

A Head Teacher's Guide to Handling Anti-Gay Harassment

To protect and support a targeted young person, you should:

- **Assure the targeted pupil that:**
 - You take what happened seriously.
 - You believe he or she deserves a safe learning environment.
 - He or she is not required to talk face-to-face with the offenders, even with a mediator present (bias-based harassment is substantially different from ordinary peer conflict).
- **Offer the targeted pupil:**
 - First aid, if necessary, and a private room in which to recover and a telephone in case he or she wants to call a parent or guardian or some other responsible adult (e.g. counsellor, Victim Support) or the police.
 - The chance to tell his or her side of the story.
 - Help to problem-solve ways he or she might protect him or herself in the future ... but make very clear that you are not assuming that he or she is to blame for what happened.
 - The option of removing him or herself from danger (e.g., to drop the class where the harassment is happening, to change for PE somewhere else, etc.) ... but recognise that this might contribute to his or her social isolation, hence feeling more like punishment than protection.
- **Remove the offenders** from the situation (transferring them to a different PE class, banning them from the bus, etc.).
- **Arrange for staff to be present** wherever the harassment has been occurring (e.g., in the south corridor before and after lunch or on the playground during break).
- **Encourage the targeted pupil to report retribution**, if the offender(s) are disciplined, but also **arrange for your staff to be vigilant** so that if there is retribution the targeted young



person will not have to be the only one reporting it.

- **Keep a record** of the events in the permanent files of the targeted pupil, with his or her permission, and of the offenders, if there has been any disciplinary action. Also keep an incident report on file in a malicious harassment log, so that patterns can be discerned and on-going problems can be addressed.

To investigate what happened, you should:

- **Interview all the witnesses**, as well as the protagonists, so that if the offenders are disciplined it will not be only the targeted pupil who turned them in.

To discipline and educate the offenders, you can:

- **Explain to them why** their behaviour is so wrong, beyond simply violating a rule.
- **Reprimand them** in a serious no-nonsense tone.
- **Warn them** that if the behaviour continues they'll be disciplined.
- Require them to write a note of apology or to make restitution or do relevant community service.
- **Discipline them** in a way that is consistent with what is done for other forms of malicious harassment (for example, if the offender used a gay slur while hitting someone, you might want to discipline him/her not just for assault but in whatever way an assault accompanied by a racial or religious or disability-related slur would be handled).
- **Call their parent(s) or guardian(s)**, if the offenders are pupils.
- **Counsel them**, if the offenders are employees, and if their actions do not improve, **use progressive discipline**.