



youth affairs council
of western australia

The Anti-Bullying Rapid Review

Joint submission by:
Youth Pride Network and
Youth Affairs Council of Western Australia

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About the Contributors

The Youth Pride Network (YPN) was established in 2017 during the marriage equality plebiscite, consists of both staff and a volunteer committee of LGBTIQA+ young people. Working in the areas of systemic advocacy, education, and events, YPN's vision is for a world that is educated and accepting of LGBTIQA+ topics and issues, where young LGBTIQA+ people don't face systemic discrimination, where they have a sense of community and empowerment, and where structural inequalities and social discrimination are mitigated.

The Youth Affairs Council of Western Australia (YACWA) is the peak non-government youth organisation in Western Australia. We operate primarily as a human rights organisation that seeks to address the exclusion of young people in a rapidly changing society. Our continued vision for Western Australia is one that celebrates and engages young people in all aspects of the community. Our role is to strengthen the trust, cooperation, collaboration; professionalism and voice of the non-government youth service sector to better serve the young people of Western Australia.

Acknowledgement of Country

We acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land on which we work, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, and their continuing connection to land, sea and sky, and their enrichment of community and dedication to storytelling. We are based in Boorloo, on Noongar Boodjar and we acknowledge the Whadjuk people of the Noongar Nation who are the traditional custodians of this land. We pay our respects to Elders past and present. Sovereignty was never ceded. Always was, and always will be, Aboriginal land.

Executive Summary

The Youth Pride Network (YPN) is a youth-led advocacy organisation committed to supporting LGBTIQ+ young people to thrive in safe, inclusive, and respectful school environments. YPN is auspiced by the Youth Affairs Council of Western Australia (YACWA), the peak advocacy body representing the interests of all young people in WA. While YACWA advocates broadly on issues affecting young people across the state, YPN focuses specifically on advancing the rights, wellbeing, and inclusion of LGBTIQ+ youth.

Despite progress, homophobic, biphobic, and transphobic bullying remains a significant and ongoing issue, often intersecting with other forms of marginalisation such as disability, cultural background, and geographic isolation.

This submission presents key themes and recommendations to assist the Department of Education in enhancing its anti-bullying frameworks. We call for a consistent, national approach that embeds inclusivity, cultural safety, youth leadership, and mandatory training at all levels of the education system. Addressing bullying effectively requires more than policy; it demands a cultural shift. That shift must be co-designed and co-led by young people.

Introduction

The Department of Education holds a critical responsibility in ensuring that all students across Australia are safe, respected, and supported to thrive in their educational environments. Despite ongoing efforts to improve student wellbeing, current research and direct feedback from young people make it clear that LGBTIQ+ students continue to face disproportionately high rates of bullying. These experiences are often compounded by inconsistent or inadequate support responses from school staff and systems, which in turn significantly impact students' mental health and wellbeing.

YPN and YACWA are committed to inclusive, youth-led policy development that centres lived experience and prioritises the voices of those most impacted. Our work reflects the realities of young people navigating educational settings that do not always recognise or respond to their needs, particularly when those experiences are shaped by multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination.

Findings from YPN's *State of Play II* report revealed that 71% of students surveyed said their experiences at school had a negative impact on their mental health ¹. Moreover, 70% of LGBTIQ+ students reported feeling unsafe or uncomfortable due to their sexuality or gender identity, with this figure rising to nearly three-quarters for trans and gender diverse students ². Half of all the students surveyed did not believe they could approach their school for help. Compounding this is the reality that bullying behaviours are often minimised or not recognised

¹ Youth Pride Network. (2023). *State of Play II: A report into the experiences of LGBTIQ+ young people in schools in Western Australia*. Perth, WA: Youth Pride Network. Retrieved from <https://youthpridenetwork.org.au/resources/state-of-play-2>

² Youth Pride Network. (2023). *State of Play II: A report into the experiences of LGBTIQ+ young people in schools in Western Australia*. Perth, WA: Youth Pride Network. Retrieved from <https://youthpridenetwork.org.au/resources/state-of-play-2>

at all. Previous studies have shown that many students who engage in cyberbullying do not perceive their behaviour as harmful, nor understand its impact ³.

“I experience a lot of homophobia at my school, some days its name calling, slurs, getting spat at, and even people tried to rip the pride pins off of my bag.” - Student, 2023.

Similarly, the *Speaking Out Survey 2021* conducted by the Commissioner for Children and Young People WA found that 16.3% of secondary students identified as LGBTIQ+, and over one-third of those students reported feeling unsafe at school ⁴. These figures are significantly higher for trans, non-binary, and culturally diverse LGBTIQ+ students.

“I was cripplingly anxious to the point I eventually moved to online schooling. It was made clear to me by school staff that I was being granted access to the male identity, not that I was a man. My transgender identity was a chore to them along with the health and mental issues alongside my gender.” - Student, 2023.

This submission outlines both the systemic challenges and the actionable, community-informed solutions required to strengthen the Department’s anti-bullying frameworks. We advocate for a consistent, intersectional, and inclusive approach that embeds cultural safety, mandatory staff training, and youth co-leadership at every level of the education system. A safe school is not only built through policy, but through cultural transformation.

Current Context and Challenges

Bullying remains a significant issue in Australian schools, with LGBTIQ+ students facing distinct and heightened risks. These include verbal harassment, cyberbullying, social exclusion, and, in some instances, physical violence. In 2023, over two-thirds of LGBTIQ+ young people reported experiencing bullying or discrimination within their educational environments, nearly four times the overall bullying rate reported across WA schools ⁵. Despite this elevated prevalence, homophobic and transphobic bullying often goes unrecognised or unreported. Such

³ Perren, S., Dooley, J., Shaw, T., & Cross, D. (2010). *Bullying in school and cyberspace: Associations with depressive symptoms in Swiss and Australian adolescents*. *Child and Adolescent Psychiatry and Mental Health*, 4(1), 28. <https://doi.org/10.1186/1753-2000-4-28>

⁴ Commissioner for Children and Young People Western Australia. (2021). *Speaking Out Survey 2021: The views of WA children and young people on their wellbeing – A summary report*. Perth: Commissioner for Children and Young People WA.

⁵ De Bortoli, L., Underwood, C., Friedman, T., & Gebhardt, E. (2024). PISA 2022. Reporting Australia’s results. Volume II: Student and school characteristics. Australian Council for Educational Research. <https://doi.org/10.37517/978-1-74286-726-7>

discrimination can be more subtle and implicit than other forms of bullying and is frequently overlooked or deprioritized by educators ⁶ and anti-bullying policies ⁷.

“Had a relief teacher spend most of our lesson talking about how gay people disgusted him (mentioned feeling physically repulsed when he saw two men kissing and thought men ‘became’ gay due to a lack of a stable father figure) and they shouldn’t have been allowed to get married Many of us reported him to the school and somehow had him again a week later” - Student, 2023.

Several factors contribute to the ongoing challenges in identifying and addressing bullying of LGBTQIA+ students: many teachers feel inadequately trained and lack confidence to effectively intervene ⁸; behavioural policies are inconsistently understood and applied across schools; students often refrain from reporting incidents due to fears of retaliation or being outed ⁹; and LGBTQIA+ students who are Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander, living with disabilities, or from migrant or rural backgrounds face compounded stigma ¹⁰.

“I have experienced both a combination of racism sexism and homophobia from peers. I’ve had multiple offensive remarks made about my gender identity for quote unquote looking like a girl”- Student, 2023.

“Since the start of the year, and the last 2 months in particular, I have increasingly not felt safe going to the bathroom at school. my schools does have a single-stall disabled bathroom that I sometimes use if I have a class nearby, but even then I have been taunted for being seen coming out of the cubicle (despite having an invisible disability I have been subject to accusations of being ableist for using the bathroom)”- Student, 2023.

“Being a person of colour and LGBTIQA makes it a lot harder to speak out being LGBTQIA+, and majority of queer people in my school are white so

⁶ Parker, L., Compare, O., & Webb, S. (2023). Bullying toward LGBTQI+ students in Australian schools: Understanding teachers' intentions to intervene. *Journal of LGBT Youth*, 20(1), 1–17. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19361653.2022.2096744>

⁷ Equal Opportunity Commission Western Australia. (2013). *Annual Report 2012–13*. Government of Western Australia. Retrieved from <https://www.wa.gov.au/system/files/2020-08/Equal-Opportunity-Commission-annual-report-2012-13.pdf>

⁸ O'Donoghue, T., & Guerin, S. (2017). *Barriers to effective intervention in homophobic bullying: The perceptions of secondary school teachers*. Educational Research, 59(4), 409–422. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00131881.2017.1364551>

⁹ Youth Pride Network. (2023). *State of Play Report II: LGBTQIA+ young people's experiences of high school in Western Australia*. Youth Pride Network. Retrieved from <https://youthpridenetwork.net/wp-content/uploads/state-of-play-report-ii.pdf>

¹⁰ Hill, A. O., Lyons, A., Jones, J., McGowan, I., Carman, M., Parsons, M., Power, J., & Bourne, A. (2021). *Writing Themselves In 4: The health and wellbeing of LGBTQIA+ young people in Australia*. Australian Research Centre in Sex, Health and Society, La Trobe University. <https://doi.org/10.26181/6010fad9b244b>

there will be different experiences. A lot of the homophobic students are also very racist, saying racist slurs as well.”- Student, 2023.

These intersecting challenges exacerbate negative outcomes, including poorer mental health, disrupted learning experiences, and increased disengagement from school.

Successful Policies, Models, and Practices

Interventions that adopt whole-school approaches are essential for effectively addressing LGBTQIA+ bullying in educational settings. These strategies have proven successful in reducing bullying and lessening its negative impact on the wellbeing of LGBTQIA+ young people ¹¹. Effective whole-school responses should not only empower the school community to recognise and respond to LGBTQIA+ discrimination, but also proactively educate community members on LGBTQIA+ issues to prevent bullying before it occurs.

The implementation of LGBTQIA+ specific policies is a critical component of these interventions. For example, Western Australian schools; Port School and Bob Hawke College are developing diversity and equity statements alongside whole-school positive behaviour management plans, while Mt Lawley Senior High School, John Curtin, and Perth College explicitly include LGBTQIA+ discrimination within their behavioural policies. Port School's approach, featuring both a dedicated Gender and Sexuality Diversity Policy and a Behaviour Management Policy, exemplifies the importance of having multiple complementary policies rather than relying on a single document ¹². This multifaceted approach has yielded positive outcomes, with 75% of parents and carers reporting that the school effectively addresses bullying, cyberbullying, and discrimination, and over 80% affirming that the school consistently demonstrates values of diversity, growth, empowerment, and community ¹³.

These efforts align closely with the recommendations from the Youth Pride Network's *State of Play II* report ¹⁴, which highlights the importance of education and prevention through staff training and inclusive curricula. Teacher professional development and upstander training are particularly vital, equipping educators to confidently intervene and foster supportive environments for LGBTQIA+ students ¹⁵.

“Having more (correct) education about LGBTQ+ identities and health/sexual education would be very beneficial and might help with normalising the ideas

¹¹ Christou, M., Gairal-Casado, R., Carbonell, S., & Vidu, A. (2024). Prevention of violence against LGBTQ+ youth: A systematic review of successful strategies. *International Journal of Education Research*, 124 (102320). <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijer.2024.102320>

¹² Christou, M., Gairal-Casado, R., Carbonell, S., & Vidu, A. (2024). Prevention of violence against LGBTQ+ youth: A systematic review of successful strategies. *International Journal of Education Research*, 124 (102320). <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijer.2024.102320>

¹³ Christou, M., Gairal-Casado, R., Carbonell, S., & Vidu, A. (2024). Prevention of violence against LGBTQ+ youth: A systematic review of successful strategies. *International Journal of Education Research*, 124 (102320). <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijer.2024.102320>

¹⁴ Youth Pride Network. (2023). *State of Play Report II: LGBTQIA+ young people's experiences of high school in Western Australia*. Youth Pride Network. Retrieved from <https://youthpridenetwork.net/wp-content/uploads/state-of-play-report-ii.pdf>

¹⁵ Christou, M., Gairal-Casado, R., Carbonell, S., & Vidu, A. (2024). Prevention of violence against LGBTQ+ youth: A systematic review of successful strategies. *International Journal of Education Research*, 124 (102320). <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijer.2024.102320>

Whole-school approaches demonstrated by Western Australian schools such as Port School, Mt Lawley Senior High School, and Bob Hawke College illustrate effective models characterised by:

- Inclusive school leadership and culture
- Visible symbols of LGBTQIA+ inclusion (e.g., pride flags, events)
- Gender-neutral bathrooms and uniform policies
- Student-led inclusion groups and peer support programs
- Embedded restorative and trauma-informed practices

Port School’s whole-school response is informed by frameworks including the *Keeping Safe: Child Protection Curriculum* and incorporates clear policies addressing gender and sexual diversity alongside bullying behaviours. Mt Lawley Senior High School actively promotes an LGBTQIA+ alliance and incorporates anti-harassment policies recognizing gender identity and sexual orientation. Bob Hawke College emphasises a comprehensive diversity and equity framework, inclusive facilities, and frequent educational initiatives such as workshops and guest speakers. Similarly, John Curtin and Perth College integrate LGBTQIA+ considerations into their core values and behavioural policies, underscoring the highest priority to bullying based on gender or sexuality and embedding supportive resources into the curriculum.

Nationally, data underscores the pivotal role that supportive leadership, educators, and peers play in improving the mental and general wellbeing of gender-diverse and transgender students¹⁶. The report advocates for greater inclusion of transgender and gender-diverse themes in sexuality and puberty education, and increased sensitivity to gendered school environments, to foster protective and inclusive educational settings.

Further, peer support services, both internal and external to schools, are proving invaluable in providing support for LGBTQIA+ young people and their families¹⁷. International studies reinforce these findings, highlighting the protective role of supportive school practices, including LGBTQIA+ inclusive curricula and student alliances, in reducing homophobic bullying and

¹⁶ Hill, A. O., Lyons, A., Jones, J., McGowan, I., Carman, M., Parsons, M., Power, J., & Bourne, A. (2021). *Writing Themselves In 4: The health and wellbeing of LGBTQIA+ young people in Australia*. Australian Research Centre in Sex, Health and Society, La Trobe University. <https://doi.org/10.26181/6010fad9b244b>

¹⁷ Victorian Government. (2023). *Pride in our future: Victoria’s LGBTQIA+ strategy 2022–32: Annual update 2023–24*. Department of Families, Fairness and Housing. <https://www.dffh.vic.gov.au/news/victorias-lgbtqi-strategy-2022-32-annual-update-2023-24-released>

enhancing school connectedness^{18 19}. Additional protective factors include strong peer groups and adult social support, which contribute to resilience among LGBTQIA+ youth^{20 21}.

Despite these advances, challenges remain, particularly in rural and regional areas where victimisation rates are higher and school environments may be more hostile²². Research identifies perpetrator-related risks such as endorsing homophobic attitudes, limited social contact with LGBTQIA+ individuals, and certain identity factors as contributors to bullying behaviour^{23 24 25}. For teachers, awareness and empathy toward the seriousness of LGBTQIA+ bullying, coupled with knowledge and skills to intervene effectively, are critical. Such competence not only helps in managing bullying incidents but also encourages students to act as upstanders themselves^{26 27}. Programs that include LGBTQIA+ inclusive curricula and foster student alliances have consistently demonstrated positive outcomes in school safety and reduced bullying^{28 29 30}.

¹⁸ Day, J. K., Fish, J. N., Perez-Brumer, A., Hatzenbuehler, M. L., & Russell, S. T. (2016). Gay-straight alliances, inclusive policy, and school climate: LGBTQ youths' experiences of social support and bullying. *Journal of Research on Adolescence*, 26(2), 453–465. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jora.12180>

¹⁹ Moyano, N., Sanz, M., & Gil-Llario, M. D. (2020). Protective factors for homophobic bullying victimization among LGB youth in Spain: The role of social support. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 17(20), 7583. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph17207583>

²⁰ Kosciw, J. G., Greytak, E. A., Palmer, N. A., & Boesen, M. J. (2014). The 2013 National School Climate Survey: The experiences of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender youth in our nation's schools. *GLSEN*. <https://www.glsen.org/research/2013-national-school-climate-survey>

²¹ Russell, S. T., Sinclair, K. O., Poteat, V. P., & Koenig, B. W. (2016). Adolescent health and harassment based on discriminatory bias. *American Journal of Public Health*, 106(3), 493–499. <https://doi.org/10.2105/AJPH.2015.302892>

²² Moyano, N., Rodríguez-Castro, Y., Sánchez-Fuentes, M. M., & Lameiras-Fernández, M. (2020). Barriers to the intervention in homophobic bullying: The teachers' perspective. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 17(9), 3064. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph17093064>

Camodeca, M., Goossens, F. A., & Schuengel, C. (2018). The role of social identity and group norms in peer victimization: An experimental study. *Journal of Experimental Child Psychology*, 176, 159–172. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jecp.2018.06.005>

²⁴ Attitudes towards homosexuality: The influence of family, friends, and school on youth. *Sex Roles*, 75(11-12), 656–670.

<https://doi.org/10.1007/s11199-016-0647-5>

²⁵ Zotti, A. M., Brown, C., & Bowes, L. (2018).

Peer relationships and homophobic bullying in adolescence: The moderating role of school climate. *Journal of Adolescence*, 64, 85–94. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.adolescence.2017.12.009>

²⁶ Anagnostopoulos, D., Kanner, M., & Smith, A. (2009).

Teacher perspectives on bullying and intervention strategies: A qualitative study. *Journal of School Violence*, 8(2), 137–157. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15388220902869966>

²⁷ Perez, D., Espelage, D. L., & Moser, S. E. (2013).

Teacher attitudes toward LGBTQ bullying: Implications for intervention and training. *Journal of LGBT Youth*, 10(3), 200–220. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19361653.2013.795669>

²⁸ Boyland, L., Birkett, M., & Espelage, D. L. (2018).

Sexual orientation and bullying in schools: A systematic review of intervention effectiveness. *Journal of School Health*, 88(7), 503–515. <https://doi.org/10.1111/josh.12625>

²⁹ Greytak, E. A., Gromik, N., & Kosciw, J. G. (2013).

Bullying prevention in schools: The role of LGBTQ-inclusive curricula and student support. *Journal of Adolescent Health*, 52(5), S49–S54. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jadohealth.2012.12.003>

³⁰ Kull, R. M., Kosciw, J. G., & Greytak, E. A. (2016).

Exploring LGBTQ student experiences: The impact of Gay–Straight Alliances and inclusive curricula. *Journal of School Violence*, 15(2), 121–142. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15388220.2014.933044>

Research further emphasises the success of upstander training and community-based actions in reducing bullying and gender-based violence, thereby improving the wellbeing of LGBTQIA+ youth. Effective programs foster a democratic, community-wide environment that rejects violence and supports victims ^{31 32}.

Sexual orientation and gender identity (SOGI) related policies are especially effective, fostering reflection on personal attitudes toward LGBTQIA+ issues and significantly reducing bullying rates when implemented consistently ^{33 34}. Intersectionality and social justice must be integral to bystander intervention programs to ensure inclusivity and active participation by students from diverse backgrounds ³⁵. Finally, targeted training on gender and transgender topics enhances educators' ability to respond appropriately across diverse school contexts, further supporting violence prevention efforts ³⁶.

Areas for Improvement

Despite the Department of Education's strong policies, significant gaps in implementation remain, which continue to impact the safety and wellbeing of LGBTQIA+ students.

Key challenges include:

- Lack of a consistent statewide standard: Policies differ across schools and districts, resulting in uneven protection and support for students.
- With insufficient training, educators frequently report limited knowledge and confidence in addressing identity-based bullying, especially regarding gender identity and sexual orientation.
- Policy fatigue and anti-bullying documents are often underutilised or regarded as symbolic rather than practical tools for change.

³¹ Flecha, R., Soler-Gallart, M., & Rodrigues de Mello, M. (2023).

Dialogic and community approaches to reducing violence and creating safer school environments. *Journal of Educational Research and Practice*

³² Soler-Gallart, M., & Rodrigues de Mello, M. (2020).

Effects of dialogic model interventions on school violence and student safety: Evidence from Spain and Latin America. *International Journal of Violence Prevention*,

³³ Kosciw, J. G., Greytak, E. A., Palmer, N. A., & Boesen, M. J. (2014).

The 2013 National School Climate Survey: The experiences of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender youth in our nation's schools. *GLSEN*. <https://www.glsen.org/research/2013-national-school-climate-survey>

³⁴ Russell, S. T., Day, J. K., Ioverno, S., & Toomey, R. B. (2016).

Are school policies focused on sexual orientation and gender identity associated with less bullying? *Teachers College Record*, 118(1), 1-26. <https://doi.org/10.1177/016146811611800101>

³⁵ McMahon, S., Post, L., & Richman, J. M. (2020).

Bystander intervention to prevent sexual violence on college campuses: Moving beyond a universal approach. *Violence Against Women*, 26(11), 1327–1349. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077801219836147>

³⁶ Bas-Pena, C., Morales, A., & López, E. (2014).

Training future professionals in gender and transgender issues: Tools for violence prevention. *Journal of Social Work Education*, 50(3), 486–498. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10437797.2014.917088>

- Reporting barriers where many students are unclear about how to report bullying incidents or fear being “outed” if they do so.

These challenges are echoed in the Youth Pride Network’s *State of Play II* report, which found that only 35% of LGBTIQ+ students felt they could be open about their identity at school, while 67% reported experiencing mental health difficulties linked to exclusion and bullying ³⁷. Such data highlights the disconnect between policy intentions and realities in schools, reinforcing the urgent need for effective implementation.

“Basically nothing has been done by the school to stop the bullying done by the group of boys. My friends and I, even others, have filed tons of complaints about them through the years, and the schools told us to ‘Just write it down and put it on record’. So, we have, and for two years nothings happened, the school has taken little to no action and the group of boys is still allowed to do what they’re doing.”- Student, 2023.

Additional barriers identified in the literature include lack of administrative support, inconsistent responses from colleagues, fear of parent backlash, and the impact of teachers’ personal beliefs on their willingness to intervene ³⁸. Teachers’ perceptions are crucial, yet many feel ill-equipped to manage homophobic and transphobic bullying due to inadequate training and unclear policy directives ³⁹.

Moreover, data highlights the importance of transgender and gender diverse-specific anti-bullying initiatives, noting that transgender students are often supported by strategies designed primarily for lesbian, gay, and bisexual youth, which fail to address their unique needs ⁴⁰. It also reveals low levels of satisfaction with school facilities and practices, such as relevant sexuality education (9%), puberty education (12%), access to appropriate toilets (14%), school camps (17%), and the impacts of gender segregation (18%).

Considering these findings, policy must be the foundation, not the end point for comprehensive implementation that includes:

- Robust, mandatory staff training on LGBTQIA+ identities and inclusive practices
- Clear, accessible reporting pathways that protect student privacy and safety
- Youth leadership and participation in policy design and school culture initiatives

³⁷ Youth Pride Network. (2023). *State of Play II: Experiences of LGBTIQ+ young people in education*. Youth Pride Network.

³⁸ O'Donoghue, T., & Guerin, S. (2017). Barriers to intervention in homophobic bullying: A systematic review. *Journal of School Psychology*, 63, 1–13. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jsp.2017.01.003>

³⁹ Kahle, L. (2017). Addressing homophobic bullying in schools: The role of specific school policies in creating safer learning environments. *Journal of LGBT Youth*, 14(2), 105–123. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19361653.2016.1268679>

⁴⁰ McGuire, J. K., Anderson, C. R., Toomey, R. B., & Russell, S. T. (2010). *School climate for transgender youth: A mixed method investigation of student experiences and school responses*. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 39(10), 1175–1188. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10964-010-9540-7>

- A whole-school approach that embeds inclusivity into daily practices and community values.

Addressing these areas is essential to transform policy into practice, ensuring all students can learn in safe, supportive, and affirming environments.

Intersectionality

To create genuinely safe and inclusive school environments, anti-bullying frameworks must reflect the diversity within the LGBTIQA+ community, including how gender identity and sexuality intersect with other aspects of identity such as race, disability, culture, faith socioeconomic background, and geographic location.

LGBTIQA+ students who also belong to other underrepresented communities often face layered and compounding discrimination. For example, a trans Aboriginal student may simultaneously experience racism, transphobia, and cultural marginalisation. Students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds or those with disabilities often encounter additional barriers to safety and inclusion and are frequently under-supported within the current school system.

Data illustrates these intersecting vulnerabilities concerning clarity. Over half (56.7%) of participants with disability or a long-term health condition reported feeling unsafe or uncomfortable at school in the past 12 months due to their sexuality or gender identity, compared to 45.1% of participants without disability ⁴¹. These figures highlight how disability can compound the risks associated with being LGBTIQA+, and how schools are currently ill-equipped to address these dual forms of discrimination ⁴².

Participants who were Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander also reported high levels of exclusion and discrimination and were more likely to feel unsafe in educational settings due to their identity. The report further showed that trans and gender diverse young people experienced the highest levels of educational exclusion yet were often placed into support strategies originally designed for lesbian, gay, or bisexual students - strategies that did not adequately address their gender-specific needs ⁴³.

⁴¹ Hill, A. O., Lyons, A., Jones, J., McGowan, I., Carman, M., Parsons, M., Power, J., & Bourne, A. (2021). *Writing Themselves In 4: The health and wellbeing of LGBTQA+ young people in Australia*. National Report, ARCSHS Monograph Series Number 124. Australian Research Centre in Sex, Health and Society, La Trobe University. https://www.latrobe.edu.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0007/1191062/Writing-Themselves-In-4-National-Report.pdf

⁴² Hill, A. O., Lyons, A., Jones, J., McGowan, I., Carman, M., Parsons, M., Power, J., & Bourne, A. (2021). *Writing Themselves In 4: The health and wellbeing of LGBTQA+ young people in Australia*. National Report, ARCSHS Monograph Series Number 124. Australian Research Centre in Sex, Health and Society, La Trobe University. https://www.latrobe.edu.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0007/1191062/Writing-Themselves-In-4-National-Report.pdf

⁴³ Lin, A. (2021). *Walkern Katatjdjin (Rainbow Knowledge) Phase 1 Community Report*. Rainbow Knowledge Project (Telethon Kids Institute)

These findings underscore the need for policies that are not just LGBTIQ+ inclusive in a general sense, but that explicitly recognise how multiple aspects of a student's identity affect their safety, wellbeing, and access to support.

Recommendations

- Embedding co-designed mandatory training for all school staff that includes cultural safety, disability inclusion, and intersectionality.
- Developing anti-bullying policies that explicitly name and address the intersection of race, gender identity, sexuality, and disability, including protections that extend beyond symbolic inclusion.
- Ensuring all inclusion frameworks are trauma-informed, culturally safe, and designed through youth co-leadership.
- Recognising that inclusion efforts cannot rely on a one-size-fits-all approach and must be tailored to the realities of students most impacted by multiple forms of discrimination.

Inclusion must mean more than visibility; it must translate into responsive, specific, and sustained support. When students are navigating the impacts of racism, ableism, homophobia, and transphobia at the same time, schools must be prepared to meet them with comprehensive and nuanced care.

Youth Participation

Young people possess critical insight into the challenges and opportunities within school environments, particularly as they relate to bullying and safety. As the primary stakeholders in the education system, their lived experiences offer indispensable perspectives that must be integrated into the development, implementation, and evaluation of anti-bullying policies and practices.

Despite this, youth participation in the creation of anti-bullying frameworks remains inconsistent and, in many cases, tokenistic. For anti-bullying initiatives to be truly effective and reflective of student needs, particularly those of LGBTIQ+ students and those at the intersections of multiple forms of marginalisation, young people must be engaged not only as participants, but as co-designers and leaders in the process.

Recommendations

To ensure that youth voice is meaningfully embedded within anti-bullying efforts, YPN recommends that the Department of Education:

- Establish youth advisory panels at both the system-wide and regional levels, with a focus on diversity and representation from LGBTIQ+ communities, First Nations students, students with disability, and students from culturally and linguistically diverse and regional backgrounds.
- Resource and support student-led inclusion initiatives within schools, such as Gender and Sexuality Alliances (GSAs), peer support programs, and youth-led wellbeing

councils. This support should include dedicated funding, staff facilitation time, and access to external expertise.

- Co-design anti-bullying strategies in collaboration with youth representatives, ensuring policies are informed by lived experience and tailored to the needs of students in diverse educational contexts.
- Embed structured mechanisms for student input and accountability, such as regular school climate surveys, student feedback loops, and consultative forums that report directly to school leadership and departmental bodies.
- Incorporate youth leadership in staff for professional learning, by involving trained young people as co-facilitators in educator training sessions to share perspectives on inclusive practice, safety, and respectful school culture.

Embedding youth participation within the Department's anti-bullying strategy is not only a matter of best practice; it is essential to the creation of policies and environments that genuinely support student wellbeing. When young people are empowered as leaders and partners, schools are better equipped to foster cultures of safety, inclusion, and respect for all students.

Reporting and Accountability

Robust, transparent, and student-centred reporting mechanisms are essential to the effectiveness of any anti-bullying strategy. LGBTIQA+ students often face significant barriers to reporting bullying, including fear of being outed, concerns about retaliation, or a lack of trust in adult responses. Without safe, clear pathways to raise concerns, incidents of identity-based bullying frequently go unreported and unaddressed, undermining the protective function of school policies.

A consistent, trauma-informed approach to reporting and accountability helps foster a culture where students feel heard, supported, and empowered to speak up.

Recommendations

- Establish confidential, accessible, and student-friendly reporting processes across all schools, ensuring students understand how to report incidents and what support is available. Reporting systems must be inclusive of all students, including those with disabilities, from non-English speaking backgrounds, or in rural and remote communities.
- Implement mandatory trauma-informed training for all school staff, equipping educators with the skills to respond to reports of bullying with sensitivity, respect, and a focus on student safety and wellbeing. Staff should also be trained in culturally safe and identity-affirming practices.
- Ensure school-wide visibility and communication about reporting procedures, including what students can expect after making a report. This includes clearly outlining timelines, support pathways, confidentiality protocols, and follow-up processes.
- Regularly collect and review data on bullying incidents and responses, disaggregated by type of bullying (including identity-based bullying), to inform school improvement plans

and departmental oversight. This data should be reviewed in consultation with student representatives and used to assess policy effectiveness.

- Utilise restorative practices where appropriate, ensuring they are never implemented at the expense of a student's emotional safety, privacy, or sense of agency. Restorative approaches must be voluntary, carefully facilitated, and centred on the needs and wishes of those harmed.

Transparent reporting processes, combined with accountable, trauma-informed responses, are critical to building school cultures where all students feel safe and respected. By prioritising trust, responsiveness, and follow-through, schools can actively contribute to reducing harm and improving outcomes for LGBTIQ+ students and the broader student community.

Recommendations for a Consistent National Standard

YPN and YACWA strongly supports the Department of Education's efforts to establish a unified, consistent, and evidence-based approach to bullying prevention across Australia. While many schools have taken commendable individual steps to create safer environments, inconsistency in policy implementation and training continues to result in unequal protection and support for students, particularly LGBTIQ+ young people and those experiencing intersecting forms of marginalisation.

Both a national and statewide framework must go beyond surface-level policy and reflect a deep commitment to equity, inclusion, and cultural safety. A whole-of-system approach, anchored by shared principles and strengthened by local flexibility, will help ensure that every student, in every school, can access a learning environment where they are safe, respected, and supported.

Guiding Principles

To achieve meaningful and lasting change, a consistent national approach should be grounded in the following principles:

- Inclusivity and safety for all identities, recognising the unique experiences of LGBTIQ+ students and those at the intersections of race, disability, geography, and other factors.
- Prevention through education and representation, embedding affirming, age-appropriate content about gender, sexuality, and respectful relationships in all school contexts.
- Youth-led co-design and leadership, centring young people as active contributors to the development, implementation, and review of anti-bullying strategies.
- Community partnership and accountability, ensuring collaboration with families, communities, and expert organisations to strengthen local engagement and trust.
- Continuous monitoring, feedback, and improvement, with policies informed by lived experience, regularly reviewed data, and open channels for student input.

Recommendations

To operationalise these principles and ensure consistency across the education system, YPN and YACWA recommend that the Department of Education:

- Develop and distribute standardised anti-bullying policy templates for all Australian schools, explicitly inclusive of LGBTIQ+ students and aligned with current research and best practices.
- Mandate comprehensive, ongoing training for all school staff—including leadership, teachers, support staff, psychologists and chaplains, on LGBTIQ+ inclusion, cultural competency, and the impacts of identity-based bullying, with specific attention to intersectionality.
- Embed digital literacy and respectful relationships education into the Australian curriculum, addressing issues such as online safety, consent, gender diversity, and the impact of language and behaviour on peers.
- Allocate dedicated funding for peer-led and student-driven inclusion initiatives, such as Gender and Sexuality Alliances (GSAs), student wellbeing councils, and anti-bullying leadership programs.
- Establish departmental oversight and transparent public accountability mechanisms, including school-level data reporting on bullying incidents, response actions, and ongoing evaluation of anti-bullying initiatives.

By implementing these recommendations, the Department of Education can lead a transformative shift in school culture statewide ensuring that anti-bullying efforts are not only consistent and enforceable but also affirming, inclusive, and genuinely responsive to the needs of all students.

Conclusion

Creating safe, inclusive, and respectful school environments for LGBTIQ+ students is not only a moral imperative; it is a legal and educational responsibility. Every student has the right to access an educational environment free from discrimination, exclusion, and harm, regardless of their gender identity, sexuality, race, ability, or background. Yet the evidence remains unequivocal: LGBTIQ+ young people continue to face disproportionately high levels of bullying and systemic neglect across Australian schools.

The Department of Education's national review is a critical opportunity to move beyond fragmented, inconsistent policies toward a unified, enforceable framework that ensures every student is protected, no matter where they live or what school they attend. This process must result in more than policy; it must deliver meaningful, measurable change through implementation, accountability, and student-led co-design.

YPN and YACWA urge the Department to use this moment to drive structural reform that embeds intersectionality, cultural safety, and youth leadership at the core of national anti-bullying strategies. With commitment, collaboration, and leadership, this review can mark a turning point: one where young people, especially those from LGBTIQ+ communities, can see their identities affirmed and their voices embedded in the very systems that shape their futures.

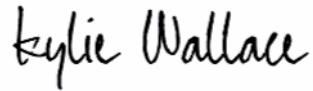
By embedding intersectionality, youth voice, and cultural safety into all levels of education, we can ensure that schools are not just places of learning, but places where every student can truly belong.

Thank you for considering this submission. We welcome the opportunity to discuss these issues further.

Yours Sincerely,



Chloe Clements
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Youth Pride Network



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Interim CEO
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