.1% |
| Multiple | 92 | 8.9% |
| Other | 57 | 5.5% |

As Table 43 below presents, of those staff who had no LGBTQ+ inclusive activities in their schools, 55.5% heard statements like 'that's so gay' either every day (2.1%, n=15), every week (5%, n=35), every month (9.5%, n=67), or every few months (38.9%, n=273).

*Table 43. Frequency of pupils making statements like 'that's so gay' cross-tabulated with school provision of proactive or reactive LGBTQ+ inclusive activities*

| | | Does your school ever provide or participate in the following? Please select all that apply. | | | | | | | |
| | | LGBT Campaign | Proactive guest speakers | Reactive Sexuality experts | Reactive Gender experts | All | None | Multi | Other |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Pupils making statements like 'that's' so gay'? | Every day | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 15 | 1 | 9 |
| | Every week | 6 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 35 | 6 | 1 |
| | Every month | 12 | 4 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 67 | 18 | 6 |
| | Every few months | 57 | 9 | 1 | 4 | 1 | 273 | 36 | 21 |
| | Never | 58 | 12 | 1 | 4 | 9 | 312 | 39 | 29 |
| Total | | 134 | 25 | 2 | 8 | 11 | 702 | 92 | 57 |

## 5. *Current Practices of Applicable Staff with regard to LGBTQ+ Inclusive Teaching and Learning*

### Quantitative Results

Respondents were asked **how often they currently enacted LGBTQ+ inclusive teaching and learning, if applicable.**

79.6% (n=648) of teaching staff either always or sometimes include same gender parented families when talking about families in general. Within this, 34.9% (n=281) of teaching staff always include same-gender parented families when talking about families in general while 44.7% (n=367) sometimes include same-gender parented families when talking about families in general.

65.6% (n=476) of teaching staff either always or sometimes include LGBTQ+ historical or public figures in lessons. Within this, 15% (n=109) of teaching staff always include LGBTQ+ historical or public figures in lessons while 50.6% (n=367) sometimes include LGBTQ+ historical or public figures in lessons.

64.2% (n=502) of teaching staff either always or sometimes use books and resources with LGBTQ+ people represented. Within this, 13.8% (n=108) of teaching staff always use books and resources with LGBTQ+ people represented, while 50.4% (n=394) of teaching staff sometimes use books with LGBTQ+ people represented.

75.3% (n=549) of teaching staff reported that they either always or sometimes teach SPHE/RSE in an LGBTQ+ inclusive way. Within this, 31.7% (n=231) of teaching staff reported that they always teach SPHE/RSE in an LGBTQ+ inclusive way while 43.6% (n=318) of teaching staff reported that they sometimes teach SPHE/RSE in an LGBTQ+ inclusive way.

Significantly, a large portion of staff reported that they never enacted these LGBTQ+ inclusive practices. 19.6% (n=158) reported that they never include same-gender parented families, 34.4% (n=250) never include LGBTQ+ historical or public figures in lessons, 35.8% (n=280) never ensure that LGBTQ+ characters are represented in books and resources, and 24.7% (n=180) never teach SPHE/RSE in an LGBTQ+ inclusive way.

*Table 44. Frequency of including LGBTQ+ identities in teaching and learning (Applicable Staff)*

|  | Always | Sometimes | Never | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| How often do you ensure that same-gender parented families are mentioned when you talk about families? | 34.9% (281) | 45.5% (367) | 19.6% (158) | 806 |
| How often do you ensure that LGBTQ+ historical or public figures are included in lessons? | 15% (109) | 50.6% (367) | 34.4% (250) | 726 |
| How often do you use books and resources with LGBTQ+ people represented? | 13.8% (108) | 50.4% (394) | 35.8% (280) | 782 |
| How often do you teach SPHE/RSE in an LGBTQ+ inclusive way? | 31.7% (231) | 43.6% (318) | 24.7% (180) | 729 |

## Qualitative Findings

Respondents had the option to answer the question**: 'Is there anything you would like to add in relation to the previous statements about your work with pupils?'.** There were 272 responses to this question, representing 26.4% of the entire cohort.

***A desire to improve was expressed by a large number of respondents to this question, do better, and they shared their willingness to do so.***

Responses from primary staff included:

> I need to do more …need to educate myself = this survey highlights this for me (387, female, straight, deputy principal, Catholic school)

> I don't think I will ever have all the right answers but I'm always open to learning more. (453, female, straight, SNA, Educate Together)

> I have definitely spotted gaps in my own teaching I need to fix. I found that because none of my pupils had LGBT in their households that I didn't really address it. (645, female, asexual, classroom teacher, Catholic school)

***A large number of respondents felt that more resources were needed in order to teach LGBTQ+ inclusively.***

Responses from primary staff included:

> There's not enough input from LGBTQI+ groups into the content of schoolbooks. Stories that provide the lived experiences of that community is essential. (346, male, straight, deputy principal, Catholic school)

> The lack of resources and books and RSE /SPHE materials is a really massive issue. The lack of visibility of different relationships and family types make it seem like they don't exist. History textbooks should include gay characters and study. Why don't they? Many teachers feel the church has still got a grip on the curriculum and an input into textbooks and that is why change is so slow and LGBTQ people continue to be invisible and that increases discrimination and makes things harder for LGBTQ children, parents and teachers (385, male, gay, classroom teacher, Educate Together)

**Many respondents felt as though they were restricted in their approach to LGBTQ+ inclusivity because of the SPHE/RSE programme their schools used; that curriculum reform is needed, and that LGBTQ+ should be explicitly mentioned in the primary school curriculum.**

Responses from primary staff included:

> I try my best to teach lessons in an LGBTQ+ inclusive way but the lack of supports and details on the curriculum leaves my hands tied at times. For example, teaching an RSE programme or the Stay Safe programme is not LGBTQ+ inclusive as the lessons themselves are all very heteronormative. The Irish SPHE curriculum doesn't go far enough to allow me to teach in an LGBTQ+ inclusive way. (115, male, gay, classroom teacher, Educate Together)

> It is so tough to teach these RSE lessons as they are SO dated and rarely mention anything to do with LGBTQ+ and non-binary people's lives. It is scary having to dodge questions from pupils as we are not supported by the curriculum. (332, male, bisexual, classroom teacher, Catholic school)

**Many respondents also stated that CPD was essential.**

Responses from primary staff included:

> I completed the INTO Summer Course The LGBT & Inclusive School and it was really amazing to bring back to the whole school and inform my own individual practice. (350, female, lesbian, deputy principal, Catholic school)

> I haven't come across or been offered any CPD about the above topics. Staff have requested it in the past. (363, female, straight, classroom teacher, Church of Ireland school)

> I haven't seen LGBTQ+ CPD for SNAs before. I would love to see courses available. (242, female, straight, SNA, Catholic school)

Mirroring other questions, **a lack of teacher education was outlined as a barrier, illustrating the impact of the lack of confidence in knowledge levels coming through in the quantitative results.**

Responses from primary staff included:

> I think my confidence levels are related to my experiences. While I have done various CDP on LGBTQI+, I have not had any pupil or parent who identified within

that group, so while I would like to think I would know what to do, I haven't had the opportunity to use what I have learned. (560, female, straight, SET, Catholic school)

Echoing responses to other questions, *several respondents stated that they couldn't approach LGBTQ+ in a way in which they felt was appropriate, as they were restricted by the ethos of the school and/or do not feel supported by the school management*.

Responses from primary staff included:

I find it difficult to teach LGBTQ+ topics openly without clashing with the school's catholic ethos. I have been pulled up on it in the past, this makes me very conscious and prohibits relaxed, open teaching (123, female, straight, classroom teacher, Catholic school)

We cannot directly teach these issues in a primary school that is state run but Catholic in ethos (323, male, gay, classroom teacher, Catholic school)

It is not my place as a teacher to discuss such matters with children. This is the role and right of the parents. (423, female, straight, classroom teacher, Catholic school)

I feel I haven't intentionally done any of the above activities without support as I'm afraid I'd be left open to a backlash from parents. I feel cowardly but it makes my life easier. (483, male, straight, classroom teacher, Catholic school)

*Some respondents stated that a person's sexuality was irrelevant to their contribution to society while some others stated that LGBTQ+ figures are included in lessons without specific attention being given to their sexuality.*

Responses from primary staff included:

I don't seek out examples of LGBTQ+ people in history etc nor do I avoid them. (in the same was as Race, Abled etc) (490, prefer not to say, prefer not to say, SET, Church of Ireland school)

I believe the sexual orientation of historical or public figures is rarely within the context of the person's achievements. In many cases we don't know what their orientation was. If it's pertinent to the matter in hand, I have no problem bringing it up or any LGBTQ+ issue (545, female, straight, classroom teacher, Catholic school)

As with previous questions, *a small minority of respondents asserted that LGBTQ+ inclusive teaching and learning was inappropriate.*

## 6. *Relationship Between Confidence in Knowledge Levels of Mainstream Class Teachers and Existing Practices with regard to LGBTQ+ Inclusive Teaching and Learning*

In our analysis we **cross-tabulated mainstream teachers' ratings on their confidence levels in their knowledge regarding LGBTQ+ inclusive teaching and learning with their existing practices with regard to LGBTQ+ inclusive teaching and learning.**

As Table 45 illustrates, of those mainstream class teachers who rated themselves as very confident in their knowledge levels about planning for lessons that are LGBTQ+ inclusive (n=172), 93% (n=160) reported they always or sometimes include same-gender parented families. Among mainstream class teachers who rated themselves as not at all confident in planning for lessons that are LGBTQ+ inclusive, 43.75% (n=28) always or sometimes ensured that same-gender parented families are mentioned when talking about families.

*Table 45. Mainstream class teachers' confidence in their knowledge levels about planning lessons that are LGBTQ+ inclusive cross-tabulated with inclusion of same-gender parented families when talking about families in general*

| | | How often do you ensure that same-gender parented families are mentioned when you talk about families? | | | |
| | | Always | Sometimes | Never | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Rate your confidence in your knowledge levels about planning lessons that are LGBTQ+ inclusive | Very Confident | 114 | 46 | 12 | 172 |
| | Somewhat Confident | 101 | 123 | 27 | 251 |
| | Neutral | 34 | 90 | 38 | 162 |
| | Not Very Confident | 24 | 80 | 39 | 143 |
| | Not at All Confident | 6 | 22 | 36 | 64 |
| | I Don't Know How Confident I Feel | 2 | 6 | 6 | 14 |
| Total | | 281 | 367 | 158 | 806 |

As illustrated by Table 46, of those mainstream class teachers who reported that they were very confident in their knowledge levels about planning for LGBTQ+ inclusive lessons (n=170), 88.2% (n=150) always or sometimes used books and resources that are LGBTQ+ inclusive.

Among mainstream class teachers who rated themselves as not at all confident in planning for lessons that are LGBTQ+ inclusive, 23.1% (n=15) always or sometimes use books/resources that are LGBTQ+ inclusive.

*Table 46. Mainstream class teachers' confidence in their knowledge levels about planning lessons that are LGBTQ+ inclusive cross-tabulated with frequency of using LGBTQ+ inclusive books and resources*

| | | How often do you use books/resources that are LGBTQ+ inclusive? | | | |
| | | Always | Sometimes | Never | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Rate your confidence in your knowledge levels about planning lessons that are LGBTQ+ inclusive | Very Confident | 64 | 86 | 20 | 170 |
| | Somewhat Confident | 32 | 162 | 50 | 244 |
| | Neutral | 9 | 73 | 68 | 150 |
| | Not Very Confident | 2 | 56 | 85 | 143 |
| | Not at All Confident | 1 | 14 | 50 | 65 |
| | I Don't Know How Confident I Feel | 0 | 3 | 7 | 10 |
| Total | | 108 | 394 | 280 | 782 |

Of those mainstream class teachers who were very confident in their knowledge levels about planning LGBTQ+ inclusive lessons (n=161), 85.7% (n=138) always or sometimes included LGBTQ+ historical or public figures in lessons.

Among mainstream class teachers who rated themselves as not at all confident in planning for lessons that are LGBTQ+ inclusive, 25% (n=13) always or sometimes include LGBTQ+ historical or public figures in lessons.

Among mainstream class teachers who rated themselves as not at all confident in planning for lessons that are LGBTQ+ inclusive, 25% (n=13) always or sometimes include LGBTQ+ historical or public figures in lessons.

*Table 47. Mainstream class teachers' confidence in their knowledge levels about planning lessons that are LGBTQ+ inclusive cross-tabulated with including LGBTQ+ historical or public figures in lessons*

| | | How often do you include LGBTQ+ historical or public figures in lessons? | | | |
| | | Always | Sometimes | Never | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Rate your confidence in your knowledge levels about planning lessons that are LGBTQ+ inclusive | Very Confident | 56 | 82 | 23 | 161 |
| | Somewhat Confident | 33 | 146 | 47 | 226 |
| | Neutral | 12 | 75 | 54 | 141 |
| | Not Very Confident | 6 | 51 | 79 | 136 |
| | Not at All Confident | 2 | 11 | 39 | 52 |
| | I Don't Know How Confident I Feel | 0 | 2 | 8 | 10 |
| Total | | 109 | 367 | 250 | 726 |

As Table 48 illustrates, of those staff who were very confident in their knowledge levels about teaching SPHE/RSE in an LGBTQ+ inclusive way (n=179), 93.3% either always or sometimes mentioned same-gender parented families. Of those staff they were not at all confident in their knowledge levels for teaching SPHE/RSE in an LGBTQ+ inclusive way (n=55), 52.7% (n=29) reported that they never included same-gender parented families.

*Table 48. Staff Confidence Levels in Knowledge Levels About Teaching SPHE/RSE in an LGBTQ+ Inclusive Way cross-tabulated with frequency of teaching SPHE/RSE in an LGBTQ+ inclusive way*

| | | How often do you teach SPHE/RSE in an LGBTQ+ inclusive way? | | | |
| | | Always | Sometimes | Never | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Rate your confidence in your knowledge le vels about teaching SPHE/RSE in an LGBTQ+ inclusive way. | Very Confident | 121 | 35 | 16 | 172 |
| | Somewhat Confident | 81 | 136 | 30 | 247 |
| | Neutral | 14 | 70 | 42 | 126 |
| | Not Very Confident | 11 | 63 | 49 | 123 |
| | Not at All Confident | 3 | 9 | 34 | 46 |
| | I Don't Know How Confident I Feel | 1 | 5 | 9 | 15 |
| Total | | 231 | 318 | 180 | 729 |

The data shows that reports of high confidence in knowledge levels about LGBTQ+ inclusive practice are associated with enacting more LGBTQ+ inclusive practices in the classroom.

### 7. Professional Needs on LGBTQ+ Inclusivity in Primary Schools

Respondents had the option to answer a final question in the survey: **'Please use this box to add any comments about your professional needs on LGBTQ+ inclusivity in primary schools.'** There were 273 responses to this question, representing 26.5% of the overall cohort.

***Respondents underlined heavily the need for CPD around LGBTQ+ inclusivity.***

Responses from primary staff included:

> CPD needed to understand terms and language. CPD needed to know what supports children can be referred too. CPD needed to work with parents in bringing LGBTQ+

to the classroom as parents will have strong opinions on either side. (95, female, straight, deputy principal, Catholic school)

Whole school LGBT inclusivity training for teachers/ SNAs. More access to books and resources with LGBT families. Circular information for parents about encouraging inclusivity at home. Schools to show that they are LGBT+ inclusive in their policies, practice and media. (480, female, lesbian, classroom teacher, Community national school)

**Several respondents emphasised the need for specific mention of LGBTQ+ in the primary school curriculum, and/or discrete lessons which dealt with the topic in the curriculum.**

Responses from primary staff included:

I think we are all a little unsure around the SPHE/ RSE side of things when it comes to LGBTQ+. I think the curriculum is outdated, and does not address many of the questions and issues that arise during these lessons. (154, female, straight, classroom teacher, Educate Together )

I would love an updated SPHE curriculum and RSE lesson plans reflecting LGBTQ+ relationships and sexuality. (342, female, bisexual, classroom teacher, Educate Together)

**The need for a whole school approach to LGBTQ+ was also mentioned by a number of respondents.** Several respondents also noted that **policies need to be put in place in schools in terms of LGBTQ+ inclusivity and how it is taught.** Several respondents felt that **specific policy/curriculum is needed to ensure they felt comfortable talking about LGBTQ+ issues in the classroom.**

Responses from primary staff included:

Government policy is needed to give schools protections from parents and BOMs. We want more inclusion but parents can withdraw their child from any lesson they want and do when it comes to LGBT and RSE. We receive complaints that we say too much from most and a minority say we don't do enough. We are in a permanent catch 22 without government policy. (274, female, straight, SET, Educate Together)

Changes need to come from the top down or else small efforts made by individual teachers will be lost and not continued from class to class. (168, female, straight, Gaelscoil)

Mirroring other questions, a number of mediating factors in their approach to LGBTQ+ inclusivity. **The role of the school ethos continued to be cited by a number of respondents as having a significant impact on LGBTQ+ inclusivity.**

Responses from primary staff included:

We need more of these conversations, and we need to stop people saying "I am not homophobic BUT..." it is infuriating. Two teachers joined our school this year. They left their previous school because they wouldn't fly the Pride flag. I think that many schools use religion to hide behind their homophobia, or as an excuse not to deal with it. In a country which has legalised same sex marriage, I find this frustrating. The separation of church and state and a direction from the NCCA on curriculum here is really warranted. (122, female, straight, principal, Educate Together)

> I have colleagues in catholic schools/Church of Ireland schools where pride flags are flown, and LGBT issues are routinely and meaningfully explored. Educate Together schools need to ensure that certain religious groups are not pedalled to and that LGBT issues are actually addressed in schools, and that the written ethos does more than pay tokenistic lip service. (57, prefer not to say, gay, classroom teacher, Educate Together)

Parents were also referred to in many responses. ***Some respondents felt parents carry the sole responsibility of teaching their children about LGBTQ+ issues, while others felt that parents have the right to be consulted before the topic is spoken about in school.***

Responses from primary staff included:

> I am unsure as to whether as a teacher I should bring these matters up with a parent, very often a child may be open in school but the parent may be oblivious to their child's openness. Where does our duty of care lie when a child is struggling with for example gender identity/sexual orientation or suffering anxiety that the teacher feels comes from this confusion. 6th class children are at a very vulnerable age. I can't see it being acceptable to 'out' a child to their parents even if the child is really struggling. (312, female, straight, classroom teacher, Gaelscoil)

> Again, the only thing holding me back is the potential fallback from parents. Further protection for teachers and schools should be in place for us to feel safe ourselves teaching about it. (248, male, gay, board of management member, Educate Together)

Finally, as with other questions, ***a small minority of respondents felt that LGBTQ+ inclusivity should not be mentioned in primary schools.***

Responses from primary staff included:

> By highlighting sexuality in this way, it creates a difference between people based on sexuality where none exists. People are people, all equal and children see this more than anyone. Children do not need to be taught about differences in this way. It is counterproductive. Let children be children and you might be surprised at how inclusive and kind they are. This type of differentiation is not necessary at primary school level. (359, female, straight, Board of management member, Catholic school)

### *Summary of Curriculum (Teaching and Learning) Findings*

The vast majority of primary school staff believed it was either very important or somewhat important for principals and deputy principals, class teachers, and SNAs and support teachers to know about LGBTQ+ inclusivity. Within this, the same level of importance was attributed to principals/deputy principals, mainstream class teachers and SNAs and support staff in knowing about LGBTQ+ inclusivity.

In terms of primary school staff attitudes to LGBTQ+ inclusivity, the vast majority of primary school staff believed that same-gender parented families should be included when talking about all family types and that lessons with LGBTQ+ characters included in the same way as heterosexual characters. A minority of staff, though, qualified this by age. Again, qualitative

questioning in the area affirmed these findings very powerfully. A large number of respondents reiterated the need for full LGBTQ+ support and inclusivity in primary schools.  Many respondents emphasised the need for LGBTQ+ representation in resources. Illustrating the portion of respondents in the quantitative questions who reported that LGBTQ+ inclusive practices should happen in primary schools but qualified this by age, several respondents explained that LGBTQ+ inclusivity should happen in an age-appropriate way. Many respondents felt that significant improvement is needed in their own schools and within the wider school community and echoed again the need for additional support and guidance when teaching/dealing with LGBTQ+ issues. Perhaps in part explaining the minority of staff who did not think that LGBTQ+ parented families should be explicitly mentioned or LGBTQ+ characters included in resources, many respondents referred to how their schools are inherently inclusive and/or how the focus should be on teaching and nurturing respect in general, rather than explicitly referring to LGBTQ+. Others specified that inclusivity refers to everybody, and that there is no need to differentiate between inclusivity and LGBTQ+ inclusivity.

In terms of confidence in knowledge levels of staff, just over a quarter of staff were very confident in using LGBTQ+ inclusive language and just 2 in 10 staff were very confident in knowing how to plan LGBYTQ+ inclusive lessons. Significantly, over a quarter of staff were not very confident or not at all confident about planning lessons that were LGBTQ+ inclusive and just under a quarter of staff (n=249) were not very confident or not at all confident in teaching SPHE/RSE in an LGBTQ+ inclusive way. Percentages remain similar when we isolate to mainstream class teachers. Almost a quarter of mainstream class teachers rated themselves as either not at all confident or not very confident in planning LGBTQ+ inclusive lessons while almost a quarter reported that they were not very confident or not at all confident about teaching SPHE/RSE in an LGBTQ+ inclusive way. A large majority of staff reported that they never either proactively or reactively organised any whole-school LGBTQ+ inclusive activities.

The data also gives us good insight into the existing teaching and learning practices of staff in this study. 8 in 10 staff either always or sometimes included LGBTQ+ parented families when talking about other family types. Almost 7 in 10 staff always or sometimes included LGBTQ+ public figures in lessons. 6 in 10 staff either always or sometimes use LGBTQ+ inclusive books or resources in an LGBTQ+ inclusive way and three quarters of staff either always or sometimes teach SPHE/RSE in an LGBTQ+ inclusive way. Significantly though, a large portion of staff reported that they didn't enact LGBTQ+ inclusive teaching and learning practices such as the ones aforementioned. 2 in 10 applicable staff reported that they never include same-gender parent families when they talk about families. Over a third of staff never include LGBTQ+ historical or public figures in lessons and over a third of staff never ensure that LGBTQ+ characters are represented in books and resources. Strikingly, a quarter of staff report that they do not teach SPHE/RSE in an LGBTQ+ inclusive way.

Many respondents to qualitative questions acknowledged the need to improve and to do better, and they shared their willingness to do so. Though, they cited multi-faceted barriers to engaging in LGBTQ+ inclusive teaching and learning in their schools. The role of the school ethos, the role of the school management, and the role of parents were mentioned as mediating factors in staff approaches to LGBTQ+ inclusivity in their teaching and learning. Some respondents stated that they couldn't approach LGBTQ+ in a way in which they felt was appropriate, as they were restricted by the ethos of the school and/or do not feel supported by the school management. Parents were also referred to in many responses. Some respondents felt parents carry the sole responsibility of teaching their children about LGBTQ+ issues, while others felt that parents have the right to be consulted before the topic is spoken about in school. Many stated that curriculum reform is needed, and that LGBTQ+ should be explicitly mentioned in the primary school curriculum. Many staff asserted that specific LGBTQ+ inclusive policy and curriculum is needed to ensure they felt comfortable talking about LGBTQ+ issues in primary schools. Many felt as though they were restricted in their approach to LGBTQ+ inclusivity in the SPHE/RSE programme their schools used. Many respondents underlined heavily too that CPD was essential and noted the lack of teacher education was a barrier. Confidence in knowledge levels appears to bear a significant relationship to the type of teaching and learning practices being enacted and a large number of respondents felt that more resources were needed in order to do carry out effective LGBTQ+ inclusive teaching and learning.

# Part B: Interviews with LGBTQ+ Parents of Primary School Children and Parents of LGBTQ+ Youth

## Methodology

### Recruitment

Purposive and snow-balling sampling methods were used to recruit participants. The primary avenue of recruitment for LGBTQ+ parents (Cohort A) was via LGBTQ+ parents and allies WhatsApp and Facebook groups with a nationwide spread. For Cohort B (Families with LGBTQ+ Youth), recruitment emails were sent through LGBTQ+ support organisation databases/networks as well as via the list of primary school staff who took the national survey and were willing to be contacted about future research.

### Participant Demographics

#### Cohort A: LGBTQ Parents

15 parents volunteered to take part, two of whom were a couple.

*Gender:* 14 cis women, one cis man.

*Sexual Orientation:* nine identified as lesbian, four identified as gay, two identified as queer.

*Ethnicity:* All white Irish, British or American.

*Religious Affiliation:* one Roman Catholic, three Church of Ireland, three Atheist, three Agnostic, two stated "none", two preferred not to say, one unknown.

*Education:* All had third level education and beyond.

*Relationship Status:* Eight married, one in a civil-partnership, one co-habiting, two dissolved/in relationship, one divorced/in relationship, one long term relationship, one single.

*Age:* They ranged in age between 39 and 57. And their primary school aged children ranged in age between 4 and 13.

*School Type:* 6 Educate Together, 3 Church of Ireland Primary, 3 Catholic Primary School, 1 Community National School, 1 Multi-Denominational Gaelscoil, 1 Steiner School. All schools were mixed/co-educational.

### Cohort B: Families with LGBTQ+ Children

7 parents/guardians and 2 children/young people (aged 12) took part. Each interview lasted an average of 80 minutes.

*Child Details*

*Gender:* 'Uses pronouns she/her', 'has identified as a boy in the past, unclear at present and will not say', 'Male', 'Trans Male', 'Trans boy', 'They don't really (articulate a gender identity)', 'As a girl', 'Transgender girl'

*Sexual Orientation:* 'Said that she likes boys and is not a lesbian', 'Not yet to my knowledge', 'They don't articulate this', 'Doesn't really define sexual orientation when speaking to me Seems shy about discussing it. Has a wide range of young LGBTQ friends.', 'None to date', 'Bisexual', 'Not yet'

*Age:* 10-13

Class group: 4$^{th}$ class to 1$^{st}$ year secondary

*Parent Details*

*Gender:* Five cis women, one gender fluid person, one non-binary person.

*Sexual Orientation:* 3 heterosexual, 1 lesbian, 1 bisexual, 1 pansexual, 1 prefer not to say

*Ethnicity:* All white/white Irish

*Religious Affiliation:* 2 Roman Catholic, 2 Atheist, 1 Agnostic, 1 Pagan, 1 none

*Education:* All third level/further education

*Relationship Status:* Six married, 1 separated

*Age:* 37-50

*School Details*

*School type*: 4 Educate Together, 2 Catholic schools, 1 Church of Ireland school

*Gender profile:* All mixed schools

*Location:* 2 city, 1 suburban, 3 towns, 1 rural


## Interview Method, Design and Analysis

Semi-structured interviews lasting an average of 80 minutes.

Semi-structured interviews contained the following question areas: basic demographic detail about the participant and their family; journey to parenthood (cohort A LGBTQ+ parents only) decisions about and experiences of pre-school education, decisions about and experiences of primary school

education; everyday life in primary school; strengths and weakness of their primary school with regard to LGBTQ+ inclusivity. All data were thematically analysed (Braun and Clarke 2006). Finding and analysis sections present the themes and sub-themes.


## Findings From Cohort A, LGBTQ+ Parents of Primary School Aged Children

### LGBTQ+ Parents' Experiences of Visibility and Representation in Community

Most parents in this study underwent significant work in negotiating their everyday worlds as same-gender parented families. They described this in terms of **continuously negotiating assumptions, answering extra questions, and having to 'come out'**:

> And it's very frustrating because, like you know, people say you don't have to come out any more. You come out, look, all day, every day, every day. And it's just. Yeah, I'm over it...I'm really over it, but I. Have come to the conclusion now the more I just make it a norm for me, and just say, oh, no, you're fine. They're like, oh, I'm really sorry. I had a patient the other day. We were talking, and she had been in multiple times. And it's like, 'oh, how the kids?' I said, 'oh, yeah. Great. Thanks'. And we were talking about her kids, her grandkids, and my kids. And she's like, oh, and does your husband work? It's like, 'oh, my wife actually looks after them during the day' ... 'Oh! I'm really sorry. In our previous conversations a couple of months ago I was referring to your wife as your husband'. And corrected herself, and the woman was 70 years old, and she was lovely about it, and I made it totally normal, and she kept apologizing. I said no need to apologize...But by making it the norm, it is the norm, and that way then people are not offended that you're correcting my situation. I'm not correcting them. I'm just correcting them of my situation. And that actually kind of makes them a lot more at ease, because if you're, I'm not coming across as a strong activist or anything like that ...(Parent 2)

**Some parents described how they often had to explain that they are in fact a family unit:**

> there's happened a few times, like, if we're in a restaurant, we'll be chatting to the staff member, and then at the very end they'll say, are these boys cousins, and we'll say no, they're brothers. We're a family. That's happened several...times...They'll say. 'Are you, sisters?' 'Are they cousins?' I'll say 'no, we're a family of four'...And you can see they just can't quite, you know, process...It's like a total blank, isn't it? It's just like they're missing this key piece of information (LGBTQ+ Parent 10).

Mirroring other parents, the same parent went on to explain that in these types of situations, they worked hard to ensure that their children did not feel alienated or somehow lesser than other families by **enacting confident responses to assumptions and questions.** They attempted to **model and instil a sense of pride in their family:**

> the very day we moved into the house, we pulled into the driveway, and there's this little gaggle of kids who came to look at us, and we were getting out of the car, and

they said, 'is there no dad?' And we said, 'we have two moms in our family and two sons. Who's in your family?' We knew what to say. We knew the line, and neither of us are offended by those questions, especially from kids, so I suppose I hope the boys just hear that and how proud we are of our family (LGBTQ+ Parent 10).

Most parents were very conscious that, in the various facets of their everyday lives, their children had very few representations of LGBTQ+ people and/or LGBTQ+ parented families and so they **tried to seek out LGBTQ+ visibility in different ways.** Several parents actively sought out other LGBTQ+ parents families for their children to socialise with:

'It was difficult in the sense that there wasn't representation for the kids to see. So we did see out LGBT parents who didn't go to the school and look for kind of connections and community that way' (Parent 5).

**A lot of parents described seeking out visibility through representation in books and resources,** so that their children might see their families reflected in their lives. They were conscious of the balance between a celebratory pride in their family form but at the same time attempting to ensure that they weren't exceptional or fetishised in some way. Most were conscious of doing this in a way that wasn't forced but rather was ordinary and unremarkable:

we kind of got a little bit wiser, and we started looking at all other literature that referenced LGBT but doesn't focus on it. So like there's another book that has pirates with two moms...The story is not about them having two moms, you know. It's a 'by the way'... So it was nice that they didn't focus on that at all. And for the kids, that wasn't the focus. And again, the main thing is trying to make our family perceived as normal as possible for them to not make it an issue, which it isn't, but to certain society members it is, you know (LGBTQ+ Parent 2).

Several parents in this study had previously lived in bigger cities in the UK and the US. Their stories of their move to Ireland were varied. Some who had grown up here were pleasantly surprised at some aspects of Irish society and how much it had changed while others were disappointed that things hadn't changed as much as they had expected. For three parents who had lived in particularly LGBTQ+ inclusive areas in other countries, the everyday reality of life in Ireland from an LGBTQ+ perspective was a very big culture change:

I think when you're away, you tend to look at everything going on at home and think like... you know, I was like, Ireland's changed so much. It's changing. It's changing all the time, and I'm not there for it. And it has absolutely. It really has, but then also you get back, and then you move to rural Ireland, then you go alright, then it didn't change all that much. So yeah, it's been... it's definitely been a bit of a challenge. Yeah. But, you know, I'm still happy to be home, and I do love being back, so I wouldn't change it right now (LGBTQ+ Parent 11).

## LGBTQ+ Parents' Choice of Primary School/Ethos

**Twelve out of the fifteen parents in this study articulated attempting to avoid sending their children to Catholic primary schools.** Some parents were acutely aware that their decision in avoiding Catholic schools was in part

shaped by their own experience of feeling excluded and delegitimised by Catholic teachings. Others were vehement that even though they had heard that not all Catholic schools are the same, they believed that the power of Catholic ethos was too much of a risk. Most feared that their child or children would not feel included in everyday life at school; that their family would not be recognised or deemed as legitimate as other families or represented as part of everyday life at school:

> So we ruled out all Catholic schools straight off the bat. We just wouldn't go anywhere near one...so people were saying before we arrived, oh, you know, Catholic schools have changed, and...you know, they're fine. And some of them are grand. And I was just like, I just was not going nowhere near them, even if the school itself, even if the principal was fine, you'd never know what the parents are like. And you could never trust that your child would be accepted and because of their parenting, would be how I feel. So that's, what, 95% of schools in Ireland are then ruled out... if I was to send them to the Catholic school down the road, they would all do hockey every week. They would have after school clubs. They would have all these kind of things. But my choices were limited because I'm a lesbian, you know, and the choices of schools were limited because of that because I didn't want my kids to be bullied. And so we didn't get the kind of choice that straight people get, because straight people could go to Educate Togethers, if that's what they want. But we can't just go to Catholic schools with impunity.... it also limits our choices massively around secondary schools. So [Child] is quite a good rugby player. He will not go to [Catholic Secondary]. You know, like it just won't happen. And he won't go because it's a Catholic school that I have no idea how he would be treated. And so he, you know, like, it limits their choices and their life chances around particular issues because of the ethos of those schools in ways that isn't the case for everyone (LGBTQ+ Parent 5).

The **majority of parents assumed that a multi-denominational school would protect their child.** They acknowledged that some Catholic schools could be progressive and that the staff in them could be very open but they considered the **Catholic 'ethos' itself to be a barrier** and a risk to the meaningful inclusion of their child and their family form or a child who was identifying as LGBTQ+ as the following quote explains:

> [If a teacher] was teaching in a Catholic school, and a child comes to her and say, you know, I'm a girl or a boy, or I'm gay, or I'm a lesbian, or I'm queer, or I'm pansexual, she can go, 'great. Would you like to talk about that? Would you like us to talk to your parents or your parent?' But whereas, if it's a Catholic school. It's like 'I didn't hear that. Go and talk to your parents'. I mean, it's like totally different. And like whatever way we look at it, that's a negative message. That's basically saying we can't talk about this in school because, you know, some people [in defence of Catholic schools] say 'it's not negative, you're just not talking about it' But, by not talking about it, it has a negative connotation (LGBTQ+ Parent 6).

Several parents articulated the **risk for their child specifically in relation to the faith formation** teaching of religion during the school day in Catholic schools and explained that their children were 'different enough' and didn't need to be further marked as 'other' by having to sit out at the time of religious instruction or be subject to religious teachings and delegitimised their family:

we just didn't want her to feel like she was different. Yeah. You know, like, she's already different enough in one respect, and we didn't want it to be ingrained somewhere else. We didn't want teachers saying that. You know that was the fear we had that we didn't want her hearing in class that that wasn't right or that wasn't God's way, and that wasn't, you know, like we didn't want her to be in a culture where that was the belief system (LGBTQ+ Parents 3.1 & 3.2).

Some parents were extremely wary of Catholic schools because they **had family members or friends whose temporary teaching contract was discontinued just after they had come out as LGBTQ+.** Another participant was an LGBTQ+ teacher herself and hadn't come out at school because she wasn't permanent yet:

I was just worried that it [coming as LGBTQ+] might, you know, prevent me from maybe getting a permanent role when the time came (Parent 11).

Of the four parents whose children attended a religious school, **two parents would have preferred a multi-denominational ethos school but had no choice** of this type of school in their rural area. One of these parents acknowledged that they would have preferred their children not to do religion but they didn't want them to be ostracised by opting out. One parent in the study was part of a family with a strong relationship with Catholic faith. They had had their children baptised and were happy to have communion and confirmation facilitated within school time.

**Three other parents specifically chose Church of Ireland schools.** One of these expressed their decision as being in part because of their wider family relationships with both the Church of Ireland and the Catholic church, and partly because of prior knowledge of the school and people there. The other parent whose child was attending a Church of Ireland school articulated his decision in terms of his own religious affiliation past, the size of the school and prior knowledge about the school.

**The nine parents whose children attended multi-denominational schools had sought out a non-Catholic school from the outset** and were relieved that they had had the option to do so. Several parents noted that the Educate Together ethos was just the 'right fit' for their family:

I always wanted an Educate Together, and I thought about the same way. They didn't have a uniform, they didn't have, I suppose decades of tradition, which sometimes I think can work against LGBT people. It's often not intentional. But when you have a school with very strict uniform codes, for instance, they tend to be a lot more traditional, and then they don't always see how that can impact on LGBT people, I think. But it was just always a good atmosphere in the Educate Together, and like I got that from the start, whereas I can think of some older schools, and I just wouldn't really be at ease sending [Child 1] there. It just wouldn't be the right fit (LGBTQ+ Parent 1)

One parent explained that a **multi-denominational school protected them because it didn't have the ethos of a Catholic school 'hanging over it':**

> I mean it helps that it's not a Catholic school because it doesn't have that hanging over it, and I'm not trying to [castigate] religious schools, but at the end of the day, whether you like it or not, there is a certain ethos that has to hang over those schools because that's what they sign up to, and we can stomp and get mad about it all we want, but I mean... you want to play with their ball, you play by their rules. And, you know, they... it is therefore they have some kind of backing to not be open, or to be discriminatory, or whatever else like that (LGBTQ+ Parent 9).

Conversely, the parent who had wanted their child to attend the Educate Together but had no local option explained that the **Educate Together ethos enabled a different level of LGBTQ+ inclusivity:**

> So we just... I think there's a comfort with where there's that. And people... there's a huge reluctance to really, really have openness that the *Educate Together* schools don't seem to have... there is no reluctance. they raised their flags. All the parents were out... the kids were out, a whole big celebration. Absolutely beautiful. Absolutely lovely (LGBTQ+ Parent 4).

At the same time, some parents whose children attended multi-denominational schools acknowledged that there was ultimately the same diversity of views about LGBTQ+ inclusivity amongst the parent population but ultimately felt secure in the equality-based ethos of multi-denominational schools. Some parents, whilst acknowledging that LGBTQ+ inclusivity was done well in their multi-denominational school, they pointed out the limits to the equality-based ethos when it came to other aspects of diversity such as ethnicity and social class.

## School Approaches to LGBTQ+ Inclusivity: Challenges and Barriers

Most parents outlined that **school administrative systems were not always reflective of their family form.** They described how, at least initially, the apps, systems and forms that schools used presumed that there was a father and a mother present in every family. For instance, one parent explained:

> as we're going through filling out the forms for the kids, she was looking for the name of the athair [father], and now her and I was like, there's no athair [father]... And she's like, oh, and I got she had an awful shock of there was no father. And then she asked me was I a single parent. And I was like, no. And then I was trying to remember the word for gay in Irish...so anyway, I outed myself to her. And she's like. Oh, that's great. That's amazing. That's no problem. Oh, my God, that's fine. So there is another parent, so. And I was like, yes, there is. It's like my partner's outside if you'd like to meet her? Well, that's totally fine. And I must amend these forms. And you know, then she realized, you know, they had mother and father, and she needed to change it to parent/guardian. So she did, which was very interesting because we got the forms the next time., we were the first ones to break it (LGBTQ+ Parent 2).

For the most part, **parents who experienced forms and administrative systems in this way described positive reactions and the systems were subsequently changed.**

**Celebratory aspects of school life such as Father's Day or Mother's Day were continuously highlighted as moments that required extra negotiation** on the part of the families and sometimes the teachers too. Again, most staff were well-intentioned but some parents described how there was a need for an advance conversation:

> I mean, last Father's Day, the teacher just said to me at the gate: "and you know, Father's Day is coming up. And I'm just wondering like, how would you like me to approach it?...I've explained already in class to everybody that like we're going to make Father's Day cards, and that you can make the card for whoever you want."...[And I said] "you know, this is not the first Father's Day. They've got all the questions...they make what they want for whoever they want". And she said "that's fine. I just wanted to check with you. I didn't want to make a big thing in the class. I just explained about the families, but she said, I just wanted to check with you if I approached it right" (LGBTQ+ Parent 14)

Some parents reported that the teacher decided not to celebrate Mothers' Day or Fathers' day at all, reasoning that not all children had a mother or father in their lives. Others reported that they forgot that the child had two mums but that another child in the class reminded the teacher. When they received them, several parents delighted in getting two Mother's day cards home both when their child was in pre-school education and in primary school. One parent jovially pointed out that her child didn't like Mother's day at school because he had the 'work' of making two cards:

> He gives out about Mother's Day because he has more work to do, you know. He's got to do two things. We tell him to just do one, and just pick one, and do one! (LGBTQ+ Parent 9)

Several parents asserted that, irrespective of how progressive they were in their own views, **staff could be fearful and/or not on solid ground where it came to enacting LGBTQ+ inclusivity in an explicit way:**

> there is an element of teacher's feeling uncomfortable to speak about this, as if they are going to have to... I don't know. It's like they're about to have to talk about sexual acts, which is not part of the scenario at all, you know what I mean? (Parent 4).

Some parents noted that teachers were even more reticent around this if they did not have a permanent contract. As aforementioned, this was particularly emphasised by Parent 11 as she herself was LGBTQ+.

**Some parents worried a lot about the threat of right-wing religious influence in their school and how associated campaigns were having a potently negative impact on teacher confidence** in and willingness to be overtly LGBTQ+ inclusive:

> But it is very, very difficult. There's a huge fear. Now seeing the best in people, not seeing people as deliberately being reluctant to change. There's a huge fear around children as if we are going to corrupt their minds. There really is that sense of horror that we're going to create a divisive society, that the school community is going to be divided in this issue, and really that is becoming apparent. In [County 1] and [geographic area], there has been a *[Right Wing Campaign]* campaign (LGBTQ+ Parent 4).

Some noted that they were **continuously fearful of the hostile, homophobic parent** and, indeed, some noted that negative parental reaction did become visible, particularly around moments of celebration like the raising of a rainbow flag for pride week. For instance, one parent articulated that they were:

> shocked when you hear about other parents in the school like taking their kids out because of Pride Week or, you know, expressing concerns about Facebook (Parent 6).

Another parent noted that she did encounter a hostile parent:

> Further on in the school I kind of did encounter a parent who was quite hostile to me, but I just avoided her because I thought it's about the kids and their relationship with the teachers' (Parent 1).

But, overall, parents whose children attended Educate Together schools believed that the ethos would ultimately supersede negative parental reaction like these ones.

A few parents acknowledged that **some teachers were resistant when it came to LGBTQ+ inclusivity:**

> I would not say they make it explicit. I have asked for their bullying policy and their inclusivity statement, let's say, or their diversity and inclusivity statement. And it's really just like we welcome everyone, you know...we welcome you to come to our school but then we're just not going to talk about your business [Being LGBTQ+ family] that's to deal with in the home. You know, and I think that when I first showed up there during junior infants, I was told just that like we welcome your family here. But family dynamics are really discussed in the home (Parent 8).

For some, this **resistance and reluctance was attributed to a particular fear and continued nervousness around gender identity:**

> I'm hearing on radio and in the media is that children are too young, and that this whole conversation around trans is recruitment, and that the trans community are recruiting children. So... it's like olden days conversation, definitely talking about homosexuality and it being contagious, or to the point that, yeah, just by being there, you're going to cause...homosexuality. I suppose I'm walking evidence so that cannot/doesn't happen, as I'm sure it's meant for many people. I did not know anybody else in my world, in my life, or in [County 1] in the [geographic area] who was who was LGBTQ+ personally. And I was still gay. So it's not like. It just is to me about the equality (Parent 4).

And some **reported that their school interpreted LGBTQ+ inclusivity in largely sexualised terms** as opposed in terms of family forms for instance, and therefore deemed the mentioning of LGBTQ+ lives and identities to only be appropriate for the older classes:

> *LGBTQ+ Parent 12*: the education doesn't start until third class/fourth class for primary schools? At least that's what I've been told.
>
> *Interviewer*: What doesn't start until third class?
>
> *LGBTQ+ Parent 12*: Being told about being gay, LGBTQ...

While most parents described overall having a positive experience in their school, several parents said that **their children reported hearing homophobia and transphobia at school and/or a de-legitimising of their family form.**

> So she's constantly, you know, there's been many incidents where they've come home and said like so and so said this today, or so and so said that today. They've pegged everybody in the class who is homophobic and who isn't homophobic. You know? And I constantly just reiterate, you know, that's not them necessarily. Like that's their families and what they're hearing at home. Do you know what I mean? You can't really get too cross with a 10-year-old child from making a gay slur, you know what I mean? (LGBTQ+ Parent 11).

Overall, several parents reported that their school had an approach that on the face of things was inclusive. While they didn't have in-depth insight into the everyday minutiae or the more subtle, 'hidden curriculum' aspects of their children's everyday lives at school, several parents **indicated that the approach to LGBTQ+ inclusivity leaned more towards tokenism.** One parent explained how, for some schools, they perceive themselves to be inclusive but it doesn't go nearly far enough:

> I think my experience management is that they feel like they're being inclusive. They feel like they are instilling great values in the children, which they are. But there is another step that is usually important. And I don't think it's enough (LGBTQ+ Parent 4).

Other parents noted how schools' approach to LGBTQ+ inclusivity can be as **a one-off, celebratory approach** and that a more embedded inclusive culture is much less likely to be achieved:

> like they're not nailing at all the inclusion of LGBTQ+. You know, they really need to work on it....but like it's not OK to be an ally just during Pride. You know? If you're an ally, you're an ally the rest of the year also (LGBTQ+ Parent 12).

### School Approaches to LGBTQ+ Inclusivity: Positives and Enablers

Many parents emphasised the huge significance when there were other LGBTQ+ people in the school community. **Parents were particularly relieved and delighted when there were other LGBTQ+ parented families in their class and/or school:**

> Relief. Absolute relief that there was somebody else there, so they were not isolated. So you know that those children, I suppose, had support within the classroom that if anybody ever questioned them, why they had two mums that was, well, so and so has two mums. What's the problem, you know, not that they need that, but it's always nice to have a little bit of somebody the same as yourselves. You're not an isolated case, I feel (LGBTQ+ Parent 2).

The dynamics of visibility and representation were to some degree already present and there wasn't the same reliance on books or resources to make LGBTQ+ lives visible when there were other children in the class or school

who had same-gender parents. Some parents like Parent 2 above described this in terms of safety in numbers while others noted that they didn't have to do the same work to advocate or find resources to represent their lives at school.

It was evident that **the principal, school leaders and staff played a crucial role in how LGBTQ+ inclusive a school felt.** Several parents who had LGBTQ+ principals and/or LGBTQ+ teachers in their schools believed that their schools were more likely to be LGBTQ+ aware and/or inclusive:

> it's probably one of the most supportive schools you could go to if that were to happen (a child coming out as LGBTQ+ at school) (LGBTQ+ Parent 5).

Having **an LGBTQ+ staff member in the school was also crucial for several parents:**

> But with [Teacher] there, the school is a bit more, yeah. I mean, I'd say she goes above and beyond. And you know, there's other gay teachers there, too, but they're open to, you know, colleagues having an open discussion (Parent 6).

Ethos was a very important factor and, as aforementioned, ethos had positive and negative impacts, but most parents acknowledged that the experience, comfort, confidence, skills and personalities of the staff were paramount in determining how LGBTQ+ inclusive a school was on a everyday basis. In particular, an inclusive, supportive principal was deemed to be a crucial factor:

> I think the principal is a driving force on this...she's very inclusive (LGBTQ+ Parents 3).


## Parents Working Hard to Change Practices/Achieve Inclusivity at School

Amidst the many ways that school culture and staff practices often unthinkingly privileged heterosexual parented families, lives and identities, the parents' accounts in this study confirmed **how hard they worked to achieve a kind of ordinary, easy visibility and inclusivity for their children in a quiet, non-confrontational way.** Some parents suggested books and resources to their schools, and this was generally well received. Other work included the quiet advocacy regarding changing forms and administrative systems. For instance, one parent approached the school quietly and respectfully regarding the app they used for communicating with parents:

> We use Aladdin app in school, and the Aladdin app did say mother, and father, and I said to the principal... so a lot of it is people just don't think, and I think you got to allow for that....So I think if you approach people, and go, oh, listen. So I mean we approached quite openly and went here, listen, we're a same a sex family... can you change this please? Which I mean, for any kid as well...You could have a mum and a granny, you can have an uncle, you could have a dad, or you can have a grandpa, you know. I think things that need to say parents/guardian are the way to go, you know? But yeah, so it's that was it (LGBTQ+ Parent 9).

Most were acutely conscious of **not 'rocking the boat'**, 'shoving it in your face' and worked to achieve inclusivity for their children in a non-demanding way. Most wanted not to be seen as the problem or difficult parent, but this was inevitable side effect of the advocacy of some parents. One parent explained that she was seen as the 'difficult' parent because she advocated for more embedded whole-school LGBTQ+ inclusive approach:

> And I sent Belong To's contact details. I sent so many contact details and it's like studies and stuff like that when I was saying to them, let's do something for Pride, you know, right? Yeah. Yeah, I reached out to Belong To myself just in case the school wouldn't....there's just there's so many possibilities, but it's been the same with autism for me, you know....Yeah, I'm a difficult parent. That's what I am. I'm seen as a difficult parent because I asked for stuff and I say that's not really good (LGBTQ+ Parent 12).

Some **parents felt a responsibility to be representative, in a nuanced way that allowed other people to see that their family form was ordinary,** just like others. This often dealing with questions and/or comments in particular ways that were educative rather than defensive or combative:

> we would definitely be the only, probably the only gay people those people have met. You know what I mean? As in so...you do feel a bit of responsibility that like, you know, you're kind of representing... you don't always want to be that you're the same-gendered parent family like cover poster people or whatever in the town. And yeah, that's okay. You don't mind. We're open to questions or open to people having that dialogue, because that's how people learn (LGBTQ+ Parent 6)

Most parents – predominantly women – **felt the need to be 'on it'; to be members of school committees and boards and to find ways to ensure that their school was as LGBTQ+ inclusive as it could be:**

> I don't want to be a helicopter parent, but I want to be present. So I think being present can actually resolve a lot of the issues, and involvement, because like the kids are only young for a certain time, and I think if you get the first seven years right, then they have a very good basis to get out in the world and defend themselves, which is huge regardless of if you're gay, straight, whatever (LGBTQ+ Parent 2).

They negotiated the gendered dynamics too of stereotypical **assumptions that two mothers in the family meant that they were doubly organised and prepared,** and felt extra pressure to perform what some referred to as the 'super mom' phenomenon:

> lesbian parents are quite visible, and they tend to step up and be on boards, and they seem to do... I'm on the board of management, and I think we just have this kind of ... we're quite hard on ourselves. We don't allow ourselves just to be ordinary, and to muck up like ordinary parents do, because we have a kind of thing about, you know. We have a thing about... the fact that we have actively chosen parenthood, that doesn't actually mean that you're gonna be a better parent. It means you might have thought about some things. That's true. And certainly I see lots of excellent lesbian parents. But I just think the perfection complex is a bit problematic (LGBTQ+ Parent 7).

There **were classed dimensions to their everyday work as parents too** as one parent pointed out:

but because we're two middle class, articulate women is there a sense of like you can deal with this yourself? (LGBTQ+ Parent 10).

Alongside all of this work on an everyday basis, some parents expressed a gratefulness too for how Ireland has changed so much:

> there like a few years ago, and we went, and there was a drag story time, and they read. And we just happened to wander in, as you do, and then they took out the book, *And Tango Makes 3…* And I can still remember thinking, 'Oh my God, I'm in [City] with my two children, and somebody's reading *And Tango Makes 3'*. So that was a really nice moment' (LGBTQ+ Parent 10).

There was also an acute awareness that things were worse in other contexts and countries:

> We forget how lucky we are in Ireland of how safe it is to be normal for us. You know, and that was a massive eye-opener going, actually, we live in a really, you know, normal place that we can be open. We can be free. We don't have risk of being stoned or shot or arrested for being LGBT, you know?...I would feel a hell of a lot safer living in Ireland or living in [international location] opposed to living in [international location]. And that's on a safety, and that's from actual exposure myself kind of going I'm not comfortable being here and not comfortable being OUT here, you know (LGBTQ+ Parent 2).

There were **several aspects to the stories of participants that highlighted how other intersectional aspects of their identities layered with their LGBTQ+ identities to complicate their everyday negotiations of school life.** Several parents acknowledged how having been separated or divorced brought a new layer of 'out of placeness', particularly as they negotiated the middle class, homogenised and conservative values of certain school contexts, both rural and urban. For example, one parent explained:

> we were all just treated like a normal heteronormative/ homonormative family. But when [Co-Parent 5] and I broke up, I became "other" again in a kind of weird way, not like... When it was a couple, people knew how to deal with it, with us. They just treated us like them, and not that they treated us like two men or like a man and woman, but they saw us as the same. And when we broke up, and when we were there, people struggled a lot more with us, and there was a lot less engagement with people, although they were very nice and all that kind of thing. You could see they didn't really know what to do (LGBTQ+ Parent 5).

Other parents explained that members of their were non-binary or a person of colour and these aspects came to the fore as they negotiated everyday life at school. Complications arose too when a parent was previously married to a man and passed as straight and she and her children shouldered the continuous burden of assessing whether to 'come out' about her identity to school community members. Such intersectional aspects increased significantly the layers of work required for the parents on an everyday basis.

### Summary of Findings From Cohort A, Families with LGBTQ+ Parents

Most parents in this study underwent significant work in negotiating their everyday worlds as same-gender parented families. They described this in terms of continuously negotiating assumptions, answering extra questions, and having to 'come out' as a family unit. Most parents were very conscious that, in the various facets of their everyday lives, their children had very few representations of LGBTQ+ people and/or LGBTQ+ parented families and so they tried to seek out LGBTQ+ visibility in different ways, through social activities but also through representation in books and resources, so that their children might see their families reflected in their lives.

The vast majority of parents articulated attempting to avoid sending their children to Catholic primary schools. The parents whose children managed to attend multi-denominational schools had sought out a non-Catholic school from the outset and were relieved that they had had the option to do so. The majority of parents assumed that a multi-denominational school would protect their child. They acknowledged that some Catholic schools could be progressive and that the staff in them could be very open, but they considered the Catholic 'ethos' itself to be a barrier and a risk to the meaningful inclusion of their child and their family form or a child who was identifying as LGBTQ+. Several parents articulated the risk for their child specifically in relation to the faith formation teaching of religion during the school day in Catholic schools and explained that their children were 'different enough' and didn't need to be further marked as 'other'.

Most parents outlined that in their dealing with schools, administrative systems were not always reflective of their family form. Celebratory aspects of school life were also highlighted as moments that required extra negotiation on the part of the families and sometimes the teachers too. Several parents asserted that, irrespective of how progressive they were in their own views, staff could be fearful and/or not on solid ground where it came to enacting LGBTQ+ inclusivity in an explicit way. Some parents worried a lot about the threat of right-wing religious influence in their school and how associated campaigns were having a potently negative impact on teacher confidence in and willingness to be overtly LGBTQ+ inclusive. Some noted that they were continuously fearful of the hostile, homophobic parent. While most parents described overall having a positive experience in their school, several parents mentioned that their children reported hearing homophobia and transphobia at school and/or a de-legitimising of their family form, and a few parents acknowledged that some staff were resistant when it came to LGBTQ+ inclusivity. Many parents emphasised the huge significance when there were other LGBTQ+ people in the school community. Parents were particularly relieved and delighted when there were other LGBTQ+ parented families in their class and/or school. It was evident too that the principal, school leaders and staff played a crucial role in how LGBTQ+ inclusive a

school felt and having an LGBTQ+ staff member in the school was also crucial for several parents.

The parents' accounts in this study confirmed how hard they worked to achieve a kind of ordinary, easy visibility and inclusivity for their children in a quiet, non-confrontational way. Most were acutely conscious of not 'rocking the boat' and worked to achieve inclusivity for their children in a non-demanding way. Some parents felt a responsibility to be representative, in a nuanced way, that allowed other people to see that their family form was ordinary, just like others. Most parents – predominantly women – felt the need to be 'on it'; to be members of school committees and boards and to find ways to ensure that their school was as LGBTQ+ inclusive as it could be. They negotiated the gendered dynamics too of stereotypical assumptions that two mothers in the family meant that they were doubly organised and prepared, and felt extra pressure to perform what some referred to as the 'super mom' phenomenon. There were several aspects to the stories of participants that highlighted how other intersectional aspects layered with their LGBTQ+ identities to complicate their everyday negotiations of school life such as social class, relationships status and having children of colour.

## Findings From Cohort B, Families with LGBTQ+ Youth

### Gender Identity and Expression Over Time

All of the pupils in this study **articulated their gender identity in very sophisticated and articulate ways from an early age.** Like many others, one mother explains how the journey began at 10 months old:

> from she was about 10 months old, and like her first Christmas, she just cried and cried, like put her sister's Frozen dress on her and then wanted to play with her sister's Frozen castle...progressively from then on, she only ever...she just showed a preference for like female kind of stereotypical toys and pink and wanted to wear her sister's clothes, and I definitely thought she was gay... and that's OK. We can handle gay. Then, when she was about four, she spoke to my mum first. She was just watching TV with her and just said that she wanted to be a girl, and we just kind of didn't really do much with her. We were just like, OK, don't know what that means, you know. But then from four years old, now and again she would just bring that up. 'I want to be a girl'. Or 'I am a girl', or she would want to wear wigs. Or she'll put towels in her head to have like long hair. And so I think, maybe from about 5-6 I kind of in my head was like, oh, we could be dealing with transgender (Parent of Child 3).

As this account illustrates, most children expressed their gender through vehement rejection of clothes, toys and modes of expression that were typically associated with their birth-assigned gender. Later, once some children had transitioned, their parents talked about them 'relaxing' a little more into their gender, being less concerned about rigidly corresponding with gender norms and stereotypes:

it was like once she felt accepted, and once she felt that everyone in her world was like, yeah, you're a girl, there's no question, that she then was able to just relax back into her own sense of style (Parent of Child 7).

Across the cohort of LGBTQ+ identifying children, **there was a diversity of experiences and expressions of their gender.** Some children had positive relationships with their bodies. Some who had had displayed body dysphoria in the past had come to accept their bodies for now. Some children and their parents were thinking and talking about the possibility of medicalised pathways. Some children continued to demonstrate dysphoria and would hold in the upset mostly until it came out in bursts at certain times. Mostly, as children were accepted or they had successfully made a social transition in their families, communities and schools, they were generally more positive in themselves:

in about fifth class the anxiety started waning going into school...he needed less and less, and no panic attacks, and just the anxiety totally decreased (Parent of Child 5).

However, for some children the upset and pain remain very present:

But there's turmoil. And it really is that sense of turmoil and pain churning inside. But he just puts on a "Ahh, everything is alright, mom. Don't worry about a thing" to the world, and even at home. And then it will reach a point, and even you, you mentioned the meltdowns that I spoke about previously still happens, and that he'll reach a point, and he'll just get really stressed, and he'll get really upset, but again finds it difficult to articulate (Parent of Child 6).

**Safe or safety were commonly used words amongst both the children and their parents.** For instance, in talking about her future secondary school, one child explained:

I don't know much about it, but it does seem like the most friendly school, or like the safest school to be in, you know?...I mean, safe to be myself...They had a couple Pride flags outside like the classrooms and science rooms and the art rooms. I mean, I pointed it out and said, "How cool is that," you know, because that's another reason that I want to go there for knowing that it's a Safe Sphere school (Child 7).

**Covid lockdowns were reported by parents as a time of safety and reprieve** for several children and their families who were coming to terms with gender identity. Time and space away from school allowed them to grapple with aspects of their identity in the safety of their homes and families. For example, one parent said:

during COVID, she just came in to me, and she just said you can call me X now...it was in COVID, so it was very protective, and you know. She was just surrounded by family, and she wasn't going to socially transition in school. She had decided she would just do it around family and friends (Parent of Child 3).

Another parent explained:

COVID came, so he was out of school for so much of the time, which was super. He loved that. And yeah, he did kind of like going back to his friends a little bit, but it

was again that safe bubble of being at home with us. And with it, it's just safe, isn't it? It's a safe place, and it's comfortable (Parent of Child 6).

Most parents noted that **their children just wanted to be ordinary and live their lives.** Though, these parents acknowledged that this was very difficult to achieve. The parent of child 6 explained how when thinking ahead to secondary school, he asserted:

"I'm just going to go in and be me"...I'm not gonna tell people, but I'm not gonna not tell people...I'm not gonna, like, be waving a big trans flag or anything, but if somebody asked me, I'd tell them (Parent of Child 6).

This quest for ordinariness for some involved a rejection of any celebratory aspect of being LGBTQ+. One parent said:

he's not celebratory about it or, you know, that kind of way...And I mean, that might change the more people you meet...He hasn't been enveloped in that unity yet. Or you know what I mean? To see the fun side of it or whatever. But, you know, or maybe he never will. Maybe he'll just float away the way he's going, you know (Parent of Child 5).

## Parents: Constant Work and Worry

As they talked, the parents in this study demonstrated that they **thought a huge amount about how to advocate for their child and how to help them along and respond to them, without guiding them or leading them** in any way. Several parents worried and were careful not to be 'leading':

So I would dance around it, but I just wouldn't give the word. And even with the books and that kind of thing, I didn't get them, and I didn't read them because you just always see or hear that thing of like the parents made them, or, you know, the parents putting that on their child, or parents are living that through their child, or, you know, just let the child have that. It's just a fear, or, you know, you're making more out of it than it should have been, you're making a mountain out of a mole hill (Parent of Child 3).

This parent went on the explain this palpable sense of worry that she and other parents that she knows through support groups will be **judged for supporting their child:**

This thing of like 'it's a phase' or you know, 'parents are putting things in their kids mouths'. Like if you could see how assured my child is, like you could not see her as anything else unless you're looking in her underwear, which you should not be doing. So, like she is as confident and assured as she is than probably most adults. You know, and yeah, that just she has that resilience that, yeah, if you could bottle it up, you would be a millionaire (Parent of Child 3).

When their children had made the step to transition at school, **several parents wrote letters** on their behalf for circulation to staff and parents, explaining their child's history, situation, their decision to socially transition and what that would look like. Other parents – usually having been asked by staff – **went about finding books and resources** that could help the school

understand about gender diversity and LGBTQ+ inclusivity more broadly. While most parents were happy to do this work, one parent pointed out the **problem in the onus being on the parent** to educate the teacher about LGBTQ+ inclusivity:

> She was wanting to learn, wanting to get to...where do I go? what do we do? how do we learn? And I did sort of thing to myself, OK... It IS positive...but it's also actually not appropriate. You don't ask the parent, "How do I learn?" You're the teacher, and I'm sending my kid to your school six hours a day, and what, you're gonna tell me now that you need me to educate you on how to be inclusive? And as I've said, I have a lot of respect for [the principal], and I adore her, and I think she's amazing and everything, and she's been on a learning process too. But I do remember that particular meeting thinking to myself, no, it's not my job to educate you (Parent of Child 7).

In saying this, **many parents were mostly grateful** to have had a positive reaction and were **acutely aware of not 'rocking the boat'** with their advocacy for their child and not over-stepping the mark and becoming the 'problem' parent.

**A child's social transition at school was made all the more complicated if a partner or ex-partner did not agree**. One parent described a situation whereby her ex-partner would not affirm his child's gender identity and, because of this, the school found themselves in a difficult position. The parent of this child was particularly angry, arguing that in a child-centred approach, the child herself should be heard:

> but we have psychological proof from the psychologists' survey that this is damaging the child, so we could stand behind that. Do you know what I mean?...But I understand why they didn't because I've been on the Board of Management, and I understand that would have gone to a group of 12 people, some of whom run other schools, and they would have said, No, the last thing we want is like a parent coming in here and suing the school or whatever. So I do understand why they didn't do that, but again, child's best interest should trump, and "Educate Together" is meant to be a child-centred school. And what does that mean if it's not in practice, child-centred? (Parent of Child 7).

**All parents worried about the potential of a hostile or transphobic parent.** Unfortunately, one parent described a harrowing story whereby the fact that their child was coming out as trans at school was the subject of a series of official and legal complaints. Other parents described less extreme stories but nonetheless were very aware of the rise of transphobia and worried about their child being subject to such narratives, or worse still, violence, as they went about their everyday lives.

Overall, **the hugely powerful impact of supportive and affirming parents was evident across the accounts of this study**. Both children who themselves participated in interviews were very grateful for their parents' support and affirming care. One child said:

> I am very lucky (Child 1)

while the other child had a keen awareness of having grown up with a very open and supportive mother and been surrounded by happiness:

> everyone around me is happy, and that would obviously make me happy, you know? And everyone around me is, like, I feel I just know I can be safe around them, and I feel safe around them, which is another way to make me happy, you know? (Child 7).

## Schools: Generally Well-Intentioned and Supportive, but Reactive and Ill-Prepared

Most parents talked about how when their children were disclosing their trans identity at first or expressing a wish to make a social transition at school, the **staff in their school were generally not adequately educated about gender identity diversity** or prepared to facilitate a child to socially transition at school. For example, one parent said:

> they really didn't have a clue (Parent of Child 5).

But, mirroring a lot of contexts, this parent went on to explain that given the place they started from, the school responded quickly and did well to try to support in whatever way they could:

> school did absolutely amazingly when I think about it, because [Child 5] was definitely the first transgender child to come out in the school, you know? So they really didn't have a clue, and we didn't have a clue at that time as well. We were at the same level as them, you know. So I mean, the fact that I remember now, [the principal], the principal going to [Support Service] and everything, that's pretty incredible (Parent of Child 5).

Several parents and children confirmed that the **knowledge, comfort levels and openness of the principal were crucial** in ensuring the overall LGBTQ+ inclusivity of the school and one child illustrated this explaining that she felt supported and safe in the school because of the principal's leadership, reaction and responsiveness:

> Yeah, my principal's really nice. She's really kind. And like every time she comes into our class, she always lets us know that if we ever we need to talk to her, we can just come down and talk to her. She's really nice. She's really sweet, you know? Yeah she always comes in and is checking on us. She does like watch people out on break. Like she goes out on break to make sure nobody does anything (Child 7).

One parent generally had great confidence in their school staff's ability to ensure gender inclusiveness but, like several other parents, acknowledged that there is a **randomness to the knowledge and comfort level of each primary school staff member:**

> You're very much at the mercy of the teacher you've got. And we've had amazing ones and bad ones. On the flip side... I've always felt that there is a whole school atmosphere and a kind of collegiality. And when I talk to the teachers... I know the teachers who I feel have particular comfort and fluency in these sorts of issues (Parent of Child 4).

Ultimately, the **power and impact of supportive, caring, open staff members, peers and parents** were emphasised as crucial by all parents. Several participants reported positive experiences. For example:

> he was just accepted as a boy and that was it. And it hasn't been any different since. There was no... like we didn't have any bad experiences after that or nothing came up that made him feel otherwise. You know, he was totally accepted (Parent of Child 5).

Most children also reported having **specifically positive and moving experiences with their peers.** One child said:

> Probably my number one [moment] is when I told my best friend that I was trans, and they said that that was okay.... Like, that really made my school a better place. Like that was the biggest change in my time at school (Child 7).

While most parents and children echoed this idea that the people in their primary school were the most important factors in ensuring LGBTQ+ inclusivity and how they felt on an everyday basis, several parents and children acknowledged that the ***Educate Together* equality-based ethos bolstered the staff in the school to be supportive.** For example, one child said:

> it's like an Educate Together. You know, you're never really going to be shunned or shamed for being different. You can always ask. And you know you can talk to teachers if need be about stuff like that. I think they're all very open about like talking to students about any issues they have... I'm actually really lucky... I'm in a school that's really open to that kind of stuff. I didn't have to worry about what are people gonna think of me if I come out because was just able to do that. I was able to just say, yeah, I'm trans. There was nothing weird about it. I wasn't separated from anyone because some of them might have had experiences like me, or some of them just might have also been LGBT, and they wouldn't have known. It wouldn't have been like I was different to anyone (Child 1).

Some parents noted that while they were grateful for their school's positive reaction, they **would have liked a more proactive approach to LGBTQ+ inclusivity**; one that would mean that they wouldn't be on the back foot in addressing the needs of their child. One parent noted:

> this is something I've really really noticed, the first step is always the individual solution, and if you can get an individual solution that works in the context of a busy school building... (Parent of Child 3).

Another parent said:

> they are quite inclusive, but there wouldn't be, as far as I know...anything proactive in terms of publicizing anything [LGBTQ+ inclusivity-wise]...Like I have a lot of Pride things that I wear...it's just supposed to show that we're inclusive. But I haven't seen anything in the school, and they have... so there's a Catholic ethos. I don't know if that affects it, but they're quite accepting of families of different makeup (Parent of Child 2).

One parent of a child with a more fluid relationship with gender explained that even if schools are using resources proactively, they ought to ensure that they are fully reflective of gender diversity:

for parents like me, whose child doesn't really identify as trans, that I've, I find it inappropriate to use trans materials to talk about…Because, you know, we're very consciously not transitioning, you know, and quite consciously trying to undermine the binary, and all that sort of stuff. And so you know, a lot of trans information which I get really, really works for children who transition. doesn't work for children who are more fluid (Parent of Child 4).

Contrary to most of the accounts so far, some **children and parents had experienced negative reactions to their child coming out or expressing a wish to transition at school.** One parent reported a very difficult experience with their principal which made negotiating her son's social transition at school an extra trying time:

I think with the principal it was a combination of **lack of education, experience, and also a stubbornness** to be the person in charge and didn't want to be… an **unwillingness to learn** or to have put a hand up and say that they didn't know something (Parent of Child 6).

One parent reported that her child – who was attending an all-boys primary school - was **not taken seriously** when she eventually worked up the courage to talk to the school:

they were…definitely not putting any weight to it or any…it was just very much a passing, like… all right, OK… piece of information. Yeah, it definitely wasn't any weight to it? (Parent of Child 3).

After some time, the parent contacted the only other school in the area, an all-girls school – but was met with **significant resistance to the idea that her child would attend the all-girls school:**

so she asked me a couple of questions. She asked me what therapy [Child 3] has had. Yeah, she doesn't need any therapy… And then she asked me, how could she… how would she respond to the parents that in good faith are sending their children to an all-girls school? So she was very much putting up the walls, trying to, in her most professional way, but she was putting up the walls already, and I was like, if I have to battle her here now, just to enter the school, I'm going to have such a fight in my hands when, [Child 3]'s in the school (Parent of Child 3).

Indeed, several parents noted that resistance and reluctance to their child's transition at school was very often positioned in relation to a fear around the reaction of other parents.

Ultimately, parents emphasised the **absolute need for schools to be proactively LGBTQ+ inclusive but also to be supportive and affirming, especially in light of the rise in transphobia and moral panics around gender diversity** in the public sphere. One parent powerfully articulated this as follows:

So there's a lot of, there's a lot of panic around people like my daughter and my daughter. Has is has been seen by all the professionals. You could be seen by… And all of them have said she is well adjusted and happy and confident and no mental illness. No issue. There's nothing. There's nothing wrong with this child… And all the evidence shows that the best practice is that we should continue to support her and since. She has been fully supported. She has flourished. And she has become

even more confident, and she has become so much better, better able for the world and just more, more confident, happier, more well-adjusted. Everything that gets said about kids like her she is, is I don't recognise my daughter in those stories because no one is telling stories about a 5 year old girl who said mom, I'm a girl and was accepted and loved and supported by her family and then went to school and was accepted and loved and supported by her classmates and by her teachers and who has just been happy and joyful and thriving and flourishing ever since. Not needed any extra supports of any kind from anyone else in society other than just to be loved and supported, and that is a story that I think needs to be told as well because she is a real-life child living in Ireland. And this is evidence backed truthfulness by her very being... And we have all the expert reports. I wish people could understand that all trans children's experiences aren't the same but that when trans children are supported and loved by their families and by their communities and by their schools, they flourish, their life gets easier, they become happier, they become more confident (Parent of Child 7).

## The Gender Binary in Primary Schools and the Impact for Trans and Gender Diverse Children

Parents and children in this study described several aspects of school life that demonstrate how **the gender binary is deeply embedded in primary school life in overt and subtle ways** that very often pose difficulties of trans and gender diverse children.

Several parents and children noted that gendered language, groupings and segregation by gender probably happened regularly, but it was hard for parents to know the minutiae of what happened in classrooms unless their child reported it. One child gave some examples of gender segregation:

> Sometimes in maths they do that, boys verses girls...like in PE sometimes, it's boys verses girls (Child 7).

For these activities, this child was put in the 'girl group' so she generally didn't mind. Another parent noted how their child reported gender segregation happening a lot but when she asked for this to be changed, the school and teachers adapted:

> some teachers, particularly older ones, may have put them into groups. A lot of boys and girls, but...it was addressed. Then she didn't come back with any other issue. And she just gets on with it (Parent of Child 2).

**PE and sport were mentioned prominently by several parents.** Some children loved sport and participated in mixed teams in and outside school while others reported that they were permitted to play on single-gender teams; teams that aligned with their gender. One child was initially upset when her club separated them by gender by age 6 but she accepted it:

> And the sports, I think they were about 6 when they segregated for, GAA. No, that was an issue for her. But like I said, it wasn't a huge issue because if it was, I would have pushed for it to go with the boys, but she was actually like, my friends are going, so she was fine with that (Parent of Child 2).

Other parents reported that even though their children liked sport and were sporty, they shied away from sport, in the following case as a result of a transphobic incident that the parent didn't elaborate on:

> *Parent of Child 6:* he probably has a natural sporting ability, but he's shied away from that very significantly. And he had an uncomfortable experience at a sports camp a couple of years ago and left the camp and hasn't been back, so I think that's kind of... he's just, that's what sport is. He kicked the ball around, you know, with friends at lunchtime or in the park or something, but hasn't progressed that
>
> *Interviewer:* So, when you say uncomfortable, are you are you talking about related to...a transphobic incident or...?
>
> *Parent of Child 6:* Yes, and he just hasn't come back, and I think sport is... that's the end of that.

**Swimming also came up as a central talking point for many parents.** Swimming was a concern mentioned by several primary school staff members when they spoke to the parents in this study. One parent reported that the school, when broaching the subject, assumed that her child wouldn't be going swimming:

> the teacher wanted to speak with me, and she called me, and, you know, wanted to have meeting...and God love her like, with the best of intention, she was like, 'now we're going swimming. We're starting swimming lessons. And I assume [Child 3] won't be going'. And I was just like 'why?' She was like, 'well, just everything'. I was like, 'no... if she wants to go, I will make sure that she has everything that she needs to be comfortable. I'll get her one of the big poncho towels. And I was like, no, she loves going swimming. Like if I need to go out and change her in a separate cubicle, like I.... she's not missing those things'. So the teacher, then, was able to ask me some questions and get a bit more of a better understanding because obviously, if you haven't dealt with this and it is on you, you know, you can be mind-blown by it all and how it works. (Parent of Child 3)

Most schools and parents worked out ways to ensure that the child was happy and content to take part and comfortable in changing rooms. For some children, they were happy changing in the changing rooms of their birth-assigned gender. For others, staff facilitated the child to go to a separate wheelchair accessible cubicle.

**Most parents reported that toilets were gender segregated in their schools.** In some situations, children were encouraged to use whichever toilet they wanted, even when there were gendered symbols embedded in the doors, as this child explains:

> there is a picture of like the girl stickman and the boy stickman, but the teacher says that that doesn't matter. Just use whatever toilet you want, you know. (Child 7)

In other situations, the toilets are not single cubicle toilets with separate entrances but are instead large, gendered toilets and so one child, although upset about it at first, has accepted that she[33] has to use the girls' toilets:

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[33] This child uses pronouns she/her, has identified as a boy in the past, unclear at present and will not say.

And in terms of gender with school toilets and things, she could have made it an issue, but she didn't. She just goes to the girls and that's it (Parent of Child 2).

**Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) was talked about as a problem area in several interviews.** Mirroring the swimming situation, one parent explained that it was assumed that her child would step out and not take part in the sex education classes:

The SPHE [teacher] as well as Principal had said to me "[Child 5] could not come in on that day, or could leave the room or whatever?" and I said "no way, I said "that's going to draw huge attention to him. I wouldn't even have thought of it... no...because if he's gone for that why is he gone for that? (Parent of Child 5).

One parent did some prior advocacy, attempting to ensure that the groups weren't separated and all children could attend 'the talks' together:

there was a lot of back and forth about...was [having mixed gender classes] appropriate, would that be traumatizing for them? And I made the point 'this isn't about Fred, boys need to know about girls' reproductive systems and girls need to know about boys' reproductive systems and how it all works. That's just life (Parent of Child 1)

Another parent was critical of the curriculum and how its emphasis on biology:

So I asked them how they taught it [Relationship and Sexuality Education] and they said, 'oh, we just use the curriculum'. And I looked at the curriculum. It's like. And it's so awful...they do get tripped up in the biological detail and when they're teaching RSE [Relationship and Sexuality Education], particularly this Catholic curriculum that they have, it is entirely about penises and vaginas... (Parent of Child 4)

Unfortunately, **several parents and children reporting hearing or being subject to disrespect of their gender and transphobic insults.**

One parent explained that children and adults hear homophobic and transphobic comments all the time and that it doesn't have to be direct bullying to be hurtful:

It doesn't have to be direct bullying to have an impact. I found that as a young person and I still find it as an adult that people will say homophobic things around me rather than to me. And, but that's very kind of hurtful in its own right. So even though it might seem that no child is being directly bullied, if there isn't a good atmosphere, they're still failing at something (Parent of Child 1).

One child explained a difficult situation he had experienced, though they didn't articulate it as transphobia:

Like the story is, I had this toy... we were all playing around with it. And eventually like, I took it back and this one kid at my table, he hadn't gotten a chance to play with the toy. So he was like, oh, [Child 1 name], can you give me the pen? And I said no, I'm putting it away now. And it's always been kind of funny how, like, abrupt it was, but it did upset me quite a bit, just out of nowhere. And then instead of saying [Child 1 name], he says the wrong name. And like he says it again. And, you know, I was obviously upset, and like my whole table was just kind of looking at him like, hey, you can't say that. You can't do that. So in terms of what I think, like obviously

it wasn't the teacher's fault that he did that because like the teacher hadn't heard a thing. And I never told the teacher because I just wasn't bothered, honestly.... Yeah, I didn't want it to turn into a big thing. So I just kind of... and then like it was right before the school day ended, so I didn't have to worry about it all day because by the time it was sort of finished up, I want to say the bell had rang, and we had left.

Another parent reported that their child had been subject to a few incidents in the school yard:

Two boys kind of came up to her in the yard, and she was sitting down, and they kicked her, and they said 'you're not a girl'. And she was very upset about that. And then the other two incidences were he... kind of like slapped her or something in the stairway or something and said something like, "You're not a girl" or something like that' (Parent of Child 7).

## Summary of Findings From Cohort B, Families with LGBTQ+ Children

All of the pupils in this study articulated their gender identity in very sophisticated, articulate and vehement ways from an early age. Safe or safety were commonly used words amongst both the children and their parents. Covid lockdowns were reported by parents as a time of safety and reprieve for several children and their families who were coming to terms with gender identity. Most parents noted that their children just wanted to be ordinary and live their lives. Though, these parents acknowledged that this was very difficult to achieve.

The parents of LGBTQ+ identifying children demonstrated that they thought a huge amount about how to advocate for their child and how to help them along and respond to them, without guiding them or leading them in any way and worried about being judged for supporting their child. Parents did significant work including writing a letter to school communities explaining their circumstances and sourcing books and resources underlining how the onus was mostly on the parents to educate the teacher about LGBTQ+ inclusivity. All parents worried about the potential of a hostile or transphobic parent and most parents were grateful to have had a positive reaction in their schools. They were, thus, acutely aware of being careful in their advocacy for their child and not over-stepping the mark or becoming the 'problem' parent. Overall, all parents emphasised the hugely powerful impact of supportive and affirming parents was evident across the accounts of this study.

# Discussion

## Policy and Planning

Policy development with regard to LGBTQ+ inclusivity has moved forward in some ways in primary schools. Half of the staff who responded to this survey reported that their anti-bullying policy included information on education and/or prevention strategies in relation to homophobic, biphobic and transphobic bullying. Many primary school staff also reported developing an equality policy independent of their bullying policy with many mentioning sexual orientation, gender identity or LGBTQ+ people explicitly. On the other hand, 2 in 10 staff reported that their anti-bullying policy did not include information on education and/or prevention strategies in relation to homophobic, biphobic and transphobic bullying and 3 in 10 respondents reported that they did not know. There is significant room for improvement in planning for continuing professional development (CPD) with regard to LGBTQ+ inclusivity. Half of the respondents had never participated in CPD related to LGBTQ+ inclusivity and half of the respondents rated themselves as 3 stars or less in terms for their preparedness.

Given the lack of CPD access or engagement, it is perhaps unsurprising that the interviews revealed that the onus was mostly on parents to educate staff about LGBTQ+ inclusivity. Mirroring research in the UK (Carlile and Paechter, 2018), LGBTQ+ parents described continuous work negotiating assumptions, answering extra questions, and having to 'come out' as a family unit. Some LGBTQ+ parents felt a responsibility to be representative of LGBTQ+ people, in a nuanced way, that allowed other people to see that their family form was ordinary, just like others. Most LGBTQ+ parents outlined that in their dealing with schools, administrative systems were not always reflective of their family form. Celebratory aspects of school life were also highlighted as moments that required extra negotiation on the part of LGBTQ+ parents, and sometimes the teachers too. Parents did significant work on a daily basis, including writing letters to school communities, explaining their circumstances, and sourcing books and resources. Several parents asserted that, irrespective of how progressive they were in their own views, staff could be fearful and/or not on solid ground where it came to enacting LGBTQ+ inclusivity in an explicit way.

Most parents in this study – predominantly women – felt the need to be 'on it'; to be members of school committees and boards and to find ways to ensure that their school was as LGBTQ+ inclusive as it could be. LGBTQ+ parents negotiated the gendered dynamics too of stereotypical assumptions that two mothers in the family meant that they were doubly organised and prepared, and felt extra pressure to perform what some referred to as the 'super mom' phenomenon. Across both cohorts, there were other intersectional aspects of their lives that layered with their own, or their

children's LGBTQ+ identities to complicate their everyday negotiations of school life. Aspects such as social class, relationships status, 'race' and ethnicity came to the fore in their accounts as requiring extra energy, work and negotiation.

## Relationships and Partnerships

Survey respondents overall were very comfortable with the idea of a colleague or a parent coming out or being openly LGBTQ+, though, some staff noted that they still heard casualised homophobia, biphobia and transphobia amongst staff. While more than half of staff never heard subtle derogatory comments or jokes about LGBTQ+ people amongst pupils, almost a third of staff heard this kind of commentary every few months. Overt homophobic, biphobic and transphobic bullying were rarer, but many staff reported that this still occurred every few months. The vast majority of staff were comfortable with the idea of a pupil coming out as LGBTQ+ but they mentioned some mediating factors. They reported that knowing somebody who was LGBTQ+ had a positive impact while many staff worried about the reactions of other children, parents. They also talked about reluctances related to school ethos and had specific considerations related to the age of the pupil who was coming out. Many respondents stated that they would like proactive additional support and guidance to know how best to support a child who was 'coming out' as LGBTQ+ or socially transitioning at school.

While most parents across the interviews described having largely positive experiences in their schools, several parents noted that their children reported hearing homophobia, biphobia and transphobia at school and/or a legitimising of their family form, and a few parents acknowledged that some staff were resistant when it came to LGBTQ+ inclusivity. The vast majority of parents worried about the potential of a hostile homophobic, biphobic or transphobic parent, and most parents were grateful to have had a positive reaction in their schools. Some parents worried a lot about the threat of right-wing religious influence in their school and how associated campaigns were having a potently negative impact on teacher confidence in and willingness to be overtly LGBTQ+ inclusive.

Overall, interviews with family members emphasised the hugely powerful impact of supportive and inclusive staff, peers, and school communities. Many LGBTQ+ parents emphasised the huge significance when there were other LGBTQ+ people in the school community. Parents were particularly relieved when there were other LGBTQ+ parented families or children in their class and/or school. Similarly, parents delighted in having an LGBTQ+ staff member in the school who had the potential to advocate for LGBTQ+ inclusivity in their school. It was evident that the principal, school leaders and staff played a crucial role in how LGBTQ+ inclusive a school felt

but most parents acknowledged that this was unpredictable, individualised and left to chance.

## Culture & Environment

Overall, half of primary school staff rated their school as 3 stars (out of 5) or less in terms its overall LGBTQ+ inclusivity. Many respondents spoke of an active or visible approach to LGBTQ+ inclusivity in their schools and half of the respondents rated their schools as 4 or 5 stars. However, there was a discrepancy between their 4 or 5 star ratings, and what these staff reported on their practice, indicating perhaps a lack of understanding of what good LGBTQ+ inclusive practice looks like. Furthermore, a large number of respondents understood inclusivity in reactive terms rather than proactive terms.

Across all types of schools, many staff reported that their ethos positively impacted on LGBTQ+ inclusivity. However, many staff members in Catholic schools explained that their ethos was a significant barrier with regard to LGBTQ+ inclusivity. Many respondents also noted that there was a fear of repercussion if LGBTQ+ issues were discussed in the classroom, or if a more visible/proactive approach was taken to LGBTQ+ inclusivity. Many respondents mentioned too the role of parents and school management as mediating factors that can be a barrier to a school's approach to LGBTQ+ inclusivity. Aligned with previous research in the Irish context, many also referred to the notion that a school overall could be inclusive, but the level of inclusivity and the approach taken to LGBTQ+ inclusivity was largely ad hoc and individual to staff members (Neary et al., 2017). There were also many staff members who noted that the topic of LGBTQ+ inclusivity was never mentioned in their school and many who felt that their school was not LGBTQ+ inclusive. Perhaps fitting with such experiences, there were some respondents who articulated the belief that sexuality was a private matter and indicated that LGBTQ+ inclusivity should not be spoken about in school.

The reluctances related to religious ethos were echoed in the interviews with the families. Fitting with research in the UK (McDonald and Morgan, 2019), LGBTQ+ parents carefully evaluated potential primary schools for their child based on how LGBTQ+ inclusive they might be. Perhaps unique to the character of Irish schooling, the vast majority of parents in this study attempted to avoid sending their children to Catholic primary schools. The LGBTQ+ parents who managed to secure their child's attendance at a multi-denominational school had sought out a non-Catholic school from the outset and were relieved that they had had the option to do so. The majority of LGBTQ+ parents assumed that a multi-denominational school would protect their child. They acknowledged that some Catholic schools could be progressive, and that the staff in them could be very open, but they considered the Catholic ethos itself to be a barrier and a risk to the

meaningful inclusion of their child and their family form or a child who was identifying as LGBTQ+. Several LGBTQ+ parents articulated the risk for their child specifically in relation to the faith formation model of teaching religion during the school day in Catholic schools and explained that their children were 'different enough' and didn't need to be further marked as 'other'. Amongst the LGBTQ+ children and their parents who attended *Educate Together* schools, the emphasis was on how the equality-based ethos allowed them to be themselves and made them feel 'safe'. Children and parents alike across both cohorts delighted in seeing a rainbow flag or a symbol that represented LGBTQ+ inclusivity in schools. Most parents acknowledged the power and impact of ethos but also highlighted the ultimate significance of individual staff who showed support, empathy, solidarity and affirmation.

## Curriculum (Teaching and Learning)

The vast majority of survey respondents believed it was important for all staff to know about LGBTQ+ inclusivity. The vast majority also believed that same-gender parented families should be included when talking about all family types and that lessons with LGBTQ+ characters included in the same way as heterosexual characters. In the qualitative questions, a large number of respondents reiterated the need for full LGBTQ+ support and inclusivity in primary schools, emphasising the need for LGBTQ+ representation in lessons and resources. Some qualified that this would need to be in an age-appropriate way, albeit without any consistent explanation of what constituted age-appropriateness with regard to LGBTQ visibility (Neary and Rasmussen, 2020).

Overall, echoing research internationally (Bartholomaeus, Riggs and Yarrow, 2017; Payne and Smith, 2014; Meyer et al., 2019), confidence in knowledge levels of primary school staff about LGBTQ+ inclusivity was low. A large majority of staff reported that they never either proactively or reactively organised any whole-school LGBTQ+ inclusive activities. Despite confidence levels being low, the majority of staff either always or sometimes included LGBTQ+ parented families when talking about other family types; included LGBTQ+ public figures in lessons; used LGBTQ+ inclusive books or resources in an LGBTQ+ inclusive way and reported that they taught SPHE/RSE in an LGBTQ+ inclusive way. However, nonetheless, a significant portion of staff reported that they didn't enact LGBTQ+ inclusive teaching and learning practices, and confidence in knowledge levels bears a significant relationship to the type of teaching and learning practices being enacted.

Mirroring research internationally, many respondents acknowledged the need to improve and to do better, and they shared their willingness to do so in qualitative commentary (Leonardi and Staley, 2018; Bochiccio et al., 2019; Payne and Smith 2014). However, they cited multi-faceted barriers to engaging in LGBTQ+ inclusive teaching and learning in their schools. The role of the

school ethos, school management, and parents were all mentioned as mediating factors in staff approaches to LGBTQ+ inclusivity in their teaching and learning. Some respondents stated that they couldn't approach LGBTQ+ in a way in which they felt was appropriate, as they were restricted by the ethos of the school and/or did not feel supported by the school management. Parents were also referred to in many responses. Some respondents felt parents carry the sole responsibility of teaching their children about LGBTQ+ issues, while others felt that parents have the right to be consulted before the topic is spoken about in school.

Aligned with research internationally around primary school staff and LGBTQ+ inclusivity (van Leent, 2017), many respondents continuously reiterated the need for teacher education, CPD, support and guidance. Many stated that curriculum reform is needed, and that LGBTQ+ should be explicitly mentioned in the primary school curriculum to ensure they felt comfortable talking about LGBTQ+ issues in primary schools. Many felt as though they were restricted in their approach to LGBTQ+ inclusivity in the SPHE/RSE programme their schools used and a large number of respondents felt that more resources were needed in order to do carry out effective LGBTQ+ inclusive teaching and learning.

In the interviews, most LGBTQ+ parents were very conscious that, in the various facets of their everyday lives, their children had very few representations of LGBTQ+ people and/or LGBTQ+ parented families and so they tried to seek out LGBTQ+ visibility in different ways through social activities but also through representation in books and resources, so that their children might see their families and identities reflected in their everyday lives. Most parents across the two cohorts noted that they and their children just wanted to be ordinary and live their lives. Though, many parents acknowledged that this was very difficult to achieve. Safe or safety were commonly used words, particularly amongst the LGBTQ+ children and their parents, and Covid lockdowns were reported by them as a time of safety and reprieve for several of these children and their families who were coming to terms with gender identity. The families across this study worked hard to achieve this kind of ordinary, easy visibility and inclusivity for their children in a quiet, non-confrontational way in their primary school communities. Most were acutely conscious of not 'rocking the boat' and worked hard to achieve inclusivity for their children in their primary school. Most of the parents of LGBTQ+ identifying children demonstrated that they thought a huge amount about how to advocate for their child, and how to help them along and respond to them, without guiding them or leading them in any way, and constantly worried about being judged for supporting their child. They were, thus, acutely aware of being careful in their advocacy for their child and not over-stepping the mark or becoming the 'problem' parent.

# Recommendations

## Recommendations to Policy-Makers

### Teacher Education

- **Integrate** LGBTQ+ awareness and inclusivity to undergraduate and postgraduate teacher-education programmes.
- **Provide** comprehensive Continued Professional Development (CPD) on LGBTQ+ awareness and identities to all primary staff, both teaching and non-teaching.
- **Invest** in the development of tailored professional development courses on specific areas of LGBTQ+ inclusivity as related to named policies and procedures, including on the areas of anti-bullying, coming out and social transition at school.
- **Encourage** school leadership, including principals, deputy principals, and Board of Management members, to take part in LGBTQ+ inclusivity training.

### Fostering LGBTQ+ Safe and Supportive Primary Schools

- **Fund** initiatives, similar to Belong To's LGBTQ+ Quality Mark for post-primary schools, which take a holistic approach to whole-school community LGBTQ+ inclusivity at primary level.
- **Engage** parents in LGBTQ+ inclusive work at primary level, including the provision of evidence-based information on the importance and impact of fostering an open and inclusive environment.
- **Resource** primary staff to foster LGBTQ+ inclusive practice through ongoing training, policy development and local information-sharing networks.

### Policy Review

- **Implement** Action 2.11 of *Cineáltas: Action Plan on Bullying* by reviewing and updating the SPHE/RSE curriculum across primary schools to ensure that it includes, in an age-appropriate manner, LGBTQ+ identities.
- **Retain** the specific naming of homophobic and transphobic bullying upon updating the *Anti-Bullying Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools*, as per action 3.3 of *Cineáltas: Action Plan on Bullying.*
- **Engage** with primary schools and the Inspectorate to ensure that, as per the existing *Anti-Bullying Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary*

*Schools* (Circular 45/2013), all primary schools explicitly name homophobic and transphobic bullying in their Anti-Bullying Policy, along with education and prevention strategies to tackle the same, and that all school staff are aware of these inclusions.

- **Prioritise** the implementation of Action 3.6 of *Cineáltas: Action Plan on Bullying* by developing and publishing an updated version of the *Being LGBT in School* resource, with the consideration of the provision of guidelines for primary schools.
- **Develop** clear guidelines for primary schools, grounded in Irish equality law and taking a rights-based approach, on LGBTQ+ inclusivity and its interaction with school ethos.
- **Include** outstanding actions under Objective 1 of the *LGBTI+ National Youth Strategy 2018-2022* in the new national LGBTQ+ inclusion strategy.

## Recommendations to Primary Schools

### Policy & Procedures

- **Ensure** the school anti-bullying policy:
  - o outlines bullying education and prevention strategies, and
  - o explicitly addresses homophobic, biphobic and transphobic bullying.
- **Communicate** school policies, particularly the anti-bullying policy, to staff, pupils, parents, guardians and carers regularly.
- **Implement** clear procedures for pupils and parents to report instances of harassment or discriminatory treatment by school staff.
- **Adopt** a school-wide zero-tolerance approach to homophobic, transphobic and biphobic remarks by recognising, intervening in and reporting all instances of such remarks.
- **Enact** education and prevention strategies to address homophobic, biphobic and transphobic bullying, as detailed in the school anti-bullying policy.

### Staff Actions

- **Facilitate** and **encourage** all school staff to take part in education and training on LGBTQ+ awareness, identities and experiences.
- **Include** LGBTQ+ identities and experiences across the school curriculum, in the library and in teaching resources.

**Student Supports**

- **Engage** the school community, including parents, in reviewing what more the school could do to support LGBTQ+ pupils, staff members and parents.
- **Develop** strong relationships with local LGBTQ+ support services, including Belong To's national Family Support Service, to facilitate referral pathways for parents, guardians, carers and pupils who require additional support.

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