



Belong To LGBTQ+
Youth Ireland

**Belong To Submission to the Oireachtas Joint Committee on
Education, Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation
and Science**

**School Bullying, LGBTQ+ Youth and the new Action Plan on
Bullying**

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Introduction

Belong To

www.belongto.org

Belong To is the national youth LGBTQ+ organisation. Since 2003, the organisation has worked with lesbian, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ+) young people, between 14 and 23 years, to create a world where they are equal, safe, and thriving in the diversity of their identities and experiences. Belong To also advocates and campaigns on behalf of young LGBTQ+ people, and offers a specialised LGBTQ+ youth service with a focus on mental and sexual health, alongside drug and alcohol support.

We welcome the opportunity to contribute to the Committee's work on effectively addressing bullying in schools and wish to highlight the elements of the reforms to be strengthened so as to fully support LGBTQ+ students.

Belong To draws attention to the requirement for substantial, structural reforms in schools to effectively tackle homophobic, biphobic and transphobic bullying, and ensure an educational environment within which LGBTQ+ or questioning students are safe, supported, and thriving in their social, personal, and educational development.

It is also important to stress the need for each of the recommendations outlined in this submission to be understood as complementary to each other. For example, a comprehensive school anti-bullying policy that addresses key action areas for staff in responding to anti-LGBTQ+ bullying that is not sufficiently resourced through staff training, or awareness raising among staff, students and parents, is limited in its effectiveness.

Structure of Submission

This submission follows the structure of the 2013 *National Action Plan on Bullying*, with recommendations outlined for each of the specific actions with the Plan. The recommendations made within this submission are complementary to the existing policy document, with the intention of strengthening it in safeguarding students and young people who identify as LGBTQ+. These recommendations reflect Belong To's newly-launched 'LGBTQ+ Quality Standards Framework for schools and alternative education spaces', which has begun recruitment and will be rolled out in August 2022. This Framework has been developed in line with national and international best practice and is informed by two robust pilot studies evaluated by researchers at National University of Ireland, Galway and Dublin City University. It is also informed by the on-the-ground experiences of LGBTQ+ young people, school staff, and community groups.

Both this submission and the 'LGBTQ+ Quality Standards Framework' draw primarily on the evidence-base published jointly by the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth and National University of Ireland, Galway in 2021, *LGBTI+ Youth in Ireland and Across Europe: A two-phased Landscape and Research Gap Analysis*. This report gives a comprehensive overview of existing research and best practice as relates to actions within the *LGBTI+ National Youth Strategy*. The submission also draws on international research, and national research conducted by Belong To, primarily the *School Climate Survey, 2019*.

1. New National Anti-Bullying Procedures for Schools

Recommendation:

- **Belong To recommends that all school policies are reviewed annually by a team of school staff, parents, students, and a member of the Board of Management to ensure that they are inclusive of LGBTQ+ students.**

Current Scope

- The *Action Plan on Bullying*, published in 2013, requires an Anti-Bullying Policy that respects diversity and is reviewed annually.

Context of Recommendation

- Objective 1 of the *LGBTI+ National Youth Strategy* encourages whole-school inclusion policies beyond specific Anti-Bullying Policies.
- To ensure that a school is a safe and inclusive environment for all LGBTQ+ students, it is important to look beyond the scope of bullying. Many other policies may indirectly negatively impact LGBTQ+ students and their enjoyment of a welcoming learning environment.
- Examples include policies relating to the school's uniform or dress code, the enrolment and admissions policy, and the school's Code of Behaviour.

Recommendation:

- **Belong To recommends that all school policies and procedures are shared with the entire school community, encompassing staff, the Board of Management, students, parents, and local youth groups and community centres.**

Current Scope

- In accordance with the *Action Plan on Bullying, 2013*, the Board of Management is responsible for ensuring that all school staff are aware of the Anti-Bullying Policy.

Context of Recommendation

- It is important that the entire school community, encompassing staff, the Board of Management, students, parents, and local youth groups and community centres have access to school policies.
- In the context of harder to reach parents, who may not be actively engaged with the school environment, youth services, community organisations and family resource centres can provide additional support to parents of LGBTQ+ youth.

Recommendation:

- **Belong To recommends that both teaching and ancillary staff are provided with training, so that they are empowered to recognise and intervene at instances of anti-LGBTQ+ language and bullying, and report the event in line with the school's Anti-Bullying Policy.**

Current Scope

- In accordance with the *Action Plan on Bullying, 2013*, the Board of Management is responsible for ensuring that all school staff are aware of the Anti-Bullying Policy.

Context of Recommendation

- It is important that staff not only read but understand their school's Anti-Bullying Policy as it relates to students within specific identity groups, including students who identify as LGBTQ+.

- The *LGBTI+ Youth in Ireland and Across Europe* study published by National University of Ireland, Galway and the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth highlights the need for a comprehensive Anti-Bullying Policy to be complemented by staff training.¹
- The 2019 *School Climate Survey*, published by Belong To and the Teacher's College, Columbia, revealed 45% of LGBTQ+ students reported that school staff had not intervened when homophobic remarks were made.²
- However, students who had witnessed staff intervene at such instances were 5% more likely to feel accepted by the student body, 15% more likely to feel they belong in their school, and 8% less likely to miss school on account of feeling unsafe.³
- International research shows that a failure of teachers to intervene in anti-LGBTQ+ bullying stems primarily from a lack of knowledge as to how to support LGBTQ+ students.⁴ A majority of teachers surveyed in this study expressed a strong desire to receive more training on working with and supporting LGBTQ+ students.⁵
- This training should support teachers in not only recognising instances of anti-LGBTQ+ bullying, but also equip them with the

¹ Költő, A., Vaughan, E., O'Sullivan, L., Kelly, C., Saewyc, E. M., & Nic Gabhainn, S. (2021). *LGBTI+ Youth in Ireland and across Europe: A two-phased landscape and research gap analysis*. Dublin: Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth. Available here: <https://assets.gov.ie/135654/4d466c48-34d9-403a-b48e-fdcfb7931320.pdf>

² Belong To and Teacher's College, Columbia. (2019) *School Climate Survey*. Dublin: Belong To. Available at: <https://belongto.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/BeLonG-To-School-Climate-Report-2019.pdf>

³ Belong To and Teacher's College, Columbia. (2019) *School Climate Survey*. Dublin: Belong To. Available at: <https://belongto.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/BeLonG-To-School-Climate-Report-2019.pdf>

⁴ Jones, M. H., Hackel, T. S., Hershberger, M. and Goodrich, K. M. (2018) 'Queer youth in educational psychology research', *Journal of Homosexuality*, 66 (13), pp. 1797–1816. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00918369.2018.1510262>

⁵ Jones, M. H., Hackel, T. S., Hershberger, M. and Goodrich, K. M. (2018) 'Queer youth in educational psychology research', *Journal of Homosexuality*, 66 (13), pp. 1797–1816. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00918369.2018.1510262>

knowledge of how to intervene and address anti-LGBTQ+ language that may not immediately to be considered bullying.

Recommendation:

- **Belong To recommends that schools put clear procedures in place on how to support LGBTQ+ students, beyond the scope of the school's Anti-Bullying Policy.**

Current Scope

- In accordance with the *Action Plan on Bullying, 2013*, schools are currently required to have a Code of Behaviour and Anti-Bullying Policy which respect diversity.

Context of Recommendation

- For LGBTQ+ students to feel safe and supported in school, is it important to employ proactive, protective factors alongside a comprehensive Anti-Bullying Policy.
- International research shows that the well-being of LGBTQ+ students is directly linked to the presence of supportive teachers and school staff.⁶ Even one staff member dedicated to supporting LGBTQ+ students can improve feelings of safety among LGBTQ+ youth.⁷

⁶ Sandor, B., Kosciw, J., Dombos, T. and Tihanyi, K. (2017) Supportive friends, unprepared institutions: The experience of LGBTQI students in Hungarian schools based on the National School Climate Survey. Budapest, Hungary: Háttér Society. Available at: <http://hatter.hu/sites/default/files/dokumentum/kiadvany/school-environment-report.en.pdf>

⁷ McNamee, H. (2006) Out on your own: An examination of the mental health of young same-sex attracted men. Belfast, United Kingdom: The Rainbow Project. Available at: <https://www.rainbowproject.org/Handlers/Download.ashx?IDMF=ab3a6f2f-3937-4c68-89b3-9ce7c668457a>

- It is positive that the 2019 *School Climate Survey* found 97% of LGBTQ+ students could identify at least one staff member who is supportive of LGBTQ+ youth.⁸
- The Survey further found that LGBTQ+ students who reported a high proportion of supportive staff within their school were 45% more likely to feel accepted by the student body, 34% more likely to feel that they belong in school, and 20% less likely to miss school on account of feeling unsafe.⁹ This reflects international research.¹⁰

Recommendation:

- **Belong To recommends that schools put a transition plan in place for trans and non-binary students.**

Current Scope

- In accordance with the *Action Plan on Bullying, 2013*, schools are currently required to have a Code of Behaviour and Anti-Bullying Policy which respect diversity.
- Schools are not required to have a transition plan in place for trans and non-binary students.

Context of Recommendation

- The 2019 *School Climate Survey* found that 34% of LGBTI+ students avoid using bathrooms and 24% avoid using locker

⁸ Belong To and Teacher's College, Columbia. (2019) *School Climate Survey*. Dublin: Belong To. Available at: <https://belongto.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/BeLonG-To-School-Climate-Report-2019.pdf>

⁹ Belong To and Teacher's College, Columbia. (2019) *School Climate Survey*. Dublin: Belong To. Available at: <https://belongto.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/BeLonG-To-School-Climate-Report-2019.pdf>

¹⁰ Sandor, B., Kosciw, J., Dombos, T. and Tihanyi, K. (2017) *Supportive friends, unprepared institutions: The experience of LGBTQI students in Hungarian schools based on the National School Climate Survey*. Budapest, Hungary: Háttér Society. Available at: <http://hatter.hu/sites/default/files/dokumentum/kiadvany/school-environment-report.en.pdf>.

rooms during school hours.¹¹ This issue of accessibility disproportionately affects trans and non-binary students.

- Sadly, the report also found that nearly 55% of LGBTQ+ students had heard negative remarks about trans people made by a teacher or staff member in their school.¹²
- In the context of the above finding, it is important that other procedures, such as a transition plan for trans and non-binary students, is considered within the framework of anti-bullying.
- Such procedures should focus broadly on inclusion, support and accessibility, placing the student at the centre and following the procedure in a way that best supports them.

2. Review of Teacher Education Support Service Provision

Recommendation:

- **Belong To recommends that all school staff complete Belong To's elearning module 'Supporting LGBTI+ Young People', and that the module be hosted on webwise.ie.**

Current Scope

- Webwise.ie has dedicated resources for teachers, parents, children and young people with practical information and advice on cyberbullying, sexting, image sharing, respectful communication, and apps.

¹¹ Belong To and Teacher's College, Columbia. (2019) School Climate Survey. Dublin: Belong To. Available at: <https://belongto.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/BeLonG-To-School-Climate-Report-2019.pdf>

¹² Belong To and Teacher's College, Columbia. (2019) School Climate Survey. Dublin: Belong To. Available at: <https://belongto.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/BeLonG-To-School-Climate-Report-2019.pdf>

Context of Recommendation

- To complement training on how school staff can follow and implement their school's Anti-Bullying policy, staff should be encouraged to engage in training and education that highlights the particular challenges faced by LGBTQ+ students, and promotes school-wide LGBTQ+ inclusion.
- Undertaking broader inclusion training, which addresses the experiences of LGBTQ+ students beyond the scope of anti-LGBTQ+ bullying, is an important protective factor in creating safe and supportive schools for LGBTQ+ youth.¹³
- Irish research shows that LGBTQ+ students who had learned positive information about LGBTQ+ people in classes were more likely to feel accepted, to feel they belong in their school, and were less likely to miss school on account of feeling unsafe.¹⁴
- As noted previously, LGBTQ+ students who reported a high proportion of supportive staff within their school were 45% more likely to feel accepted by the student body, 34% more likely to feel that they belong in school, and 20% less likely to miss school on account of feeling unsafe,¹⁵ reflecting international research.¹⁶

¹³ Sandor, B., Kosciw, J., Dombos, T. and Tihanyi, K. (2017) Supportive friends, unprepared institutions: The experience of LGBTQI students in Hungarian schools based on the National School Climate Survey. Budapest, Hungary: Háttér Society. Available at: <http://hatter.hu/sites/default/files/dokumentum/kiadvany/school-environment-report.en.pdf>.

¹⁴ Belong To and Teacher's College, Columbia. (2019) School Climate Survey. Dublin: Belong To. Available at: <https://belongto.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/BeLonG-To-School-Climate-Report-2019.pdf>

¹⁵ Belong To and Teacher's College, Columbia. (2019) School Climate Survey. Dublin: Belong To. Available at: <https://belongto.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/BeLonG-To-School-Climate-Report-2019.pdf>

¹⁶ Sandor, B., Kosciw, J., Dombos, T. and Tihanyi, K. (2017) Supportive friends, unprepared institutions: The experience of LGBTQI students in Hungarian schools based on the National School Climate Survey. Budapest, Hungary: Háttér Society. Available at: <http://hatter.hu/sites/default/files/dokumentum/kiadvany/school-environment-report.en.pdf>.

3. Coordinated training and resource development for boards of management and parents

Recommendation:

- **It is important that the Board of Management take a leading role in supporting school staff, who in turn can support LGBTQ+ students, by being proactive in engaging with resources and training that relate to the challenges faced by LGBTQ+ students in school environments.**

Current Scope

- In accordance with the existing 2013 Action Plan on Bullying, the Board of Management is responsible for ensuring that all school staff are aware of the Anti-Bullying Policy.

Context of Recommendation

- As noted previously, international research shows that a failure of teachers to intervene in anti-LGBTQ+ bullying stems primarily from a lack of knowledge as to how to support LGBTQ+ students.¹⁷
- Belong To recommends that the Board of Management take a leading role in making their school a safe and supportive space for LGBTQ+ students.
- Furthermore, strong and active engagement by the Board of Management ensures a supportive environment for LGBTQ+ students that is sustainable, and not affected by the departure of staff members active in the area of LGBTQ+ inclusion.

¹⁷ Jones, M. H., Hackel, T. S., Hershberger, M. and Goodrich, K. M. (2018) 'Queer youth in educational psychology research', *Journal of Homosexuality*, 66 (13), pp. 1797–1816. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00918369.2018.1510262>

4. School inspection

Recommendation:

- **Belong To recommends that Department of Education Inspectors are instructed to confirm that the inspected school has documented their Education and Prevention Strategy.**
- **Belong To recommends that the Department of Education provide schools with training and support on meeting the requirement of documenting their education and prevention strategy.**

Current Scope

- In accordance with circular 45/2013, all schools are required to produce and implement an Education and Prevention Strategy with regard to anti-bullying.

Context of Recommendation

- While many Department Inspectors do a comprehensive check of all school policies, documents and procedures, it is crucial that schools confirm the existence and implementation of their Education and Prevention Strategy.

5. Thematic evaluation of bullying in schools

No recommendations under this Section.

6. School Self Evaluation

Recommendation:

- **Belong To recommends that the Board of Management and school principal engage with all teaching staff to ensure that LGBTQ+ relationships, identities and sexualities are fully represented in SPHE, RSE and throughout all curricula.**
- **Belong To recommends that teachers integrate LGBTQ+ families, identities, history and culture to their curriculum and teaching materials.**
- **Belong To recommends that all school staff review their teaching and support materials to ensure that they are inclusive, and do not contain stereotyped notions of LGBTQ+ identities and experiences.**
- **Belong To recommends that age appropriate, LGBTQ+ inclusive literature is made available to students in the school library.**
- **Belong To recommends that schools endeavour to be visibly safe and supportive, by representing LGBTQ+ families, identities and culture throughout the school, particularly in the entrance hall.**
- **Belong To recommends that teachers and classrooms are visibly supportive of LGBTQ+ students, through flags, pins, stickers and badges.**

Current Scope

- In accordance with the current *Action Plan on Bullying*, schools should be supported in self-evaluating their effectiveness in creating a positive school culture and in preventing and tackling bullying, through the provision of criteria to judge quality within the Leadership and Management and the Support for Students dimensions of School Self-Evaluation (SSE).

Context of Recommendation

- As discussed in detail under previous sections, a new anti-bullying action plan should take a holistic approach, focusing broadly on creating supportive, inclusive environments. This may serve as a preventative factor for bullying, and more importantly creates a dynamic within which students feel comfortable approaching school staff for support should bullying occur.
- Noted previously in this submission, Irish research shows that LGBTQ+ students who had learned positive information about LGBTQ+ people in classes were more likely to feel accepted, to feel they belong in their school, and were less likely to miss school on account of feeling unsafe.¹⁸
- Similarly, students who had witnessed staff intervene at such instances were 5% more likely to feel accepted by the student body, 15% more likely to feel they belong in their school, and 8% less likely to miss school on account of feeling unsafe.¹⁹
- Finally, international research shows that the well-being of LGBTQ+ students is directly linked to the presence of supportive teachers and school staff.²⁰ Even one staff member dedicated to supporting LGBTQ+ students can improve feelings of safety among LGBTQ+ youth.²¹

¹⁸ Belong To and Teacher's College, Columbia. (2019) School Climate Survey. Dublin: Belong To. Available at: <https://belongto.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/BeLonG-To-School-Climate-Report-2019.pdf>

¹⁹ Belong To and Teacher's College, Columbia. (2019) School Climate Survey. Dublin: Belong To. Available at: <https://belongto.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/BeLonG-To-School-Climate-Report-2019.pdf>

²⁰ Sandor et al., 2017)

²¹ (McNamee, 2006)

Recommendation:

- **Belong To recommends that all students are allowed to be their authentic selves in school, by facilitating the option of gender-neutral uniforms, and allowing students to wear the school uniform they feel most comfortable in.**
- **Belong To recommends that, where a school does not have a prescribed uniform, students are allowed to dress in a manner that reflects their gender identity or expression, in line with the general regulations as to dress-code.**
- **Belong To recommends that schools work towards the provision of gender-neutral bathrooms and changing facilities. Where these facilities are not immediately available, accommodations should be made for trans and non-binary students, such as using staff bathrooms.**

Current Scope

- In accordance with the current *Action Plan on Bullying*, schools should be supported in self-evaluating their effectiveness in creating a positive school culture and in preventing and tackling bullying, through the provision of criteria to judge quality within the Leadership and Management and the Support for Students dimensions of School Self-Evaluation (SSE).

Context of Recommendation

- The above recommendations should be integrated to the school's transition plan for trans and non-binary students, discussed earlier in this submission under Section 1.
- These recommendations should also be included in the school's policies on uniform or dress code, health and safety as relates to the use of changing and bathroom facilities, and procedures and regulations on sporting activities, extracurricular events, and school trips.

- A wealth of international research shows that visibility and acceptance in school is a key source of support, and a protective mental health factor, for LGBTQ+ youth.²²
- As shared by one participant in the 2016 *LGBTIreland Report*, “visibility is vital to the coming out process”.²³

Recommendation:

- **Belong To recommends that students work in equal partnership with school staff to explore what is needed to make the school a safe and supportive environment for LGBTQ+ students.**
- **Belong To further recommends that all students in the school be engaged in this process, and have an opportunity to use their voice by means of an anonymous survey.**
- **Belong To recommends that the school facilitates and supports students in setting up an LGBTQ+ and allies group or club.**

Context of Recommendation

- The *LGBTI+ Youth in Ireland and Across Europe* report stressed the need for positive engagement with LGBTQ+ youth, and the

22 Black, W. W., Fedewa, A. L. and Gonzalez, K. A. (2012) ‘Effects of “safe school” programs and policies on the social climate for sexual-minority youth: A review of the literature’, *Journal of LGBT Youth*, 9 (4), pp. 321–339. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19361653.2012.714343>; Blais, M., Bergeron, F. A., Duford, J., Boislard, M. A. and Hébert, M. (2015) ‘Health outcomes of youth sexual minorities in Canada: An overview’, *Adolescencia e Saude*, 12 (3), pp. 53–73. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5247260/>; Johns, M. M., Beltran, O., Armstrong, H. L., Jayne, P. E. and Barrios, L. C. (2018a) ‘Protective factors among transgender and gender variant youth: A systematic review by socioecological level’, *The Journal of Primary Prevention*, 39 (3), pp. 263–301. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10935-018-0508-9>; Wilson, C. and Cariola, L. A. (2020) ‘LGBTQI+ youth and mental health: A systematic review of qualitative research’, *Adolescent Research Review*, 5, pp. 187–211. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40894-019-00118-w>.

²³ 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 Youth Services. . [Available at: <https://belongto.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/LGBT-Ireland-Full-Reportpdf.pdf>]

importance of a greater focus on resilience, empowerment and protective factors in both research and practice.²⁴

- As discussed under previous sections, international research shows that the well-being of LGBTQ+ students is directly linked to the presence of supportive teachers and school staff.²⁵ Even one staff member dedicated to supporting LGBTQ+ students can improve feelings of safety among LGBTQ+ youth.²⁶
- The 2019 *School Climate Survey* found that LGBTQ students who reported a high proportion of supportive staff within their school were 45% more likely to feel accepted by the student body, 34% more likely to feel that they belong in school, and 20% less likely to miss school on account of feeling unsafe.²⁷ This reflects international research.²⁸
- Involving LGBTQ+ students and their allies in exploring what is needed within the school environment to ensure that LGBTQ+ students are safe and supported, as per the above recommendations, fosters a sense of resilience and empowerment among LGBTQ+ youth.

²⁴ Költő, A., Vaughan, E., O’Sullivan, L., Kelly, C., Saewyc, E. M., & Nic Gabhainn, S. (2021). LGBTI+ Youth in Ireland and across Europe: A two-phased landscape and research gap analysis. Dublin: Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth. Available here: <https://assets.gov.ie/135654/4d466c48-34d9-403a-b48e-fdcfb7931320.pdf>

²⁵ Sandor, B., Kosciw, J., Dombos, T. and Tihanyi, K. (2017) Supportive friends, unprepared institutions: The experience of LGBTQI students in Hungarian schools based on the National School Climate Survey. Budapest, Hungary: Háttér Society. Available at: <http://hatter.hu/sites/default/files/dokumentum/kiadvany/school-environment-report.en.pdf>

²⁶ McNamee, H. (2006) Out on your own: An examination of the mental health of young same-sex attracted men. Belfast, United Kingdom: The Rainbow Project. Available at: <https://www.rainbowproject.org/Handlers/Download.ashx?IDMF=ab3a6f2f-3937-4c68-89b3-9ce7c668457a>

²⁷ Belong To and Teacher’s College, Columbia. (2019) School Climate Survey. Dublin: Belong To. Available at: <https://belongto.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/BeLonG-To-School-Climate-Report-2019.pdf>

²⁸ Sandor, B., Kosciw, J., Dombos, T. and Tihanyi, K. (2017) Supportive friends, unprepared institutions: The experience of LGBTQI students in Hungarian schools based on the National School Climate Survey. Budapest, Hungary: Háttér Society. Available at: <http://hatter.hu/sites/default/files/dokumentum/kiadvany/school-environment-report.en.pdf>

- Through school staff proactively engaging with and facilitating LGBTQ+ students and allies, school staff can visibly show their support for the LGBTQ+ community, therefore increasing feelings of inclusion and safety for LGBTQ+ students.

7. New national anti-bullying website

Recommendation:

- **Belong To recommends that Belong To's elearning module 'Supporting LGBTI+ Young People' be hosted on the new national anti-bullying website.**

Current Scope

- It has been recommended that a single national anti-bullying website be developed to provide information for parents, young people and school staff on types and methods of bullying and how to deal with bullying behaviour.

Context of Recommendation

- See discussion at Section 2, with regard to the inclusion of Belong To's elearning module 'Supporting LGBTI+ Young People' on the webwise platform.

8. Stand Up Awareness Week against Homophobic, Biphobic and Transphobic Bullying

Recommendation:

- **In addition to the financial support currently provided by the Department for *Stand Up Awareness Week*, we recommend that the Department encourage all post-primary schools to participate in the campaign.**
- **Belong To recommends that *Stand Up Awareness Week* be student-led, with students and school staff working together to plan and roll out the week's activities and initiatives.**

Current Scope

- The Department of Education currently financially supports Belong To's *Stand Up Awareness Week* campaign.
- The campaign's objective is to prevent and tackle homophobic and transphobic bullying in schools by increasing friendship and support of LGBTQ+ students by other students; increasing awareness of LGBTQ+ students among other students, teachers, principals, and others in the school-wide community; increasing respect for diversity and LGBTQ+ identities; increasing the likelihood that LGBTQ+ students will report bullying; and, thereby, reduce bullying and attendant isolation, self-harm, suicidality, and mental health difficulties among LGBTQ+ students.

Context of Recommendation

- The 2019 *School Climate Survey* revealed that 86% of LGBTQ+ students feel deliberately excluded by their peers, with 77%

suffering verbal harassment and 38% suffering physical harassment.²⁹

- However, the same report shows that LGBTQ+ students who had learned positive information about LGBTQ+ people in classes were more likely to feel accepted, to feel they belong in their school, and were less likely to miss school on account of feeling unsafe.³⁰
- By integrating positive discussions on LGBTQ+ identities and experiences, creating a welcoming school environment, and engaging students in the planning and coordination of activities, *Stand Up Awareness Week* is a crucial first step in increasing feelings of belonging and acceptance among LGBTQ+ students, and promoting retention of LGBTQ+ in education.

9. Support a media campaign focused on cyber bullying and specifically targeted at young people

No recommendations under this section.

10. Research on effective supports for children with special educational needs

No recommendations under this section.

²⁹ Belong To and Teacher's College, Columbia. (2019) School Climate Survey. Dublin: Belong To. Available at: <https://belongto.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/BeLonG-To-School-Climate-Report-2019.pdf>

³⁰ Belong To and Teacher's College, Columbia. (2019) School Climate Survey. Dublin: Belong To. Available at: <https://belongto.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/BeLonG-To-School-Climate-Report-2019.pdf>

11. Research on prevalence and impact of bullying linked to social media on the mental health and suicidal behaviour among young people

No recommendations under this Section.

12. Awareness raising measures, including guidelines, for policy makers and DES agencies and services which work in the schools sector on all types and forms of bullying

Recommendation:

- **Belong To recommends that schools be encouraged to develop close relationships with local LGBTQ+ youth services, family and community resource centres, and other relevant services.**
- **Belong To recommends that posters with details of local LGBTQ+ youth groups be displayed in the school.**

Current Scope

- The Department of Education facilitates a series of internal seminars to build capacity in respect of bullying. All policy staff of relevant Department of Education business units and Department agencies and services will be invited to participate.
- Guidelines are due to be developed for staff to support policy proofing for identity-based issues, in particular LGBTQ+ identity and homophobic bullying.

Context of Recommendation

- As discussed under Section 1, it is important that the entire school community, including local youth groups, family resource centres and community organisations, be engaged in the promotion and

development of a safe and supportive school for LGBTQ+ students.

- Outreach by a school to local LGBTQ+ youth groups or youth work organisations can act as a support to school staff, who then have a clear referral pathway for LGBTQ+ students and/or their parents to seek support outside of the school environment.
- In the context of harder to reach parents, who may not be actively engaged with school staff, youth services, community organisations and family resource centres are a vital alternate source of support and advice for parents of LGBTQ+ young people.