



Belong To LGBTQ+
Youth Ireland

**Belong To Submission to the National Council for
Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) on the draft Primary
Wellbeing Curriculum Specification**

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Contact: Neasa Candon (neasa@belongto.org), Moninne Griffith
(moninne@belongto.org)

Introduction

Belong To - LGBTQ+ Youth Ireland is a national organisation supporting lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ+) young people. Since 2003, Belong To has worked with LGBTQ+ youth to create a world where they are equal, safe and thriving in the diversity of their identities and experiences.

The organisation advocates and campaigns with and on behalf of LGBTQ+ young people. Belong To runs specialised LGBTQ+ youth services in Dublin, offers crisis counselling for young people experiencing self-harm and suicide ideation in partnership with Pieta, and supports a National Network of youth workers which collectively runs over 70 LGBTQ+ youth groups across Ireland.

Since 2022, Belong To has run the highly successful LGBTQ+ Quality Mark initiative, an 18-month accreditation initiative for post-primary schools to develop LGBTQ+ safe and supportive schools. Belong To's annual Stand Up Awareness Week, supported by the Department of Education is a time for post-primary schools, youth services and Youthreach centres in Ireland to join us and take a stand against homophobic, biphobic and transphobic bullying.

We strongly welcome the redevelopment of the primary curriculum, and the opportunity to feed in on the draft Wellbeing specification. Belong To commends the NCCA on the truly transformational work which has been done with regard to this curriculum, and curriculum reform for post-primary schools, specifically with regard to Junior and Senior Cycle SPHE. It is highly significant that the new primary curriculum centres on the empowerment of pupils, and development of life skills throughout this cycle of education.

Belong To looks forward to continued engagement with the NCCA and offers support on the development of toolkit resources for this curriculum and training for primary staff.

Summary of Recommendations

The following sections of this submissions set out the research context for recommendations on the draft specification, and a detailed rationale for each recommendation.

For ease of reference, a summary of recommendations are included below:

- Homophobic, biphobic and transphobic bullying should be specifically named with reference to the *Wellbeing Curriculum's* relationship with wider policy, and as part of Learning Outcomes that relate to bullying.
- Homophobic, biphobic and transphobic bullying should be specifically and individually named and defined within the Glossary.
- Comprehensive supports relating to homophobic, biphobic and transphobic bullying should be provided via the Wellbeing Online Toolkit.
- The wellbeing rationale should specifically name LGBTQ+ identities and experiences within the scope of "self-awareness, personal safety, emotional regulation, resilience, empathy, movement, decision-making, and healthy relationship-building".
- The wellbeing rationale should name an awareness of LGBTQ+ identities and experiences within the scope of "cultivating a strong sense of connection among children to their school, community, and wider society."
- The SPHE/RSE rationale should specify that Learning Outcomes under this strand should be taught in an LGBTQ+ inclusive manner.
- The SPHE/RSE rationale should clearly name existing requirements under Circular 0045/2013, *Anti-Bullying Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools*, for primary schools to implement education and prevention measures to tackle homophobic and transphobic bullying.
- LGBTQ+ identities and experiences should be integrated, in an age-appropriate manner, across stages 1 through 4 of the Identity strand of the *Wellbeing Curriculum*.
- Staff materials and resources accompanying the *Wellbeing Curriculum*, such as those on the Wellbeing Online Toolkit, should include practical support materials and best practice guidelines on supporting a pupil who comes out as LGBTQ+; the process of engaging with the pupil and their parent, guardian or caregiver; and proactive measures a school can put in place to ensure that the school is a safe and supportive environment for all LGBTQ+ pupils, whether they are out or not.

- Learning Outcomes under strands 3 and 4 of the Emotional Awareness and Expression Unit should specifically name LGBTQ+ identities as part of self-identity formation within the context of influences on emotions and feelings.
- All primary staff, both teaching and non-teaching, should be provided with training, resources and guidance on the topic of supporting LGBTQ+ young people's mental health.
- Belong To's e-learning module, 'Educators and Youth Workers Supporting LGBTQ+ Young People',¹ and the e-learning module produced by Belong To and Jigsaw, 'Supporting the Mental Health of LGBTI+ Young People',² should be included in the Wellbeing Online Toolkit.
- Homophobic, biphobic and transphobic bullying should be specifically and individually named within the Learning Outcomes of the Relationships strand.
- LGBTQ+ inclusion and visibility should be named across the school environment as a key aim of primary staff within the Relationships strand.
- Specific forms of diversity, such as sexual orientation, gender identity, race, religion and membership of the Traveller community, should be clearly named within Learning Outcomes under the Sense of Belonging strand.
- LGBTQ+ identities and experiences should be included across a range of strands, through specific naming and reference in Learning Outcomes and/or inclusion in resource, training and support materials, to further support the intended outcome of the Sense of Belonging strand
- Representation of same-sex parented families should be retained in the *Wellbeing Curriculum*, and this inclusion should be supported with resources in the Wellbeing Online Toolkit.
- The NCCA should engage with the Department of Education on developing clear procedural templates and guidelines on supporting LGBTQ+ pupils who come out in school.
- The Wellbeing Online Toolkit should include practical support materials and guidelines on supporting a pupil who comes out as LGBTQ+; the process of

¹ <https://www.belongto.org/support-for-someone-else/at-school/post-primary/training-for-educators/>

² <https://www.belongto.org/training/>

engaging with the pupil and their parent, guardian or caregiver; and proactive measures a school can put in place to ensure that the school is a safe and supportive environment for all LGBTQ+ pupils, whether they are out or not.

- Supports, resources and materials provided in the Wellbeing Online Toolkit should represent LGBTQ+ identities and experiences.
- The NCCA should engage with relevant stakeholders to produce a range of CPD programmes on areas relating to LGBTQ+ identities, experiences and inclusion.
- Strengthen the definitions of equality, inequality and discrimination with specific reference to personal characteristics protected under the Equal Status Acts, namely gender, marital status, family status, disability, race, religion, age, sexual orientation, and membership of the Traveller community.
- The terms 'human rights', 'equality', 'misconceptions', 'respect' and 'relationships' (in a context other than 'in movement') – should be added to the Glossary and be clearly defined for teaching staff.
- In the Glossary, the terms equity, stereotypes and diversity should be clearly defined and name the nine protected characteristics under Irish equality law, namely gender, marital status, family status, disability, race, religion, age, sexual orientation, and membership of the Traveller community.

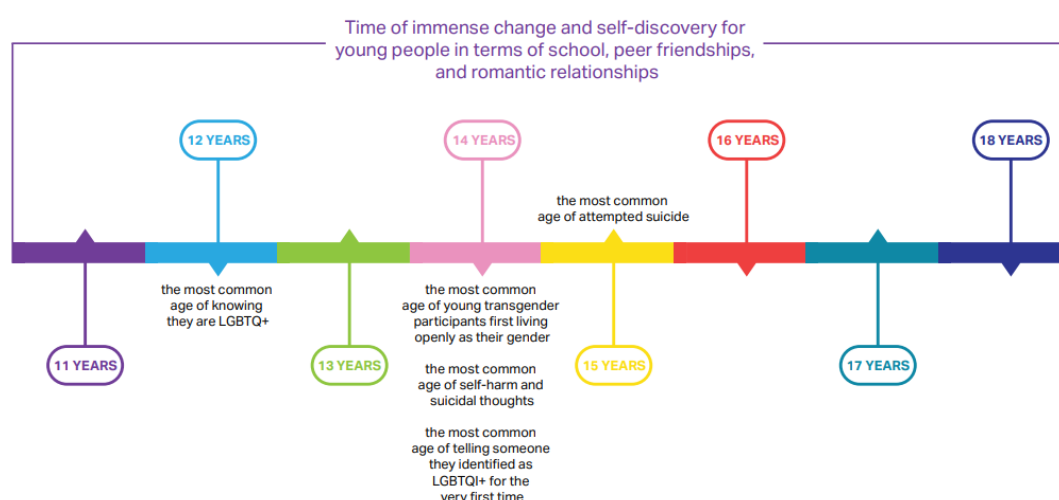
Research Background: LGBTQ+ Youth in Ireland Today

Being LGBTQI+ in Ireland is a research project conducted by Trinity College Dublin and published in partnership with Belong To – LGBTQ+ Youth Ireland that examines the mental health and wellbeing of Ireland's LGBTQI+ population and investigated public attitudes towards LGBTQI+ people.³ The research sample includes over 2,800 LGBTQI+ people aged 14-84 living in the Republic of Ireland. This is the second iteration of the *LGBTIreland* report,⁴ published by Trinity College Dublin, GLEN and Belong To in 2016.

This research provides important context to the need for LGBTQ+ inclusivity to be embedded across education levels, for the safeguarding of the mental health and wellbeing of LGBTQ+ young people, as well as for fostering acceptance and positive attitudes towards the LGBTQ+ community within society.

Coming Out as LGBTQI+ and Mental Health

As demonstrated in the table below, the experience of LGBTQI+ 14-25 year olds understanding their LGBTQI+ identity, sharing this with people in their life, and the likelihood that they will first experience suicidal thoughts or self-harm is closely tied to the final years of primary school and early years of post-primary education.



³ Higgins A; Downes C; O'Sullivan K; de Vries J; Molloy R; Monahan M; Keogh B; Doyle L; Begley T; Corcoran P; (2024) *Being LGBTQI+ in Ireland: The National Study on the Mental Health and Wellbeing of the LGBTQI+ Communities in Ireland*. Dublin: Belong To. [Available here.](#)

⁴ Higgins A. et al. (2016) *The LGBTIreland Report: national study of the mental health and wellbeing of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex people in Ireland*. Dublin: GLEN and Belong To. [Available here.](#)

Among this cohort, age 12 is the most common age at which a person knows they are LGBTQI+. The most common age to live as one's gender identity and/or to tell someone about their LGBTQI+ identity for the first time is age 14. Among 14-25 year old LGBTQI+ people, age 14 was also the most common age at which a person experienced self-harm or suicidal thoughts. The most common age of attempting suicide for this cohort was age 15.

Other Factors Impacting Mental Health

Many people experience challenges to their mental health and wellbeing during adolescence. However, the report findings show that, compared to the general youth population in Ireland, LGBTQI+ young people aged 14-18 experience three times the level of severe or extremely severe depression and anxiety, three times the rate of self-harm, twice the rate of suicidal thoughts, and five times the rate of suicide attempts.

This research found that a number of internal and external factors influenced LGBTQI+ people's experience of self-harm, suicide ideation and suicide attempts. These factors are outlined in the tables below:

Internal factors	External factors
<ul style="list-style-type: none">— Self-hatred and inability to accept self— Confusion regarding one's identity— Ashamed to be LGBTQI+ due to negative reactions— Fear of being outed— Shame— Gender dysphoria	<ul style="list-style-type: none">— Family rejection— Negative media— Bullying and discrimination— Societal rejection— Negative attitudes from family/friends and wider society

The study found a correlation between those who had experienced bullying and those with poorer mental health and wellbeing outcomes. LGBTQI+ people who had been bullied had significantly higher symptoms of depression, anxiety and stress; higher rates of self-harm, suicidal thoughts, suicide attempts and eating disorders; and lower scores for happiness, self-esteem and resilience than those who had not been bullied.

The research also examined factors that had positively impacted upon participants' mental health. At least 83% of participants felt that legal changes such as the introduction of marriage equality, LGBTQI+ representation in the media, coming out as LGBTQI+ and making new LGBTQI+ friends, and joining or visiting LGBTQI+ groups or centres had positively impacted their mental health. While 87% of LGBTQI+ people consider coming out to friends as a positive experience, coming out to family was ranked as positive for only 66% of participants.

A key recommendation from Trinity College Dublin as part of this research project was the implementation of *Cineáltas: Action Plan on Bullying* (Department of Education, 2022) to ensure the inclusion and safety of LGBTQI+ young people in school.

LGBTQI+ People in Irish Society

On a positive note, research participants named the importance of supportive family and friends, a supportive workplace and support from the local community for LGBTQI+ people as important safeguards for mental health and wellbeing. Members of the LGBTQI+ community felt strongly that being able to come out and be accepted not only positively impacted their mental health and wellbeing but also fostered a greater sense of belonging and resilience.

However, members of Ireland's LGBTQ+ community continue to navigate their lives within a climate of fear – despite being almost a decade on from the marriage equality referendum of 2015. *Being LGBTQI+ in Ireland* finds that 53% of LGBTQI+ people in Ireland feel unsafe holding hands with a same-sex partner in public, and over half of trans and non-binary people feel unsafe expressing their gender identity in public. The research further found that one in four members of Ireland's LGBTQI+ community have been punched, hit or physically attacked due to being LGBTQI+, and 72% experienced verbal abuse due to being LGBTQI+.

Within the context of education, these figures point to the need awareness of LGBTQ+ identities and experiences to be fostered at all levels of education, in an age and stage appropriate manner, so as to ensure the safety and equality of Ireland's LGBTQ+ population generally.

Recommendations

The *Being LGBTQI+ in Ireland* research made a number of recommendations relevant to this submission, including:

- The Department of Education should continue to prioritise the timely implementation of Cineáltas: Action Plan on Bullying Implementation Plan 2023-2027, with a focus on initial teacher education and continuous professional development for new and existing post-primary school staff.
- The survey of attitudes of the general public showed that the knowledge base of the general public around LGBTQI+ identities include many uncertainties. As a result, the population is vulnerable to misinformation aimed at discrediting the LGBTQI+ community, in particular transgender, intersex and non-binary groups. While progress has been made since 2014 in terms of inclusivity and reduction in prejudice, in order to sustain this progress targeted educational initiatives rooted in evidence-based research are needed. Therefore, through a community partnership approach the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth should implement specific actionable, achievable, concrete, measurable and time-bound interventions to increase the knowledge and understanding of LGBTQI+ lives among the general public with targeted consideration regarding transgender, non-binary, intersex and bisexual experiences and needs.

Research Background: Primary School Staff and LGBTQ+ Inclusivity

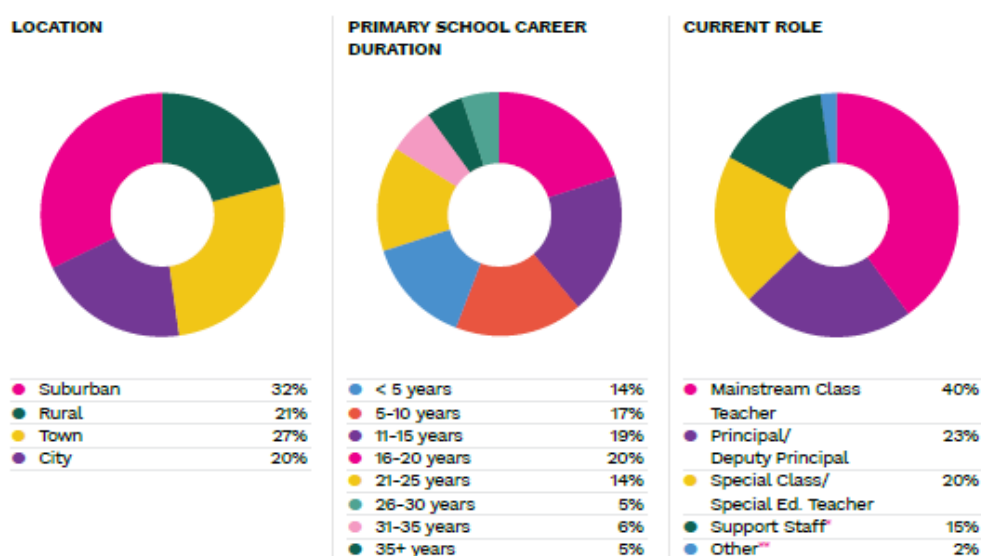
The *Belong To Primary: New Foundations for LGBTQ+ Inclusivity in Primary Schools* research was conducted by the University of Limerick in partnership with Belong To – LGBTQ+ Youth Ireland, funded by an Irish Research Council ‘New Foundations: Engaging Civil Society’ grant, and published in June 2024.⁵

The *Belong To Primary* research surveyed staff employed in primary schools across Ireland about their experience, attitudes, knowledge levels, practices and

⁵ Neary, A. and Power, J. (2024) *Belong To Primary: New Foundations for LGBTQ+ Inclusivity in Primary Schools*. Research Report. Dublin: Belong To and University of Limerick. [Available here.](#)

professional needs regarding LGBTQ+ inclusivity. The survey was conducted online from March to May 2023. To obtain a representative sample of primary school staff nationally, the survey was distributed via the Department of Education database of contact point email addresses to all 3,231 primary schools in Ireland.

The final sample consists of 1,031 primary school staff. This comfortably exceeded the minimum acceptable sample size of 382 required relative to the number of staff currently employed in primary schools in Ireland. Almost one quarter (23%) of those who responded to the survey indicated that they held the role of primary school principal or deputy principal, and 50% of participants had been working in primary schools for 16 or more years. A demographic breakdown of primary staff who took part in the research is included below:



This groundbreaking research demonstrates a strong willingness among primary school staff in Ireland to be LGBTQ+ inclusive in their practice, and a desire for support, training and guidance in this area. However, there is a clear gap between this willingness and primary school staff's confidence and knowledge levels with regard to LGBTQ+ inclusivity, creating a sizable gap in LGBTQ+ inclusive practice.

Views on LGBTQ+ Inclusion at Primary Level

There is strong support for LGBTQ+ inclusive practice in primary schools. Among primary school staff who participated in this research:

- 90% believe it is important for primary staff, including principals, deputy principals, class teachers, special needs assistants and support staff, to know about LGBTQ+ inclusivity.
- 86% feel primary lessons should include same-gender parented families in the same way as different-gender parented families.
- 85% staff think that LGBTQ+ characters should be included in primary lessons in the same way as heterosexual characters.

Within open-ended sections for this question, participants shared:

“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.”

“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.”

Confidence in LGBTQ+ Inclusive Teaching

Despite this high level of support, a significant proportion of primary staff do not feel confident in teaching in an LGBTQ+ inclusive manner. Among primary school staff who participated in this research:

- 1 in 4 do not feel confident in knowing how to plan LGBTQ+ inclusive lessons.
- 1 in 4 do not feel confident teaching SPHE/RSE in an LGBTQ+ inclusive way.
- 17% do not feel confident in using LGBTQ+ inclusive language.

Within open-ended sections for this question, participants shared:

“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 makes it seem like they don’t exist.”

LGBTQ+ Inclusive Teaching in Practice

This lack of confidence may shed light on the gap between how important primary staff feel knowledge and representation of LGBTQ+ identities and experiences are, and how this is reflected in their teaching. Among primary school staff who participated in this research:

- 68% never organised LGBTQ+ inclusive activities such as an LGBT campaign, guest speakers or engaging expertise on sexual orientation and gender.
- 1 in 4 teaching staff never teach SPHE/RSE in an LGBTQ+ inclusive way.
- 1 in 3 teaching staff never use books and resources with LGBTQ+ people represented.

Despite the above, it is positive to see that four in five teaching staff include LGBTQ+ parented families when talking about families.

Relationship Between Confidence and Practice

Through cross-analysis, this research showed a clear relationship between confidence in planning LGBTQ+ inclusive lessons, and likelihood of teaching lessons that include and represent LGBTQ+ figures.

Among primary teaching staff who felt very confident in planning LGBTQ+ inclusive lessons, they reported high rates of LGBTQ+ inclusive practice:

- 93% include same-gender parented families in lessons.
- 88% use LGBTQ+ inclusive books and resources.
- 86% include LGBTQ+ historical or public figures in lessons.

Among primary teaching staff who reported that they did not feel at all confident in planning LGBTQ+ inclusive lessons, they reported significantly lower rates of LGBTQ+ inclusive practice:

- 44% include same-gender parented families in lessons.
- 23% use LGBTQ+ inclusive books and resources.
- 25% include LGBTQ+ historical or public figures in lessons.

With regard to teaching SPHE/RSE in an LGBTQ+ inclusive manner, 93% of primary teaching staff who were very confident in planning LGBTQ+ inclusive SPHE/RSE lessons do, in their classes, teach SPHE/RSE in an LGBTQ+ way. This is compared to primary teaching staff who did not feel at all confident in planning LGBTQ+ inclusive SPHE/RSE lessons, 44% of whom teach SPHE/RSE in an LGBTQ+ inclusive way.

Within open-ended sections for this question, participants highlighted the curriculum and a lack of training as key barriers to teaching SPHE/RSE in an LGBTQ+ inclusive manner:

“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.”

Supporting an LGBTQ+ Pupil Coming Out

The *Being LGBTQI+ in Ireland* research detailed in the previous section demonstrates the significance of an LGBTQI+ person’s experience of coming out to their mental health and wellbeing, in the short and long term.⁶ Among LGBTQI+ young people aged 14-25 and living in Ireland, 14 was the most common age to first tell someone about their LGBTQI+ identity and/or begin to live as their gender identity. For this cohort, age 14 was also the most common age at which a person experienced self-harm or suicidal thoughts.

The *Belong To Primary* research shows that primary staff have high comfort levels with a pupil coming out to them as LGBTQ+, but again we see a gap in openness and knowledge levels in what to do in this circumstance. Among primary school staff who participated in this research:

- 79% feel comfortable with a pupil coming out to them as LGBTQ+.
- 84% feel comfortable with a pupil coming out as lesbian, gay or bisexual.
- 75% feel comfortable with a pupil coming out as trans or non-binary.

⁶ Higgins A; Downes C; O’Sullivan K; de Vries J; Molloy R; Monahan M; Keogh B; Doyle L; Begley T; Corcoran P; (2024) *Being LGBTQI+ in Ireland: The National Study on the Mental Health and Wellbeing of the LGBTQI+ Communities in Ireland*. Dublin: Belong To. [Available here.](#)

- Only 3 in 10 feel very confident in knowing what to do if a pupil comes out as LGBTQ+.
- 37% feel very confident in knowing what to do if a pupil came out about their sexual orientation.
- 24% feel very confident in knowing what to do if a pupil came out as trans or non-binary.
- 1 in 4 feel very confident in knowing what to do if a pupil wants to socially transition at school.

Similar to the area of LGBTQ+ inclusive teaching, the findings suggest some relationship between formal training and support and school staff's confidence in supporting an LGBTQ+ pupil coming out.

Among primary school staff who participated in the research:

- 56% either have no formal school supports for a pupil who comes out as LGBTQ+ or are unsure of whether such supports are in place.
- 57% have never taken part in LGBTQ+ specific professional development.
- Only 1 in 3 feel very confident in their knowledge of LGBTQ+ identities.
- 1 in 4 do not feel confident in their knowledge of gender identity.

Within open-ended sections for questions relating to a pupil coming out as LGBTQ+ in school, many primary staff clearly highlight the lack of supports and training available to them, meaning they feel less prepared to support the pupil in the way that they would like to:

"There is no support structure in place. It would be down to the teacher involved."

"Very little supports. Not really prepared for what is an inevitability."

"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... We do not have initiatives in place or training."

"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.”

“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.”

“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.”

Anti-Bullying Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools

Since 2013 the Department of Education’s Anti-Bullying Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools, Circular 45/2013, has required all primary schools to explicitly name homophobic and transphobic bullying in their anti-bullying policy, along with education and prevention strategies to tackle these. However, over a decade on, a significant proportion of primary staff are not aware of whether their school fulfils this requirement. Within the *Belong To Primary* research, among primary staff:

- 1 in 3 either did not know whether their school’s anti-bullying policy mentioned homophobic and transphobic bullying or reported that this was not included in the policy.
- 3 in 10 reported that their school’s anti-bullying policy mentioned transphobic bullying.
- Half reported that their school’s anti-bullying policy included information on education and/or prevention strategies relating to homophobic, biphobic and transphobic bullying.

This is in spite of primary staff who responded to the *Belong To Primary* research reporting relatively high rates of casual homophobia, and a strong desire to include teaching on anti-LGBTQ+ bullying in their practice. Among primary staff who took the survey:

- 44% heard pupils make subtle derogatory jokes or comments about LGBTQ+ people.
- 3 in 10 only sometimes intervene when overhearing subtle, derogatory jokes or comments about LGBTQ+ people.
- 55% reported hearing pupils in their school make statements such as “that’s so gay”.
- 9 in 10 say that primary pupils should learn about anti-LGBTQ+ bullying.
- 57% feel confident in teaching about anti-LGBTQ+ bullying.

Recommendations

The *Belong To Primary* research made a number of recommendations to policymakers relevant to the review of the draft specification, including:

- **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.
- **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.

The research also made a number of recommendations to policymakers relevant to the roll-out of the *Wellbeing Curriculum* across several areas, including:

Teacher education

- **Integrate** LGBTQ+ awareness and inclusivity in 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 sustainable LGBTQ+ inclusive practice through ongoing training, policy development and local information-sharing networks.

Policy review

- **Retain** the specific naming of homophobic and transphobic bullying upon updating Circular 45/2013, *Anti-Bullying Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools*, as per Action 3.3 of *Cineáltas: Action Plan on Bullying*.
- **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 consideration of the provision of best-practice 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 2018-2020* in the new national LGBTQ+ inclusion strategy.

Feedback on Draft Curriculum Specification

Principles of Learning, Teaching and Assessment

The principles of learning, teaching and assessment are broad-based, and welcome in the context of the draft specification. However, as outlined previously, the *Belong To Primary* research found that while a large majority of primary staff feel it is important for themselves and their colleagues to know about LGBTQ+ identities, and represent LGBTQ+ identities in their teaching, a lack of training and the absence of LGBTQ+ inclusion in current curricula acted as a barrier to being LGBTQ+ inclusive in their practice.⁷ This was particularly pronounced for the area of SPHE/RSE. The research found that 93% of primary teaching staff who were very confident in planning LGBTQ+ inclusive SPHE/RSE lessons do, in their classes, teach LGBTQ/RSE in an LGBTQ+ way. This compared to primary teaching staff who did not feel at all confident in planning LGBTQ+ inclusive SPHE/RSE lessons, 44% of whom teach SPHE/RSE in an LGBTQ+ inclusive way.

It is therefore important for all principles of learning, teaching and assessment, particularly 'Inclusive education and diversity' and 'Relationships' to be taught in an LGBTQ+ inclusive manner.

For this to be achieved, terms that are not included in the Glossary – including 'human rights', 'equality', 'misconceptions', 'respect' and 'relationships' (in a context other than 'in movement') – should be added to the Glossary and be clearly defined for teaching staff.

Terms that are currently in the Glossary, relevant to this section, do not clearly explain which groups of people or characteristics are included when defined under key terms including equity, stereotypes and diversity. Definition of these terms in the Glossary should make clear reference to the nine protected characteristics under Irish equality law, namely gender, marital status, family status, disability, race, religion, age, sexual orientation, and membership of the Traveller community.

⁷ Neary, A. and Power, J. (2024) *Belong To Primary: New Foundations for LGBTQ+ Inclusivity in Primary Schools*. Research Report. Dublin: Belong To and University of Limerick. [Available here.](#)

Recommendations:

- The terms ‘human rights’, ‘equality’, ‘misconceptions’, ‘respect’ and ‘relationships’ (in a context other than ‘in movement’) – should be added to the Glossary and be clearly defined for teaching staff.
- In the Glossary, the terms equity, stereotypes and diversity should be clearly defined and name the nine protected characteristics under Irish equality law, namely gender, marital status, family status, disability, race, religion, age, sexual orientation, and membership of the Traveller community.

Rationale

Wellbeing

This section describes the Wellbeing Curriculum as “a catalyst for lifelong wellbeing by integrating vital life skills such as: self-awareness, personal safety, emotional regulation, resilience, empathy, movement, decision-making, and healthy relationship-building” and as being instrumental in “cultivating a strong sense of connection among children to their school, community, and wider society”.

As detailed previously, the *Being LGBTQI+ in Ireland* research found that, among 14–25-year-old LGBTQI+ people in Ireland, age 12 is the most common age at which a person knows they are LGBTQI+. ⁸ The most common age to live as one’s gender identity and/or to tell someone about their LGBTQI+ identity for the first time is age 14, and age 14 was also the most common age at which a person experienced self-harm or suicidal thoughts. The most common age of attempting suicide for this cohort was age 15. A number of internal and external factors influenced LGBTQI+ people’s experience of self-harm, suicide ideation and suicide attempts, as detailed in the table below:

⁸ Higgins A; Downes C; O’Sullivan K; de Vries J; Molloy R; Monahan M; Keogh B; Doyle L; Begley T; Corcoran P; (2024) *Being LGBTQI+ in Ireland: The National Study on the Mental Health and Wellbeing of the LGBTQI+ Communities in Ireland*. Dublin: Belong To. [Available here.](#)

Internal factors	External factors
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> — Self-hatred and inability to accept self — Confusion regarding one's identity — Ashamed to be LGBTQI+ due to negative reactions — Fear of being outed — Shame — Gender dysphoria 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> — Family rejection — Negative media — Bullying and discrimination — Societal rejection — Negative attitudes from family/friends and wider society

Within this context, primary school emerges as a key age at which an LGBTQI+ young person begins to explore and eventually knows their own LGBTQI+ identity, placing a strong onus on primary schools and the *Wellbeing Curriculum* to ensure that primary school does, for these young people, act as a “catalyst for lifelong wellbeing” in a positive way. Where LGBTQI+ topics are not explored, represented or included at primary level, there is a risk that a lack of self-acceptance of one's LGBTQI+ identity, feelings of shame, and bullying may develop, with detrimental long-term consequences. LGBTQ+ inclusion and awareness can also act as a means of preventing anti-LGBTQ+ bullying. Indeed, since 2013 Circular 0045/2013, *Anti-Bullying Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools* has required primary schools to implement education and prevention strategies to tackle homophobic and biphobic bullying. Tackling this form of bullying and creating the conditions within which it is less likely to develop, are highly significant in safeguarding the long-term mental health and wellbeing of LGBTQ+ people. The *Being LGBTQI+ in Ireland* research found a correlation between those who had experienced bullying, and poorer mental health and wellbeing outcomes.⁹ LGBTQI+ people who had been bullied had statistically significantly higher symptoms of depression, anxiety and stress; higher rates of self-harm, suicidal thoughts, suicide attempts and eating disorders; and lower scores for happiness, self-esteem and resilience.

⁹ Higgins A; Downes C; O'Sullivan K; de Vries J; Molloy R; Monahan M; Keogh B; Doyle L; Begley T; Corcoran P; (2024) *Being LGBTQI+ in Ireland: The National Study on the Mental Health and Wellbeing of the LGBTQI+ Communities in Ireland*. Dublin: Belong To. [Available here.](#)

Recommendations:

- The wellbeing rationale should specifically name LGBTQ+ identities and experiences within the scope of “self-awareness, personal safety, emotional regulation, resilience, empathy, movement, decision-making, and healthy relationship-building”.
- The wellbeing rationale should name an awareness of LGBTQ+ identities and experiences within the scope of “cultivating a strong sense of connection among children to their school, community, and wider society.

Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE)

It is welcome to see a range of topics, including diversity of families and identities, boundaries, consent, and emotional management included under this rationale.

However, it is concerning to see that LGBTQ+ identities, or reference to sexual orientation and gender identity broadly, are absent from the rationale of SPHE.

The *Belong To Primary* research identified a lack of specificity in the curriculum as a key barrier to being LGBTQ+ inclusive in teaching.¹⁰ This draft specification has unfortunately not done enough to overcome this existing barrier, as LGBTQ+ identities are not specifically named within this rationale or within most learning outcomes. While the rationale does describe SPHE as covering a “rich tapestry of... identities... and families” and as recognising how pupils are “unique individuals”, there is a concern that this is not a sufficiently strong basis upon which a primary teacher or school leadership can inform, or defend, teaching LGBTQ+ topics in the classroom in an age-appropriate manner.

As detailed previously, one in four primary teaching staff never teach SPHE/RSE in an LGBTQ+ inclusive way.¹¹ 93% of primary teaching staff who were very confident in planning LGBTQ+ inclusive SPHE/RSE lessons do, in their classes, teach SPHE/RSE in an LGBTQ+ way. This is compared to primary teaching staff who did not feel at all confident in planning LGBTQ+ inclusive SPHE/RSE lessons, 44% of

¹⁰ Neary, A. and Power, J. (2024) *Belong To Primary: New Foundations for LGBTQ+ Inclusivity in Primary Schools*. Research Report. Dublin: Belong To and University of Limerick. [Available here.](#)

¹¹ Neary, A. and Power, J. (2024) *Belong To Primary: New Foundations for LGBTQ+ Inclusivity in Primary Schools*. Research Report. Dublin: Belong To and University of Limerick. [Available here.](#)

whom teach SPHE/RSE in an LGBTQ+ inclusive way. Within open-ended sections for this question, participants highlighted the curriculum and a lack of training in key barriers to teaching SPHE/RSE in an LGBTQ+ inclusive manner:

“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.”

While Learning Outcomes and the Glossary do include same-sex parented families within the definition of diverse family structures, this is not considered sufficiently progressive for LGBTQ+ inclusion at primary level, as the research shows that four in five primary teaching staff already do include LGBTQ+ parented families when talking about families. This form of representation, while positive, does not directly translate to real-world capabilities as, while the level of representation for LGBTQ+ families is high, only three in 10 primary staff feel very confident in knowing what to do if a pupil comes out as LGBTQ+.

Additionally, it is very concerning to see that there is effectively no guidance given within the draft specification as to how LGBTQ+ identities will be included in “acquir[ing] accurate and developmentally appropriate information about human development and sexuality that is evidence informed”. There is a significant risk that, without this level of detail, the primary *Wellbeing Curriculum* will facilitate the same lack of certainty, knowledge and skills as currently exists with regard to LGBTQ+ inclusion at primary level – particularly in relation to SPHE/RSE – and, as such, many LGBTQ+ primary school pupils will continue to go without this form of education which is vital to their long-term wellbeing and sense of self.

Recommendation:

- **The SPHE/RSE rationale should specify that Learning Outcomes under this strand should be taught in an LGBTQ+ inclusive manner.**

It is also vital that homophobic, biphobic and transphobic bullying be explicitly mentioned within this rationale, and throughout the *Wellbeing Curriculum* broadly. The *Belong To Primary* research found that only 57% of primary staff feel confident in teaching about anti-LGBTQ+ bullying, and yet 9 in 10 feel that primary pupils

should learn about anti-LGBTQ+ bullying.¹² 44% of primary staff heard pupils make subtle derogatory jokes or comments about LGBTQ+ people, while 3 in 10 only sometimes intervene when hearing such jokes or comments.

The SPHE rationale states that, within the context of child protection, the curriculum “supports children to recognise healthy, unhealthy, and harmful behaviours within relationships... By fostering this understanding, children are empowered to recognise, respond and report instances of bullying and abuse, contributing to their overall wellbeing and safety and that of others.” If almost half of primary staff lack confidence in teaching about anti-LGBTQ+ bullying, and homophobic, biphobic and transphobic bullying are not mentioned anywhere in the draft specification, it is wholly unclear how LGBTQ+ pupils will be supported in recognising such harmful behaviours and be empowered to recognise, respond to and report such instances of bullying.

The inclusion of teaching on homophobic and transphobic bullying would not be a new development for primary schools. Since 2013, they have been required to explicitly name homophobic and transphobic bullying in their anti-bullying policy, and detail education and prevention measures to tackle the same, as per the Department of Education’s Circular 0045/2013, *Anti-Bullying Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools*. However, despite this requirement being in place for over a decade, the *Belong To Primary* research found that among primary staff in Ireland:¹³

- 1 in 3 either did not know whether their school’s anti-bullying policy mentioned homophobic and transphobic bullying, or reported that this was not included in the policy.
- 3 in 10 reported that their school’s anti-bullying policy mentioned transphobic bullying.
- Only half reported that their school’s anti-bullying policy included information on education and/or prevention strategies relating to homophobic, biphobic and transphobic bullying.

¹² Neary, A. and Power, J. (2024) *Belong To Primary: New Foundations for LGBTQ+ Inclusivity in Primary Schools*. Research Report. Dublin: Belong To and University of Limerick. [Available here.](#)

¹³ Neary, A. and Power, J. (2024) *Belong To Primary: New Foundations for LGBTQ+ Inclusivity in Primary Schools*. Research Report. Dublin: Belong To and University of Limerick. [Available here.](#)

Finally, as noted previously, the *Being LGBTQI+ in Ireland* research found a correlation between those LGBTQI+ people who had experienced bullying, and poorer mental health and wellbeing outcomes, as compared to LGBTQI+ people who had not been bullied.¹⁴ LGBTQI+ people who had been bullied had statistically significantly higher symptoms of depression, anxiety and stress; higher rates of self-harm, suicidal thoughts, suicide attempts and eating disorders; and lower scores for happiness, self-esteem and resilience.

Recommendation:

- **The SPHE/RSE rationale should clearly name existing requirements under Circular 0045/2013, *Anti-Bullying Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools*, for primary schools to implement education and prevention measures to tackle homophobic and transphobic bullying.**

Emotional and Relational Education

Identity

Some of the key elements within the Learning Outcomes under the Identity strand of the draft specification include:

- develop a growing sense of self-identity and self-worth, exploring their unique qualities, abilities, talents, and interests, recognising similarities and uniqueness in others;
- demonstrate increasing self-awareness and self-confidence, recognising and accepting their unique qualities, while also demonstrating acceptance and respect for uniqueness in others;
- demonstrate awareness of the factors that can contribute to their self-image, self-worth, and an evolving sense of identity and identify ways to nurture a positive sense of self-worth; and

¹⁴ Higgins A; Downes C; O'Sullivan K; de Vries J; Molloy R; Monahan M; Keogh B; Doyle L; Begley T; Corcoran P; (2024) *Being LGBTQI+ in Ireland: The National Study on the Mental Health and Wellbeing of the LGBTQI+ Communities in Ireland*. Dublin: Belong To. [Available here.](#)

- recognise, value, and respect their unique qualities, cultivating a confident, positive sense of self, and demonstrate acceptance, respect and compassion towards diversity in others, fostering inclusion.

For many LGBTQ+ people, a number of the above-named elements play a central role in their understanding of their sexual orientation and/or gender identity. A wealth of Irish and international research draws a clear correlation between the circumstances of a person beginning to recognise and understand their LGBTQ+ identity, and their mental health and wellbeing in both the short and long-term. One such example is the recently published *Being LGBTQI+ in Ireland* report, a national study of the mental health and wellbeing of Ireland's LGBTQI+ community.¹⁵

This research found that, among LGBTQI+ people aged 14-25 living in Ireland, 12 is the most common age at which a person knows they are LGBTQI+. The most common age to live as one's gender identity and/or to tell someone about their LGBTQI+ identity for the first time is age 14. For this cohort, age 14 was also the most common age at which a person experienced self-harm or suicidal thoughts, and the most common age of attempting suicide was 15.

This research found that a number of internal and external factors influence LGBTQI+ people's experience of self-harm, suicide ideation and suicide attempts. These factors include "self-hatred and inability to accept self", "confusion regarding one's identity", "ashamed to be LGBTQI+ due to negative reactions", "shame", "bullying and discrimination", and "negative reactions from family/friends and wider society". Additionally, compared to the general Irish youth population, LGBTQI+ young people aged 14-18 experience three times the level of severe or extremely severe depression and anxiety, three times the rate of self-harm, twice the rate of suicidal thoughts, and five times the rate of suicide attempts.

Recommendation:

- **LGBTQ+ identities and experiences should be integrated, in an age-appropriate manner, across stages 1 through 4 of the Identity strand of the *Wellbeing Curriculum*.**

¹⁵ Higgins A; Downes C; O'Sullivan K; de Vries J; Molloy R; Monahan M; Keogh B; Doyle L; Begley T; Corcoran P; (2024) *Being LGBTQI+ in Ireland: The National Study on the Mental Health and Wellbeing of the LGBTQI+ Communities in Ireland*. Dublin: Belong To. [Available here.](#)

To facilitate this integration it is also strongly recommended that staff materials and resources accompanying the *Wellbeing Curriculum*, such as those on the Wellbeing Online Toolkit, include practical support materials and best practice guidelines on supporting a pupil who comes out as LGBTQ+; the process of engaging with the pupil and their parent, guardian or caregiver; and proactive measures a school can put in place to ensure that the school is a safe and supportive environment for all LGBTQ+ pupils, whether they are out or not. This should be supported by clear procedural templates and guidelines published by the Department of Education. Together, these measures will help to safeguard the mental health and wellbeing of LGBTQ+ pupils who begin to understand and/or come out while in primary school.

This recommendation emerges from findings published as part of the *Belong To Primary* research which found that although 79% of primary staff feel comfortable with a pupil coming out as LGBTQ+, only three in 10 feel very confident in knowing what to do if a pupil comes out at as LGBTQ+ at school, and only one in four feel very confident in knowing what to do if a pupil wants to socially transition at school.¹⁶ 56% of primary staff report that their school either has no formal supports for a pupil who comes out as LGBTQ+, or that they are unsure of whether such supports are in place.

Commenting on this topic, research participants said:

“We listen and accept what [pupils] 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.”

“There is no support structure in place. It would be down to the teacher involved.”

“I know our school is not set up to support a child effectively in this situation [of coming out]. I would be very concerned for the child’s welfare and their needs going forward as there is no structure in place for this.... We do not have initiatives in place or training.”

“I wouldn’t be uncomfortable about the information [of a pupil coming out as LGBTQ+], I would be uncomfortable about how to support the

¹⁶ Neary, A. and Power, J. (2024) *Belong To Primary: New Foundations for LGBTQ+ Inclusivity in Primary Schools*. Research Report. Dublin: Belong To and University of Limerick. [Available here.](#)

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.”

Recommendation:

- **Staff materials and resources accompanying the *Wellbeing Curriculum*, such as those on the Wellbeing Online Toolkit, should include practical support materials and best practice guidelines on supporting a pupil who comes out as LGBTQ+; the process of engaging with the pupil and their parent, guardian or caregiver; and proactive measures a school can put in place to ensure that the school is a safe and supportive environment for all LGBTQ+ pupils, whether they are out or not.**

Emotional Awareness and Expression

As detailed under the previous Identity section, among LGBTQI+ people aged 14-25 living in Ireland, 12 is the most common age at which a person knows they are LGBTQI+; 14 is the most common age at which a person experienced self-harm or suicidal thoughts, and the most common age of attempting suicide was 15.¹⁷ Internal and external factors, related to emotional awareness and expression, which influence LGBTQI+ people's experience of self-harm, suicide ideation and suicide attempts include “self-hatred and inability to accept self”, “confusion regarding one's identity” and “shame”.¹⁸

The recently published *Belong To Primary* research found that only one in three primary staff feel very confident in their knowledge of LGBTQ+ identities and more than half of primary staff (57%) have never taken part in LGBTQ+ specific professional development.¹⁹

¹⁷ Higgins A; Downes C; O'Sullivan K; de Vries J; Molloy R; Monahan M; Keogh B; Doyle L; Begley T; Corcoran P; (2024) Being LGBTQI+ in Ireland: The National Study on the Mental Health and Wellbeing of the LGBTQI+ Communities in Ireland. Dublin: Belong To. [Available here.](#)

¹⁸ Higgins A; Downes C; O'Sullivan K; de Vries J; Molloy R; Monahan M; Keogh B; Doyle L; Begley T; Corcoran P; (2024) Being LGBTQI+ in Ireland: The National Study on the Mental Health and Wellbeing of the LGBTQI+ Communities in Ireland. Dublin: Belong To. [Available here.](#)

¹⁹ Neary, A. and Power, J. (2024) *Belong To Primary: New Foundations for LGBTQ+ Inclusivity in Primary Schools*. Research Report. Dublin: Belong To and University of Limerick. [Available here.](#)

It is therefore recommended that Learning Outcomes under strands 3 and 4 of the Emotional Awareness and Expression Unit make explicit reference to LGBTQ+ identities as part of self-identity formation within the context of influences on emotions and feelings. It is also recommended that all primary staff be provided with training, resources and guidance on the topic of supporting LGBTQ+ young people's mental health. Finally, it is recommended that Belong To's e-learning module, 'Educators and Youth Workers Supporting LGBTQ+ Young People',²⁰ and the e-learning module produced by Belong To and Jigsaw, 'Supporting the Mental Health of LGBTI+ Young People',²¹ both of which are self-directed and free to use, be included in the Wellbeing Online Toolkit.

Recommendations:

- **Learning Outcomes under strands 3 and 4 of the Emotional Awareness and Expression Unit should specifically name LGBTQ+ identities as part of self-identity formation within the context of influences on emotions and feelings.**
- **All primary staff, both teaching and non-teaching, should be provided with training, resources and guidance on the topic of supporting LGBTQ+ young people's mental health.**
- **Belong To's e-learning module, 'Educators and Youth Workers Supporting LGBTQ+ Young People',²² and the e-learning module produced by Belong To and Jigsaw, 'Supporting the Mental Health of LGBTI+ Young People',²³ should be included in the Wellbeing Online Toolkit.**

Relationships

Research demonstrates that LGBTQ+ young people are at high risk of experiencing bullying, friendship challenges, harassment and assault during their adolescence and school years. Published in 2022, findings from the *School Climate Survey*

²⁰ <https://www.belongto.org/support-for-someone-else/at-school/post-primary/training-for-educators/>

²¹ <https://www.belongto.org/training/>

²² <https://www.belongto.org/support-for-someone-else/at-school/post-primary/training-for-educators/>

²³ <https://www.belongto.org/training/>

demonstrate the reality of school life for many LGBTQ+ post-primary students in Ireland.²⁴

The report states that, compared to Ireland's general youth population, LGBTQ+ post-primary students are:

- Nine times more likely to report being deliberately excluded by peers;
- Nine times more likely to report being the focus of rumours or lies;
- Four times more likely to report being verbally harassed, including name-calling and being threatened;
- Five times more likely to suffer physical harassment, including being shoved or pushed;
- Four times as likely to feel lonely at school;
- Three times as likely to feel like an outsider at school;
- Twice as likely to face difficulties making friends in school; and
- Three times as likely to feel disliked by other students.

Additionally, in the year prior to the research being carried out:

- 12% of LGBTQ+ students were physically assaulted, including being punched, kicked, or injured with a weapon;
- 46% of LGBTQ+ students were sexually harassed, including unwanted touching or sexual remarks; and
- 41% of LGBTQ+ students were cyberbullied over social media, phone, or email.

These experiences have long-term consequences. The *Being LGBTQI+ in Ireland* research, with a sample of over 2,800 participants aged 14-84, demonstrates the long-term impact of anti-LGBTQI+ bullying.²⁵ Within the cohort of LGBTQI+ participants, LGBTQI+ people who had been bullied had statistically significantly higher symptoms of depression, anxiety and stress; higher rates of self-harm,

²⁴ Pizmony-Levy, O. (2022) *The 2022 Irish School Climate Survey*. Research Report. Global Observatory of LGBTQ+ Education and Advocacy. Dublin and New York: Belong To and Teachers College, Columbia University. [Available here](#).

²⁵ Higgins A; Downes C; O'Sullivan K; de Vries J; Molloy R; Monahan M; Keogh B; Doyle L; Begley T; Corcoran P; (2024) *Being LGBTQI+ in Ireland: The National Study on the Mental Health and Wellbeing of the LGBTQI+ Communities in Ireland*. Dublin: Belong To. [Available here](#).

suicidal thoughts, suicide attempts and eating disorders; and lower scores for happiness, self-esteem and resilience.

LGBTQ+ young people who contributed to Belong To's focus group in advance of this submission named how negative attitudes towards LGBTQ+ people, and a pattern of being isolated or targeted on the basis of sexual orientation and/or gender identity, often began in primary school. The group felt that, as LGBTQ+ topics were not spoken about during their time in primary school and anti-LGBTQ+ comments were not challenged by school staff, casual homophobia, transphobia and biphobia went unchecked, facilitating a culture of exclusion and anti-LGBTQ+ bullying.

Key elements within the Learning Outcomes under Relationships that directly affect LGBTQ+ youth include friendships, respectful interactions, bullying and abuse. For this strand to be taught in a way that encompasses the challenges and experiences of LGBTQ+ pupils, and aligns with the requirement to prevent and tackle homophobic bullying and transphobic bullying in accordance with Circular 0045/2013, *Anti-Bullying Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools*, the *Wellbeing Curriculum* should explicitly name and define homophobic, biphobic and transphobic bullying, and name these experiences within the Learning Outcomes of this strand. Additionally, so as to foster an inclusive environment within which healthy relationships between classmates can be fostered and interactions are respectful, LGBTQ+ inclusion and visibility across the school environment should be a key aim of primary staff.

Recommendations:

- **Homophobic, biphobic and transphobic bullying should be specifically named within the Learning Outcomes of the Relationships strand.**
- **LGBTQ+ inclusion and visibility should be named across the school environment as a key aim of primary staff within the Relationships strand.**

Community and Belonging

Sense of Belonging

While relating to post-primary students, the findings of the *School Climate Survey* demonstrate how, for LGBTQ+ young people, a sense of belonging includes and extends beyond what is taught in the curriculum.²⁶ The research finds that:

- including positive things about LGBTQ+ related topics in the curriculum means LGBTQ+ students are 11% more likely to feel accepted by the student body and 22% more likely to feel they belong in their school;
- in schools with higher levels of staff support for LGBTQ+ youth, LGBTQ+ students were 33% more likely to feel they belong in their school and 35% more likely to feel accepted by the student body; and
- when staff members intervened in homophobic remarks, LGBTQ+ students were 13% more likely to feel accepted by the student body and 14% more likely to feel they belong in their school.

In light of the above, it is recommended that specific forms of diversity, such as sexual orientation, gender identity, race, religion and membership of the Traveller community, are clearly named within Learning Outcomes under the Sense of Belonging strand. Following the holistic and integrated approach taken by the draft specification, it is also recommended LGBTQ+ identities and experiences be included across a range of strands, through clear and named reference in Learning Outcomes and/or inclusion in resource, training and support materials, to further support the intended outcome of this strand.

Recommendations:

- **Specific forms of diversity, such as sexual orientation, gender identity, race, religion and membership of the Traveller community, should be clearly named within Learning Outcomes under the Sense of Belonging strand.**
- **LGBTQ+ identities and experiences should be included across a range of strands, through specific naming and reference in Learning**

²⁶ Pizmony-Levy, O. (2022) *The 2022 Irish School Climate Survey*. Research Report. Global Observatory of LGBTQ+ Education and Advocacy. Dublin and New York: Belong To and Teachers College, Columbia University. [Available here](#).

Outcomes and/or inclusion in resource, training and support materials, to further support the intended outcome of the Sense of Belonging strand

Family

It is welcome that the Learning Outcomes under the Family strand name the inclusion of same-sex families within the definition of family structures, and we strongly encourage its retention.

The representation of same-gender parented families in the same way as different-gender families in primary lessons is supported by 86% of primary staff, with four in five primary teaching staff already mentioning same-gendered parented families when talking about families generally.

Recommendation:

- **Representation of same-sex parented families should be retained in the *Wellbeing Curriculum*, and this inclusion should be supported with resources in the Wellbeing Online Toolkit.**

Rights and Fairness

It is recommended that equality, inequality and discrimination be more clearly defined within the Learning Outcomes under the Rights and Fairness strand. These Learning Outcomes would be strengthened with specific reference to personal characteristics protected under the Equal Status Acts, namely gender, marital status, family status, disability, race, religion, age, sexual orientation, and membership of the Traveller community.

Sadly, members of Ireland's LGBTQ+ community continue to live in a climate of fear, despite significant progress on LGBTQ+ rights in recent years. *Being LGBTQI+ in Ireland* finds that 53% of LGBTQI+ people in Ireland feel unsafe holding hands with a same-sex partner in public, and over half of trans and non-binary people feel unsafe

expressing their gender identity in public.²⁷ Primary educators have a key role to play in shaping a safer, more equal society for everyone, including the LGBTQ+ community. An age and stage appropriate understanding of inequality and discrimination as relate to members of the LGBTQ+ community is integral to achieving this.

This is important not only to ensure that pupils fully benefit from the scope of Rights and Fairness strand, but also as a means of supporting the implementation of education and prevention strategies to deal with homophobic and transphobic bullying, as per Circular 0045/2013. The recently published *Belong To Primary* research reveals that the proportion of primary staff who feel confident in teaching about anti-LGBTQ+ bullying is relatively low, at 57%.²⁸ However, almost half of primary staff (44%) hear pupils make subtle derogatory jokes or comments about LGBTQ+ people in school. In order to foster a school environment where homophobic and transphobic bullying is not only addressed, but prevented, it is vital that pupils learn about equality, inequality and discrimination in clearly defined terms.

Recommendation:

- **Strengthen the definitions of equality, inequality and discrimination with specific reference to personal characteristics protected under the Equal Status Acts, namely gender, marital status, family status, disability, race, religion, age, sexual orientation, and membership of the Traveller community.**

Practical Considerations

The *Wellbeing Curriculum* and Wider Policy

It is welcome that the draft specification names its position in the context of wider policies and circulars relating to child protection and bullying. One such policy is Circular 0045/2013, *Anti-Bullying Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools*,

²⁷ Higgins A; Downes C; O'Sullivan K; de Vries J; Molloy R; Monahan M; Keogh B; Doyle L; Begley T; Corcoran P; (2024) Being LGBTQI+ in Ireland: The National Study on the Mental Health and Wellbeing of the LGBTQI+ Communities in Ireland. Dublin: Belong To. [Available here.](#)

²⁸ Neary, A. and Power, J. (2024) *Belong To Primary: New Foundations for LGBTQ+ Inclusivity in Primary Schools*. Research Report. Dublin: Belong To and University of Limerick. [Available here.](#)

which has required all primary schools to name homophobic and transphobic bullying in their anti-bullying policy, and explicitly detail education and prevention strategies to tackle homophobic and transphobic bullying since 2013. The draft specification states that: “When preparing and planning for learning, teaching, and assessment related to the Wellbeing Curriculum, it is essential to consider wider policy and circulars which set out the mandated programmes within SPHE... the Anti-Bullying procedures for primary and post-primary schools sets out the requirements on schools in relation to preventing and dealing with bullying behaviour.”

The recently published *Belong To Primary* findings reveal a concerning lack of awareness among primary staff as to whether their school is following the requirements of Circular 0045/2013.²⁹ One in three primary staff either do not know whether their school’s anti-bullying policy mentions homophobic and biphobic bullying, or reported that this was not included. Only three in 10 primary staff reported that their school’s anti-bullying policy mentioned transphobic bullying and just half of primary staff were aware of information on education and/or prevention strategies relating to homophobic and transphobic bullying in their school’s anti-bullying policy.

Cinéaltas, the national action plan on bullying, commits to updating the *Anti-Bullying Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools* to, among other things, take account of gender identity bullying and provide guidance as to when an incident of bullying becomes a Child Protection Concern.

Within the context of the above research findings, it is strongly recommended that the Wellbeing Curriculum specifically names homophobic and transphobic bullying within this section, as part of Learning Outcomes that relate to bullying and in the Glossary, along with the provision of comprehensive supports relating to homophobic and transphobic bullying via the Wellbeing Online Toolkit.

Recommendations:

- **Homophobic, biphobic and transphobic bullying should be specifically named with reference the *Wellbeing Curriculum*’s relationship with wider policy, and as part of Learning Outcomes that relate to bullying.**

²⁹ Neary, A. and Power, J. (2024) *Belong To Primary: New Foundations for LGBTQ+ Inclusivity in Primary Schools*. Research Report. Dublin: Belong To and University of Limerick. [Available here.](#)

- **Homophobic, biphobic and transphobic bullying should be specifically and individually named within the Glossary.**
- **Comprehensive supports relating to homophobic, biphobic and transphobic bullying should be provided via the Wellbeing Online Toolkit.**

The Role of External Facilitators and Programmes

The draft specification states that “as a result of their established relationship with the children, their pedagogical and curriculum knowledge, the classroom teacher is uniquely and best positioned to effectively implement the *Wellbeing Curriculum*.

Where a specific need is identified, external facilitators can play a complementary role in collaborative partnership with teachers for aspects of the curriculum...

Consideration should also be given to the progression of children’s learning and whether an external facilitator will complement this. Furthermore, alignment between the external facilitator and the *Wellbeing Curriculum* in terms of content, pedagogical approaches and the children’s needs, age, and maturity should be considered.”

Belong To fully supports this approach and agrees that the classroom teacher is best placed to implement the Learning Outcomes under the Wellbeing Curriculum. *Belong To*’s post-primary school programmes, the LGBTQ+ Quality Mark and Stand Up Awareness Week, are designed to build the capacity of classroom teachers and school staff to lead on the integration of LGBTQ+ inclusion to the school culture, environment and curriculum in a way that engages the whole school community and is sustained over time.

Within the context of the draft specification, the absence of significant representation of LGBTQ+ identities and experiences, beyond the inclusion of same-sex parents, risks limiting the extent to which these topics are taught in primary schools.

The *Belong To Primary* research shows that nine in 10 primary staff believe it is important for those working in primary schools to know about LGBTQ+ inclusivity, yet only one in three primary staff feel very confident in their knowledge of LGBTQ+ identities and more than half of primary staff (57%) have never taken part in

LGBTQ+ specific professional development.³⁰ The findings show that where primary staff feel very confident in planning LGBTQ+ inclusive lessons, as compared to those who are not at all confident in planning such lessons, they are:

- More likely – by a margin of 49% - to include same-gender parented families in lessons (93% v 44%).
- More likely – by a margin of 65% - to use LGBTQ+ inclusive books and resources (88% v 23%).
- More likely – by a margin of 61% - to include LGBTQ+ historical or public figures in lessons (86% v 25%).

Similarly, primary staff who feel very confident in teaching SPHE/RSE in an LGBTQ+ way are, by a margin of 65%, more likely to teach LGBTQ+ inclusive SPHE/RSE lessons as compared to primary staff who consider themselves not at all confident in teaching LGBTQ+ inclusive SPHE/RSE (91% vs 26%).

The above figures show a clear gap between primary staff members' ambition to be LGBTQ+ inclusive in their practice, and their capacity to do so, owing to low levels of knowledge and confidence.

Clear, named inclusion of LGBTQ+ topics across the draft specification, including Learning Outcomes, is recommended to provide the basis for primary staff training on LGBTQ+ inclusion, and the role of external facilitators where a specific need for support regarding LGBTQ+ topics is identified.

Wellbeing Online Toolkit

We welcome the inclusion of a Wellbeing Online Toolkit to support the successful implementation of the Wellbeing specification.

The recently published *Belong To Primary* research, a study involving 1,031 primary school staff's experience, attitudes, knowledge levels, practices and professional needs regarding LGBTQ+ inclusivity, provides useful insight as to their support needs in the context of this curriculum.³¹

³⁰ Neary, A. and Power, J. (2024) *Belong To Primary: New Foundations for LGBTQ+ Inclusivity in Primary Schools*. Research Report. Dublin: Belong To and University of Limerick. [Available here.](#)

³¹ Neary, A. and Power, J. (2024) *Belong To Primary: New Foundations for LGBTQ+ Inclusivity in Primary Schools*. Research Report. Dublin: Belong To and University of Limerick. [Available here.](#)

Coming Out Supports

79% of primary staff feel comfortable with a pupil coming out as LGBTQ+. However, only three in 10 feel very confident in knowing what to do if a pupil comes out as LGBTQ+ at school, and only one in four feel very confident in knowing what to do if a pupil wants to socially transition at school.³² Over half of primary staff (56%) either have no formal school supports for a pupil who comes out as LGBTQ+, or are unsure of whether such supports are in place.

Commenting on this topic, one research participant said:

“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.”

To address this identified gap, the Wellbeing Online Toolkit should include practical support materials and best practice guidelines on supporting a pupil who comes out as LGBTQ+; the process of engaging with the pupil and their parent, guardian or caregiver; and proactive measures a school can put in place to ensure that the school is a safe and supportive environment for all LGBTQ+ pupils, whether they are out or not. This should be supported by clear procedural templates and guidelines published by the Department of Education.

Recommendations:

- **The NCCA should engage with the Department of Education on developing clear procedural templates and guidelines on supporting LGBTQ+ pupils who come out in school.**
- **The Wellbeing Online Toolkit should include practical support materials and guidelines on supporting a pupil who comes out as LGBTQ+; the process of engaging with the pupil and their parent, guardian or**

³² Neary, A. and Power, J. (2024) *Belong To Primary: New Foundations for LGBTQ+ Inclusivity in Primary Schools*. Research Report. Dublin: Belong To and University of Limerick. [Available here.](#)

caregiver; and proactive measures a school can put in place to ensure that the school is a safe and supportive environment for all LGBTQ+ pupils, whether they are out or not.

LGBTQ+ Inclusive Materials

An overwhelming majority of primary staff (85%) think that LGBTQ+ characters should be included in primary lessons in the same way as heterosexual characters.³³ However, one in three primary teaching staff never use books and resources with LGBTQ+ people represented. Similarly, one in four primary staff do not feel confident teaching SPHE/RSE in an LGBTQ+ inclusive way, and one in four primary teaching staff never teach SPHE/RSE in an LGBTQ+ inclusive way.

Speaking to the importance of accessing LGBTQ+ inclusive materials, research participants said:

“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.”

“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.”

It is vital that supports, materials and resources provided in the Wellbeing Online Toolkit reflect the diversity of Irish society today, including representation of LGBTQ+ people and experiences. As mentioned above by research participants, it is important that LGBTQ+ identities are not isolated solely to resources dedicated to teaching about LGBTQ+ specific themes. Visibility across a variety of materials is required to ensure that pupils can develop a holistic understanding of difference and diversity.

³³ Neary, A. and Power, J. (2024) *Belong To Primary: New Foundations for LGBTQ+ Inclusivity in Primary Schools*. Research Report. Dublin: Belong To and University of Limerick. [Available here.](#)

Recommendations:

- **Supports, resources and materials provided in the Wellbeing Online Toolkit should represent LGBTQ+ identities and experiences.**

Primary Staff Training and Capacity Building

Nine in 10 primary staff believe it is important for those working in primary schools to know about LGBTQ+ inclusivity, yet only one in three primary staff feel very confident in their knowledge of LGBTQ+ identities and over half of primary staff (57%) have never taken part in LGBTQ+ specific professional development.³⁴ The *Belong To Primary* findings show a consistent desire among primary staff to equip themselves with the confidence, skills and knowledge to be more LGBTQ+ inclusive in their practice, by means of training.

Indeed, the research findings show that where primary staff feel very confident in planning LGBTQ+ inclusive lessons, as compared to those who are not at all confident in planning such lessons, they are:

- More likely – by a margin of 49% - to include same-gender parented families in lessons (93% v 44%).
- More likely – by a margin of 65% - to use LGBTQ+ inclusive books and resources (88% v 23%).
- More likely – by a margin of 61% - to include LGBTQ+ historical or public figures in lessons (86% v 25%).

Similarly, primary staff who feel very confident in teaching SPHE/RSE in an LGBTQ+ way are, by a margin of 65%, more likely to teach LGBTQ+ inclusive SPHE/RSE lessons as compared to primary staff who consider themselves not at all confident in teaching LGBTQ+ inclusive SPHE/RSE (91% vs 26%).

³⁴ Neary, A. and Power, J. (2024) *Belong To Primary: New Foundations for LGBTQ+ Inclusivity in Primary Schools*. Research Report. Dublin: Belong To and University of Limerick. [Available here.](#)

Recommendations:

- **The NCCA should engage with relevant stakeholders to produce a range of CPD programmes on areas relating to LGBTQ+ identities, experiences and inclusion.**

Glossary

Family Structures Definition

It is welcome that the Glossary clearly states that same-sex families should be included within the definition of family structures, and we strongly encourage its retention. The representation of same-gender parented families in the same way as different-gender families in primary lessons is supported by 86% of primary staff, with four in five primary teaching staff already mentioning same-gendered parented families when talking about families generally.

Bullying Definition

The definition of bullying is broad, and makes reference to five forms of bullying, namely identity bullying, cyber bullying, racist bullying, sexist bullying, and sexual harassment. These forms of bullying are not currently defined within the Glossary, and their individual inclusion as defined terms is vital so as to ensure that they are fully and consistently understood among primary staff.

Homophobic and Transphobic Bullying

It is vital that homophobic and transphobic bullying be individually listed and defined within the Wellbeing specification's Glossary.

Since 2013 the Department of Education and Skills' Circular 0045/2013, *Anti-Bullying Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools* has required all primary schools to name homophobic and transphobic bullying in their anti-bullying policy, and explicitly detail education and prevention strategies to tackle homophobic and transphobic bullying. The new Wellbeing specification must be aligned with, and support the continued implementation of, existing Department of Education procedures.

The recently published *Belong To Primary* findings reveal a concerning lack of awareness among primary staff as to whether their school is following the requirements of Circular 0045/2013.³⁵ One in three primary staff either do not know whether their school's anti-bullying policy mentions homophobic and biphobic bullying, or reported that this was not included. Only three in 10 primary staff reported that their school's anti-bullying policy mentioned transphobic bullying and just half of primary staff were aware of information on education and/or prevention strategies relating to homophobic and transphobic bullying in their school's anti-bullying policy.

The proportion of primary staff who feel confident in teaching about anti-LGBTQ+ bullying is relatively low at 57%.³⁶ However, almost half of primary staff (44%) hear pupils make subtle derogatory jokes or comments about LGBTQ+ people in school. A lack of confidence in teaching about anti-LGBTQ+ bullying, teamed with the prevalence of casual LGBTQ+phobia in primary schools, creates a protection gap for pupils at risk of experiencing homophobic and transphobic bullying.

The *Being LGBTQI+ in Ireland* research demonstrates the long-term impact of homophobic and transphobic bullying on LGBTQI+ people. Within the cohort of LGBTQI+ participants, LGBTQI+ people who had been bullied had statistically significantly higher symptoms of depression, anxiety and stress; higher rates of self-harm, suicidal thoughts, suicide attempts and eating disorders; and lower scores for happiness, self-esteem and resilience.³⁷

As such, the Wellbeing specification must, at a minimum, name and define homophobic and transphobic bullying.

LGBTQ+ Terminology

Only one in three primary staff feel very confident in their knowledge of LGBTQ+ identities, and one in four primary staff do not feel confident in their knowledge of

³⁵ Neary, A. and Power, J. (2024) *Belong To Primary: New Foundations for LGBTQ+ Inclusivity in Primary Schools*. Research Report. Dublin: Belong To and University of Limerick. [Available here.](#)

³⁶ Neary, A. and Power, J. (2024) *Belong To Primary: New Foundations for LGBTQ+ Inclusivity in Primary Schools*. Research Report. Dublin: Belong To and University of Limerick. [Available here.](#)

³⁷ Higgins A; Downes C; O'Sullivan K; de Vries J; Molloy R; Monahan M; Keogh B; Doyle L; Begley T; Corcoran P; (2024) *Being LGBTQI+ in Ireland: The National Study on the Mental Health and Wellbeing of the LGBTQI+ Communities in Ireland*. Dublin: Belong To. [Available here.](#)

gender identity.³⁸ As such, the Glossary should detail specific terminology relating to LGBTQ+ identities and experiences, including terms relating to sexual orientation, gender identity, pronoun use and coming out.

³⁸ Neary, A. and Power, J. (2024) *Belong To Primary: New Foundations for LGBTQ+ Inclusivity in Primary Schools*. Research Report. Dublin: Belong To and University of Limerick. [Available here.](#)

Consultation with LGBTQ+ Young People

Introduction

In advance of Belong To's submission to the NCCA on the draft Wellbeing Specification for primary level, a consultation was held with Belong To's Youth Advisory Panel. The Youth Advisory Panel is a group of 30 LGBTQ+ young people aged 14-23 who support and advise Belong To's work across policy, research, advocacy and campaigns. This consultation took the form of a workshop, and was held in April 2024 during a focused youth engagement day. The workshop was supported by youth workers and facilitated by Belong To's Policy and Participation Coordinator.

To facilitate an open and non-guided discussion, young people worked in groups across each of the four thematic areas below:

- What should primary pupils learn in relation to LGBTQ+ topics?
- What do LGBTQ+ or questioning primary pupils need?
- What do teachers need around LGBTQ+ inclusion at primary level?
- What do parents need around LGBTQ+ inclusion at primary level?

When all groups had discussed and given feedback on each of the below questions, all participants collectively discussed the key recommendations arising from the workshop. Young people's feedback and recommendations are detailed below, arranged in accordance with each of the four thematic questions. This feedback has guided Belong To's submission and recommendations in relation to the draft Wellbeing specification.

What should primary pupils learn in relation to LGBTQ+ topics?

LGBTQ+ Representation and Awareness

Young people engaged in the workshop felt that it was important for LGBTQ+ people to be represented across the primary school curriculum. The group were keen to stress the need for this to 'build as pupils grow up', giving the example of reading a book that includes two mothers for younger age groups and building to learning about LGBTQ+ identities in later primary years. In particular, young people who took

part in the workshop highlighted the need to cover the 'basics' of LGBTQ+ identities among older primary pupils by providing a definition of LGBTQ+ and explaining what pronouns are and why they are important.

Young people felt that LGBTQ+ representation is important for all primary pupils, as it reflects the reality of the world around them. The group also felt that this kind of representation could support teachers in informal conversations about the family dynamics of pupils within the class, for example a pupil with same-gender parents or with an LGBTQ+ sibling. The group strongly felt that this should be supported by access to age-appropriate books and media that reflect the diversity of Irish society, including gender, sexual orientation, disability, race and family origin. Even though young people felt it is very positive to have LGBTQ+ representation in SPHE or during Pride celebrations, it was expressed that only featuring LGBTQ+ people in these specific areas risked separating out a person's LGBTQ+ identity from their day to day life.

In particular, LGBTQ+ young people felt that it was very important for older primary pupils to learn about LGBTQ+ history and in particular why Pride celebrations are important. The group felt that this would foster a sense of belonging among LGBTQ+ pupils, and open positive conversations about LGBTQ+ topics among pupils who are not LGBTQ+.

Empathy and Acceptance

Young people felt that it was important for representation of LGBTQ+ people and identities to be integrated to broader SPHE and Wellbeing topics related to empathy, friendships and community. The group felt that, when it came to post-primary school, one of the main issues that leads to the bullying and social exclusion of LGBTQ+ students is a lack of empathy and understanding in relation to their identity. In response, young people felt that primary school was a crucial time to include LGBTQ+ people within broader conversations around difference, each person being unique, and acceptance of yourself and others. For older primary cohorts, the group recommended including allyship in broader teaching about rights and equality in society. The group also felt that the classroom and school environment more broadly should be a safe space for pupils to think about and question their identity.

Curriculum Topics

Regarding specific curriculum topics, young people felt it was vitally important for all primary pupils to learn about consent in an age- and stage-appropriate manner. The group felt that programmes such as Stay Safe were very important for primary pupils, and noted how the theme of consent could be integrated across a variety of topics and lessons, along with general interaction among pupils, so that awareness of consent is embedded in all interactions that pupils have in and outside of school.

In addition, young people felt that understanding and challenging gender stereotypes is important for primary pupils as they understand themselves, others and the world around them. An awareness of trans and intersex identities, taught in an informed and respectful way, was also noted as something that is important for the SPHE strand of Wellbeing.

What do LGBTQ+ or questioning primary pupils need?

School Culture

The most prominent feedback from LGBTQ+ young people regarding what LGBTQ+ or questioning pupils need related to the broad school culture and environment. The group self that the school should be an accepting and supportive environment, inside and outside the classroom. This includes ensuring that there is no shaming, othering or embarrassment of LGBTQ+ or questioning pupils by fellow pupils or school staff. LGBTQ+ young people felt that putting up posters with information about LGBTQ+ youth and family support services, and general LGBTQ+ inclusive posters indicating that people of all identities are welcome in the school, were important for this.

Additionally, the group felt that it was important for LGBTQ+ or questioning pupils to know that they have a place of safety in their school. This could be an LGBTQ+ or diversity group or club that any pupil can attend, or identifying dedicated staff in the school who have been trained in supporting LGBTQ+ pupils.

Teaching and Resources

Within the classroom, LGBTQ+ young people felt that it was vital for teaching staff to be knowledgeable of LGBTQ+ identities, supportive of LGBTQ+ or questioning pupils, and willing and able to answer appropriate questions about LGBTQ+ identities and experiences. This includes having the stories and experiences of LGBTQ+ people included in stories and teaching resources in the classroom and library. Additionally, the group felt it is important for all primary pupils to be taught relationship and sexuality education that represents LGBTQ+ identities in an age-appropriate manner. The group also felt that education on misinformation was vital for primary pupils, as many have access to online information and need support in knowing how to identify reliable and unreliable information.

Facilities and Procedures

Regarding school facilities, LGBTQ+ highlighted the importance of having access to gender-neutral bathrooms along with a variety of uniform options. The group felt that a variety of uniform options was important for all primary pupils as a means of challenging gender stereotypes, and shouldn't only be reserved for trans or non-binary pupils. For example, cisgender girls should have the option of wearing trousers to school if they would prefer. In relation to school procedures, LGBTQ+ young people stressed the need for there to be clear protections against homophobic, biphobic and transphobic bullying, and for the school's anti-bullying policy and related procedures to be clearly communicated to pupils, staff, parents and caregivers. Additionally, the group felt it would be helpful for primary schools to have an anonymous reporting procedure for pupils to draw attention to anti-LGBTQ+ behaviour within the school, for the benefit of questioning pupils or LGBTQ+ pupils who are not out.

What do teachers need around LGBTQ+ inclusion at primary level?

Training

The main point of discussion among LGBTQ+ young people in relation to what primary teachers need around LGBTQ+ inclusion was training. The group felt that

this training should span several areas, including how to respond to anti-LGBTQ+ bullying, how to teach an LGBTQ+ inclusive curriculum, and general information about LGBTQ+ terms and experiences. Young people felt it was vital for this to be supported by the availability of LGBTQ+ teaching and support materials and resources for primary staff. The group felt that LGBTQ+ inclusion training should be certified and evidence-based, and that education around LGBTQ+ identities and supporting LGBTQ+ or questioning pupils should be integrated to formalised initial teacher education courses. Vitally, LGBTQ+ young people felt that the Department of Education and school leadership should foster a willingness to learn about LGBTQ+ topics among primary staff, by highlighting the importance of this for LGBTQ+ or questioning pupils and their families.

Questions on LGBTQ+ Topics

Additionally, the group stressed the need for primary staff to be supported around questions in the classroom. This included having the knowledge and confidence to respond to genuine and appropriate questions asked about LGBTQ+ topics by pupils, and in turn creating space in the classroom for pupils to have the ability to ask genuine and appropriate questions about these topics. LGBTQ+ young people also felt it was important for primary staff to feel confident in setting boundaries within the classroom around what kinds of questions are appropriate relating to LGBTQ+ topics, and what kinds of questions are not appropriate to ask people who are LGBTQ+.

Respect and Visibility

Finally, LGBTQ+ pupils felt that primary staff needed to be educated on understanding the importance of LGBTQ+ visibility and respect for LGBTQ+ identities in primary schools. This should include training on their school's policies, including anti-bullying and inclusion policies, and how they relate to LGBTQ+ pupils, and education around internalised personal bias. The group felt it was important for primary staff to be encouraged to be open-minded, and to create space among the staff to have constructive conversations, ask questions and identify knowledge gaps in relation to LGBTQ+ identities.

What do parents need around LGBTQ+ inclusion at primary level?

Information

Above all else, LGBTQ+ young people felt that parents needed information, about LGBTQ+ identities, how these identities and topics would be taught in school, and why LGBTQ+ inclusion is important at primary level. The group felt that having this information would support parents if their child came out to them as LGBTQ+ during primary school or in later years, as it would reduce fear and concern around their child's wellbeing. LGBTQ+ young people thought it would be a good idea for parents to be provided with leaflets and resources detailing how Wellbeing and particularly the SPHE strand would be taught, including a note highlighting how all elements of SPHE, including LGBTQ+ identities, are taught in an age-appropriate manner. Additionally, the group felt it would benefit parents to have support and information around the early signs of mental health challenges in children and young people, so that support can be given as soon as possible.

Communication & Support

The group felt it was important for pupils to be encouraged to communicate with their parents and caregivers around a range of topics, including mental health, bullying, and if they are exploring their sexual orientation and/or gender identity. LGBTQ+ young people felt that parent support groups and information nights, hosted by schools or in the community, would be a good space for parents to learn from each other. In particular, the group felt it would be helpful for parents and caregivers who had gone through the process of supporting their child coming out to speak to parents and caregivers who are earlier in that process, to share their learning and experiences. At a broader level, LGBTQ+ young people felt that it would be helpful for there to be a designated person within the school whose role is support parents and families connect with the school. Some young people in the group noted how some schools have a dedicated Home School Community Liaison, and the group felt that it would be beneficial for all schools to have this designated role.