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To All Headteachers and Directors of Children's Services

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HOMOPHOBIC BULLYING GUIDANCE

In September 2007, the Department launched a suite of guidance for schools on how to prevent and tackle bullying called '*Safe to Learn: embedding anti-bullying work in schools*'. The suite was made up of core guidance, guidance on homophobic bullying and cyberbullying, and it linked to guidance produced the previous year on bullying related to race, religion and culture. We added further guidance on bullying related to special educational needs and disability in 2008 and plan to publish further guidance later this year on bullying related to gender and gender identity, thereby ensuring schools have comprehensive advice across all the equality strands.

I am writing specifically to draw your attention to the guidance on homophobic bullying. The guidance has separate sections for governors, head teachers and senior management teams, and school staff. While many schools have made effective use of the document, we are aware that in some instances school staff and governors are not aware of it, and are not using it as effectively as they might. All forms of bullying, including homophobic bullying are unacceptable. We are keen to ensure that the document is widely and consistently used by governors and school staff across the country to ensure that homophobic bullying is tackled whenever and wherever it occurs. My purpose in writing is to ask if you could specifically draw the document to the attention of your staff and governors and ask them to make use of it. The guidance can be accessed on www.teachernet.gov.uk.

I thought it might also be helpful to set out the background to the guidance, and to outline some of the key and important issues which it addresses. The guidance was developed on our behalf by Stonewall and Educational Action Challenging Homophobia (EACH). We closely consulted the education unions, children's charities, faith groups and other organisations on the document and all of those who we consulted have welcomed the document.



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The homophobic bullying guidance provides advice on how to fulfil the duty on all schools to prevent bullying on the grounds of either a pupil's or their parents' sexual orientation. It advises schools on the employment protection which applies to school staff under the Employment Equality (Sexual Orientation) Regulation 2003. It makes clear that Section 28 of the Local Government Act 2003 was repealed in 2003 and is no longer law, and that there are no legal barriers to teachers discussing issues around sexual orientation in the classroom. The guidance also sets out how the school's approach to homophobic bullying will help to ensure it is able to meet the Every Child Matters outcomes.

The guidance importantly flags up that homophobic bullying can impact not only on lesbian, gay and bisexual (LGB) young people, but also on those who are perceived to be so but who are in fact heterosexual. These young people can also be subjected to physical and verbal homophobic abuse, or other forms of bullying. It is important to recognise that homophobic bullying, whether it is directed at a lesbian, gay, bisexual or heterosexual young person, can be deeply damaging to that young person's confidence and sense of self-worth, and it can impact on their ability to realise their full potential and their future life chances.

The homophobic bullying guidance provides strategies for developing whole school policies which challenge homophobic abuse, prejudice and stereotypes. It gives school staff the practical skills to feel confident challenging both physical and verbal abuse, as well as information on working with parents, engaging the whole school community and supporting those young people being bullied.

The guidance provides more dedicated advice on a number of topics including: challenging the use of the word "gay" as a derogatory term; working with pupils who bully and providing support to those who are being bullied; how teachers should respond if a pupil 'comes out' as lesbian or gay; and preventing homophobic abuse within schools by ensuring proper reporting systems are in place and creating a climate where lesbian, gay and bisexual adults and students feel safe.

I commend the guidance to you and I would ask you to ensure that your staff and governors use it to develop strategies to tackle homophobic bullying.

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