

The Highland Council

Education, Children and Adult Services Committee 26 January 2017

Agenda Item	16.
Report No	ECAS 12/17

Time for Inclusive Education

Report by Director of Care and Learning

Summary

The 'Time for Inclusive Education' (TIE) campaign has raised awareness of the bullying experienced by LGBT+ pupils in schools. National statistics show there is a significant negative impact due to bullying on the mental health of LGBT+ young people in schools. Members have requested that this report be presented to the Education, Children & Adult Services Committee to provide information on how LGBT issues are being addressed in Highland schools and how bullying relating to gender identity or sexual orientation is being tackled in Highland.

1. Background

- 1.1 The Equality Act (2010) places specific duties on Education Authorities to address and prevent prejudice and disadvantage in relation to certain protected characteristics, including gender and sexual orientation.
- 1.2 Awareness of the extent and impact of homophobic and transphobic violence is gradually rising, helped by high profile campaigns by Stonewall, LGBT Youth Scotland, and the Time for Inclusive Education (TIE) campaign. At the same time, successive Scottish Social Attitudes Surveys have shown rising public support for efforts to reduce inequalities based on gender and sexual orientation.
- 1.3 In order to provide a specific focus on issues that relate to gender and sexual orientation, the Highland LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender) Equality Sub-Group was established as a sub-group of the Care and Learning Equalities Improvement Group. This group has been able to provide dedicated time to discuss, advise on and address issues that relate to LGBT children and young people in Highland schools and communities, and to work in partnership with national organisations to disseminate best practice on bullying prevention and support.
- 1.4 An early output from this group was the report presented to the Education, Children and Adult Services Committee on 12 November 2014 regarding the research being undertaken by the Highland Council Psychological Service on young people's experiences of homophobic bullying within one Highland secondary school. This report can be accessed in the Members' Library and at:
www.highland.gov.uk/download/downloads/id/12122/homophobic_bullying_report_november_2014.
- 1.5 This research was also discussed at the Community Safety, Public Engagement and Equalities Committee on 10 December 2014 and, as a result, Highland Council signed up to the Stonewall Education Champions programme, to support the work being undertaken to promote inclusive practice in relation to LGBT issues.

- 1.6 The current report briefly describes the work done to progress the knowledge and understanding of LGBT issues in schools since then, and to implement the recommendations arising from that research and the comments made by elected members at the time.

2. Time for Inclusive Education

- 2.1 There have been two recent studies undertaken by TIE in Scotland to assess and understand trends in attitudes towards LGBT within Scottish schools. The report can be accessed at:

http://media.wix.com/ugd/e904fd_3aeb571e4e584001a7956dca4991a34e.pdf

- 2.2 Generally, the data shows that pupils within the LGBT community do not feel that school is always a safe or supportive place and teachers report that they are not confident in tackling homophobia, bi-phobia and transphobia within their schools.

- 2.3 The survey undertaken by the TIE Campaign used data from 317 respondents - 169 of whom self-identified as lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender, with 98 reporting to be heterosexual. Around 36% of respondents were still attending school, while around 64% had left school, many within the past 6 years.

- 2.4 45% of heterosexual respondents reported that they never experienced homophobia, bi-phobia and transphobia while at school, compared to the 90% of LGBT youth who reported that they had. 92% of heterosexual respondents reported that they had never been bullied because of their sexual orientation, compared to the 64% of LGBT respondents who reported that they had.

- 2.5 27% of LGBT respondents to the survey reported that they had attempted suicide at least once as a result of bullying, while 15% had tried more than once. 95% of LGBT respondents believe that being bullied has had long lasting negative effects on them.

- 2.6 86% of LGBT respondents in the TIE survey reported that LGBT issues were never discussed or taught in a progressive manner at their school. Many respondents specifically highlighted that the lack of LGBT inclusive sex education was also an issue within their schools. Only 6% of respondents overall believed that their teachers were adequately equipped to discuss LGBT issues in the classroom, while around 72% reported that homophobic, bi-phobic and transphobic bullying was not challenged by teachers in their schools.

- 2.7 408 teachers responded to the survey - 72% teaching in the secondary sector and 76% identifying as heterosexual. 87% of teachers reported that they regularly hear homophobic, transphobic and bi-phobic language in their school. Almost all believed that schools should deliver an LGBT inclusive education and that staff should receive training on LGBT issues. However 75% of the teachers who responded, reported that they had not received any training on LGBT issues.

3. Homophobic bullying in Highland

- 3.1 The 2014 research conducted in Highland showed that homophobic bullying is common, affects heterosexual as well as LGBT young people, and has far-reaching consequences. Just under a quarter of young people who participated in the research had experienced a negative consequence as a result of homophobic bullying in school, including some 7% of the school who reported a major

consequence such as using alcohol, drugs or self-harm and suicide attempts. Over 40% of the pupils recalled homophobic bullying starting in Primary School. It was found that, while young people identifying as LGBT had an increased risk of being bullied, in contrast to the TIE survey results, three-quarters of young people experiencing homophobic bullying identified as heterosexual. Reassuringly, and again contrary to the TIE survey, a large proportion of young people reported that teachers or other staff took action when they witnessed bullying.

3.2 An essential first step to reducing bullying is to understand each context in which it is happening. However, it would not be sustainable to repeat the 2014 work across all schools. The Equality Group has therefore developed and piloted, in partnership with school staff and with children and young people, a 10-minute web-based survey that provides rich data on amounts, causes, places and times of bullying experienced by pupils. Trials of the survey have provided useful data specific to each school and a key finding so far is that across both primary and secondary schools the most common single reason for bullying, where a cause is known, is homophobic or transphobic bullying. The data allows school staff to target interventions and repeating the survey allows assessment of the impact of intervention.

4. Reducing homophobic bullying

4.1 Homophobic bullying has effects beyond the immediate harm. Much international research has shown a link between being bullied and poor attainment for individuals, but also for the wider pupil group. At a whole school level, the same attitudes that drive or support homophobic bullying are also associated with increased violence and poorer behaviour overall, with consequent impacts on the school environment and attainment. As a result, work to promote equality and diversity needs to be seen not as an “add on” or “extra”, but as a key strategy in delivering schools’ core business of attainment, achievement and well-being.

4.2 At the same time, research shows that homophobic and transphobic bullying are complex issues that include enforcing gender roles and stereotypes as well as more straightforward prejudice. A wide range of measures at different levels is required to address them. Simply declaring “zero tolerance”, or quickly rolling out training that does not reflect particular school communities and cultures, is unlikely to be effective and may even be counter-productive. It should also be acknowledged that addressing homophobic and transphobic bullying is not always easy for staff, as there can be legacy concerns from previous legislation, such as Section 28, and also anxieties about possible parental concerns. This is also an area in which staff may feel less confident and relatively unskilled.

4.3 The LGBT subgroup of the Care and Learning Equalities Group has representation from primary and secondary schools, High Life Highland, Police Scotland, LGBT Youth Scotland and others. Work undertaken, supported or coordinated by the group so far includes:

- The development of an online bullying survey to allow school managers to easily assess pupils’ experiences of bullying, including those with protected characteristics. This has been used to engage children and parents in collaborative work to address equality issues in general and homophobia in particular. Secondary schools such as Fortrose Academy and Kinlochleven High School, and primary schools such as Crown Primary and Smithton Primary School have used the survey to inform anti-bullying planning.

- Curriculum development around equalities and the protected characteristics with lesson plans and appropriate children's story books. This is currently being developed by the whole Millburn Associated Schools Group.
- Development and gradual roll-out (to be accelerated during 2017), of Equality and Diversity training for school managers and staff to increase confidence and support the implementation of the requirements under the 2010 Act.
- Support for young people's LGBT support groups, for example those in Millburn Academy, Kingussie High School and Inverness Royal Academy.
- LGBT Youth Scotland support a well-used youth group in Inverness called Pillar.
- In consultation with young people, families and school staff, the development of Gender Variance Guidance for those working with non-binary and transgender young people, with accompanying leaflets for young people and families.

4.4 There are key actions with ongoing activity that is monitored through the Equalities Improvement Group:

- Ensuring that all schools have bullying policies that specifically reference homophobic and transphobic bullying. A template has been provided to support this work.
- Ensuring that all schools have appropriate Equality policies, as required by the 2010 Act and that these are reflected in culture and practice. This is supported through training and the provision of guidance and policy.
- Promoting the use of the online bullying survey in all schools to allow for evidence-based intervention and the building of collaboration with young people and families. The results of the surveys undertaken are monitored centrally to provide information about trends across Highland.
- Continuing to support the development and accessibility of curriculum materials across all school ages and stages – three secondary schools are developing and trialling materials that are available on GLOW.
- Continuing to develop the fruitful partnership with other public and third-sector agencies.
- Developing and testing a toolkit of resources and training that all staff working with children and their leaders can use to address gaps in knowledge and skills or organisational culture. These materials are also available on GLOW to support local training and interventions.

5. Impact of work

5.1 It is difficult, in a complex field with many strands of intervention, to establish what effort has which impact. The direction of travel is evidence-based, being drawn both from international research and from our own consultations with young people in Highland. There are several encouraging indications of progress that can be

mentioned in conclusion:

- In Kinlochleven High School, where for some time there has been work to address Equalities issues, led in part by the young people and fully supported by school staff, the bullying survey shows relatively lower levels of homophobic bullying.
- Requests for consultation on Gender Variance are increasing as awareness rises and schools become more confident in intervening to support children and young people.
- In the national Stonewall Equality Index - a rigorous audit of policy, strategy, intervention and partnerships - Highland is the second highest rated local authority in Scotland.
- 60% of pupils in the Highland bullying survey trial said that staff take action most of the time when they see homophobic bullying, and 75% said teachers take action at least sometimes on hearing homophobic language. In addition, 2 out of 3 pupils who told a member of staff found that things got better.

6. Implications

- 6.1 This work is overseen by the Care and Learning Equalities Improvement Group and aims to improve outcomes for children and young people identifying as LGBT, but also to improve the culture of respect for all pupils and staff in Highland schools.
- 6.2 There are no resources, risk, legal, climate change/carbon clever, Gaelic or rural implications.

7. Recommendation

- 7.1 Members are asked to endorse the progress made in addressing homophobic and transphobic bullying in Highland and the ongoing actions to continue to monitor the impact of this work and to increase inclusive practice in Highland schools.

Designation: Director of Care and Learning

Date: 16 January 2017

Author: Bernadette Cairns, Head of Additional Support Services

Background Papers: