

To the Committee Secretary,

My name is Kelli Charles, and I currently work as an LGBTQIA+ School Inclusion Officer for Working It Out. I am based in Launceston, and work in schools across the North and North West of the state, in support of LGBTQIA+ young people, and the adults and communities surrounding them. I have worked in counselling, mental health support and community work 15 years, 8 of which have been in Tasmania, and in roles that have put me in contact with various Tasmanian schools, including public, independent and faith-based.

In my current role I meet and talk directly with school-aged LGBTQIA+ young people, and overwhelmingly I am hearing that discrimination and bullying against young people who hold any kind of marginalised identity is still rife. This is particularly the case for young people who are LGBTQIA+, but also for those who are racially and ethnically diverse, Aboriginal, have disabilities, or are otherwise marginalised, and even more true again for those at the intersectionality of these identities.

Many adults in school environments report that they feel homophobia and biphobia are lessening problems in their schools, but same-sex attracted young people report to me a different story, and say that they often hear comments, derogatory remarks and invasive questions directed their way, often out of the earshot of the adults in the room. They report not feeling safe to come to school, or walk past certain areas of the school, or attend certain classes where they know these situations are more likely to occur.

Unfortunately, and thanks to the recent mis and disinformation being spread in the media, transphobia is undoubtedly on the rise in schools in Tasmania. Gender diverse young people report being subjected to outright bullying from their peers, and discrimination and silencing from their teachers who often don't feel knowledgeable or supported enough to step in. This kind of bullying sometimes extends to young people who aren't necessarily gender diverse, but who challenge gender stereotypes in other ways, who are then significantly targeted for stepping outside of gendered expectations.

Without schools making strong, positive statements in support of LGBTQIA+ people and communities, many individual teachers are left unsure how to handle situations of bullying or harassment that may arise in school environments because they aren't sure that they will be backed up by senior staff and school leadership. While Tasmanian public schools are making some headway in terms of implementing policy and procedural changes that support inclusion of LGBTQIA+ people in education, many faith-based and independent schools are lacking this, leaving LGBTQIA+ young people, families and teachers open to ongoing discrimination and harassment.

The impact of these instances of bullying and discrimination in Tasmanian schools are significant and sometimes severe. Some of these that have been reported to me by LGBTQIA+ young people and their families are:

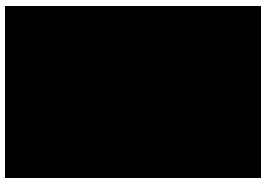
- Young people refusing to use the bathroom at school, because of comments from students about which toilet they should or should not be using. This results in young

people dehydrating and starving themselves to avoid needing the bathroom, and has led to significant health issues for some students

- Young people not returning to school following incidents of harassment and violence
- Students as young as 6 being diagnosed with depression, anxiety and other mental health conditions following significant bullying at school.
- Young people avoiding certain subjects or activities at school because they are more likely to be misgendered or discriminated against, or have their identities erased, or up for public debate and ridicule (e.g. Health and PE classes)
- Young people feeling alone, scared and targeted, just for being and expressing themselves authentically

Young people deserve safety, inclusion, visibility and celebration in all school communities, environments and curriculum, so that they can thrive, learn and flourish. Unfortunately, it seems that for all too many students, this is increasingly not the case. I welcome this inquiry, and hope it leads to some positive, systemic change that centres the rights and wellbeing of all Tasmanian young people, regardless of identity or circumstance.

With Kindness,



Kelli Charles

LGBTQIA+ School Inclusion Officer

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