INTO Equality Survey Report: LGBT+ Inclusion

Feabhra 2020

INTO Equality Survey Report

The INTO Equality Committee, working with the INTO LGBT+ Teachers' Group, surveyed members on the following LGBT+ related issues:

- The experiences of LGBT+ teachers in our schools.
- Awareness of LGBT+ teacher issues in our schools.
- Preventing and dealing with homophobic and transphobic bullying among pupils and students.
- Gender non-conforming pupils/students and pupils/students transitioning between genders.
- Usualising LGBT+ identities through the school curriculum.

A total of 2,362 responses were received, 2,103 from members across all counties in the Republic of Ireland (ROI) and 259 from members across all counties in Northern Ireland (NI). Of the total respondents, 90% identified as heterosexual and 10% as LGBT+. Almost one fifth were principals. The following provides a summary of the findings and a discussion of the pertinent issues arising from these.

The experiences of LGBT+ teachers in our schools

The experiences of LGBT+ teachers in our schools were mixed and differences were noted between the ROI and NI jurisdictions*. Only 18% ROI/12% NI of the respondents were out to staff, parents and pupils in their schools. 42% ROI/33% NI were out to staff only, 27% ROI/42% NI were not out in school and a further 13% ROI/13% NI were not out at all. Of those who were out in school, 41% ROI/14% NI were very comfortable, 53% ROI/57% NI were comfortable while 6% ROI/29% NI were not comfortable being out at school. One respondent indicated that "I came out very slowly to only one colleague at a time. It was extremely scary and stressful. Being in the closet causes an extreme amount of discomfort and distress." Another respondent said "I would love for there to be natural opportunities to introduce myself at work that include my name and pronouns. I would love to know that it wouldn't be my job to explain trans and nonbinary identities if I did come out."

For some, being openly LGBT+ in a professional capacity was not expressed as a difficulty, however, others, notably those in religious patronaged schools, expressed concerns about the reaction of their boards of management/governors and parents. Recognising the concern that they might be discriminated against when applying for a job, 43% of those who are out in ROI schools indicated that getting a permanent contract of employment was an influence on them coming out at school. However, only 20% among ROI and NI respondents indicated that they would be comfortable being open about membership of LGBT+ groups or identifying their pronouns during the application/interview stage of job seeking. One respondent indicated that "there is still a lot of prejudice out there. I didn't want to take the risk that one of these people would be sitting on the interview panel" while another expressed concern regarding "how the information would be used and by whom". A number (7% ROI/21% NI) of LGBT+ teachers felt that their sexual orientation inhibited them from applying for promotions or open competition positions in another school.

Across both jurisdictions, 79% of all those who were out in school said they received equal treatment from the principal and management, 17% indicated that it depends and 1% didn't feel they were equally treated. Of those who are out, 43% felt that their LGBT+ identity/expression was fully accepted by their staff while 19% indicated that it wasn't. However, 47% have heard derogatory language regarding LGBT+ identities used in their staffroom with 13% of those comments being considered deliberate and malicious. The majority (80%) who had heard such language indicated that it upset them, particularly where the principal of the school was deemed complicit in the commentary. One respondent commented that "I feel it infringes on my right to work in a safe environment and feel it is exactly the same as passing a racist remark". Few challenged the language or reported it to the principal, with some identifying that they did not want to draw attention to themselves by doing so, for example, one respondent indicated that not challenging the comments was "out of sheer fear of being outed or becoming too emotional to speak properly".

By contrast, non-LGBT+ colleagues reported fewer incidences of hearing derogatory language – 17% ROI/33% NI, perhaps highlighting a lack of awareness or sensitivity to such language. However, similar fears about challenging the language are evident with some of those who have challenged such language saying that "I'd like to have the confidence to be more vocal, but I find it difficult".

Some LGBT+ colleagues indicated that a parental complaint had been made to their principal/management about their LGBT+ identity/expression while a small number have had a teaching colleague complain about their LGBT+ identity/expression.

Awareness of LGBT+ teacher issues and creating an LGBT+ inclusive school environment

There was a mix of experiences and understanding among survey respondents with regard to LGBT+ inclusion and visibility in the school environment and within the curriculum and school policies. There was a general consensus on the role of school leadership, however respondents expressed experiencing tensions regarding school management/ethos.

The majority, (72% ROI/71% NI), of all respondents described the tone of management with regard to LGBT+ inclusion as passive/neutral whereby any LGBT+ person or child coming into the school would not know or sense if his/her/their identity was accepted or represented.

There were some contrasting responses between LGBT+ teachers and non-LGBT+ colleagues with regard to the school environment and policies. While acknowledging that there was a small number of LGBT+ respondents from NI*, there was also a marked difference between the ROI and NI jurisdictions, as responses to the following questions show:

it must be noted that the number of LGBT+ respondents from NI totalled 24, of which 10 were not out at school.

Do you deem your staffroom/school to be supportive of LGBT+ staff?

	Yes, fully	Yes, generally	Yes, to some extent	No	Don't know
LGBT+ teachers ROI	30%	38%	20%	4%	8%
Non-LGBT+ teachers ROI	39%	32%	10%	2%	17%
LGBT+ teachers NI	21%	21%	25%	8%	25%
Non-LGBT+ teachers NI	30%	34%	12%	3%	21%

Many respondents noted openness and inclusive attitudes in their school while others indicated that 'the issue' had never arisen or discussed, for example "my school promotes a kind and caring ethos but there is nothing specifically aimed at being LGBT+ inclusive". Some difficulties were expressed with regard to the extent of the support, for example one respondent indicated that "People are supportive on a personal level but not on a level where colleagues are happy for me to be openly gay with pupils and parents."

Do you consider your school policies to be LGBT+ inclusive?

	Yes, fully	Yes, generally	Yes, to some extent	No	Don't know
LGBT+ teachers ROI	15%	30%	24%	14%	17%
Non-LGBT+ teachers ROI	23%	30%	16%	8%	23%
LGBT+ teachers NI	4%	12%	17%	46%	21%
Non-LGBT+ teachers NI	12%	27%	18%	15%	28%

Many indicated that policies were more inclusive on paper than in practice or that their policies are "not intentionally non-inclusive, rather not thought about particularly." Others cited conflict with the school's religious ethos/patronage, for example "we updated our SPHE policy recently and we did say that we should be more openly talking about same-sex parents, but it was thrown out because of the patronage of the school."

Do you consider your school to have a positive environment for LGBT+ people?

	Yes, fully	Yes, generally	Yes, to some extent	No	Don't know
LGBT+ teachers ROI	21%	34%	28%	9%	8%
Non-LGBT+ teachers ROI	31%	37%	16%	5%	11%
LGBT+ teachers NI	12%	25%	13%	37%	13%
Non-LGBT+ teachers NI	19%	36%	21%	8%	16%

Many respondents described the actions taken by their schools to create a positive school environment, for example, "very clear messaging from the principal e.g. reminders at staff meeting to read the *LGBT+ Inclusive Staffroom* poster, inclusive picture books bought by non-LGBT+ staff members, amended enrolment for welcoming same-sex parents and "displaying of posters, discussing inclusion of LGBT+ issues as part of the SPHE curriculum at staff meeting, congratulating a gay member of staff on his marriage in the school newsletter". Others indicated that more could be done, for example, "I feel there should be books in all classrooms representing the different types of families and identities. I also feel that all the class toilets should be gender neutral." For those LGBT+ teachers in Northern Ireland indicating that the school was not a positive environment for LGBT+ people the key inhibitor was their school ethos.

Equality legislation

In the ROI, equality legislation recognises sexual orientation as a ground upon which no-one can be discriminated against. However, given the conflict between LGBT+ identity and church teachings, LGBT+ teachers were acutely conscious of the derogation under *Section 37.1 of the Employment Equality Act* in 1998 given to schools with a religious patron. This section allowed "a religious, educational or medical institution which is under the direction or control of a body established for religious purposes or whose objectives include the provision of services in an environment which promotes certain religious values" to take "action which is reasonably necessary to prevent an employee or a prospective employee from undermining the religious ethos of the institution". With the support of the INTO leadership, the INTO LGBT+ Teachers' Group led a campaign to remove this element from the legislation. This campaign came to fruition in 2015 when the legislation was amended to allow "an educational or medical institution referred to in subsection (1) is maintained, in whole or in part, by monies provided by the Oireachtas" to only "take action [against a teacher] to prevent the undermining of its religious ethos if it can be objectively justified by the institution's aim and the action is appropriate, necessary and proportionate".

Just over half (52%) of ROI LGBT+ respondents indicated that they were familiar with this amendment and understood what it meant in practice, a quarter had heard of it but didn't know what it meant in practice while the remainder had never heard of it. By comparison, 41% of non-LGBT+ teachers were unaware of the legislation and 27% knew of it and understood what it meant in practice. However, while the majority of principals who responded indicated they were familiar with the amendment only 40% knew what it meant in practice.

In Northern Ireland, the *Fair Employment and Treatment Order* (1998, 2003) exempts teachers, where the essential nature of their employment requires a person holding, or not holding, a particular religious belief or political opinion, from adhering to *Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act*. This section requires public authorities to have due regard for the need to promote equality of opportunity between: persons of different religious belief, political opinion, racial group, age, marital status or sexual orientation and persons with a disability and persons without. Most respondents (NI) were either familiar (38%) or somewhat familiar (38%) with the section while 24% were not.

Supports for inclusion

The majority (80%) of respondents across both jurisdictions indicated that role of the principal was essential to creating an

LGBT+ inclusive school as leadership needed to come from the top down. However, it was acknowledged that their role can be constrained if not supported by the boards of management/ governors.

Many respondents cited a lack of training to enable and empower them to more appropriately create an LGBT+ inclusive school environment. While some viewed it as a personal responsibility to be informed, respondents identified the DES/DENI, school management/patron bodies, school boards of management/governors, colleges of education, the Education Authority (NI) and the PDST (ROI) as responsible for providing support. There was also support for an online INTO summer course that sought to support schools becoming more LGBT+ inclusive. However, one respondent noted that "supplying books and PowerPoints and online resources to read has little impact. Presentations and discussion groups reach the problem and bring a school as a community into recognition and discussion about the issue."

LGBT+ Inclusive Staffroom poster and Different Families, Same Love competition

It is notable to mention that, in the ROI, one of the key steps taken by the INTO LGBT+ Teachers' Group to promote awareness of LGBT+ teachers' inclusion was the dissemination of the LGBT+ Inclusive Staffroom poster that outlined good practice guidelines for the inclusion of LGBT+ staff. The group, along with INTO, also promote the Different Families, Same Love competition that encourages teachers to teach about different family make ups, including same-sex parents and enter their projects into a competition.

Just over half of the respondents (60%) indicated that the poster was on display in their staffrooms. However, where the poster is displayed, 24% indicated that the guidelines advised on the poster were only somewhat being implemented while 16% indicated that the guidelines are not implemented. One third of respondents were not aware that the poster had been sent to all schools while 23% were aware of the poster but it had not been put on display in the staffroom. Some respondents, both LGBT+ and non-LGBT+, questioned the need for the poster as they felt they were already open and inclusive, others on the grounds that there were no LGBT+ people in their school while some non-LGBT+ teachers cited that, by having the poster, they were being excluded from inclusion. Others stated that the school ethos prevented them from displaying the poster with one respondent indicating that "some elements of that poster are not in line with Catholic ethos of school." In contrast, many LGBT+ respondents indicated that seeing the poster displayed in a staffroom provided a significant level of comfort that their identity was accepted and respected.

There was a general awareness of the Different Families, Same Love competition among both LBGT+ teachers (93%) and non-LGBT+ teachers (85%). However, only 11% of respondents indicated that they/their school had entered the competition, 73% of these respondents were LGBT+ teachers.

Preventing and dealing with homophobic and transphobic bullying among pupils and students

Children may be singled out by other children and bullied because they do not conform to stereotypical gender expectations or behaviours, because they have LGBT+ parents or family members or because they themselves are, or are perceived to be, LGBT+. In 2013, the Department of Education (ROI) published Anti-Bullying Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Guidelines. These guidelines stipulate that schools must implement education and preventative strategies to deal with identity-based bullying including, in particular, homophobic and transphobic bullying. There are no equivalent guidelines or procedures in place in Northern Ireland. However, Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act provides an underpinning principle of equal opportunity for school policy in this area.

The majority of ROI respondents were familiar (73%) or somewhat familiar (21%) with the DES guidelines and procedures, however, 6% were not familiar with them. The majority (86%) were also aware that all schools must implement education and preventatives strategies to deal with homophobic and transphobic bullying, however, 14% were not aware.

While there is no prescribed requirement to include reference to homophobic or transphobic bullying in a school's anti-bullying policy in Northern Ireland, 36% of respondents indicated that their school's anti-bullying policy included a requirement to implement education and preventative strategies to deal with homophobic and transphobic bullying, 28% indicated that there was no such requirement in their school's policy while 36% didn't know.

While 36% of respondents (ROI and NI) indicated that they were not confident implementing LGBT+ strategies in their classrooms, the majority were confident (62%) or somewhat confident (28%) challenging homophobic/transphobic name calling by pupils. However, the vast majority (89%) had not received any training in how to educate about and prevent homophobic/transphobic bullying. Of those who had not received training, 77% indicated that they would like training in this area.

Gender non-conforming pupils/students and pupils/students transitioning between genders

Gender non-conformity refers to those whose gender identity or gender expression is different from traditional or stereotypical expectations of how a boy or a girl 'should' appear or behave. Transitioning between genders refers to a process through which some people begin to live as the gender with which they identify, rather than the one assigned at birth.

Only a small proportion (8%) of respondents across both jurisdictions indicated that they were very informed on gender non-conformity. About half (51%) had a general understanding while the remainder (31%) had a vague or no understanding. In the majority of schools (75%) pupils did not have access to gender neutral toilets, 6% had access and the reminder (11%) either had one or a couple of toilets designated as gender neutral. The majority of respondents in NI (66%) cited that pupils did not have gender neutral uniform options while the majority of respondents in ROI (52%) cited that pupils did have gender neutral uniform options.

A very small number of respondents indicated that they had experience of supporting (within a school context) a child transitioning in the context of their gender. One indicated that "Pronouns were an issue. Finding young adult fiction stories to relate to was hard. Class mates were supportive and accepting. We didn't feel we had relevant experience but we tried to address any needs as it came up." While another indicated that it was a "very challenging experience" due to the lack of school supports.

All respondents strongly agreed that guidelines, training, LGBT+ specialist school support persons and a resource website/hub for teachers were required to provide teachers with the knowledge and skills to support a child with regard to gender non-conformity or transitioning. While the Northern Ireland Education Authority published *Guidance for Schools EOTAS Centres and Youth Service on Supporting Transgender Young People* (November 2019), the majority of NI respondents were not aware of them. However, it must be noted that the survey from which these findings arise was engaged with in the month following the publication of these guidelines.

Usualising LGBT+ identities through the school curriculum

The concept of usualising LGBT+ identities is that pupils/students see LGBT+ as a positive, everyday reality because they have seen LGBT+ individuals and characters through their classroom and curriculum interaction. For example, through reading books from the school library with an LGBT+ character, talking about different family formations in the relevant curricular areas, in the school library and/or hearing LGBT+ inclusive language.

A small proportion (11%) of respondents across both jurisdictions indicated that they have books with LGBT+ characters or themes in their class library. Slightly more (14%) have explored LGBT+ identities with their class. However, 9% indicated that they were inhibited by their school patronage/boards of management/governors from making reference to LGBT+ identities while a further 24% felt inhibited by them to some extent. It had been made explicit to a small number of respondents (5%) not to include LGBT+ issues in their teaching or teaching resources. While the majority of respondents indicated that LGBT+ identity should be openly discussed/presented across all curricular areas in the same way as ability/disability, culture and race, 18% disagreed.

Issues arising

The following four key issues are worth noting from the survey responses

⚶ Why there is a need for LGBT+ visibility and inclusion.

⚶ Conflicts with school ethos.

⚶ Need for clarity with regard to what is expected from schools, particularly primary schools.

⚶ Need for appropriate training and support for school staff and management.

The need for LGBT+ visibility and inclusion

A number of respondents questioned the need for LGBT+ visibility and proactive measures to promote LGBT+ inclusion. Of these, some queried the need on the basis of not having any LGBT+ staff or children, others in their school indicated that the school was already inclusive of all, while others felt focusing on including LGBT+ was exclusionary of heterosexual people, for example one respondent indicated that "I don't see any reason LGBT support is needed anymore than support for heterosexual teachers/students" while another commented that "This issue has never arisen. LGBT colleagues have had no issues."

Such responses point to the need for greater awareness raising among the teaching profession of the concerns and fears many LGBT+ teachers hold about how they might be perceived and treated in the staffroom given the long history of admonishment, non-acceptance and discrimination suffered by the LGBT+ community.

They also point to the need to raise awareness about the importance of seeing evidence of one's identity within a school context, whether that be the LGBT+ poster on display or reading about an LGBT+ character in a school library book. It also points to the need for management guidance, curriculum guidance and training supports to empower teachers, school leaders and school boards of management/governors to create a school environment that recognises LGBT+ identities and culture.

Conflicts with school ethos

A significant number of respondents cited that the proactive inclusion of LGBT+ staff and pupils/students and the inclusion of LGBT+ in their teaching conflicted with the religious ethos of their school. One respondent stated that "an undercurrent of non-acceptance exists by virtue of the act that the school has a Catholic ethos". Others refer to the existence of a 'don't ask, don't tell' culture in relation to LGBT+/gender identity because of the school ethos. While some LGBT+ respondents said they experienced explicit non-acceptance because of the school's religious ethos, others expressed an inherent concern that their identity/expression would not be accepted with one LGBT+ respondent stating that "I assume it wouldn't be accepted by staff. It's a Catholic school." Others indicated that they waited or would wait until they had the protection of a permanent contract before coming out as LGBT+ in a religious ethos school while some expressed concerns regarding the opportunity of promotion, for example one respondent stated that "The fear of being passed over for promotion or not being suitable to be principal of a school with a religious patronage is still very real."

Many distinguished between inclusion and respect from colleagues in the staffroom and an uncertainty regarding the same from management or the perception that they would not be included given the teachings of the church with regard to their sexual orientation. Many cited that "it's a Catholic school so it's unlikely to be LGBT+ friendly" while others said that the "church teachings promote love, respect and tolerance" and therefore everyone is included. In some cases this principle extended to LGBT+ people but in others it was not fully clear or affirmed if it included LGBT+ people.

Many mentioned tensions around including LGBT+ identities in lessons to support educating about and preventing homophobic/transphobic bullying. As noted previously, in some cases teachers were explicitly told not to reference LGBT+ with one teacher stating that "During the gay marriage referendum we were asked not to discuss the referendum with the children. The children were discussing it openly amongst themselves. They were naturally curious about it. I remember thinking how shameful it was – that we couldn't even mention it – an important issue of equality. I cannot imagine how it would have felt for an LGBTQ teacher." However, another respondent indicated that "Catholic schools week last week was about different family types – LGBT families were discussed." These experiences show the lack of consistency from the leadership and management of schools with religious patronage with regard to the inclusion of LGBT+ identities in classroom lessons and discussions.

Aside from preventing teachers (ROI) adhering to the requirements of the *Anti-Bullying Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Guidelines* (DES 2013), it is evidenced that religious ethos is curtailing teachers' professional judgement to better support LGBT+ awareness raising, inclusion and the principle of equality for all.

These tensions point to the need for church patrons/management bodies, school boards of management/governors to affirm their regard for and support the implementation of equality legislation and all Department of Education and Skills/Education Authority guidelines issued. It also points to the need for an explicit, stated indication of equality of opportunity for all regardless of gender, religion, race, disability, sexual orientation, marital/family status etc to be included in all advertisements and application forms for employment and promotions in all schools. Such affirmations would provide clarity to teachers, parents and the wider school community with regard to their role in LGBT+ inclusion but also give comfort to LGBT+ teachers, parents and pupils/students that the principle of equal opportunities and treatment would be applied.

Need for clarity with regard to what is expected from schools, particularly primary schools

Some respondents expressed uncertainty around what they were supposed to teach with regard to LGBT+ identities. Many were under the misconception that details about sexual preferences were to be taught to young children while others expressed the view that primary children were too young to discuss sexuality, without recognising that referring to mammy and daddy family formations imply a particular type of sexuality – that of heterosexuality. At post-primary level some respondents indicated the need to address sexual health and mental health issues presenting in schools.

Need for appropriate training and support for school staff and management

The evidenced lack of training and support and uncertainty regarding parental support for awareness raising of LGBT+ identities leaves teachers in a vulnerable position, with many expressing their concern about not knowing how to provide appropriate support particularly for gender non-conforming children or children who are transitioning. Respondents indicated a willingness to support but expressed the need for both information and skills. One respondent summarises this need as follows:

"Teachers need training. We need to know how to deal with situations without causing upset. We need to have a deeper understanding of what our young people are experiencing. All societal issues are impacting on our children in school and this in turn is impacting on our teachers. Primary schools struggle to access counselling services for pupils yet we are expected to know how to deal with these very sensitive and complex issues."

Recommendations

The findings from this survey suggest the following recommendations

- That teachers are made aware of the need for LGBT+ inclusion and visibility within the school context

- That teachers are provided with comprehensive training and support in
  - Understanding LGBT+ terminology
  - LGBT+ inclusion and visibility within the school environment
  - LGBT+ inclusion and visibility within the curriculum context to empower teachers to address the requirements of the *Anti-Bullying Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Guidelines*, in the case of ROI, and educate and prevent transphobic, homophobic and bi-phobic bullying in the case of NI
  - Understanding gender non-conformity and transitioning between genders and best practice in supporting gender non-conforming and transitioning pupils/students

This training must include approaches conducive to talk and discussion to allow teachers tease out the issues that concern them and areas where they lack confidence.

- That the Department of Education and Skills/Department of Education Northern Ireland/Education Authority in collaboration with school management bodies and teacher unions publish agreed guidelines and resources to empower schools to implement best practice in the area of LGBT+ inclusion and support.
- That school patrons/management bodies, school boards of management/governors publicly affirm their regard for and support the implementation of equality legislation and all Department of Education/Education Authority guidelines issued with regard to LGBT+ inclusion.
- That teacher employers make it explicit that they are equal opportunities employers on all applications for employment and promotion, including internal promotions and that a guarantee of privacy and confidentiality is given in relation to all information submitted by the applicant.
- That all schools implement a culture of zero-tolerance towards homophobic, transphobic and biphobic language and actions and that this culture be clearly communicated to all staff, pupils and the wider school communities.

Conclusion

Member engagement with this INTO Equality survey has afforded an invaluable insight into the lived school experiences and perceptions of INTO LGBT+ teachers and their non-LGBT+ colleagues. The findings highlight that, despite greater awareness of and a more inclusive socio-political environment for LGBT+ identities, many LGBT+ teachers are not wholly confident or comfortable expressing their identity in their schools. This, therefore, evidences a need for stated affirmation and a commitment to equal opportunities, treatment and inclusion by school management and teacher employers to counteract this lack of confidence and comfort. The findings also evidence the necessity for appropriate training and support to empower teachers, management and other stakeholders to create more inclusive LGBT+ schools.

The INTO Equality Committee hopes, as a first step in addressing these needs, that the Equality Conference provides delegates with opportunities to engage with LGBT+ inclusion and to become more informed and aware of key LGBT+ issues.

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