

# BeLonG To Youth Services The 2019 School Climate Survey

The experiences of lesbian, gay,  
bisexual and trans young people  
in Ireland's schools.

Supporting Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual &  
Trans Young People in Ireland

**belong**<sup>TO</sup>

**TEACHERS COLLEGE**  
COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>FORWARD</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>LIST OF TERMS</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>EXECUTIVE SUMMARY</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>METHODOLOGY</b>	<b>16</b>
METHODS	16
ADVERTISING AND DISSEMINATION	17
SAMPLE	18
<b>THE FINDINGS</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>THE PROBLEM</b>	
SCHOOL SAFETY	21
BIASED LANGUAGE	24
HARASSMENT AND ASSAULT	31
OTHER TYPES OF HARASSMENT AND NEGATIVE EVENTS	34
<b>THE IMPACT</b>	<b>37</b>
EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES AND ASPIRATIONS	37
ABSENTEEISM	39
SENSE OF BELONGING	39
ISOLATION	42
<b>THE SOLUTION</b>	<b>44</b>
SEEKING SUPPORT	44
EFFECT OF SUPPORT	46
STAFF INTERVENTION	49
CURRICULUM	50
SCHOOL POLICIES	53
<b>CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS</b>	<b>55</b>
<b>REFERENCES</b>	<b>59</b>

BeLonG To Youth Services,

Parliament House,

13 Parliament St,

Temple Bar,

Dublin 2,

D02 P658

Ph: 01 670 6223 Email: [info@belongto.org](mailto:info@belongto.org)

[www.belongto.org](http://www.belongto.org)

©BeLonG To Youth Services

When referencing this document, we recommend the following citation:

Oren Pizmony-Levy & BeLonG To Youth Services (2019) *The 2019 School Climate Survey Report: The experience of lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans young people in Ireland's schools*. Research Report. Ireland: Dublin.

Graphic design: Piquant Media

Quotes throughout are from students' responses to open-ended questions in the survey.

Electronic versions of this report and all other BeLonG To Youth Services research reports are available at: [www.belongto.org/professionals/research/](http://www.belongto.org/professionals/research/)

## Forward

---

This ground-breaking study is a first for Ireland, shining a light on the experience of 778 lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans young people in schools across the country.

The landscape of Ireland has changed for the LGBTI+ community over the past three decades. We have celebrated significant milestones including the decriminalisation of homosexuality in 1993, the introduction of the Employment Equality Act 1998 and Equal Status Act 2000 and, more recently, Marriage Equality and Gender Recognition for over 18s in 2015. With this research, we wanted to discover if the lived experiences of LGBTI+ young people at school mirror these legislative and constitutional changes.

Conducted by BeLonG To Youth Services and the Teachers College, Columbia University, the School Climate Survey 2019<sup>1</sup> is the largest research sample of LGBTI+ young people in schools in Ireland ever. The research examines indicators of a negative school experience, the effects of school climate on students, and school-based supports that can improve the lives of LGBTI+ young people. This study and our recommendations draws directly on our LGBTI+ Safe and Supportive Schools Toolkit co-developed with the Health Service Executive (HSE).<sup>2</sup>

The study paints a bleak picture of the reality of school life for LGBTI+ students in Ireland. Findings indicate that in the 2018-2019 school year, an alarming 73% of LGBTI+ students felt unsafe at school, with the majority of students experiencing homophobic remarks, many experiencing harassment and some experiencing physical and sexual assault. For many LGBTI+ young people in Ireland, school is an unwelcoming environment that excludes their experiences. The results show increased levels of absenteeism since *The LGBTIreland Report*<sup>3</sup> which plays a part in how students negotiate their educational outcomes and their ambitions for the future.

From our frontline work, we have heard stories of anti-LGBTI+ bullying, from students being violently kicked and punched to being thrown down the stairs at school. One student described going home from school with the feeling of 1,000 paper cuts following a day of hearing homophobic remarks in succession. The heart-breaking reality is that for many LGBTI+ students, school is an isolating, unsafe place.

---

<sup>1</sup> Pizmony-Levy, O. (2019). *The 2019 Irish National School Climate Survey Report*. Research Report. New York: Teachers College, Columbia University.

<sup>2</sup> Barron, M. and O'Hagan, L. (2019) *LGBTI+ Safe and Supportive Schools*. 2nd Ed. Dublin: HSE, BeLonG To Youth Services.\*

\*This citation was omitted from the original print run and this error has been rectified in this reprint of the report.

<sup>3</sup> 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

The 2019 School Climate Survey was conducted online from May to August 2019. To obtain a representative national sample of LGBTI+ young people, we conducted outreach through national, regional and local organisations that provide services to or advocate on behalf of LGBTI+ youth, liaised with our education partners, network of parents/guardians, professionals and young people. We utilised social networking sites, such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and Snapchat, to advertise and disseminate the survey.

While there is much to do to improve the experiences of LGBTI+ young people in school, it is important to note the positive outcomes when staff members, school curriculum and school policies are inclusive of LGBTI+ identities. There are remarkable teachers and school staff across Ireland saving lives by creating safe, supportive spaces for LGBTI+ students. Findings indicate that such support means LGBTI+ students were more likely to feel accepted by their peers, had an increased sense of belonging and were less likely to miss school to avoid victimisation.

This research must act as a wake-up call for all of us passionate about learning and education: students, parents, schools, politicians and the government. LGBTI+ young people need to feel equal, safe and supported at school so that they can live healthy lives and thrive at school.

Moninne Griffith, CEO

## Acknowledgments

---

BeLonG To Youth Services wish to thank the students who participated in our survey for enlightening us about their experiences in school. Without you this report would not be possible. We also wish to acknowledge the organisations and individuals that helped disseminate information about the survey, including the national, regional and local youth services and programs, schools, teachers and businesses that invited their constituents to participate in the survey. We are indebted to Professor Oren Pizmony-Levy and the Teachers College at Columbia University for their collaboration on this research. We are grateful for the wisdom and generosity of GLSEN and Joseph G. Kosciw for their support and encouragement at the early stages of this research and for their permission to engage with the vast experience they have accumulated in this area of knowledge production for 29 years. We are also thankful for our BeLonG To colleagues, our board of directors and the young people within our youth groups who provided thoughtful feedback and continual support throughout the survey development and data collection process. We are grateful to the Department of Education and Skills for their support for Stand Up Awareness Week and the HSE and National Office of Suicide Prevention for their support of our National Network of LGBTI+ youth groups.

## List of Terms

---

**Androgynous:** This can describe someone who has a gender expression that is both masculine and feminine.

**Asexual:** Someone who is not sexually attracted to others or who has no (or low) interest in having sexual experiences.

**Bisexual:** Someone who is attracted to more than one gender e.g. both men and women.

**Bi-erasure:** Ignoring, removing or re-explaining the evidence of bisexuality.

**Biphobia:** Discrimination against and/or fear or dislike of bisexual people (including those perceived to be bisexual) or of bisexuality. This also includes the perpetuation of negative myths and stereotypes through jokes and personal negative thoughts about bisexual people.

**Cis/cisgender:** A person whose gender is the same or mostly the same as the sex they were assigned at birth.

**Cisnormativity:** An emphasis on people being “the norm” if their gender identity and assigned gender at birth match, and therefore having a valued position in society. This often highlights and reinforces expected and more traditional ways of presenting your gender too e.g. the expectation for women to present as “feminine” and men to present as “masculine”.

**Coming out:** The process of understanding yourself and telling others about your sexual orientation or gender identity.

**Gay:** Someone who is attracted to people of the same gender. Gay usually refers to men, as many women prefer to call themselves lesbian.

**Gender identity:** A person’s deeply felt internal identity as female, male or another identity such as non-binary.

**Gender expression:** How people show their gender through clothes, hair, voice and so on.

**Gender fluid:** Someone who does not have a constant or fixed gender identity.

**Heterosexual:** Someone who is attracted to people of the opposite gender.

**Heterosexism/Heteronormativity:** The assumption that everyone is heterosexual or straight, and that heterosexuality is superior, with an emphasis on heterosexuality being “the norm” and therefore having a valued position in society. The media often reinforces heteronormativity through images used and portrayal of character’s identities and attitudes.

**Homophobia:** Discrimination against and/or fear or dislike of lesbian and gay people (including those perceived to be gay or lesbian). This also includes the perpetuation

of negative myths and stereotypes through jokes and personal negative thoughts about lesbian and gay people.

**Lesbian:** A woman who is primarily attracted to other women.

**LGBTI+:** Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Intersex people. The plus sign includes people with other minority sexual orientations and gender identities.

**Minority stress:** Minority stress is based on the premise that LGBTI+ people, like members of any minority group, are subject to chronic psychological stress due to their group's stigmatised and marginalised status in society. While LGBTI+ people are not inherently any more prone to mental health problems than other groups in society, coping with the effects of minority stress can be detrimental to LGBTI+ people's mental health.

**Non-binary:** Individuals who do not have an exclusively male or female gender identity.

**Pansexual:** An individual who may be attracted to any person, regardless of their sex or gender identity.

**Queer:** Some people use this term as an alternative to LGBTI+. This term isn't embraced by all LGBTI+ people.

**Sexual orientation:** This is a term used to describe someone's emotional, romantic and sexual attraction to other people.

**Sex assigned at birth:** People are assigned a sex at birth, usually based on observation of external genitals. A person may be assigned "female", "intersex" or "male". However, this does not necessarily reflect how a person will identify themselves.

**Transgender or trans:** An umbrella term for those whose gender identity and/or gender expression differs from the sex they were given at birth.

**Transition:** A process in which trans people begin to live as the gender with which they identify, rather than the sex they were given at birth.

**Transphobia:** Discrimination against and/or fear or dislike of people whose gender identity does not align with the gender they are assigned at birth, or whose gender identity or expression doesn't appear to align. This also includes the perpetuation of negative myths and stereotypes through jokes and personal negative thoughts about trans people.

**Intersex:** This is an umbrella term used to describe a wide range of natural bodily variations that do not fit typical binary notions of male and female bodies. In some cases intersex traits are visible at birth, while in others they are not apparent until puberty or later in life. Some intersex variations may not be physically apparent at all.

## Executive Summary

---

### ABOUT THE SURVEY

The 2019 School Climate Survey was conducted online from May to August 2019. To obtain a representative national sample of LGBTI+ young people, we conducted outreach through national, regional and local organisations that provide services to or advocate on behalf of LGBTI+ youth, liaised with our education partners, network of parents/guardians, professionals and young people. We utilised social networking sites such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and Snapchat to advertise and disseminate the survey.

The final sample consisted of a total of 788 students between the ages of 13 and 20. Students were from all 26 counties in the Republic of Ireland and all four provinces. Participants had an average age of 15.9 years old. Half of the sample are female, about one-fifth are male (21.9%), with the rest choosing other gender identities (trans 12.4%, non-binary 7.8%). Two-fifths of the sample identify as bisexual (45.2%); one-quarter identify as gay; and one-fifth identify as lesbian (26.4% and 21.1% respectively). The rest identify as queer, pansexual or questioning (17.1%, 15.4% and 12.1% respectively).

### SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

#### The Problem

Anti-LGBTI+ bullying is rife throughout second-level schools in Ireland. This alarming reality results in a hostile school environment for many LGBTI+ students and poses a significant threat to their wellbeing, mental health and welfare.

#### SCHOOL SAFETY

- 73% of LGBTI+ students feel unsafe at school. 47% because of their sexual orientation and 27% because of their gender expression.
- 3 in 10 LGBTI+ students missed at least one day in the past month because they feel unsafe or uncomfortable.
- LGBTI+ students avoid certain spaces and activities due to safety concerns: PE: 37%, bathrooms: 34%, locker rooms: 24%, sports facilities: 22%, lunch area: 18%

#### ANTI-LGBTI+ REMARKS

- 68% of LGBTI+ students hear homophobic remarks from other students, with these comments bothering and distressing over 50% of LGBTI+ students.
- Nearly 50% of LGBTI+ students hear negative remarks about trans people.
- 48% of LGBTI+ students reported hearing a homophobic remark from a teacher or staff member.
- 55% of LGBTI+ students reported hearing a transphobic remark from a teacher or staff member.

## HARASSMENT AND ASSAULT

- The majority of LGBTI+ students (86%) feel deliberately excluded by peers with 74% experiencing being the focus of rumours or lies.
- 77% of LGBTI+ students are verbally harassed (e.g. name calling or being threatened) based on their sexual orientation, gender, gender expression or ethnic origin.
- 38% of LGBTI+ students are physically harassed (e.g. being shoved or pushed), 25% because of their sexual orientation and 18% based on gender expression.
- 11% of LGBTI+ students are physically assaulted (e.g. punched, kicked or injured with a weapon) because of their sexual orientation, 8% because of their gender expression.
- 43% of LGBTI+ students are sexually harassed (e.g. unwanted touching or sexual remarks).
- 39% of LGBTI+ students experience cyberbullying via social media, telephone and email over the past year.

### The Impact

Feeling unsafe and unaccepted effects both academic performance and mental health. LGBTI+ students who experience bullying and harassment at school have lower self-esteem, higher levels of isolation and poorer educational outcomes.

## ABSENTEEISM AND ACADEMIC ASPIRATIONS

Compared to the OECD (2017) study, LGBTI+ students who experience frequent verbal harassment because of their sexual orientation are:

- 8% less likely to pursue third-level education (66% vs 74%).
- 27% more likely to have missed school in the past month (40% vs 13%).
- LGBTI+ students who experience victimisation based on their gender identity are 24% more likely to have missed school in the past month (43% vs 19%).

## SENSE OF BELONGING

Experiencing victimisation and discrimination impacts LGBTI+ students sense of self-esteem and belonging at school.

1 in 3 LGBTI+ students reported that other students are not accepting of LGBTI+ people.

LGBTI+ students who experienced victimisation based on their sexual orientation feel less accepted at school compared to those who do not (38% vs 56%).

In the past year:

- 70% of LGBTI+ students felt that other students do not like them.

- 49% of LGBTI+ students felt lonely at school.
- 49% of LGBTI+ students were unable to make friends.
- 44% of LGBTI+ students felt like an outsider at school.

## ISOLATION

Students often rely on the intervention of peers, family and school staff in instances of LGBTI+ bullying and harassment, all of which contribute to the creation of a hostile school climate when left unaddressed.

In the past year:

- 64% of LGBTI+ students said their peers never intervened.
- 86% of LGBTI+ students felt deliberately excluded or “left out” by other students.
- 74% of LGBTI+ students had mean rumours or lies told about them.
- 60% of LGBTI+ students never reported incidents of LGBTI+ bullying to school staff and 54% never reported to a family member.
- 60% of LGBTI+ students felt school staff intervention was ineffective.

## The Solution

Safe and supportive schools<sup>4</sup> with inclusive staff, representation of LGBTI+ identities in the curriculum and explicit anti-bullying policies results in reduced levels of anti-LGBTI+ bullying and a student body with a higher sense of belonging and better educational outcomes.

## SEEKING SUPPORT

Almost all LGBTI+ students (97%) identified at least one school staff member supportive of LGBTI+ students.

75% of LGBTI+ students in Leinster identified more than six supportive teachers in their school, compared to 64% in Munster, 62% in Ulster and 54% in Connaught.

63% of LGBTI+ students felt more comfortable talking to other students about LGBTI+ issues than talking to a staff member.

## EFFECT OF SUPPORT

Students who reported a higher level of staff who support LGBTI+ students were:

- 45% more likely to feel accepted by the student body (64% vs 19%).
- 34% more likely to feel that they belong in their school (57% vs 23%).

---

<sup>4</sup> Barron, M. and O’Hagan, L. (2019) *LGBTI+ Safe and Supportive Schools*. 2nd Ed. Dublin: HSE, BeLonG To Youth Services.\*

\*This citation was omitted from the original print run and this error has been rectified in this reprint of the report.

- 20% less likely to miss days of school due to feeling unsafe (24% vs 44%).

## STAFF INTERVENTION

45% of LGBTI+ students reported that staff did not intervene if present when homophobic remarks were made.

When staff members intervened in homophobic remarks, LGBTI+ students were:

- 5% more likely to feel accepted by the student body (28% vs. 33%)
- 15% more likely to feel that they belong in their school (47% vs 32%).
- 8% less likely to miss days of school due to feeling unsafe (31% vs 39%).

## CURRICULUM

68% of LGBTI+ students were not taught anything positive about LGBTI+ identities in school.

LGBTI+ students identified positive representations of LGBTI+ topics in the following subjects:

SPHE (23%), English (7%) and History (6%). 78% of students are never taught about LGBTI+ bullying in school.

Including LGBTI+ related issues in the curriculum means students are 26% more likely to feel accepted by the student body, 20% more likely to feel they belong at school and 9% more likely to not miss days of school due to feeling unsafe.

## SCHOOL POLICIES

Although 88% of LGBTI+ students have an anti-bullying and harassment policy in their school, only 29% of students reported that the policy explicitly mentioned sexual orientation or gender identity and expression.

## Conclusion

This research presents the harsh reality of the lived experiences of LGBTI+ students in second-level schools in Ireland.

The findings capture the diversity of the LGBTI+ community within second-level education and the intense and indisputable discrimination, harassment, isolation and stigmatisation that LGBTI+ students are subjected to.

Each student who participated in this survey had the opportunity for the first time to narrate in their own words the difficulties they face as an LGBTI+ student on a regular basis. While positives were identified in the context of staff support, access to resources and inclusive curriculums, the vast majority of LGBTI+ students are eagerly awaiting leaving school in the hope of a more inclusive environment.

LGBTI+ students are in every school in Ireland. We owe these students more than fear, anxiety, loneliness and harm – they deserve a school experience that not only

includes their identities but celebrates and values the diversity of their experiences and lives.

We will conduct this research every two years to assess the progression of the school climate for LGBTI+ students. We will not stop until LGBTI+ students are equal, safe and valued within their school.

## Introduction

---

*“You’re better off being quiet in the corner – after 6th year, in college, you can be yourself.”*

BeLonG To Youth Services as Ireland’s national LGBTI+ youth service is committed to ensuring LGBTI+ young people are equal, safe and valued in the diversity of their identities and experiences, and this extends to their schooling environment. Since we opened our doors in 2003, everyday our youth workers have heard stories from young LGBTI+ people or their parents about bullying, isolation and not feeling like they belong in their school and the devastating impact it can have on them. For over 15 years, BeLonG To Youth Services has worked with teachers and other education stakeholders to ensure that schools in Ireland are safe and affirming spaces for all students, regardless of their sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression. We aim to achieve this mission through campaigns, youth work, training and research.

2019 marks the 10th anniversary of Stand Up Awareness Week, our national campaign to end LGBTI+ bullying in post-primary schools in Ireland. As part of this campaign, we wanted to incorporate a research piece which would fill the lacuna within Irish research surrounding LGBTI+ young people’s schooling experience. The ambition of this research was to gather quantitative data that would speak to the nature of LGBTI+ students lived experiences while also allowing students to narrate their lives in their own words. This is the first instalment of the research which will run biennially for as long as it is required. The research reports on the presence of homophobic, biphobic and transphobic language, other forms of biased language, discrimination, victimisation and harassment, and the impact that these experiences have on LGBTI+ students’ educational outcomes, aspirations and well-being. The research also examines the solutions available to the government, schools and students based on the student responses within the survey. Often it is one supportive teacher who makes an immeasurable difference in the life of an LGBTI+ young person – indeed, it can determine whether they will attend school one day to the next. Equally as significant as supportive staff and school personnel, the survey identified the importance of LGBTI+-inclusive curricular resources as well as inclusive and supportive school policies.

In collaboration with other educational stakeholders, BeLonG To aim to create a school climate that is not only accepting of LGBTI+ lives but celebrates and values the diversity of every individual student. Searching for a new opportunity to capture the reality of school life for LGBTI+ students, we reached out to GLSEN (Gay, Lesbian & Straight Education Network), a US based LGBTI+ advocacy organisation set up by

a group of teachers in 1990 to create affirming learning environments for LGBTQ youth. GLSEN have been running their own school climate surveys for many years as part of their work to collect information on LGBTQ middle and high school students' experiences with discrimination, biased language, and availability and utility of supportive school resources. They developed, refined and shared the research instrument freely within the US more recently with the ongoing collaboration with Columbia University's Teachers College they have supported NGOs to run this survey in many countries. As a result of their generosity, this research offered an opportunity to

- (a) collect data on students' experiences in school communities in Ireland, so that their experiences can be documented and used to advocate for safer and more inclusive programs and policies in our schools and communities.
- (b) include young LGBTI+ voices in Ireland within the international conversation surrounding schooling, discrimination, equality and belonging in one's educational environment.

While we acknowledge both within the context of our work with students, teachers, schools, boards of management, parents/guardians and educational stakeholders that life for LGBTI+ young people has improved in recent decades in Ireland, the findings of this report represent a compounding of how far we have come and how much work is still required within existing partnerships.

In the last 50 years, LGBTI+ lives have shifted dramatically in experience. Once an LGBTI+ identity was mired with isolation, stigma and violence. However, in present-day Ireland, many LGBTI+ people live visibly, are happy, successful and fulfilled in their lives. This has been made manifest through a combination of political and legislative developments and an overall move towards a more socially and culturally inclusive Ireland. This is particularly prevalent when the legislative developments of LGBTI+ rights and equality provisions are contextualised alongside and compared to the policy context of discrimination, bullying and inclusion within schools in Ireland. While LGBTI+ adults have been afforded the opportunity to marry and be legally recognised as their gender identities as well as much other crucial equality legislation, Irish LGBTI+ young people are often forgotten and left anticipating the opportunity to leave school in order to be their most authentic selves.

With the Irish gay rights movement establishing itself in the 1970s, the tireless dedication of LGBTI+ activists resulted in the decriminalisation of homosexuality in 1993 which signalled a snowball effect for LGBTI+ rights and equality which would follow in the proceeding 20 years. During the last two decades the Irish LGBTI+ community has gained access to the same rights and protections as their heterosexual, cisgender counterparts in many ways such as the introduction of the Equal Status Act (2000), Employment Equality Acts (1998-2015), Civil Partnership Act (2010), Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission Act (2014) Marriage Equality Act (2015), Gender Recognition Act (2015) and the Children and Family

Relationship (Amendment) Act (2018). However, the School Climate Report demonstrates that while many LGBTI+ adults are celebrating their newly found inclusion in Irish society, many young people feel isolated, ostracised and victimised because of the LGBTI+ identity.

This research is situated not just within the context of legislative developments for LGBTI+ young people but within the policy developments and both national and international literature which aims to advance the lived experience of young people within Irish post-primary schools. The majority of LGBTI+ people will come to the realisation of their identity while in the Irish post-primary schooling system – 12 being the most common age for realising that they may be/are LGBTI+. They do so however, in not only an unwelcoming environment but often in a hostile environment that actively excludes their experiences (Higgins et al, 2016; Bontempo & D’Angelli, 2002; Bagley & Tremblay, 2000). Coming to the realisation that one is LGBTI+ can often be a time of frustration, isolation and confusion. Without the support of loved ones, friends and key players in your life, such as an educator, a young person may feel guilt, shame, isolation and rejection (Duong, 2014; Haas et al, 2011; Diaz et al, 2010). The young people who engaged in this survey witnessed the legislative changes in the last 10 years that heralded an acceptance of LGBTI+ people within the politics of personhood and citizenship in Ireland. However, the results of this research demonstrate how many students are subjected still to bullying, harassment, isolation and victimisation simply because they are LGBTI+. Situated within the literature to date on LGBTI+ young people’s experience in post-primary schools (Higgins et al, 2016; Minton, 2011; Birkett et al, 2009; Mayock et al, 2009; O’ Higgins Norman, 2008, 2009a, 2009b, 2010), this research demonstrates how relatively little has changed in the lived experiences of those growing up LGBTI+ in Ireland. This research highlights that negative experiences of being LGBTI+ in post-primary education in Ireland were not eradicated with the emergent legislative change afforded to the community. LGBTI+ young people still have an ongoing struggle to be accepted and protected in school.

The Irish government published an Action Plan on Bullying in 2013 with specific procedures to tackle, among other issues, discrimination on grounds of sexual orientation and gender identity. On foot of this policy, schools were issued with a circular from the Department of Education and Skills “to give direction and guidance to school authorities and school personnel in preventing and tackling school-based bullying behaviour amongst its pupils and in dealing with any negative impact within school of bullying behaviour that occurs elsewhere. These procedures apply to all recognised primary and post-primary schools and to centres for education (as defined in the Education Act 1998) which are attended by pupils under the age of 18 years”. The Plan and Procedure refer specifically to homophobic and transphobic bullying. Requirements under the procedures include:

1. Education and prevention strategies must explicitly deal with homophobic and transphobic bullying
2. Schools are responsible for creating positive school culture and climates.
3. Schools may also need to address topics that are masked by prejudice and silence such as homophobic bullying.

An essential and exciting follow on from the anti-bullying policy of 2013 came in 2014 when the Department of Children and Youth Affairs launched the National Policy Framework for Children and Young People, *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures: The national policy framework for children & young people 2014–2020* (BOBF). The BOBF framework is a whole-of-government policy that operates across all government departments and agencies, and also extends to statutory and non-statutory organisations that work with, and for, children and young people. The vision of the BOBF framework is to make Ireland the best small country in the world in which to grow up and raise a family, and where the rights of all children and young people are respected, protected and fulfilled; where their voices are heard and where they are supported to realise their maximum potential now and in the future.

The BOBF Framework identified five national outcomes for children and young people. They are to seek to ensure that they:

1. Are active and healthy with positive physical and mental wellbeing.
2. Are achieving their full potential in all areas of learning and development.
3. Are safe and protected from harm.
4. Have economic security and opportunity
5. Are connected, respected and contributing to their world.

*The National Youth Strategy 2015-2020* identifies LGBTI+ young people as “a specific group to be considered in the context of focused provision for young people”. It draws attention to homophobic, biphobic, transphobic and interphobic bullying.

The *LGBTI+ National Youth Strategy 2018-2020* sets out the goals and objectives for serving the needs of LGBTI+ people aged 10 to 24. LGBTI+ bullying features significantly within this consultation report and the strategy itself. In fact Objective 1 sets out 7 actions to create a more supportive and inclusive environment for LGBTI+ young people in formal education settings.

Objective 1: Create a more supportive and inclusive environment for LGBTI+ young people in formal education settings

- A. Encourage schools in the development of a whole-school policy to ensure the inclusion of LGBTI+ young people, with particular regard to exploring opportunities for the appropriate inclusion of LGBTI+ lives in the teaching

curriculum as part of curriculum review at both primary and senior-cycle levels. Schools will be required to consult with parents and students on all school policies, including school uniform policy.

- B. Review and update professional development supports for teachers to take account of the LGBTI+ Youth Strategy.
- C. Conduct a thematic evaluation of SPHE (including RSE) and related culture of inclusion in schools and publish a composite report. The evaluation will address all aspects of that programme, including how issues of different types of sexuality and the different types of gender are treated
- D. Maintain the high standard of LGBTI+ leadership within third level institutions.
- E. Develop and pilot a student-centred evidence-based model of peer support for LGBTI+ and their alliances within post-primary schools.
- F. A policy template on LGBTI+ inclusion with particular emphasis on transgender and intersex will be developed for adaptation and adoption across all Further Education and Training (FET) provision services.
- G. Support the provision of student-led LGBTI+-specific awareness-raising initiatives in Higher Education Institutions and Further Education and Training (FET) Institutions. Such initiatives may include provision of Pink and Purple Training.

The strategy sets out a number of other actions to be taken by the Department of Education and others in relation to capacity building amongst professionals, exploring provision of gender neutral bathrooms and changing rooms, and the provision of specific prevention initiatives for LGBTI+ identity based bullying in schools.

The Strategy also sets out actions in relation to the enhancement of the quality of LGBTI+ data and the commission of research to ensure evidence-informed policy and service delivery.

BeLonG To Youth Services' *School Climate Report* carried out with Columbia University is such research. Through giving voice to LGBTI+ students' lived experience we can move towards policies and services that will improve their lives, their attendance, their education outcomes and overall wellbeing.

This research is living and adaptable, it is an educational resource that will grow in accuracy and engagement as we continue to run it in future years. we are saddened, surprised, delighted and shocked by some of the findings but believe this will be a catalyst to change. This report will be the comparative instrument we use to gauge future change. If the young people who gave voice to their experiences in this document are heard, we should witness change within the education sector as dramatic as the constitutional and legislative change that we fought so ardently for.

## Methodology

---

### Methods

---

BeLonG To Youth Services partnered with the Teachers College at Columbia University to conduct this research project. Teachers College, Columbia University are an ongoing collaborator with GLSEN, who granted permission for other countries to utilise the survey instrument to capture school climates for LGBTI+ students. The survey instrument was modelled after GLSEN's 2017 National School Climate Survey and was appropriated by Teachers College, Columbia University and BeLonG To Youth Services into the Irish context. The survey was housed online through Columbia University's server accessible through a link on BeLonG To Youth Services website.

Students completed the online survey about their experiences in school during the 2018-2019 school year, including hearing biased remarks, feeling safe, being harassed and feeling comfortable at school. They were also asked about their academic experiences, attitudes about school, involvement in school and the availability of supportive school resources. Young people were eligible to participate in the survey if they were between the ages of 13 and 20, attended a secondary school in Ireland during the 2018-2019 school year, identified as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or a sexual orientation other than heterosexual (e.g. pansexual, questioning) or described themselves as trans or as having another gender identity that is not cisgender. Data collection occurred between May 15<sup>th</sup> and August 30<sup>th</sup>, 2019, ending before the beginning of the 2019-2020 school year.

In our survey, we examined the experiences of LGBTI+ students with regard to indicators of negative school climate:

- Hearing biased remarks, including homophobic, transphobic, racist, ableist and sexist remarks in school.
- Feeling unsafe in school because of personal characteristics, such as sexual orientation, gender expression, body image or race/ethnicity.
- Missing school because of safety reasons.
- Experiencing harassment and assault in school.
- Experiencing discriminatory policies and practices at school.

In addition, we examined whether students reported these experiences to school officials or their families, and how these adults addressed the problem.

Further, we examined the impact of school climate on LGBTI+ students' academic achievement, attendance, educational aspirations and well-being. We were equally concerned about LGBTI+ students' access to supportive resources in school and we explore the possible benefits of these resources:

- Supportive and inclusive school policies, such as anti-bullying/harassment policies.

- Supportive school staff.
- Curricular resources that are inclusive of LGBTI+-related topics.

We also utilised findings within *The LGBTIreland Report* (2016) to garner comparative data between a population of young LGBTI+ in Ireland in 2016 versus present day. Equally, we utilised the OECD Programme for International Student Assessment (2015) to draw comparisons between the school climate experiences of young LGBTI+ people and that of their heterosexual, cisgender counterparts.

## **Advertising and Dissemination**

---

In order to obtain a large and diverse sample of LGBTI+ youth in Ireland, we devised an advertising and dissemination campaign in three stages.

**Stage One:** During stage one, our communications team engaged our internal contacts with young people within our services, teachers with whom we had worked with previously or trained, and educational organisations who we had ongoing relationships with. We provided educators, schools and organisations within our network with a briefing on the survey and the ambitions of the research, the survey link, social media examples to boost engagement and a poster for the survey. We scheduled the survey to be shared on our various social media platforms which included Twitter, Facebook and Instagram, and on our website during peak times. We also utilised the national network of LGBTI+ youth groups and services asking them to share the survey with the young people they worked with and with the wider communities where they were based to get a more nationally representative participation rate.

**Stage Two:** During stage two we sought to engage educators, young people and key stakeholders who were outside of our networks. We did so in a two-pronged approach of online engagement and physical outreach. We made email contact with several youth organisations with which we had not previously had much engagement with and our youth work team engaged in outreach with the youth services in Dublin by speaking with youth workers and making them aware of the survey and encouraging them to engage the young people in their services. We printed posters and gave them to youth services and placed them in prime locations throughout the city. We also invested in Facebook and Snapchat advertising which saw a major increase in our online engagement in the survey and an overall spike in participation in the survey.

**Stage Three:** We invested once again in online advertising and reconnected with our inner and outer circles of contacts within the education sector asking them to disseminate the survey and make sure students they worked with were aware of it.

## Sample

A large number of students engaged with the survey (n=1,775). However, not everyone completed the survey. In addition to removing respondents with very partial information (n=636), we also removed cisgender heterosexual respondents (most likely allies, n=148) and respondents over the 21 years old (n=203).

The final sample consisted of a total of 788 students between the ages of 13 and 20 captured in Table 1.1. Table 1.2 presents participants' demographic characteristics and shows the characteristics of the schools attended by participants. Participants had an average age of 15.9 years old (SD=1.52). Half of the sample (50%) are female, about one-fifth is male (21.9%), with the rest choosing other gender identities (transgenders 12.4%, non-binary 7.8%). Two-fifths of the sample identify as bisexual (45.2%); one-quarter identify as gay and one-fifth identify as lesbian (26.4% and 21.1% respectively). The rest identify as queer, pansexual or questioning (17.1%, 15.4% and 12.1% respectively). Approximately six out of ten students (60.3%) lived in a city or city edge.

Table 1.1: Characteristics of Survey Participants		
<b>Age (n=788)</b>		
13	8.6%	n=68
14	11.0%	n=87
15	15.0%	n=118
16	25.1%	n=198
17	26.5%	n=209
18	11.4%	n=90
19	1.9%	n=15
20	0.4%	n=3
Average Age = 15.9 years (SD 1.52)		
<b>Sexual Orientation (n=788)</b>		
Gay	26.4%	n=208
Lesbian	21.1%	n=166
Bisexual	45.2%	n=356
Pansexual	15.3%	n=121
Straight/Heterosexual	0.3%	n=24
Questioning	12.0%	n=95
Queer	17.1%	n=135
Other Sexual Orientation	4.7%	n=37
<b>Sex/Gender (n=788)</b>		
Male	22.0%	n=173
Female	49.9%	n=393
Transgender	17.5%	n=138
Gender Non-Binary	7.9%	n=62
Gender Non-conforming	4.7%	n=37
Gender queer	3.8%	n=30
Other gender	4.9%	n=39

Born in Ireland	67.0%	n=528
-----------------	-------	-------

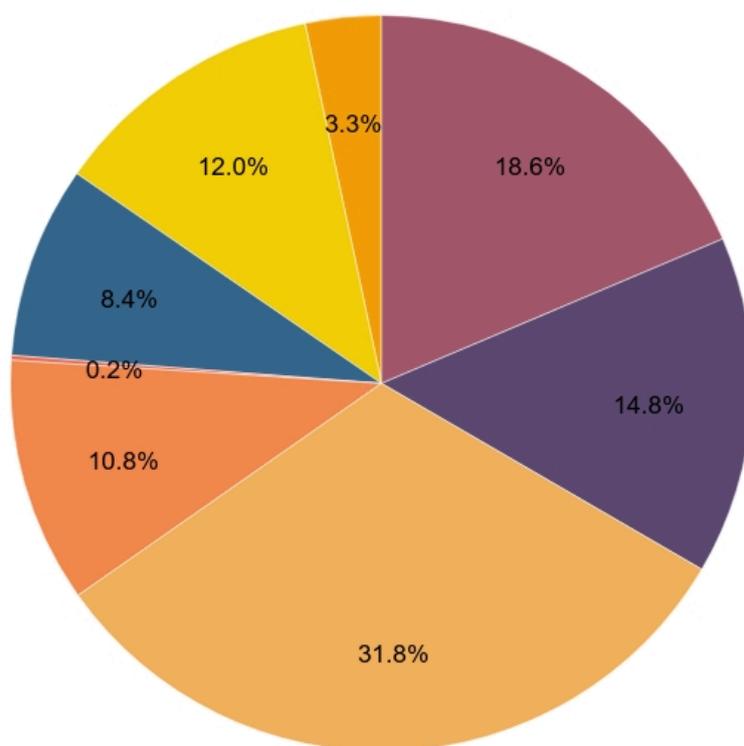
**Table 1.2: Characteristics of Participants' Schools<sup>5</sup>**

<b>Community Type (n=788)</b>		
City or City Edge	60.3%	n=475
Rural Area or Village	39.7%	n=313
<b>School Level (n=788)</b>		
Dublin	31.5%	n=248
Cork	11.2%	n=88
Kildare	5.3%	n=42
Donegal	4.6%	n=36
Galway	4.2%	n=33
Wicklow	4.2%	n=33
Meath	3.6%	n=28
Kilkenny	3.4%	n=27
Limerick	3.4%	n=27
Waterford	3.4%	n=27
Tipperary	3.2%	n=25
Louth	2.5%	n=20
Mayo	2.4%	n=19
Wexford	2.3%	n=18
Clare	2.0%	n=16
Carlow	1.9%	n=15
Kerry	1.8%	n=14
Offaly	1.7%	n=13
Westmeath	1.5%	n=12
Roscommon	1.1%	n=9
Cavan	1.0%	n=8
Laois	1.0%	n=8
Sligo	0.9%	n=7
Longford	0.8%	n=6
Monaghan	0.8%	n=6
Leitrim	0.4%	n=3
<b>School Size (n=788)</b>		
Less Than 500 Students	38.4%	n=303
501 to 1000 Students	46.2%	n=364
1001 to 1500 Students	12.6%	n=99
Over 1500 Students	2.8%	n=22

<sup>5</sup> Percentages may not total 100% due to rounding.

The majority of students in the sample have come out or shared their sexual orientation with at least one person (70.8%). About two-fifths (42.5%) came out to at least one parent. About one-third (32.2%) came out to most or all students in their school. However, only small number of students (14.5%) came out to most or all school staff. Importantly, one-quarter of transgender students are out about being transgender (26.4%).

**Sexual Orientation of Student Respondents**



● Gay	26.4	● Lesbian	21.1
● Bisexual	45.2	● Pansexual	15.3
● Heterosexual	0.3	● Questioning	12
● Queer	17.1	● Other Sexual Orientation	4.7

## The Findings

---

### The Problem

---

LGBTI+ bullying is rife throughout second-level schools in Ireland. This alarming reality results in a hostile school environment for many LGBTI+ students and poses a significant threat to their wellbeing, mental health and welfare.

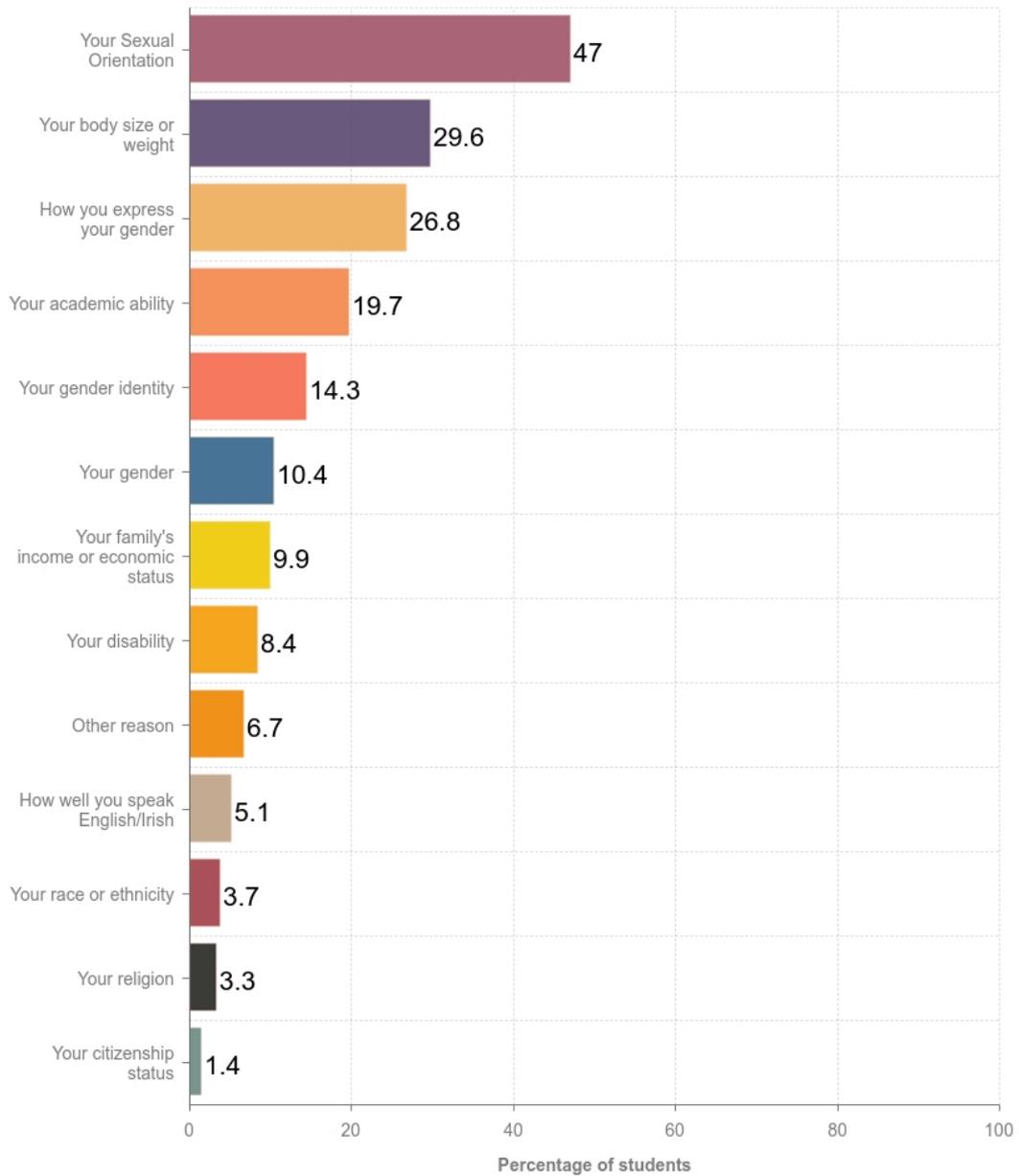
*"I'm a transgender man who goes to an all-girls school which I find extremely difficult and restrictive. I feel uncomfortable using bathrooms because technically every bathroom is a girls' bathroom."*

### School Safety

For LGBTI+ youth, school can be an unsafe place for a variety of reasons. Students in our survey were asked whether they ever felt unsafe at school during the past year because of a personal characteristic, including body size or weight, sexual orientation, gender and gender expression (i.e., how traditionally "masculine" or "feminine" they were in appearance or behaviour). As shown in Figure 1.1, LGBTI+ students most commonly felt unsafe at school because of their sexual orientation, body size or weight, and gender expression:

- 70.2% of students said they felt unsafe at school in the past year.
- About half (47.0%) reported feeling unsafe at school in the past year because of their sexual orientation.
- About one third (29.6%) of LGBTI+ students felt unsafe because of their body size or weight.
- One-quarter (26.8%) of LGBTI+ students felt unsafe because of how they express their gender.

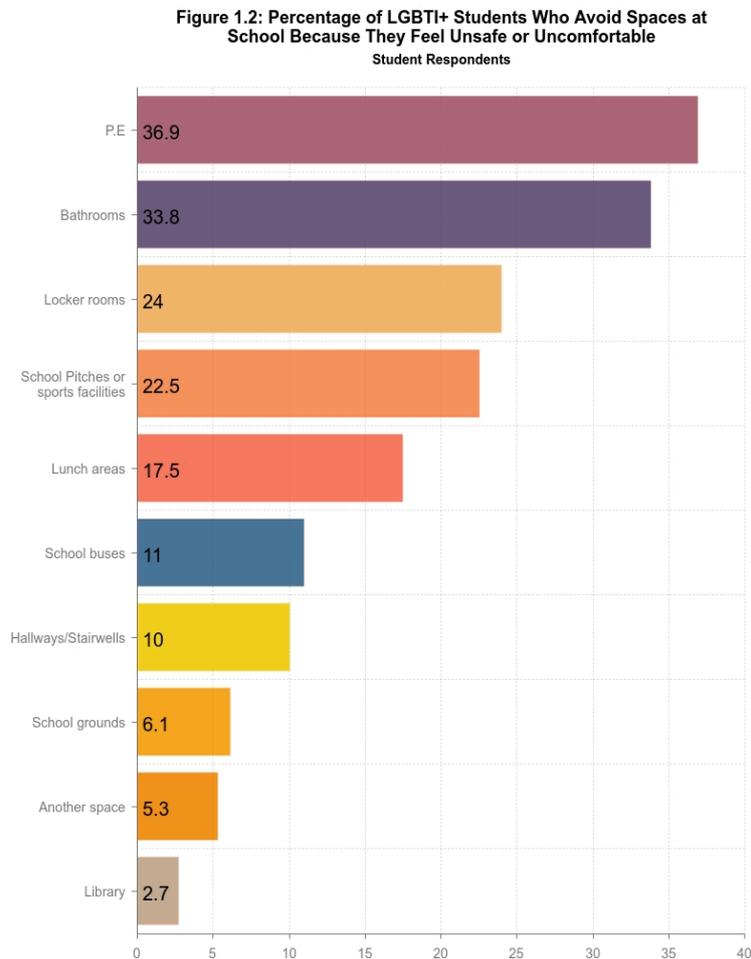
**Figure 1.1: LGBTI+ Students Who Felt Unsafe at School Because of Actual or Perceived Personal Characteristics**  
Student Respondents in Percentage



*“A lot of boys in my school either mock being gay or sexualise lesbians or bisexual girls. They bullied a male bisexual boy in my year so I now know I absolutely do not want to come out in school.”*

When students feel unsafe or uncomfortable in school, they may choose to avoid particular areas within the school grounds or activities where they feel most unwelcome or may feel that they need to avoid attending school altogether. Thus, a hostile school climate can impact an LGBTI+ student’s ability to fully engage and participate with the school community. We asked LGBTI+ students if there were

particular spaces at school that they avoided specifically because they felt unsafe or uncomfortable. As shown in Figure 1.2, LGBTI+ students most commonly avoided physical education and bathrooms, with about three in ten students avoiding each of these spaces.



- Three in every 10 LGBTI+ students (36.9%) avoided PE because they felt unsafe or uncomfortable.
- Three in every 10 LGBTI+ students (33.8%) avoided bathrooms because they felt unsafe or uncomfortable.
- One in four (24.0%) LGBTI+ students said that they avoided locker rooms.
- One in five (22.5%) LGBTI+ students said that they avoided the school athletic fields or facilities.

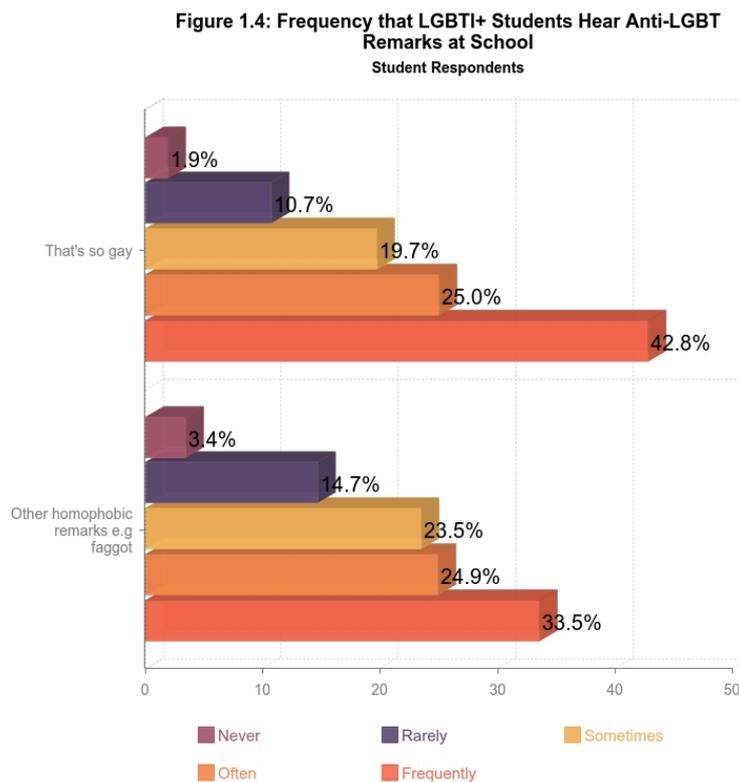
Feeling unsafe or uncomfortable at school can negatively affect the ability of students to succeed academically, particularly if it results in avoiding school or classes.

## Biased Language

Homophobic, sexist, racist and other types of biased language can create a hostile school environment for all students. We asked LGBTI+ students about their experiences with hearing anti-LGBTI+ and other types of biased remarks while at school. Because homophobic remarks and negative remarks about gender expression are specifically relevant to LGBTI+ students, we asked students in our survey's additional questions about school staff's use of and responses to hearing these types of anti-LGBTI+ language.

## Homophobic Remarks

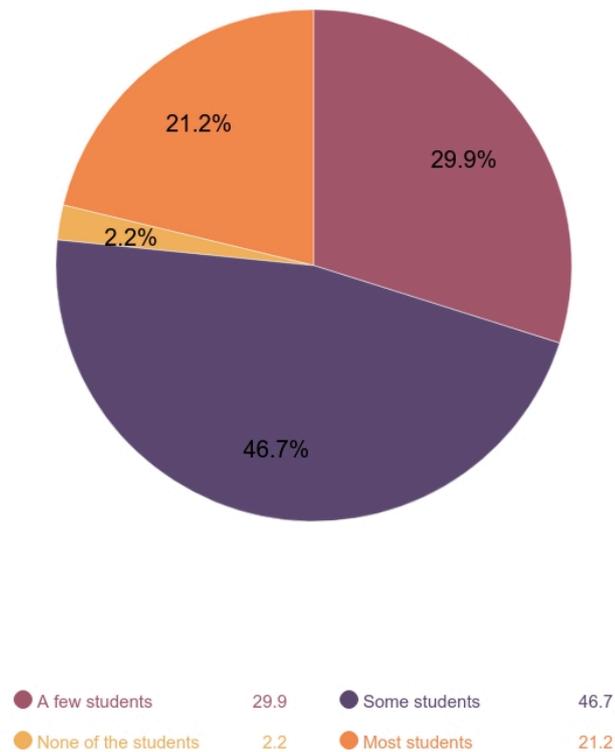
We asked students about the frequency of hearing homophobic remarks (such as "that's so gay" or typical homophobic slurs). As shown in Figure 1.4, the majority (67.8%) of LGBTI+ students reported hearing other students make derogatory remarks often or frequently in school. Further, we asked students who heard homophobic remarks in school how pervasive this behaviour was among the student population.



*"I told my friends I was gay in first year and they outed me to everyone. It was horrible. People scribbled slurs on my photos around the school and wrote a slur on my locker in marker. I told my teacher and she basically told me I shouldn't have come out then, as if it was my choice in the first place."*

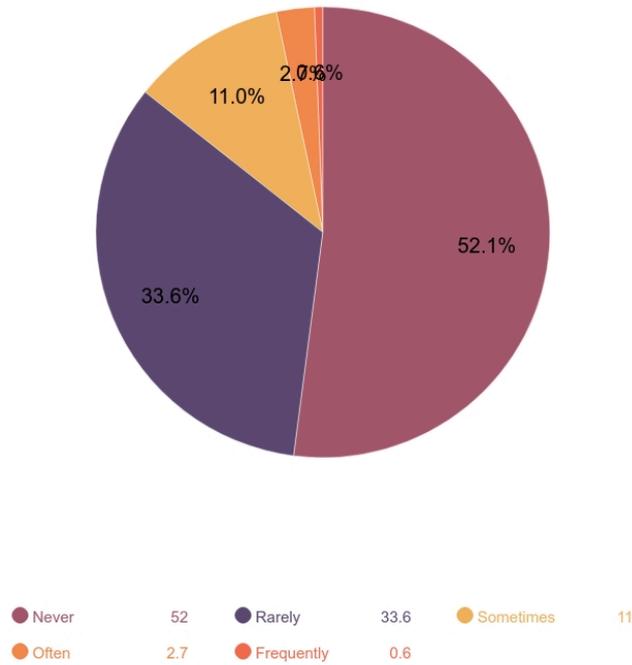
As shown in Figure 1.5, two thirds (67.9%) of the respondents said that these types of remarks were made by “some” or “most” students.

**Figure 1.5: LGBTI+ Students' Reports of How Many Students Make Homophobic Remarks**  
Student Respondents



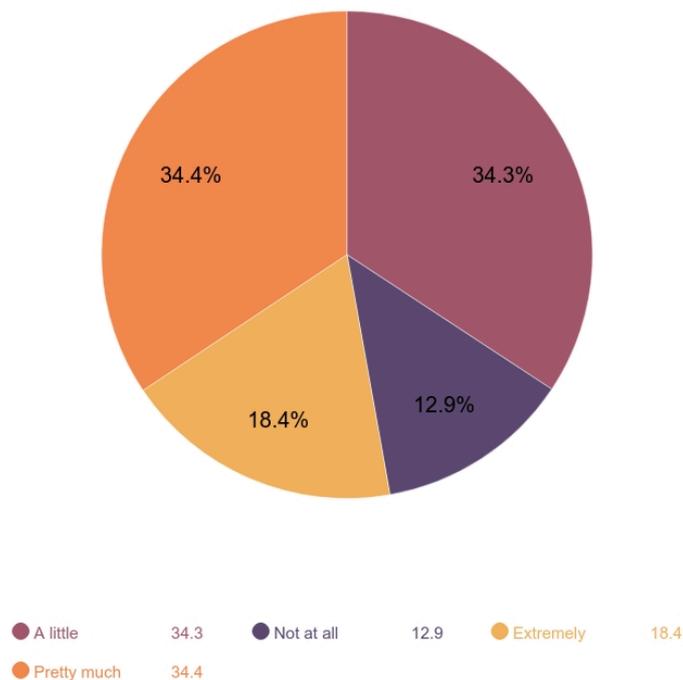
In addition, almost half (48.0%) of LGBTI+ students reported they heard homophobic remarks from teachers or staff (see Figure 1.6). One in ten students (14.3%) reported that they heard homophobic remarks from teachers and school staff “sometimes”, “often”, or “frequently”.

**Figure 1.6: LGBTI+ Students Hearing Homophobic Remark from Teachers or Other School Staff**  
Student Respondents



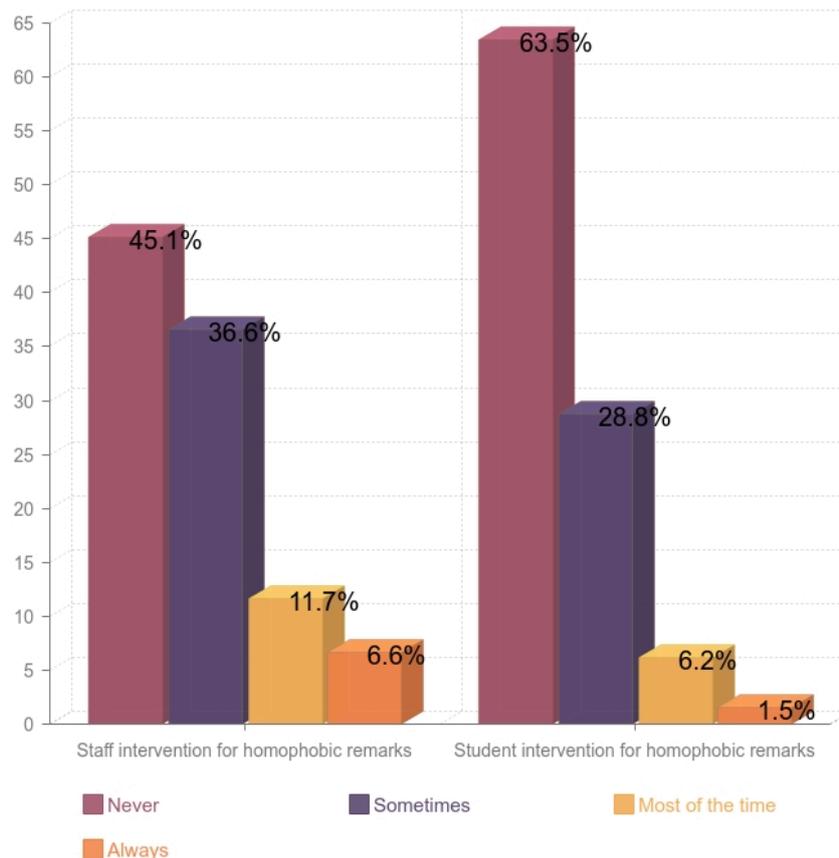
Hearing pejorative remarks in school can have negative effects on students. We asked the LGBTI+ students in our survey how bothered or distressed they were by these remarks - and more than half (52.8%) reported that they were bothered "pretty much" or "extremely" (see Figure 1.7).

**Figure 1.7: Degree that LGBTI+ Students Were Bothered or Distressed as a Result of Hearing "Gay" Used in a Derogatory Way**  
Student Respondents



Students who reported hearing homophobic remarks at school were asked how often teachers or other school staff intervened if they were present. One fifth (18.3%) reported that these school personnel intervened “most of the time” or “always” when homophobic remarks were made in their presence, and nearly half (45.1%) reported that staff never intervened when present (see Figure 1.8).

**Figure 1.8: LGBTI+ Students Reports on School Staff and Student Intervention in Homophobic Remarks**  
Student Respondents



Teachers and school staff are required to tackle identity based bullying which includes action to promote a positive school culture and climate, this includes addressing problems of biased language in school . However, students may also need to intervene when they hear biased language, especially given that school personnel are often not present during such times. Other students’ willingness to intervene when hearing this language is another important indicator of a positive school climate. However, few students reported that their peers intervened “always” or “most of the time” when hearing homophobic remarks (7.7%), and six in ten students (63.5%) said that their peers never intervened (see Figure 1.8).

The majority of LGBTI+ students report the rampant use of homophobic remarks in their schools and this behaviour contributes to a hostile learning environment for this population. Infrequent intervention by school authorities when hearing biased language in school may send a message to students that homophobic language is

tolerated. Furthermore, school staff may themselves be modelling poor behaviour and legitimising the use of homophobic language as most students said they have heard school staff make homophobic remarks at some time.

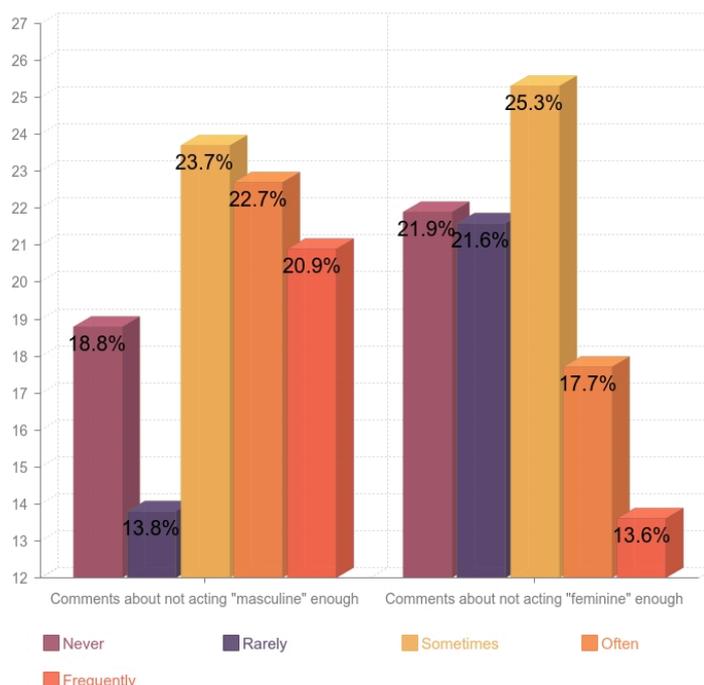
*“Though the school, in general, is quite accepting, it is still common to hear the word gay used as a synonym for bad and slurs used by certain students. Whether they realise the effects of this or fully mean it, it makes me feel like an outsider in my own school and as if I did fully come out to everyone I would not be welcomed. These remarks are also very rarely contested by other students.”*

### Biased Language about Gender Expression

Society and culture shape norms for what is considered an appropriate expression of one’s gender. Those who express themselves in a manner considered to be atypical may experience criticism, harassment and sometimes violence. We asked students two separate questions about hearing comments related to a student’s gender expression. One question asked how often they heard remarks about someone not acting masculine enough, and another question asked how often they heard comments about someone not acting feminine enough.

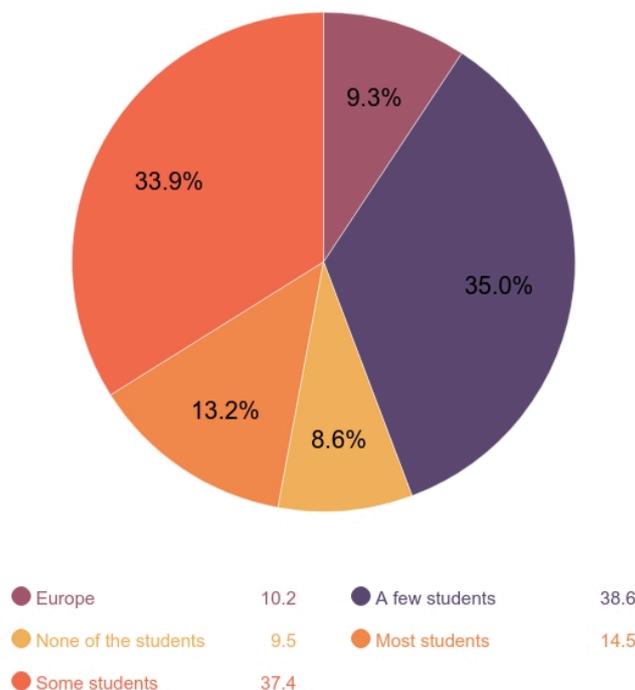
Findings from this survey demonstrate that negative remarks about someone’s gender expression were pervasive in schools. As shown in Figure 1.9, LGBTI+ students reported hearing remarks about someone’s gender expression often or frequently at school (43.6% and 31.3%, respectively). Remarks about students not acting “feminine” were as common as remarks about students not acting “masculine” enough.

Figure 1.9: Frequency of LGBTI+ Students Hearing Different Types of Remarks about Students’ Gender Expression  
Student Respondents



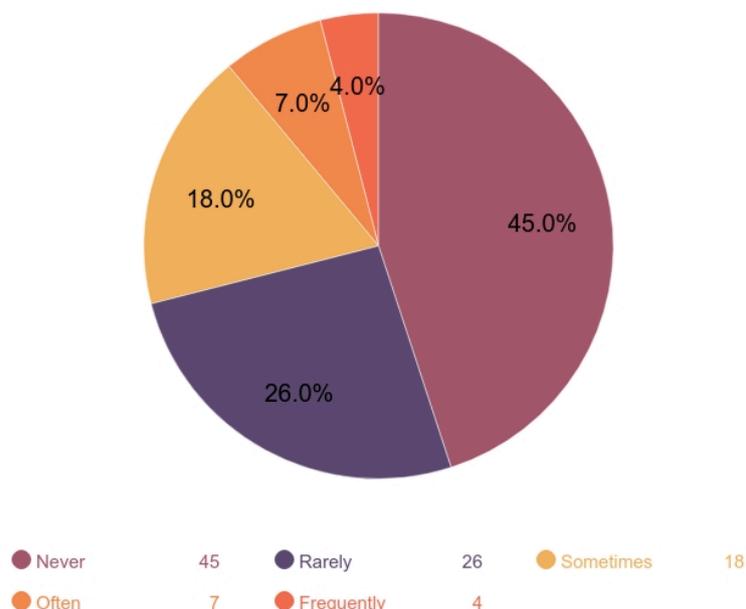
When asked how much of the student population made these types of remarks, over half (51.9%) of students reported that most or some of their peers made negative remarks about someone’s gender expression (see Figure 1.10).

**Figure 1.10: LGBTI+ Students' Reports on How Many Students Make Negative Remarks about Gender Expression**  
Student Respondents



In addition, 11.0% of LGBTI+ students reported that they heard these types of remarks from teachers and other school staff “sometimes”, “often”, or “frequently” (see Figure 1.11).

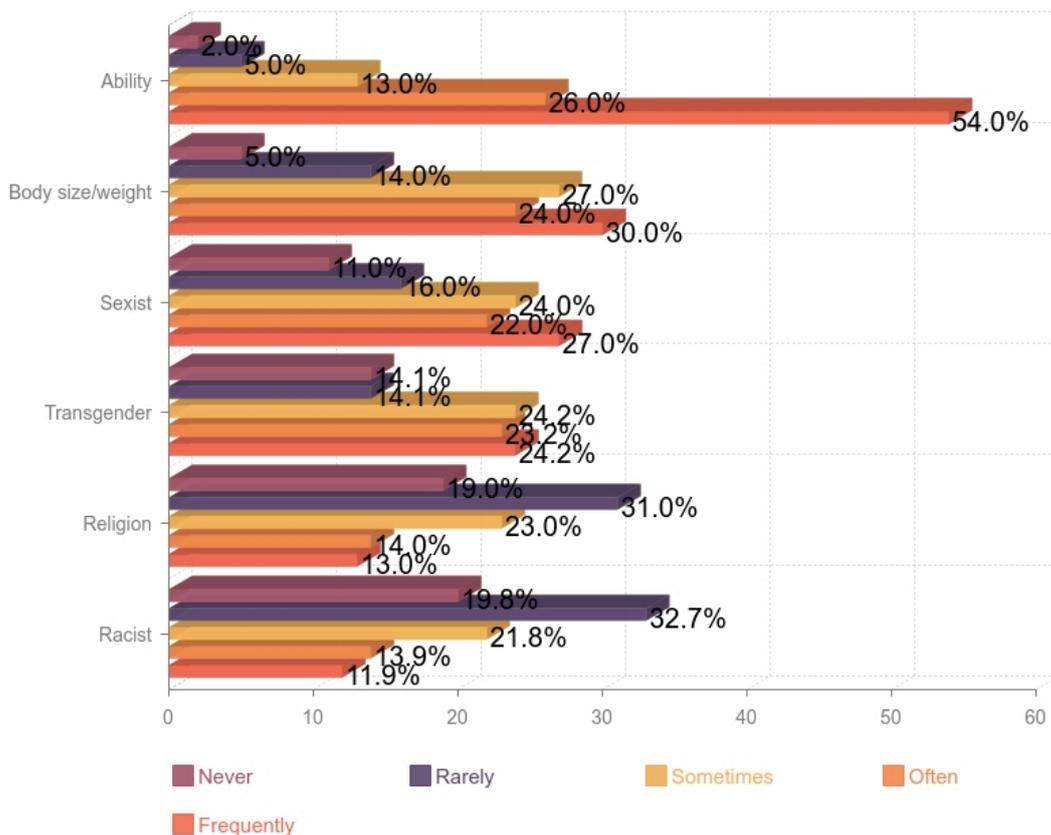
**Figure 1.11: LGBTI+ Students' Reports of School Staff for Remarks about Gender Expression**  
Student Respondents



## Biased Language about Transgender People

Similar to negative comments about gender expression, people may make negative comments about transgender people because they can pose a challenge to traditional ideas about gender. Therefore, we asked students about how often they heard negative remarks specifically about transgender people. About half (47.0%) of LGBTI+ students in our survey reported hearing these comments frequently or often (see Figure 1.12). The pervasiveness of anti-LGBTI+ remarks is a concerning contribution to hostile school climates for all LGBTI+ students. Any negative remark about sexual orientation, gender or gender expression may signal to LGBTI+ students that they are unwelcome in their school communities, even if a specific negative comment is not directly aligned to the individual sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression of the LGBTI+ student who hears it. For example, negative comments about gender expression may disparage transgender or LGB people, even if transgender-specific or homophobic slurs are not used.

**Figure 1.12: Frequency that LGBTI+ Students Hear Other Biased Remarks at School**  
Student Respondents



*"I have been scared to come out as trans in my school for three years. They barely accept gay people and I've never heard of a single out trans girl in my town. Also, I can't be myself at home because I would be stabbed in X town for being trans. I just can't wait to get to college."*

## **Other Types of Biased Language at School**

In addition to hearing anti-LGBTI+ remarks at school, hearing other types of biased language is an important indicator of school climate for LGBTI+ students. We asked students about their experiences hearing racist or xenophobic remarks and sexist remarks. As shown in Figure 1.12, the LGBTI+ students in the survey reported that these types of comments were very common in their schools, although some were more prevalent than others. A large majority of LGBTI+ students heard biased remarks about people's physical ability (80%) in their school "often" or "frequently". About half of LGBTI+ students heard body size/weight remarks and sexist remarks in their school "often" or "frequently" (54% and 49% respectively).

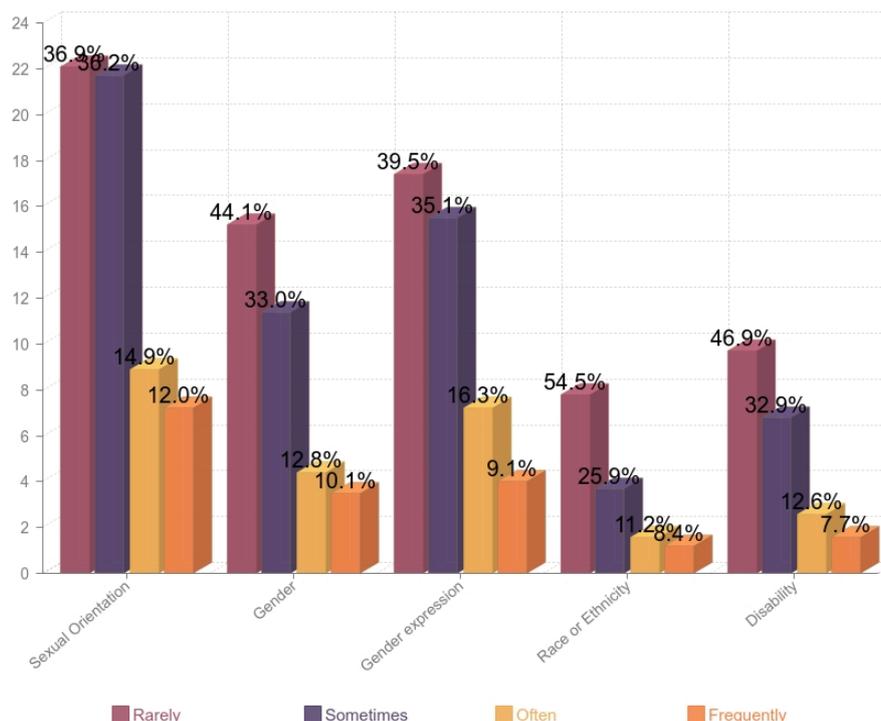
## **Experiences of Harassment and Assault at School**

Hearing anti-LGBTI+ remarks in school can contribute to feeling unsafe at school and create a negative learning environment. However, direct experiences with harassment and assault may have even more serious consequences on the lives of these students. We asked survey participants how often ("never", "rarely", "sometimes", "often" or "frequently") they had been verbally harassed, physically harassed or physically assaulted at school during the past year specifically because of a personal characteristic, including sexual orientation, gender, gender expression (e.g. not acting "masculine" or "feminine" enough) and ethnic origin.

### **Verbal Harassment**

Students in our survey were asked how often in the past year they had been verbally harassed (e.g. being called names or threatened) at school specifically because of personal characteristics. Approximately three quarters (77.5%) reported being verbally harassed at some point in the past year based on any of these personal characteristics. LGBTI+ students most commonly reported experiencing verbal harassment at school because of their sexual orientation or how they expressed their gender (see Figure 1.13).

**Figure 1.13: Frequency of Verbal Harassment Experienced by LGBTI+ Students in the Past School Year**  
Student Respondents



- Six in ten LGBTI+ students (59.9%) had been verbally harassed because of their sexual orientation.
- More than two fifths of LGBTI+ students (44.1%) were verbally harassed at school because of their gender expression.

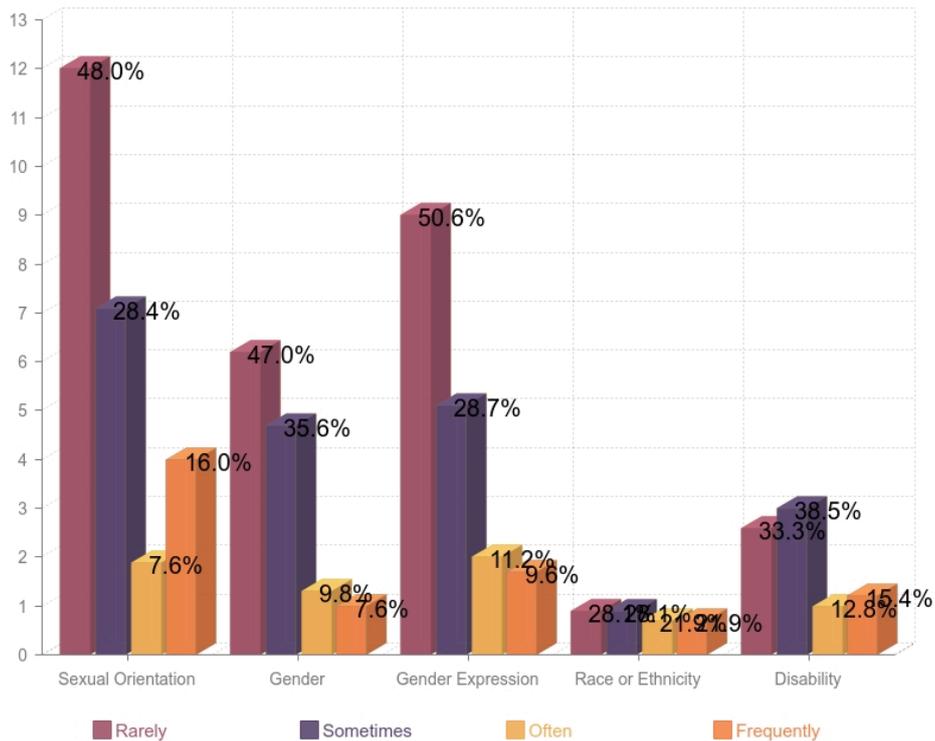
*“Despite my efforts to address my class about homophobia and people apologising for it, they continued using these terms after a few days. Teachers telling students they can’t be gay on their watch.”*

## Physical Harassment

With regard to physical harassment, two-fifths (38.4%) LGBTI+ students had been physically harassed (e.g. shoved or pushed) at some point at school during the past year based on personal characteristics. Their experiences of physical harassment followed a pattern similar to verbal harassment – students most commonly reported being physically harassed at school because of their sexual orientation or gender expression (see Figure 1.14):

- One in four LGBTI+ students (25%) had been physically harassed at school because of their sexual orientation.
- About one in five LGBTI+ students (17.8%) had been physically harassed at school because of their gender expression.

**Figure 1.14: Frequency of Physical Harassment Experienced by LGBTI+ Students in the Past School Year**  
Student Respondents



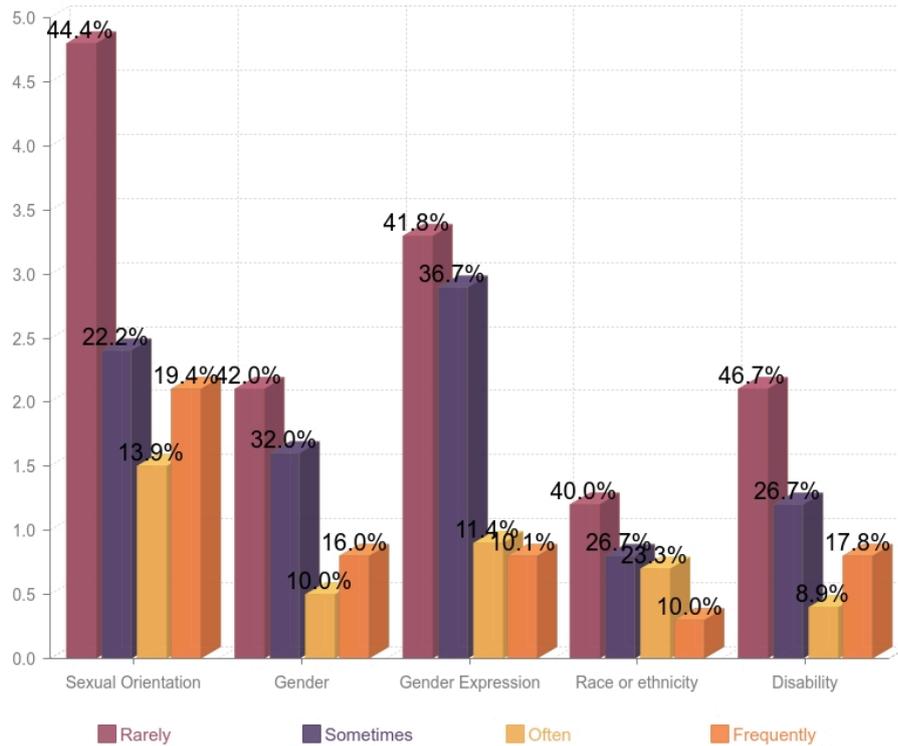
### Physical Assault

LGBTI+ students were less likely to report experiencing physical assault (e.g. punched, kicked or injured with a weapon) at school than verbal or physical harassment, which is not surprising given the more severe nature of the assault. Nonetheless, 20.4% of LGBTI+ students in our survey were assaulted at school during the past year for any personal characteristic (see Figure 1.15):

- 10.8% of LGBTI+ students were assaulted at school because of their sexual orientation.
- 7.9% were assaulted at school because of their gender expression.

*“I was physically and verbally harassed while I was in school based on my sexual orientation and because I was more masculine than other girls. I got yelled at by one student who used dyke and lesbian in a negative way towards me, then repeatedly punched and kicked me while other students watched this happened on two occasions.”*

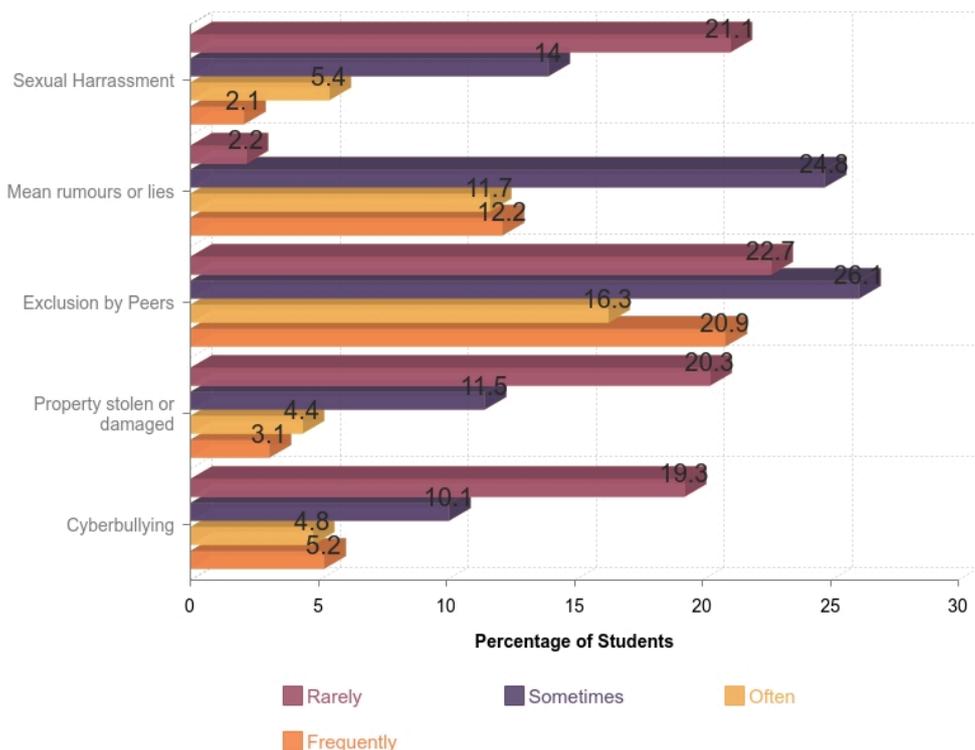
**Figure 1.15: Frequency of Physical Assault Experienced by LGBTI+ Students in the Past School Year**  
Student Respondents



### Experiences of Other Types of Harassment and Negative Events

LGBTI+ students may be harassed or experience other negative events at school for reasons that are not clearly related to sexual orientation, gender expression or other personal characteristic. In our survey, we also asked students how often they experienced these other types of events such as being sexually harassed or deliberately excluded by their peers, in the past year.

**Figure 1.16: Frequency of Other Types of Harassment Experienced by LGBTI+ Students in the Past Year**  
Student Respondents



## Relational Aggression

Research on school-based bullying and harassment often focuses on physical or overt acts of aggressive behaviour. However, it is also important to examine relational forms of aggression that can damage peer relationships, such as spreading rumours or excluding students from peer activities. We asked participants how often they experienced two common forms of relational aggression: being purposefully excluded by peers and being the target of mean rumours or lies. As illustrated in Figure 1.16, the vast majority of LGBTI+ students (86%) in our survey reported that they had felt deliberately excluded or “left out” by other students and nearly two fifths (37.2%) experienced this often or frequently. Three-quarters of students (73.9%) had mean rumours or lies told about them at school, and about one in four (23.9%) experienced this often or frequently.

*“A lot of students in my all-girl secondary school were very unsupportive and talked about me behind my back and spread rumours around school and secretly taking pictures of me and posting them on social media.”*

## Sexual Harassment

Harassment experienced by LGBTI+ students in school can often be sexual in nature. Survey participants were asked how often they had experienced sexual harassment at schools, such as unwanted touching or sexual remarks directed at them. As shown in Figure 1.16, 2 in 5 LGBTI+ students (42.6%) had been sexually harassed at school, and about 7.5% report that such events occurred often or frequently.

*“I was sexually abused by the guys in the PE changing room age 14 to 17 on a weekly basis. They would slap my ass, put their fingers up my ass, grope me and pull at my penis. I was terrified of PE and this affected my attendance on PE days, When I would tell staff they didn’t believe me as there was no CCTV and it was simply my word against theirs.”*

## Cyberbullying

Cyberbullying is using an electronic medium, such as a mobile phone or Internet communications, to threaten or harm others. In recent years there has been much attention given to this type of harassment as access to the internet, mobile phones and other electronic forms of communication have increased for many young people. We asked students in our survey how often they were harassed or threatened by students at their school via electronic mediums (telephone, internet, text message, e-mails, Facebook, Instagram, Twitter or Snapchat), two-fifths (39.4%) of LGBTI+ students reported experiencing this type of harassment in the past year; 10% had experienced it often or frequently (see also Figure 1.16).

## **Property Theft or Damage at School**

Having one's personal property damaged or stolen is yet another dimension of a hostile school climate for students. About two-fifths (39.3%) LGBTI+ students reported that their property had been stolen or purposefully damaged by other students at school in the past year (see Figure 1.16).

The following section of the report assesses the impact of the hostile school climate created by the bullying, harassment, discrimination and assault experienced by LGBTI+ students in post-primary schools in Ireland.

## The Impact

Feeling unsafe and unaccepted effects both academic performance and mental health. LGBTI+ students who experience bullying and harassment at school have lower self-esteem, higher levels of isolation and poorer educational outcomes.

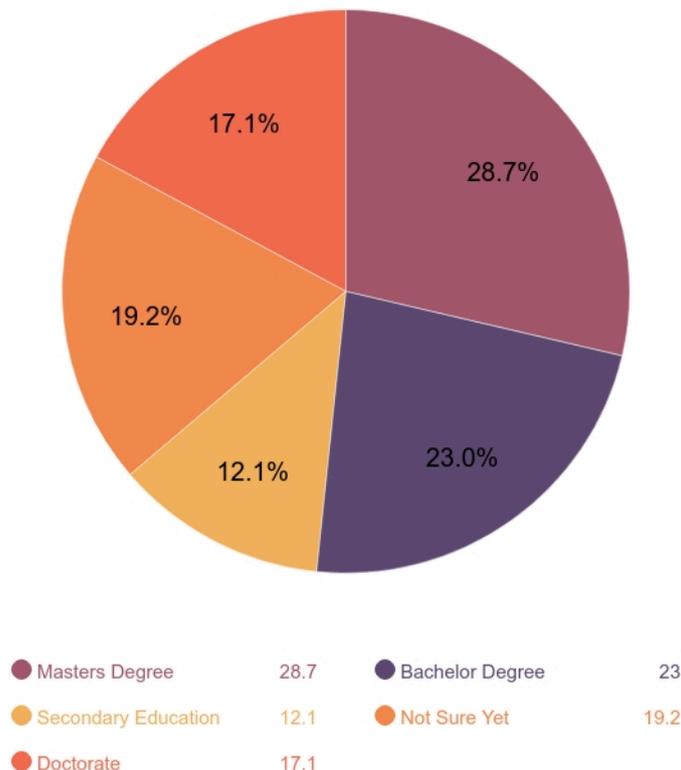
### Educational Outcomes & Aspirations

Although all students deserve equal access to education, LGBTI+ students can face a variety of obstacles to academic success and opportunity. Given the hostile climates encountered by LGBTI+ students, it is understandable that some students can have poorer outcomes in school. In this section, we examine in closer detail the educational experiences of LGBTI+ students, particularly how they might be affected by a hostile school climate.

In order to examine the relationship between school climate and educational outcomes, we asked students about their aspirations with regard to post-secondary education, including plans to graduate versus dropping out of school, as well as their highest level of expected educational attainment and intended field of study beyond post-primary school.

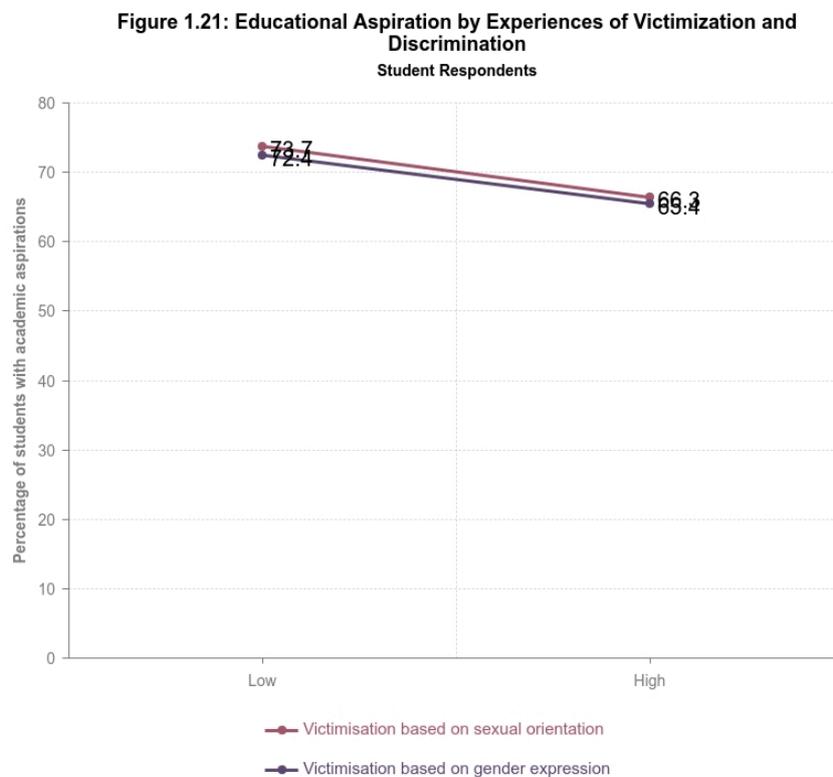
When asked about their aspirations with regard to post-secondary education, about one third of LGBTI+ students indicated that they did not plan to pursue any type of post-secondary education (i.e. that they only planned to obtain a Leaving Certificate, did not plan to finish school, or were unsure of their plans; see Figure 1.20).

**Figure 1.20: Educational Aspirations of LGBTI+ Students**  
Student Respondents



About one-fifth (19.2%) reported they are not sure yet and 12.1% indicated they aspire to complete the Leaving Certificate. About two thirds of students (68.8%) reported that they planned to get at least a bachelor's degree. It is important to note that the survey only included students who were in school during the 2018-2019 year. Thus, the percentage of LGBTI+ students not pursuing post-secondary education would be higher with the inclusion of students who had already left school without finishing.

*“School was incredibly uncomfortable and often I feared for my safety. This led to me not attending school for more days than I've ever missed previously which in turn had an immense adverse effects on my grades and prevented me from being able to put my full attention on the Leaving Certificate.”*

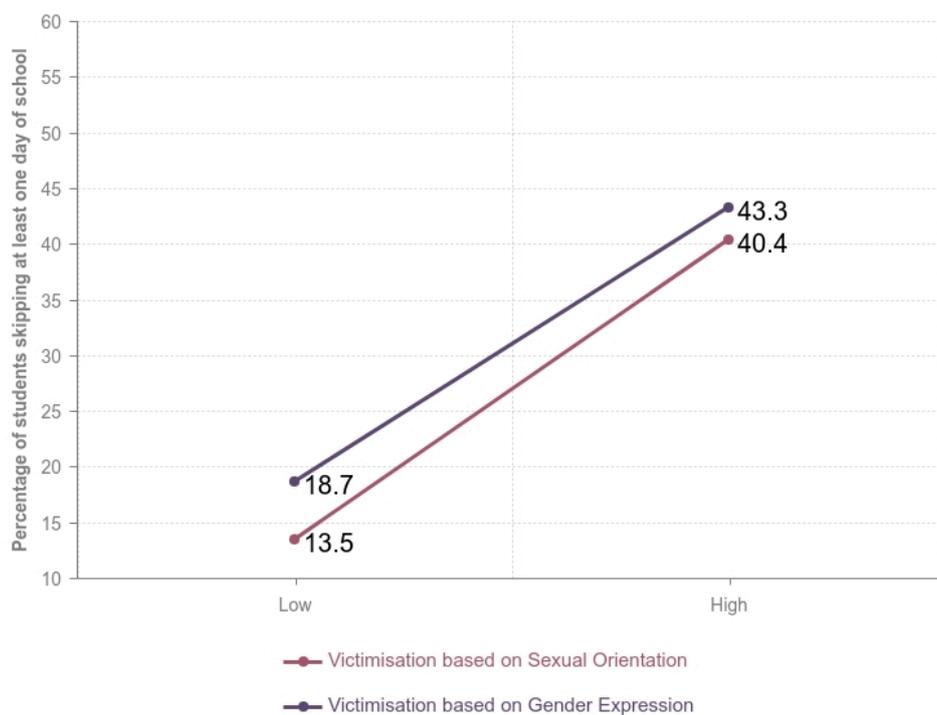


Although most students planned on finishing second level school and to attain an academic degree, we found an association between victimisation and educational aspiration. As shown in Figure 1.21, students who reported frequent verbal harassment because of their sexual orientation were less likely than other students to aspire for a post-secondary academic degree (66.3% vs 73.7%). Figure 1.21 also shows the same relationship between verbal harassment based on gender expression and academic aspirations.

## Absenteeism

Students who are regularly harassed or assaulted in school may attempt to avoid these hurtful experiences by not attending school and, accordingly, may be more likely to miss school than students who do not experience such victimisation. We found that experiences of harassment and assault were, in fact, related to missing days of school. As shown in Figure 1.22 students were more likely to have missed school in the past month if they had experienced higher levels of victimisation related to their sexual orientation (40.4% vs 13.5%) or gender expression (43.3% vs 18.7%).

**Figure 1.22: Absenteeism by Experiences of Victimization and Discrimination**  
Student Respondents



*"I have never wanted to leave my school more than since I came out as lesbian. I feel like I should have stayed in the closet. I am discriminated against by my school in a time where I felt so, so sad. I was in danger by my own mind and my school could not help me because it went against the ethos."*

## Sense of School Belonging

The degree to which students feel accepted by and a part of their school community is another important indicator of school climate and is related to a number of educational outcomes. Students who experience victimisation or discrimination at school may feel excluded and disconnected from their school community. In order to assess LGBTI+ students' sense of belonging to their school community, survey

participants were given a series of statements about feeling like a part of their school and were asked to indicate how much they agreed or disagreed with the statements. Figure 1.23A presents students' responses to these statements. Overall and across items, about half of the students reported positive feelings towards school belonging.

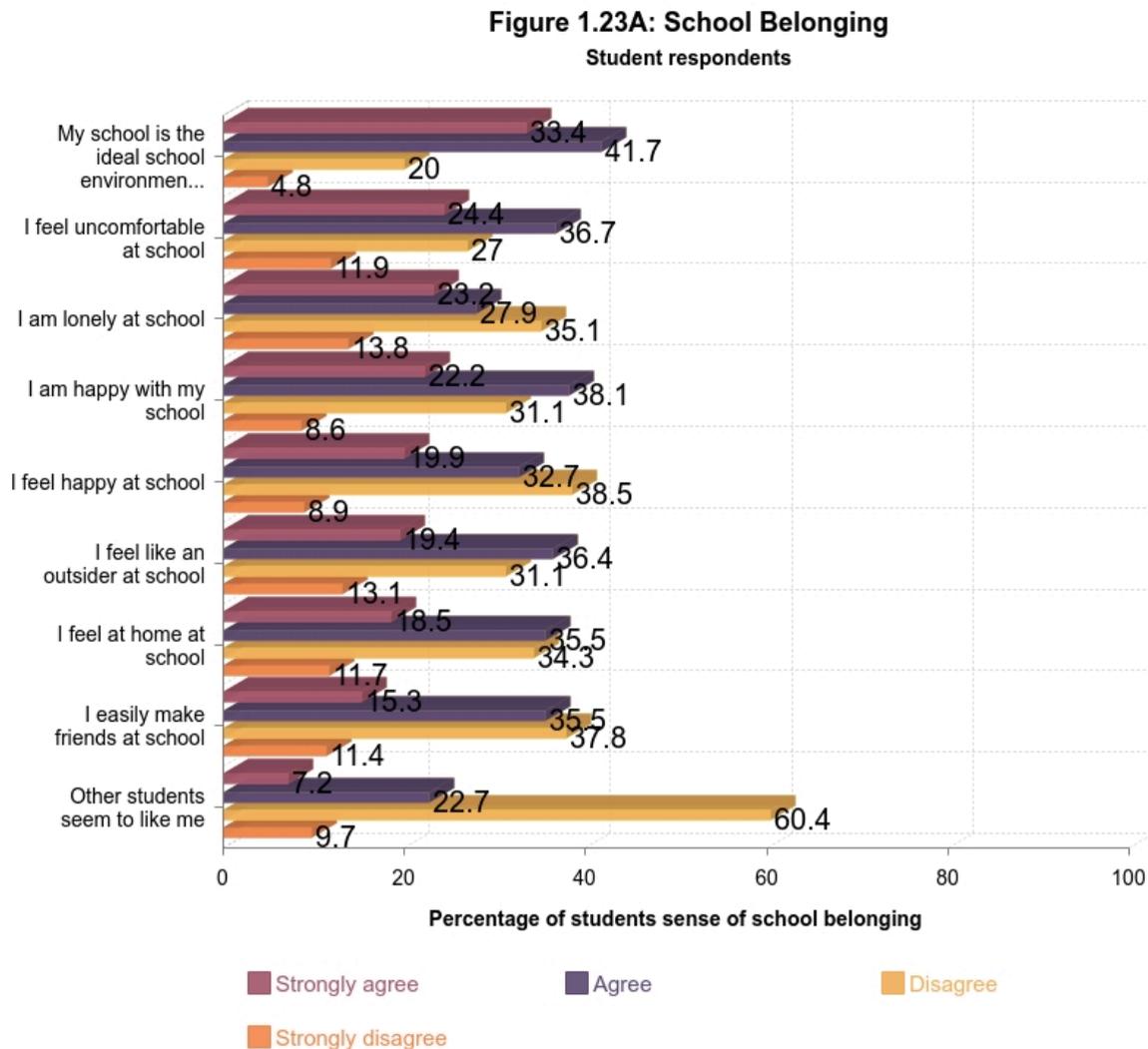
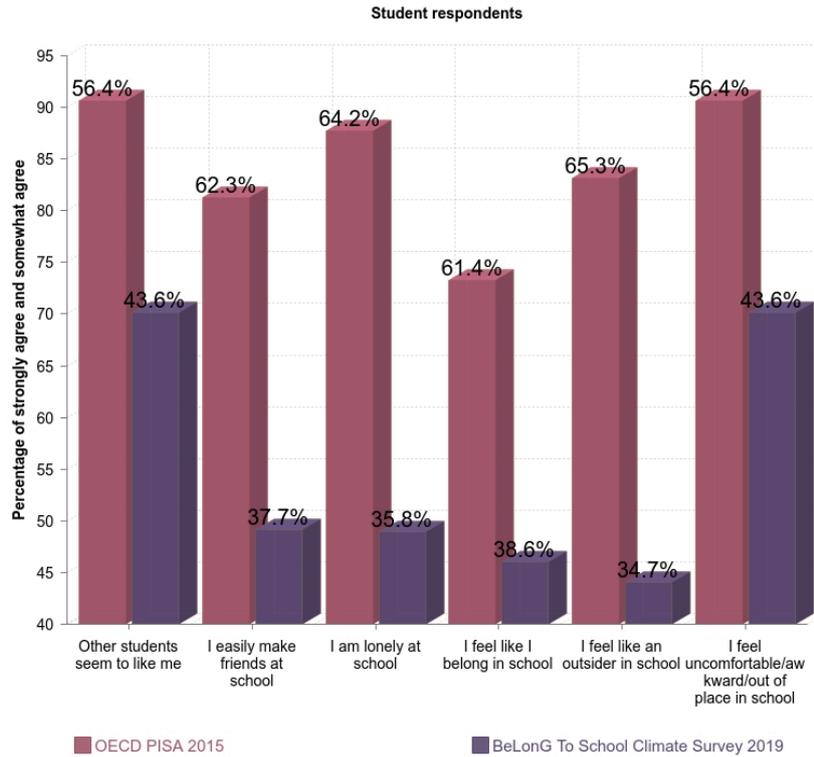


Figure 1.23B compares LGBTI+ students with a representative sample of 15-year-old students in Ireland. Data for the general population come from the 2015 OECD Programme for International Student Assessment. The wording of the four items is identical and the wording of two other items is slightly different. Compared to the general population of 15-year-old students, LGBTI+ students in Ireland on lower sense of school belonging.

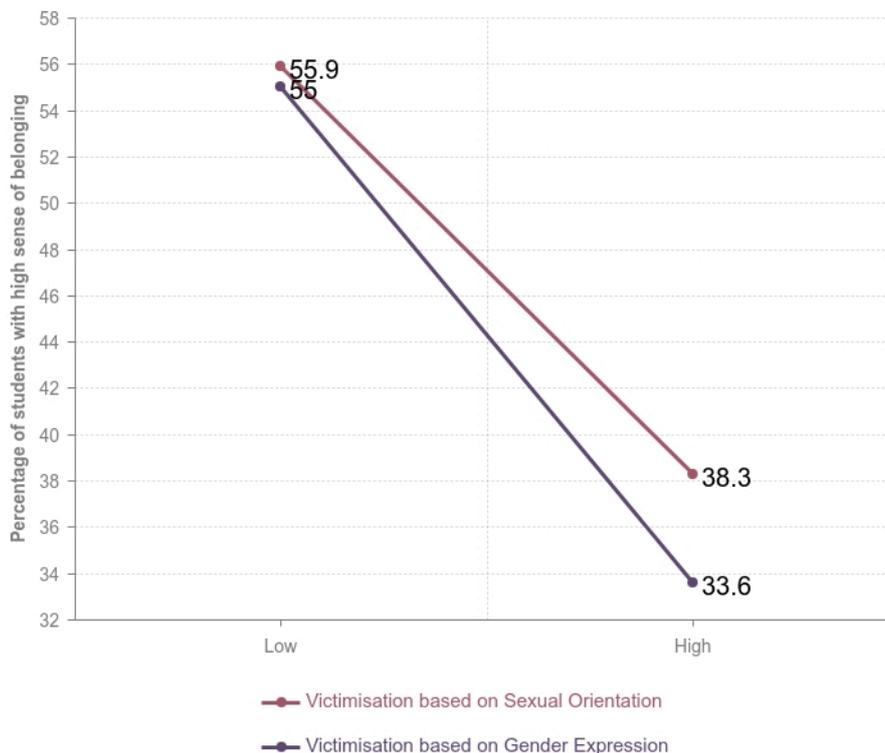
*“Being LGBT has given me an extra weight. A weight that I cannot get rid of. At least not yet, unfortunately. I will truly be free once I come out of the closet. I really, really hope at least one person genuinely accepts me. I’m honestly really scared.”*

**Figure 1.23B: School Belonging, LGBT+ Students and the General Population of 15 Year-Old Students**



As illustrated in Figure 1.23C, students who experienced victimisation based on sexual orientation or gender expression had lower levels of school belonging than students who experienced did not experience victimization in school. For example, more than half (55.9%) of students who did not experience victimisation based on their sexual orientation reported a positive sense of connection to their school, compared to two-fifths (38.3%) of students who experienced victimisation based on sexual orientation.

**Figure 1.23C: School Belonging by Experiences of Victimization and Discrimination**

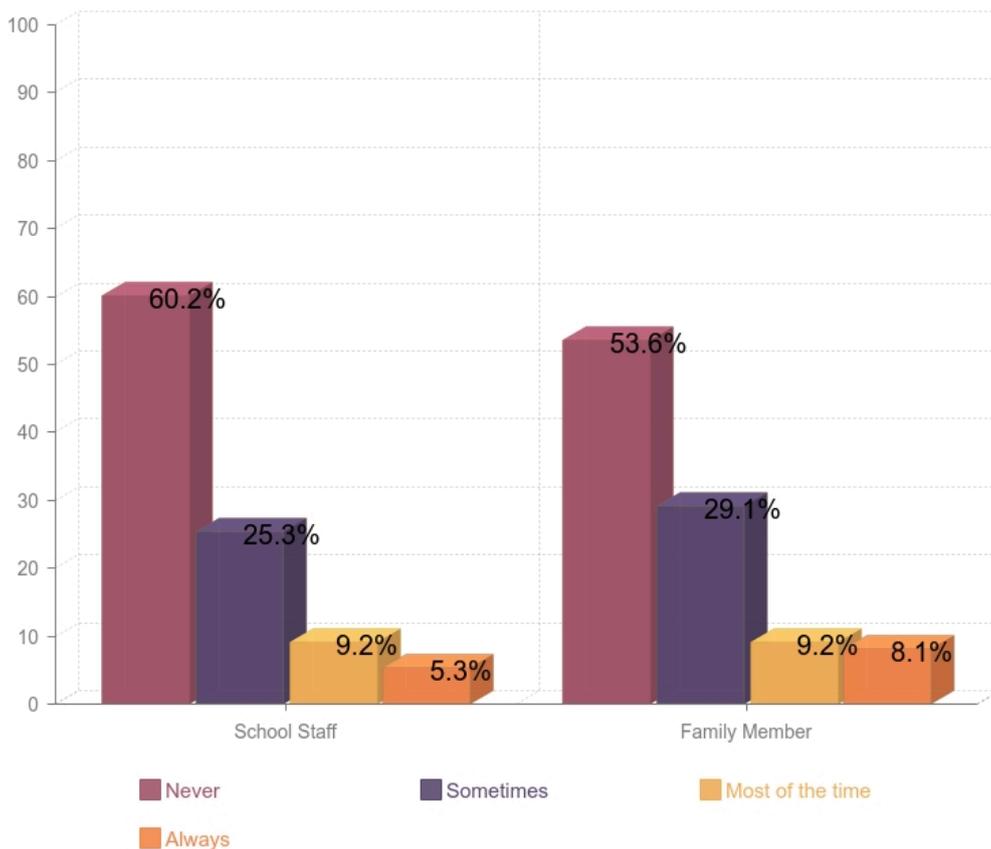


## Isolation

When harassment and assault occur in school, we expect the teachers and school personnel to address the problems effectively. However, students may not always feel comfortable reporting these events to staff. In our survey, we asked those students who had experienced harassment or assault in the past school year how often they had reported the incidents to school staff. As shown in Figure 1.17, four in ten of these students reported incidents to staff (39.9%) and 14.5% of students indicated that they regularly reported incidents of harassment or assault (9.2% reporting “most of the time” and 5.3% reporting “always” to staff).

*“Intensely lonely, no friends.”*

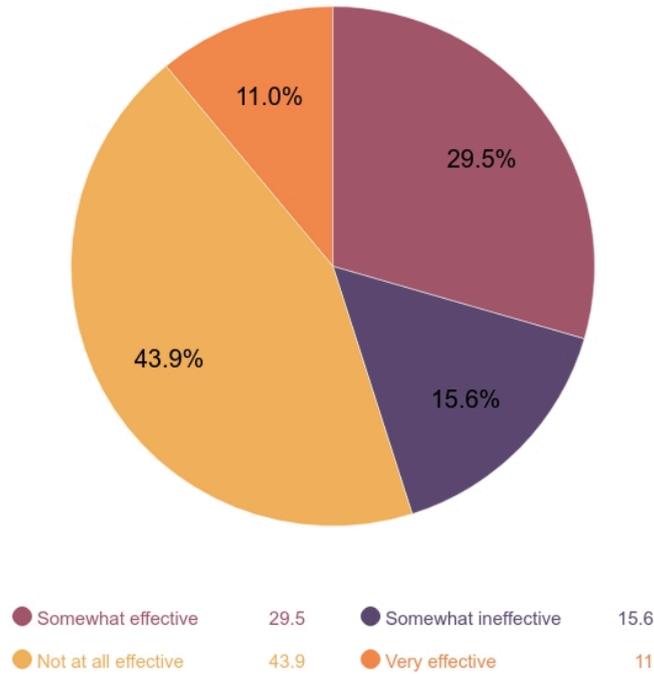
**Figure 1.17: Frequency of LGBTI+ Students Reporting Incidents of Harassment and Assault**  
Student Respondents



Students in our survey who said that they had reported incidents of victimisation to school staff were also asked how effective staff members were in addressing the problem. As shown in Figure 1.18, More than half (59.5%) of students believed that staff responded ineffectively (“Somewhat ineffective” or “Not at all Effective”) to their reports of victimisation.

**Figure 1.18: LGBTI+ Students' Perceptions of Effectiveness of Reporting Incidences of Harassment and Assault to School Staff**

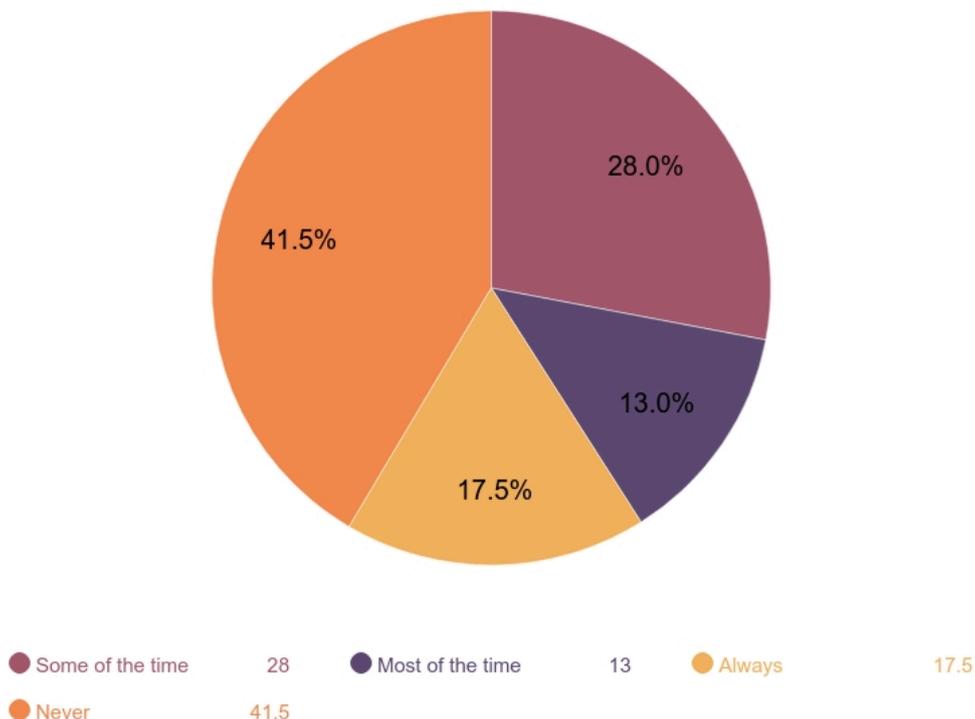
Student Respondents



Given that family members may be able to advocate on behalf of the student with school personnel, we also asked students if they reported harassment or assault to a family member (i.e. to their parent or guardian or to another family member). About half of the students (46.4%) said that they had ever told a family member (see also Figure 1.17). Students who had reported incidents to a family member were asked how often a family member had talked to school staff about the incident, and two-fifths of students (41.5%) said that the family member never addressed the issue with school staff (see Figure 1.19).

**Figure 1.19: Frequency of Intervention by LGBTI+ Students' Family Members**

Student Respondents



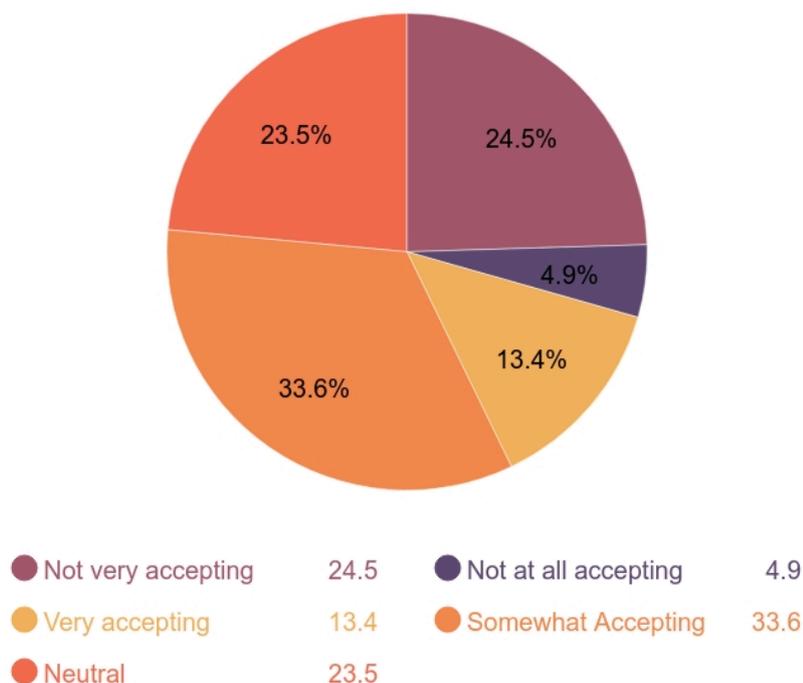
## The Solution

Safe and supportive schools<sup>6</sup> equip staff with the knowledge and understanding to support LGBTI+ students, represent LGBTI+ identities in the curriculum and explicitly name homophobic, biphobic and transphobic bullying in their anti-bullying policies. This results in reduced levels of anti-LGBTI+ bullying and creates a student body with a higher sense of belong and better educational outcomes.

### Seeking Support

LGBTI+ students may not have the same types of support from peers at their schools and in their communities. As shown in Figure 2.1, about half (47%) of LGBTI+ students reported that other students at school were accepting of LGBTI+ people ("very accepting" or "somewhat accepting") with nearly one in three students (29.4%) reporting that other students at school were not very accepting or not at all accepting of LGBTI+ people.

**Figure 2.1: LGBT Students' Reports on How Accepting Their School's Students are of LGBTI+ People**  
Student Respondents



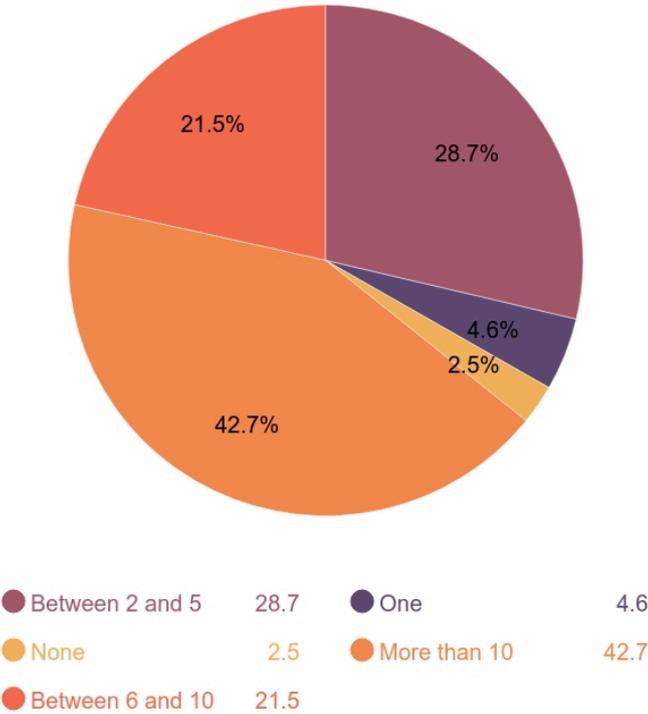
Over nine in ten students (92.9%) reported that there are numerous LGBTI+ students in their school (see Figure 2.2.).

<sup>6</sup> Barron, M. and O'Hagan, L. (2019) *LGBTI+ Safe and Supportive Schools*. 2nd Ed. Dublin: HSE, BeLonG To Youth Services.\*

\*This citation was omitted from the original print run and this error has been rectified in this reprint of the report.

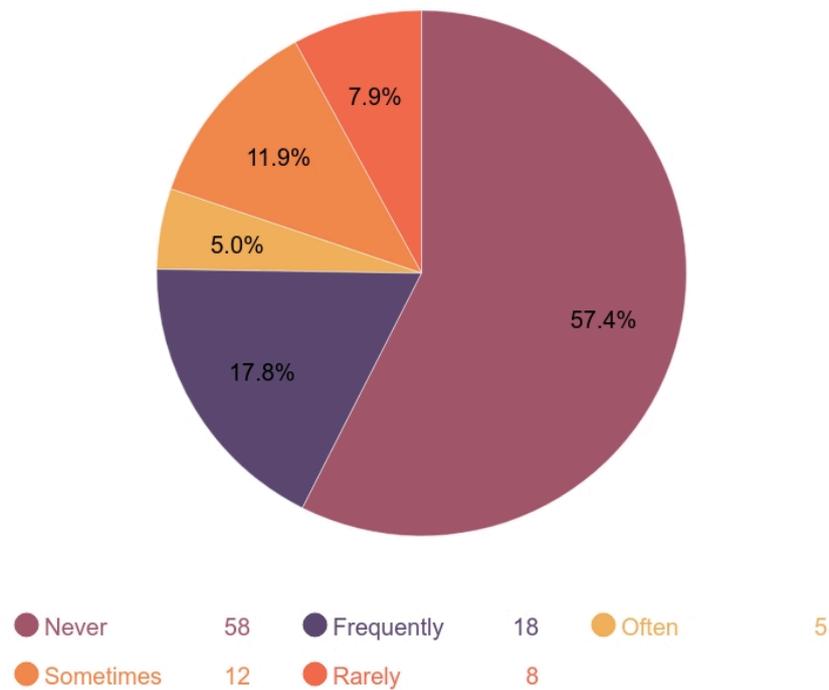
*“It feels like my school does nothing more than a half-hearted five days of ‘yeah’ (being supportive)! They only do it because they’re meant to be socially progressive and supportive of their students, not that any of the teachers actually care. It all feels very fake and disingenuous.”*

**Figure 2.2: LGBT Students' Reports on the Number of LGBTI+ Students at their School**  
Student Respondents



However, as shown in Figure 2.3, six in ten of LGBTI+ students (58%) report having never attended programs or groups for LGBTI+ youth outside of school. Thus, the availability of resources and supports in school for LGBTI+ students can be extremely important for this population of youth. There are several key resources that may help to promote a safer climate and more positive school experiences for students: school personnel who are supportive of LGBTI+ students, LGBTI+-inclusive curricular materials, and school policies for addressing incidents of harassment and assault. Thus, we examined the availability of these resources and supports among LGBTI+ students.

Figure 2.3: Frequency of Attending a Program or Group for LGBTI+ Youth Outside Their School  
Student Respondents



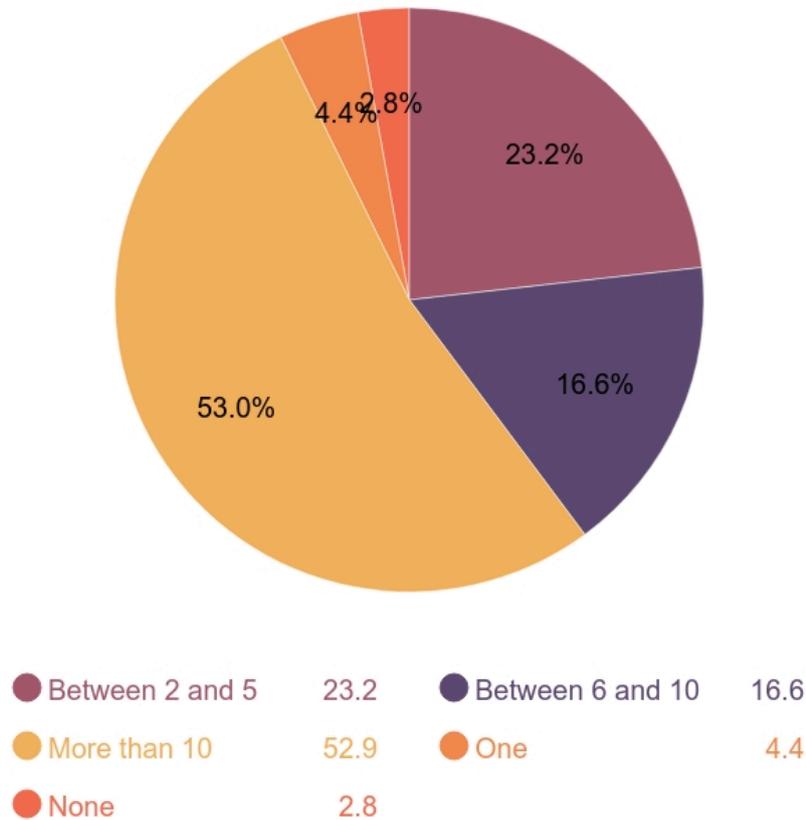
## Effect of Support

School-based resources, such as supportive school personnel, LGBTI+-inclusive curricula, and enumerated policies for reporting bullying, harassment and assault, may help create a more positive school environment for LGBTI+ students. In this section, we examine the relationship between school-based institutional supports and school climate, as well as educational indicators such as absenteeism, academic achievement and educational aspirations.

### Supportive School Personnel

Having supportive teachers and school staff can have a positive effect on the educational experiences of any student, increasing student motivation to learn and positive engagement in school. Given that LGBTI+ students often feel unsafe and unwelcome in school, having access to school personnel who provide support may be critical for creating better learning environments for LGBTI+ students. Therefore, we examined the relationships between the presence of supportive staff and several indicators of school climate, finding that the presence of school staff supportive of LGBTI+ students is one critical piece in improving the school climate. In our survey, the overwhelming majority of students (97.2%) could identify at least one school staff member whom they believed was supportive of LGBTI+ students at their school, and a half (52.9%) could identify ten or more supportive school staff (see Figure 2.4).

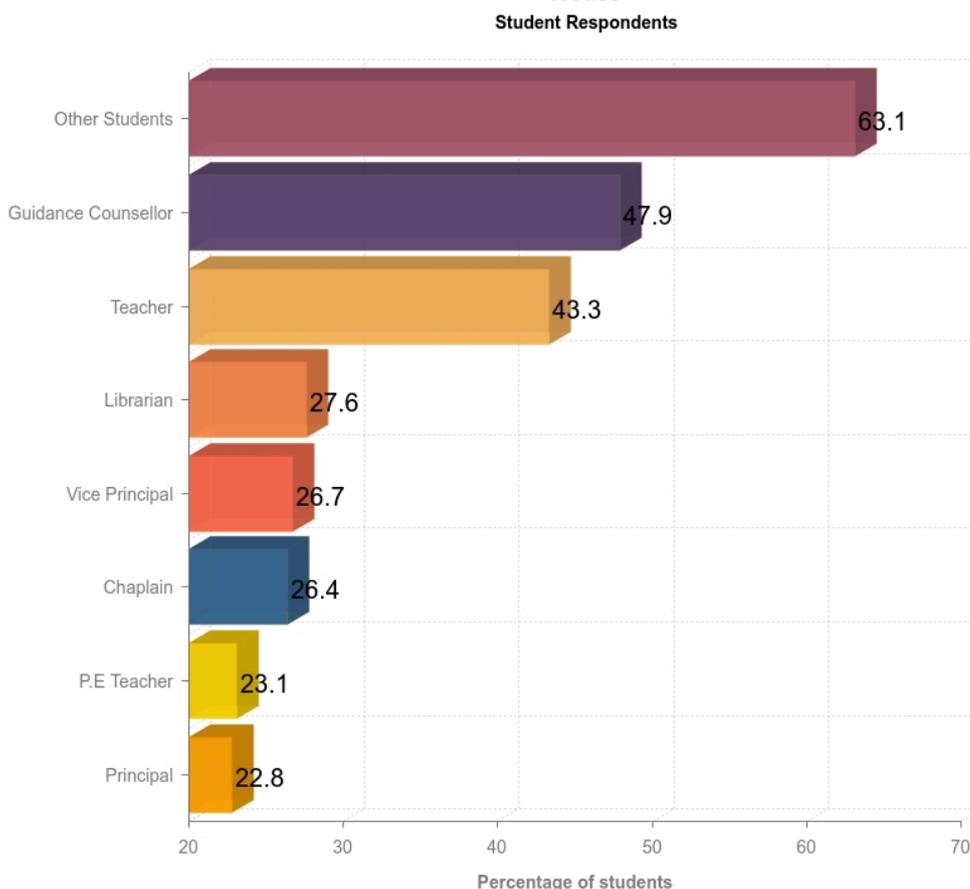
**Figure 2.4: LGBTI+ Students' Reports on Number of Teachers and Other School Staff Who are Supportive of LGBTI+ Students**  
Student Respondents



*"I am very grateful for one of my teachers. He is also gay and I feel like having him there is really comforting and I can go to him for anything I need."*

To understand whether certain types of school personnel were more likely to be seen as supportive, we asked LGBTI+ students how comfortable they would feel talking one-on-one with various school personnel about LGBTI+-related issues. As shown in Figure 2.5, students reported that they would feel most comfortable talking with other students (63.1%). About half of LGBTI+ students (47.9%) said they would be somewhat or very comfortable talking with counsellor, and two-fifths (43.3%) said they would be comfortable talking with a teacher. Fewer students in our survey said they would feel comfortable talking one-one-one with the librarian, vice principal, chaplain, PE teacher, and principal.

**Figure 2.5: Comfort Talking with School Personnel about LGBTI+ Issues**



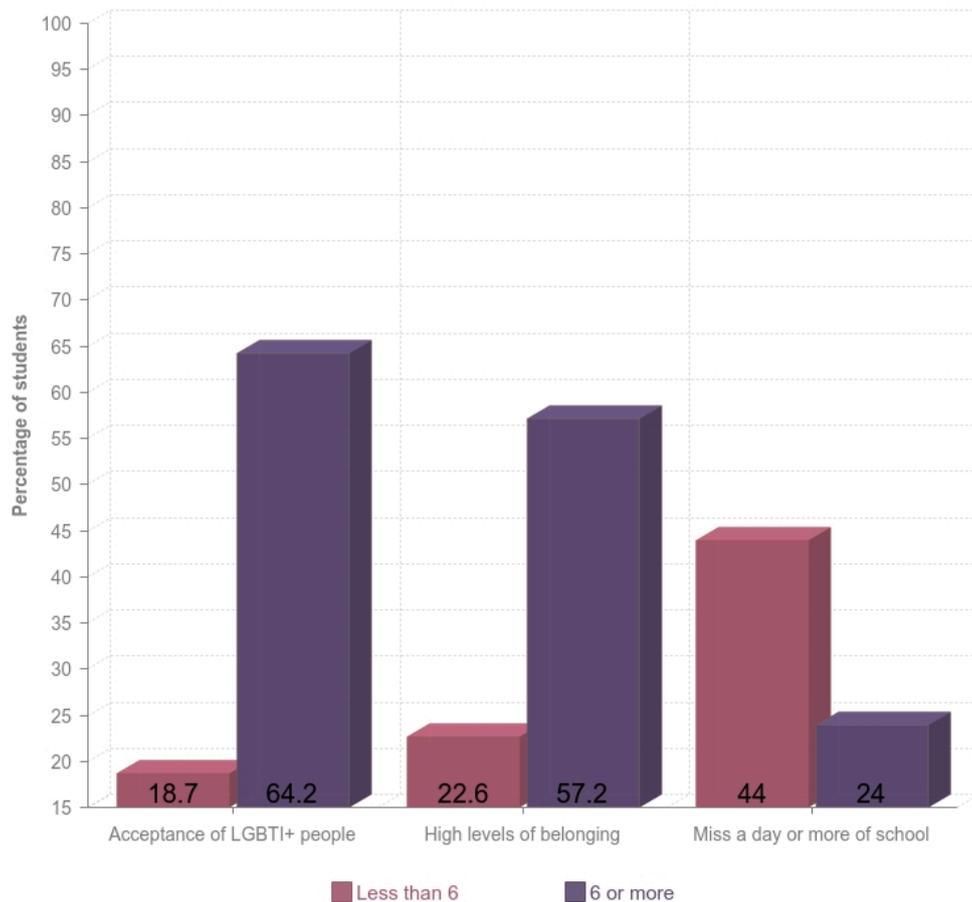
Equally in a provincial breakdown of students, Leinster (74.7%) had a significantly larger number of students who reported having six or more teachers or staff within their school who were supportive of LGBTI+ identities. This is comparable to the following findings in Munster (63.8%), Connacht (54.5%) and Ulster (61.3%). This would demonstrate that resources to equip teachers to support LGTBI+ young people are being centralised potentially within Dublin and adjacent counties furthering LGBTI+ student's experience of the rural/urban divide.

Having staff supportive of LGBTI+ students was directly related to LGBTI+ students reporting more positive feelings about their school and their education. As shown in Figure 2.8, students who reported having a higher number of teachers and school staff who support LGBTI+ students are:

- More likely to report that the general student body is more accepting of LGBTI+ people (64.2% vs. 18.7%).
- More likely to feel like they belong in their school (57.2% vs. 22.6%)
- Less likely to miss days of school because of feeling unsafe (24.0% vs. 44.0%).

*“My school guidance councillors principal and deputy principal where very supportive when I was going through tough times. The guidance councillor even came to visit me in a psychiatric hospital after an extremely bad depressive episode I had.”*

**Figure 2.8: The Number of Teacher and School Personnel Who Support LGBTI+ Students and the LGBTI+ Student Experience**  
Student Respondents

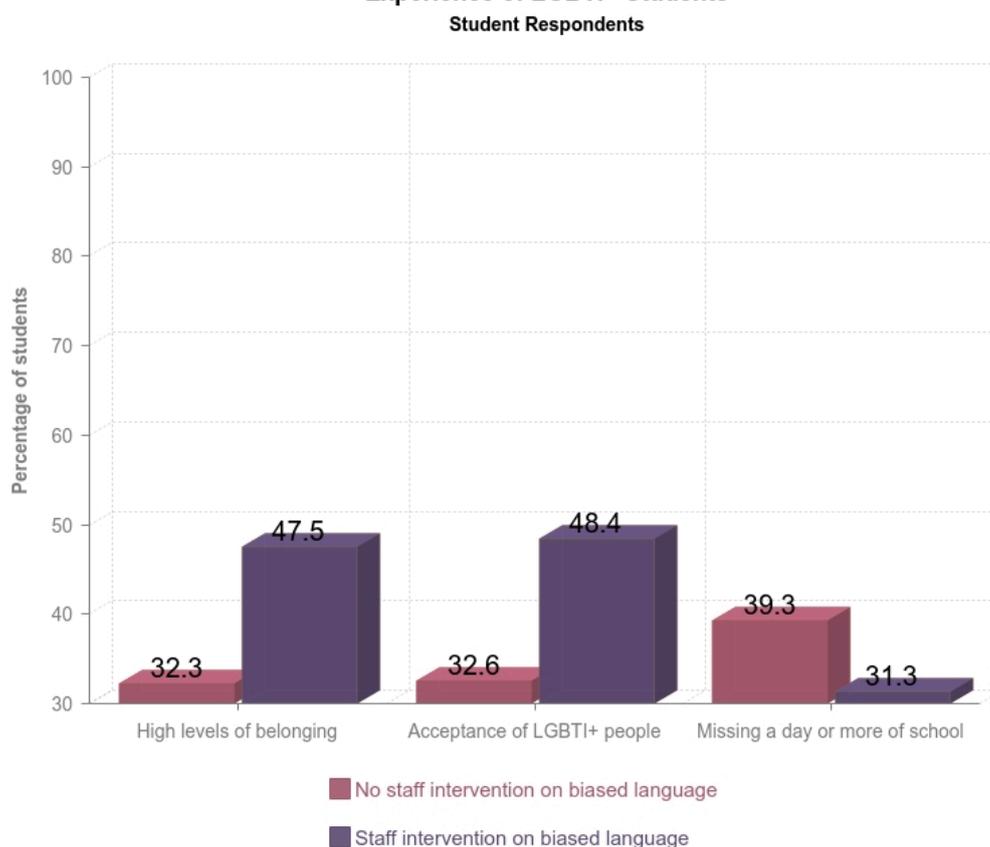


### Staff Intervention

School staff members serve a vital role in ensuring a safe learning environment for all students, and as such, should respond to biased language and bias-based victimization. When staff members intervened in homophobic remarks, LGBTI+ students reported more positive feelings about their school and education. As shown in Figure 2.9, when students said that teachers and school staff intervened more often, they also are:

- More likely to report that the general student body is more accepting of LGBTI+ people (48.4% vs. 32.6%)/
- More likely to feel like they belong in their school (47.5% vs. 32.3%).
- Less likely to miss days of school because of feeling unsafe (31.3% vs. 39.3%).

**Figure 2.9: Staff Intervention on Homophobic Comments and the Experience of LGBTI+ Students**



*“At times I wanted to leave school because my poor mental health was making it hard to pay attention and do work properly. I think I may have quit were it not for my Guidance Counsellor and Accountancy Teacher.”*

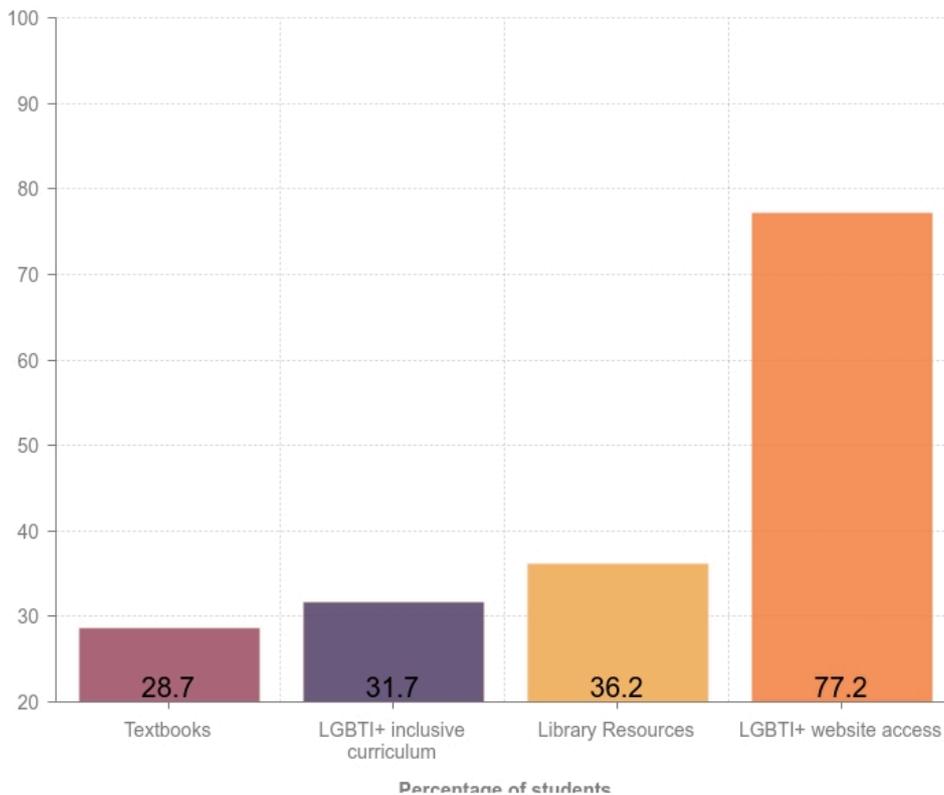
## Curriculum

LGBTI+ student experiences may also be shaped by the inclusion of LGBTI+-related information in the curriculum. Learning about LGBTI+ historical events and positive role models may enhance their engagement with the school community and provide valuable information about the LGBTI+ community. Students in our survey were asked whether they had been exposed to positive representations of LGBTI+ people, history or events in lessons at school. Less than one-third (31.7%) of respondents said that their classes did include these topics. Among the students who had been taught positive things about LGBTI+-related topics in class, SPHE, english and history were the classes most often mentioned as being inclusive of these topics.

*“It was difficult for me to not feel like an outsider. I was afraid to get changed in the changing rooms for PE out of fear of rumours or dirty looks and was almost glad when PE was stopped in my Leaving Cert year. Being an LGBTI+ youth isn’t just about coming out, it’s about not being included in health and well-being classes, not being given advice during sexual health classes, having fears every time you meet someone new in school.”*

We also asked students about their ability to access information about LGBTI+ issues that teachers may not be covering in class, such as additional reading materials featuring information about LGBTI+ issues. At least one of these types of LGBTI+-related curricular resources was available for majority of the LGBTI+ students in our survey. As shown in Figure 2.7, however, the highest noted resource was the internet which calls into question the reliability of the resources accessed and if this is an option available across schools given location and funding. Equally table 2.1 displays the positive representations of LGBTI+-related topics taught in class.

**Figure 2.7: Availability of LGBTI+-Related Curricular Resources**  
Student Respondents

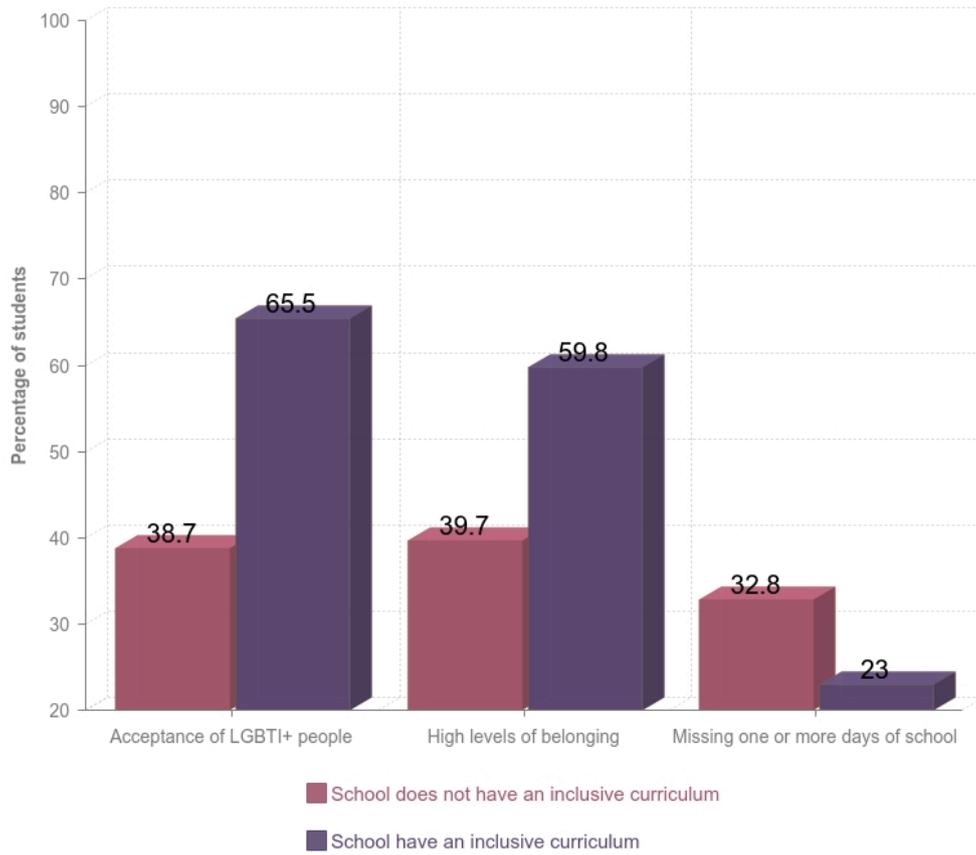


Including LGBTI+-related issues in the curriculum in a positive manner may make LGBTI+ students feel like more valued members of the school community, and it may also promote more positive feelings about LGBTI+ issues and persons among their peers, thereby resulting in a more positive school climate. In fact, as shown in Figure 2.10, LGBTI+ students who were taught positive information about LGBTI+ people, history and events were:

- More likely to report that the general student body is more accepting of LGBTI+ people (65.5% vs. 38.7%).
- More likely to feel like they belong in their school (59.8% vs. 39.7%).

- Less likely to miss days of school because of feeling unsafe (23.0% vs. 32.0%).

**Figure 2.10: Inclusive Curriculum and the Experience of LGBTI+ Students**  
Student respondents



**Table 2.1. Positive Representations of LGBTI+-Related Topics Taught in Class<sup>7</sup>**

	% among Students Taught Positive Rep of LGBTI+-Related Topics	% of all Students in Survey
SPHE	74.3%	23.1%
Other	22.4%	7.0%
English	22.0%	6.9%
History	18.0%	5.6%
Home Economics	7.3%	2.3%
Science	6.9%	2.2%
ART	5.7%	1.8%
Music	4.5%	1.4%
Math	3.3%	1.0%
Physical Education	3.3%	1.0%
Irish	2.4%	0.8%
Geography	2.0%	0.6%
Foreign Language	2.0%	0.6%
Business	1.2%	0.4%
Accounting	0.4%	0.1%

## School Policies

*"I don't feel welcomed as a transgender student, and because of this I'm afraid to come out while I'm still in school, much to the detriment of my own mental health. I don't think it's anti-bullying policies are enough in my school."*

School policies that address bullying, harassment and assault are powerful tools for creating school environments where students feel safe. The Department of Education and Skills states that homophobic and transphobic bullying must be named in a school's Anti-Bullying Policy/

These types of policies can explicitly state protections based on personal characteristics, such as sexual orientation and gender identity/expression, among others. In this report, we refer to a "comprehensive" policy as one that explicitly enumerates protections based on personal characteristics, including both sexual orientation and gender identity/expression. When a school has and enforces a comprehensive policy, especially one which also includes procedures for reporting incidents to school authorities, it can send a message that bullying, harassment, and assault are unacceptable and will not be tolerated. Comprehensive school policies may also provide students with greater protection against victimisation because they

<sup>7</sup> Because respondents could select multiple responses, the categories are not mutually exclusive. The percentages do not add up to 100%.

make clear the various forms of bullying, harassment, and assault that will not be tolerated. It may also demonstrate that student safety, including the safety of LGBTI+ students, is taken seriously by school administrators.

Students were asked whether their school had a policy about in-school bullying, harassment or assault and if that policy explicitly included sexual orientation and gender expression. As shown in Table 2.3, the majority of students (88.2%) have such policy in their school. And of the students who did report that their school had a policy, less than one-third of students said that it mentioned sexual orientation or gender identity/expression (28.9%).

<b>Table 2.3 LGBTI+ Students' Reports of Bullying, Harassment, and Assault Policies</b>	
No Policy/Don't Know	11.8%
Any Policy	
General Policy	59.3%
Sexual Orientation or Gender Identity/Expression or transgender identity mentioned	28.9%

*"I wish there was a policy for transgender students at my school. It's terrifying to have to explain your identity and not know how they will react."*

## Conclusions

---

This research presents the harsh reality of the lived experiences of LGBTI+ students in second-level schools in Ireland.

This survey was ambitious in its goal to capture the lived experiences of LGBTI+ young people in post-primary education nationwide today. We sought to represent the diversity of young LGBTI+ people in Ireland by capturing their sexual orientations, gender identities/expressions but, equally, their race, ethnicity, ability, both physical and intellectual and the type of school they attend. What emerged from this robust survey was a clear indication that LGBTI+ bullying and discrimination are unfortunately still very prevalent in Irish schools. In 2016 *The LGBTIreland Report* found that 70% of LGBTI+ students feel unsafe in school, BeLonG To Youth Services School Climate Survey 2019 found that 70.2% of LGBTI+ young people feel unsafe in Irish schools. This accumulative figure is compounded by the high numbers of students who reported hearing consistent biased language from their peers in relation to LGBTI+ identities (67.8%), a lack of intervention from school staff with students reporting that nearly half (45.1%) never intervene. The reality for many LGBTI+ young people is a schooling experience that is shaped by verbal (77.5%) and physical (38.4%) harassment with one in five (20.4) students experiencing physical assault as a result of their LGBTI+ identity.

Not only have these findings indicated a lack of progress in relation to the inclusion and support for LGBTI+ identities in Irish schools but demonstrate the variety of methods through which students are being targeted and victimised beyond verbal and physical harassment such as exclusion, cyberbullying and sexual harassment.

Students within the survey stressed a lack of effectiveness around school staff addressing issues of homophobic, biphobic and transphobic bullying (59.5% of students felt teachers were ineffective in addressing the issue) and thus this led students to be reluctant to report instances of bullying. Equally, students' family members are often ineffective in responding to report of bullying and harassment from young people with 41.5% of young people responding that their family members never addressed the issue of their bullying with school personnel.

The intersection between ongoing experiences among students of discrimination along with a lack of support and access to resources and representation in their school community is detrimental to a young person's personal development, well-being, interpersonal skills and education outcomes and aspirations.

Students reported often being subjected to not just an unaccepting school climate created by their peers but an openly hostile environment with one in three LGBTI+ students reporting that their peers were not at all accepting of LGBTI+ identities. And while the majority of students (97.2%) could identify at least one supportive member of staff the impact this support had in isolation was not enough to encourage

students to approach school staff with problems nor was it enough to decrease the hostile climate where bullying and harassment were often unaddressed.

International literature has highlighted the need for LGBTI+ young people to see themselves accurately and positively represented within their educational environment. Without positive accounts of LGBTI+ lives that are integrated and fundamental aspects of the school culture and curriculum students often feel stigmatised and isolated (Davis et al, 2014; Craig, 2013). 69.3% of students reported that LGBTI+ identities were not included in their curriculum. LGBTI+ lives when discussed were often pigeonholed to SPHE (Social, Personal and Health Education) and RSE (Relationships and Sexuality Education) where LGBTI+ identities within this context take on a sexualised nature as it is often only discussed in relation to sexual health and consent.

As well as curriculum, the naming of homophobic, biphobic and transphobic bullying within school policies is an essential means of including students in the school community, safeguarding them against discrimination, and equipping teachers with a means of tackling LGBTI+ bullying. Only 28.9% of students reported that their school policy explicitly named sexual orientation and gender identity/expression as grounds for discrimination.

One of the key findings within the research was the dramatic increase in young LGBTI+ people who were missing one or more school days as a direct result of victimisation based on their LGBTI+ identity. *The LGBTIreland Report* found that 20% of LGBTI+ young people missed school to avoid negative treatment. The BeLonG To national school climate survey found that 40.4% of young people missed school to avoid victimisation based on their sexual orientation and 43.3% of young people missed school in order to avoid victimisation based on their gender expression.

This absenteeism as a direct result of LGBTI+ bullying is instrumental in how students negotiate their educational outcomes and their ambitions for the future. LGBTI+ students who reported having a higher number of supportive teachers were less likely to miss school due to LGBTI+ bullying and reported feeling safer with a higher sense of belonging to the school community. This was equally supported by access to resources – students with greater access to LGBTI+ representation in the context of curriculum, policy, and resources in their school environment were more likely to feel accepted by their peers, had an increased sense of belonging and were less likely to miss school to avoid victimisation.

This research represents the experience of a diverse community of LGBTI+ young people throughout Ireland and through comparative pieces demonstrates how little has progressed for LGBTI+ young people in relation to their school experience.

## Recommendations

---

The following recommendations from the LGBTI+ Safe and Supportive Toolkit<sup>8</sup> are fully supported by the findings of this report. These recommendations are tailored for both the government and schools to address some of the pressing issues which have presented themselves throughout the report.

### THE GOVERNMENT SHOULD:

Implement, demonstrate, evaluate and monitor the actions from Objective 1 in the LGBTI+ National Youth Strategy with increased resources and investment (2018)<sup>9</sup>:

1. Create a more supportive and inclusive environment for LGBTI+ young people in formal education settings.

This includes actions such as:

- Review and update professional development support for teachers. Encourage schools to develop whole-school LGBTI+ inclusion policies. Develop and pilot a student-centred peer support for LGBTI+ and their allies within post-primary schools (gender-sexuality alliances).
  - Conduct a thematic evaluation of Social Personal Health Education (SPHE) including Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE).
  - Provide specific prevention initiatives for LGBTI+ identity-based bullying in schools.
  - Review the feasibility of provision for gender-neutral/single-stall bathrooms and changing rooms in the design guidelines for schools.
2. Provide resources to schools across Ireland to engage in a whole-school community model of LGBTI+ inclusion.
  3. Review the National Action Plan on Bullying (2013)<sup>10</sup> informed by recent policy, research and legislative developments in the area of anti-LGBTI+ bullying.

### SCHOOLS SHOULD:

- Develop and implement effective school LGBTI+ inclusion policies and plans.
- Implement a curriculum that supports diversity and respect for LGBTI+ people.
- Ensure that staff are LGBTI+ aware and equipped to address LGBTI+ issues and support vulnerable students.

---

<sup>8</sup> Barron, M. and O'Hagan, L. (2019) *LGBTI+ Safe and Supportive Schools*. 2nd Ed. Dublin: HSE, BeLonG To Youth Services.\*

\*This citation was omitted from the original print run and this error has been rectified in this reprint of the report.

<sup>9</sup> Department of Children and Youth Affairs (2018) *LGBTI+ National Youth Strategy 2018-2020*.

<sup>10</sup> Department of Education and Skills (2013) *National Action Plan on Bullying*: Report of the Anti-Bullying Working Group to the Minister for Education and Skills.

- Provide direct supports to LGBTI+ young people through the appropriate school structures including responding appropriately and supportively when an LGBTI+ young person comes out.
- Signpost LGBTI+ young people as appropriate to outside agencies and supports.
- Work with the community outside the school gates, including any local LGBTI+ youth projects/groups, parents and community organisations to promote a wider LGBTI+ inclusive community.

## References

---

- 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
- Bagley, C., & Tremblay, P. (2000). Elevated rates of suicidal behavior in gay, lesbian, and bisexual youth. *Crisis: The Journal of Crisis Intervention and Suicide Prevention*, 21(3), 111-117.
- Barron, M. and O'Hagan, L. (2019) *LGBTI+ Safe and Supportive Schools*. 2nd Ed. Dublin: HSE, BeLonG To Youth Services
- Birkett, M., Espelage, D. L., & Koenig, B. (2009). LGB and questioning students in schools: the moderating effects of homophobic bullying and school climate on The LGBTIreland Study 249 negative outcomes. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 38(7), 989-1000. doi: 10.1007/s10964-008-9389-1
- Bontempo, D. E., & D'Augelli, A. R. (2002). Effects of at-school victimization and sexual orientation on lesbian, gay, or bisexual youths' health risk behavior. *Journal of Adolescent Health*, 30(5), 364-374.
- Burton, C. M., Marshal, M. P., Chisolm, D. J., Sucato, G. S., & Friedman, M. S. (2013). Sexual minority-related victimization as a mediator of mental health disparities in sexual minority youth: A longitudinal analysis. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 42(3), 394-402.
- Cannon, M., Coughlan, H., Clarke, M., Harley, M., & Kelleher, I. (2013). *The Mental Health of Young People in Ireland: A report of the Psychiatric Epidemiology Research across the Lifespan (PERL) Group*. Dublin: Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland.
- Conley, C. L. (2011). Learning about a child's gay or lesbian sexual orientation: Parental concerns about societal rejection, loss of loved ones, and child well being. *Journal of Homosexuality*, 58(8), 1022-1040.
- Corliss, H. L., Rosario, M., Wypij, D., Fisher, L. B., & Austin, S. B. (2008). Sexual disparities in longitudinal alcohol use patterns among adolescents: findings from the Growing Up Today Study. *Archives of Pediatrics & Adolescent Medicine*, 162(11), 1071-1078.
- Coughlan, H., Tiedt, L., Clarke, M., Kelleher, I., Tabish, J., Molloy, C., Harley, M., & Cannon, M. (2014). Prevalence of DSM-IV mental disorders, deliberate self-harm and suicidal ideation in early adolescence: An Irish population based study. *Journal of Adolescence*, 37(1), 1-9. doi:http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.adolescence.2013.10.004
- Craig, S. L. (2013). Affirmative Supportive Safe and Empowering Talk (ASSET): Leveraging the strengths and resiliencies of sexual minority youth in schoolbased groups. *Journal of LGBT Issues in Counseling*, 7(4), 372-386.
- Cramer, D. W., & Roach, A. J. (1988). Coming out to mom and dad: A study of gay males and their relationships with their parents. *Journal of Homosexuality*, 15(3-4), 79-92.
- D'Augelli, A. R. (2006). Developmental and Contextual Factors and Mental Health Among Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Youths. In A. R. D'augelli, A. M. Omoto, & H. S. Kurtzman (Eds.), *Sexual orientation and mental health: Examining identity and development in lesbian, gay, and bisexual people*. Contemporary perspectives on lesbian, gay, and bisexual psychology. Washington, DC, US: American Psychological Association.

- Davis, B., Royne Stafford, M. B., & Pullig, C. (2014). How gay-straight alliance groups mitigate the relationship between gay-bias victimization and adolescent suicide attempts. *Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry*, 53(12), 1271-1278 e1271. doi: 10.1016/j.jaac.2014.09.010
- Dentato, M. P., Orwat, J., Spira, M., & Walker, B. (2014). Examining cohort differences and resilience among the aging LGBT community: Implications for education and practice among an expansively diverse population. *Journal of Human Behavior in the Social Environment* 24(3), 316-328.
- Departments of Children and Youth Affairs (2017) "*LGBTI+ National Youth Strategy: Report of the Consultations of Young People in Ireland*" Dublin: Department of Children and Youth Affairs
- Department of Children and Youth Affairs (2013) *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures: The national policy framework for children & young people 2014–2020*. Dublin: DCYA
- Department of Children and Youth Affairs (2014) *The National Youth Strategy 2015-2020*. Dublin: DCYA
- Department of Education and Skills (DES) and GLEN. (2009). *Being LGBT in School: A Resource for Post-Primary Schools to Prevent Homophobic and Transphobic Bullying and Support LGBT Students*. Dublin: DES & GLEN.
- Department of Education and Skills. (2013). *Anti-bullying Procedures for Primary and Postprimary Schools*. Dublin: Department of Education and Skills.
- Department of Education and Skills; Health Service Executive; Department of Health interdepartmental sub-group. (2013). *Well-being in post primary schools. Guidelines for mental health promotion and suicide prevention*. Dublin: Department of Education and Skills; Health Service Executive & Department of Health.
- Department of Education and Skills (DES), National Association of Principals and Deputy Principals (NAPD) and Gay and Lesbian Equality Network (GLEN). (2011). *Including Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Students in School Policies: Guidelines for Principals*. Dublin: DES, NAPD & GLEN.
- Department of Health and Children. (2006). *A Vision for Change: Report of the Expert Group on Mental Health Policy*. Dublin: Department of Health and Children.
- Department of Health. (2013). *Healthy Ireland - a framework for improved health and wellbeing 2013 - 2025*. Dublin: Department of Health.
- Department of Health. (2015). *Connecting for Life: Ireland's National Strategy to Reduce Suicide 2015-2020*. Dublin: Department of Health.
- Diaz, E. M., Kosciw, J. G., & Greytak, E. A. (2010). School Connectedness for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Youth: In-School Victimization and Institutional Supports. *Prevention Researcher*, 17(3), 15-17
- Dooley, B. A., & Fitzgerald, A. (2012). *My world survey: National study of youth mental health in Ireland*. Headstrong and UCD School of Psychology.
- Doyle, L., Treacy, M. P., & Sheridan, A. (2015). Self-harm in young people: Prevalence, associated factors, and help-seeking in school-going adolescents. *International journal of mental health nursing*, 24(6), 485-494. doi: 10.1111/inm.12144
- Drabble, L. A., Midanik, L. T., & Trocki, K. (2005). Reports of alcohol consumption and alcohol-related problems among homosexual, bisexual and heterosexual

- respondents: results from the 2000 National Alcohol Survey. *Journal of studies on alcohol*, 66(1), 111-120.
- Duong, J., & Bradshaw, C. (2014). Associations between bullying and engaging in aggressive and suicidal behaviors among sexual minority youth: the moderating role of connectedness. *Journal of school health*, 84(10), 636-645.
- Fisher, E. S., Komosa-Hawkins, K., Saldana, E., Thomas, G. M., Hsiao, C., Rauld, M., & Miller, D. (2008). *Promoting School Success for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgendered, and Questioning Students: Primary, Secondary, and Tertiary Prevention and Intervention Strategies*. The California School Psychologist, 13, 79–91.
- Garofalo, R., Wolf, R. C., Wissow, L. S., Woods, E. R., & Goodman, E. (1999). Sexual orientation and risk of suicide attempts among a representative sample of youth. *Archives of Pediatrics & Adolescent Medicine*, 153(5), 487-493.
- Gay Lesbian and Straight Education Network. (2017). *The experiences of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender middle school students*. GLSEN Research Brief. New York: Gay Lesbian and Straight Education Network.
- Goodenow, C., Szalacha, L., & Westheimer, K. (2006). School support groups, other school factors, and the safety of sexual minority adolescents. *Psychology in the Schools*, 43(5), 573-589. doi: 10.1002/pits.20173
- Grossman, A. H., & D'Augelli, A. R. (2006). Transgender Youth. *Journal of Homosexuality*, 51(1), 111-128. doi: 10.1300/J082v51n01\_06
- Guasp, A. (2012). *The experiences of gay young people in Britain's schools in 2012*. Cambridge, UK: Centre for Family Research, University of Cambridge.
- Haas, A. P., Eliason, M., Mays, V. M., Mathy, R. M., Cochran, S. D., D'Augelli, A. R., Silverman, M.M., Fisher, P.W., Hughes, T., & Rosario, M. (2011). Suicide and suicide risk in lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender populations: review and recommendations. *Journal of Homosexuality*, 58(1), 10-51.
- Heck, N. C. (2015). The Potential to Promote Resilience: Piloting a Minority Stress-Informed, GSA-Based, Mental Health Promotion Program for LGBTQ Youth. *Psychology of Sexual Orientation and Gender Diversity*, 2(3), 225-231. doi: 10.1037/sgd0000110
- Heck, N. C., Lindquist, L. M., Stewart, B. T., Brennan, C., & Cochran, B. N. (2013). To Join or Not to Join: Gay-Straight Student Alliances and the High School Experiences of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Youths. *Journal of Gay & Lesbian Social Services*, 25(1), 77-101. doi: 10.1080/10538720.2012.751764
- Hequembourg, A. L., & Brallier, S. A. (2009). An exploration of sexual minority stress across the lines of gender and sexual identity. *Journal of Homosexuality*, 56(3), 273- 298.
- Higgins, A., Sharek, D., McCann, E., Sheerin, F., Glacken, M., Breen, M., & McCarron, M. (2011). *Visible Lives: Identifying the experiences and needs of older lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people in Ireland*. Dublin: Gay and Lesbian Equality Network
- Johnson, M., & Amella, E. (2014). Isolation of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender youth: A dimensional concept. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 70(3), 523-532.
- Kann, L., Olsen, E. O., McManus, T., Kinchen, S., Chyen, D., Harris, W. A., & Wechsler, H. (2011). Sexual identity, sex of sexual contacts, and health-risk behaviors among students in grades 9-12--youth risk behavior surveillance, selected

- sites, United States, 2001-2009. *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report Surveillance Summary*, 60(7), 1-133.
- Kecojevic, A., Wong, C. F., Schrager, S. M., Silva, K., Bloom, J. J., Iverson, E., & Lankenau, S. E. (2012). Initiation into prescription drug misuse: differences between lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender (LGBT) and heterosexual high-risk young adults in Los Angeles and New York. *Addictive Behaviors*, 37(11), 1289-1293. doi: 10.1016/j.addbeh.2012.06.006
- Kennedy, N., & Hellen, M. (2010). Transgender children: more than a theoretical challenge. *Graduate Journal of Social Science*, 7(2), 25-43.
- Knight, R., Shoveller, J., Carson, A., & Contreras-Whitney, J. (2014). Examining clinicians' experiences providing sexual health services for LGBTQ youth: considering social and structural determinants of health in clinical practice. *Health education research*, 29(4), 662-670.
- Kosciw, J. G., Palmer, N. A., Kull, R. M., & Greytak, E. A. (2013). The Effect of Negative School Climate on Academic Outcomes for LGBT Youth and the Role of In-School Supports. *Journal of School Violence*, 12(1), 45-63. doi: 10.1080/15388220.2012.732546
- Lehavot, K., & Simoni, J. M. (2011). The impact of minority stress on mental health and substance use among sexual minority women. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 79(2), 159-170. doi: 10.1037/a0022839
- Lodge, A, Gowran, S & O'Shea, K. (2008) "Valuing Visibility: An Exploration of How Sexual Orientation Issues Arise and Are Addressed in Post-Primary Schools Summary Report" NUI Maynooth: Department of Education
- Lynch, K. and Lodge, A. (2002) "Equality and Power in Schools: Redistribution, Recognition and Representation" London: Routledge Falmer.
- MacManus, E. (2004) "The School-based lives of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) Youth" Dublin: University College Dublin
- Martyn, D., Andrews, L., & Byrne, M. (2014). Prevalence rates and risk factors for mental health difficulties in adolescents aged 16 and 17 years living in rural Ireland. *Irish Journal of Psychological Medicine*, 31(02), 111-123. doi: doi:10.1017/ ipm.2014.20
- Mayock, P., Bryan, A., Carr, N., & Kitching, K. (2009). *Supporting LGBT Lives: The Mental Health and Well-being of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender People in Ireland*. Dublin: GLEN.
- McAlister, S., Carr, N., & Neill, G. (2014). *Queering the Family: Attitudes towards Lesbian and Gay Relationships and Families in Northern Ireland*. Retrieved from: <http://www.ark.ac.uk/publications/updates/Update89.pdf>
- McBride, R. (2013). *Grasping the Nettle: The Experiences of Gender Variant Children and Transgender Youth Living in Northern Ireland* Belfast: Institute for Conflict Research.
- McCann, E., & Sharek, D. (2014). Challenges to and opportunities for improving mental health services for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people in Ireland: A narrative account. *International journal of mental health nursing*, 23(6), 525-533.
- McIlroy, C. (2009). *Transphobia in Ireland*. Dublin: Transgender Equality Network Ireland.
- McNeil, J., Bailey, L., Ellis, S., & Regan, M. (2013). *Speaking from the Margins: Trans Mental Health and Wellbeing in Ireland*. Dublin: Transgender Equality Network Ireland (TENI).

- McIntyre, B., & Nixon, E. (2014). *Working It Out: Driving Business Excellence by Understanding Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Workplace Experiences*. Dublin: Gay and Lesbian Equality Network (GLEN).
- McCormack, Orla & Gleeson, Jim (2010) '*Attitudes of parents of young men towards the inclusion of sexual orientation and homophobia on the Irish post-primary curriculum*', Gender & Education, 4th of February 2010 (iFirst)
- Minton, S. J. (2011). *Experiences of and perspectives on homophobic bullying amongst a sample of upper secondary school students in Ireland*. Paper presented at the 15th European Conference on Developmental Psychology 23rd – 27th August., Bergen, Norway.
- Minton, S. J., Dahl, T., O'Moore, A. M., & Tuck, D. (2008). An exploratory survey of the experiences of homophobic bullying among lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered young people in Ireland. *Irish Educational Studies*, 27(2), 177-191.
- Morrison, T. G., Harrington, R., & McDermott, D. T. (2010). Bi now, gay later: Implicit and explicit binegativity among Irish university students. *Journal of Bisexuality*, 10(3), 211-232.
- Morrison, T. G., Kenny, P., & Harrington, A. (2005). Modern prejudice toward gay men and lesbian women: Assessing the viability of a measure of modern homonegative attitudes within an Irish context. *Genetic, Social, and General Psychology Monographs*, 131(3), 219-250.
- Norman, J. (2005). *A Survey of Teachers on Homophobic Bullying in Irish Second-Level Schools*. Dublin: Dublin City University.
- Norman, J., & Galvin, M. (2006). *Straight Talk: Researching Gay and Lesbian Issues in the School Curriculum*. Dublin: Dublin City University.
- OECD (2017), PISA 2015 Results (Volume III): Students' Well-Being, PISA, OECD Publishing, Paris.
- O'Higgins-Norman, J. (2009a). Still Catching up: Schools, Sexual Orientation and Homophobia in Ireland. *Sexuality & Culture*, 13, 1-16.
- O'Higgins-Norman, J. (2009b). Straight talking: Explorations on homosexuality and homophobia in secondary schools in Ireland. *Sex Education*, 9(4), 381-393.
- O'Higgins-Norman, J., Goldrick, M. & Harrison, K. (2010). *Addressing Homophobic Bullying in Second-Level Schools*. Dublin: The Equality Authority.
- O'Higgins - Norman, J. (2008). Equality in the provision of social, personal and health education in the Republic of Ireland: the case of homophobic bullying? *Pastoral Care in Education*, 26(2), 69-81.
- O'Sullivan, O. (2013). *Equality and Identity Transgender and Intersex Experience in Ireland*. Dublin: Transgender Equality Network Ireland.
- Poteat, V. P., Sinclair, K. O., DiGiovanni, C. D., Koenig, B. W., & Russell, S. T. (2013). Gay–Straight Alliances Are Associated With Student Health: A Multischool Comparison of LGBTQ and Heterosexual Youth. *Journal of Research on Adolescence*, 23(2), 319-330. doi: 10.1111/j.1532-7795.2012.00832.x
- Power, E., Coughlan, H., Clarke, M., Kelleher, I., Lynch, F., Connor, D., Fitzpatrick, C., Harley, M., & Cannon, M. (2015). Nonsuicidal self-injury, suicidal thoughts and suicide attempts among sexual minority youth in Ireland during their emerging adult years. *Early Intervention in Psychiatry*. doi: 10.1111/eip.1224
- Rivers, I. (2000). Social Exclusion, Absenteeism And Sexual Minority Youth. *Support for Learning*, 15(1), 13-18. doi: 10.1111/1467-9604.00136

- Rivers, I. (2001). The bullying of sexual minorities at school: Its nature and long-term correlates. *Educational and Child Psychology*, 18(1), 32-46.
- Rivers, I. (2004). Recollections of bullying at school and their long-term implications for lesbians, gay men, and bisexuals. *Crisis*, 25(4), 169-175.
- Rooney, A. J. (2015). *The Coming Out Experience in Ireland*. DIT, Dublin.
- Rosario, M., Schrimshaw, E. W., & Hunter, J. (2009). Disclosure of sexual orientation and subsequent substance use and abuse among lesbian, gay, and bisexual youths: critical role of disclosure reactions. *Psychology of Addictive Behaviors*, 23(1), 175.
- Russell, S. T., Toomey, R. B., Ryan, C., & Diaz, R. M. (2014). Being out at school: the implications for school victimization and young adult adjustment. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, 84(6), 635-643. doi: 10.1037/ort0000037
- Schneider, W. (2010). Where Do We Belong? Addressing the Needs of Transgender Students in Higher Education. *Vermont Connection*, 31, 96-106.
- Seelman, K. L., N, F., Walls, E., & Bridges, B. (2015). School engagement among LGBTQ high school students: The roles of safe adults and gay-straight alliance characteristics. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 57, 19-29.
- Silverschanz, P., Cortina, L., Konik, J., & Magley, V. (2008). Slurs, snubs, and queer jokes: Incidence and impact of heterosexist harassment in academia. *Sex Roles*, 58, 179-191
- Transgender Equality Network Ireland (TENI) (2014). *STAD: Stop Transphobia and Discrimination Report*. Dublin: Transgender Equality Network Ireland.
- Turner, L., Whittle, S., & Combs, R. (2009). *Transphobic hate crime in the European Union*. London: Press for Change.
- Walls, N. E., Wisneski, H., & Kane, S. B. (2013). School climate, individual support, or both? Gay-straight alliances and the mental health of sexual minority youth. *School Social Work Journal*, 37, 88-111.
- Whitaker, K., Shapiro, V. B., & Shields, J. P. (2016). School-Based Protective Factors Related to Suicide for Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Adolescents. *Journal of Adolescent Health*, 58(1), 63-68. doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.jadohealth.2015.09.008>