

Friday 30 August 2024

To whom it may concern,

My name is Daniel Howard. Since February 2022 I have been employed by Working It Out in the role of LGBTIQ+ School Inclusion Officer. This role has afforded me the opportunity and privilege of meeting with hundreds of LGBTIQ+ students – both in group settings and individually. In addition, I have met with dozens of parents / carers / guardians of LGBTIQ+ young people, as well as innumerable teachers and school support staff. Whilst the following submission represents the voices and experiences of these groups of people, it is the experiences of LGBTIQ+ young people in our school system that I seek to highlight and privilege.

**What direct and indirect discrimination, prohibited conduct, unequal and disadvantageous treatment, bullying and harassment is occurring in Tasmanian schools in regard to students and staff?**

I have seen indirect discrimination and unequal or disadvantageous treatment assume many guises in Tasmanian schools:

- Teachers avoiding LGBTIQ+ topics in class for fear of student reaction and/or parent and community ‘push back’ and complaints
- Teachers allowing the human rights and identities of LGBTIQ+ people to be ‘up for debate and discussion’ in classroom activities
- Teachers not selecting texts with queer characters for study in class out of concern they won’t appeal to the ‘average’ student
- Teachers approaching education on puberty, respectful relationships, (what is still colloquially known as) ‘sex ed’, etc. as if all students are biologically typical, cisgendered and heterosexual – leaving queer students both feeling marginalised / othered and woefully uneducated / uninformed in the process
- Teachers and staff in schools perpetuating heteronormativity by making assumptions, using unnecessarily gendered language, resisting suggested inclusive practices

There is also an absence of LGBTIQ+ inclusion and representation in the wider educational field – for example, whilst documents such as the AITSL teacher standards and ACARA Australian Curriculum specifically cover diversity and inclusion in a range of areas, a search for ‘LGBTIQ+’ would be a largely fruitless exercise. These privileged documents inform curriculum, lesson plans, teachers’ access to and funding of

professional learning and so on. As a direct result, the invisibility of LGBTIQA+ students in these documents perpetuates the invisibility of these students in the school system.

When visiting pride groups [Pride groups are informal groups for LGBTIQA+, questioning and allied students to meet, typically on a weekly basis during lunch time with the support of trained school staff in the role of adult advisor/s] in schools and colleges:

- Support staff have confided that they know there are LGBTIQA+ students who would like to attend the group, but these students feel unable to do so as they fear being seen by others, being outed to their parents, etc.
- I have witnessed other students at the school banging on the windows, kicking at the door, yelling slurs from the corridor and behaving in other ways that make LGBTIQA+ students feel intimidated, unsafe and unwelcome.
- The group has had to select a windowless space away from main student thoroughfares as their meeting room so that LGBTIQA+ students feel safe attending the group.
- A student has beamed with pride and positivity during the lunchtime meeting, only to stop by the door before exiting to remove the rainbow pride / trans pride badges from their school jumper whilst announcing, “I’ll just take these off now so I don’t get bullied”
- LGBTIQA+ students and pride group adult advisors alike have told me that the “cost” of celebrating / acknowledging events such as Wear It Purple Day is to be targeted by groups of students with queerphobic slurs (“fucking faggots”) and physical contact (such walking into their path and shoulder bumps) – away from the eyesight and earshot of staff.
- In response to the question, “So what’s it like being LGBTIQA+ at this school?” pride group members have responded with:
  - *“We’re gay, of course we don’t feel supported.”*
  - *“We don’t feel welcome here.”*
  - *“This school isn’t a good place to be if you’re queer.”*

I have had LGBTIQA+ and allied students share with me that:

- They have had teachers who have said:
  - homosexuality is wrong
  - asexuality is not real
  - being transgender is a mental illness
- They have had teachers who have not respected their pronouns or affirmed name and have told them that gender is fixed and binary

- They can think of no examples of positive mentions or representations of LGBTIQ+ identities, people, stories and history in their educational experience
- They are too afraid to be out about their sexuality and/or gender in the school setting
- They hear homophobic or transphobic slurs on a daily basis
- Their perception / experience is that teachers will address swearing and racist language from students but will ignore (pretend they didn't hear) or downplay ("they didn't mean it like *that*") queerphobic language
- After, as a student leader, making a speech in assembly calling for a more inclusive school environment and an end to homophobic language, they were subjected to frequent and ongoing name calling from fellow students – mostly discrete and out of earshot of teachers
- They felt they could not attend their school's pride group because they would be witnessed doing so and it would make them vulnerable and a target in what they perceived to be a hostile and homophobic school environment

I have had LGBTIQ+ young people who attend faith-based schools (and their parents / guardians) tell me that:

- They have not been allowed to wear the school uniform that aligns with their gender identity
- They have not been allowed to participate in overnight school camps as their affirmed gender identity
- Their school has refused to refer to them by their affirmed pronouns and, in some cases, chosen name

### **What measures are necessary to prevent and remedy discrimination and bullying in Tasmanian schools in regard to students and staff?**

Much of the positive work occurring in schools is happening courtesy of the goodwill of dedicated and overworked staff members – spending money out of their own pocket and devoting 'spare time' they don't actually have in their working day. A system seeking significant, sustainable and replicable change cannot be reliant on the "over-and-above" commitment of individuals. Schools should receive funding to support the staffing and resourcing of student-led Pride Groups. Schools should receive funding to support the formation of school-based LGBTIQ+ inclusion committees (teachers and support who meet to monitor the school policies, practices and professional learning in relation to LGBTIQ+ inclusion).

Wear It Purple Day (and/or other such dates of significance on the LGBTIQA+ calendar\_ should be celebrated and promoted by individual schools and colleges – as well as by DECYP more broadly – on a similar scope and scale as other annual events such as Book Week and NAIDOC Week.

The promotion, encouragement and systemic support and resourcing of staff-led Ally Networks and LGBTIQA+ Committees in schools.

Simplification and unification of administrative systems to make it easier for staff and students to safely register their affirmed name and pronouns and to make it easier for schools to record / track / respect students' and staff members' affirmed names and pronouns.

Decluttering the administrative workload and whole-school mandatory requirements in order to 'free up space' for schools to engage in LGTBIQA+ professional learning.

The embedding of a curriculum and educational experience and philosophy that is inclusive and representative of bodily differences, diverse sexualities and gender diversity from the early years – so that students are not indoctrinated with binary ways of thinking and viewing the world, and to prevent students from seeing difference and diversity in terms of gender, sexuality and bodies as being wrong or shameful.

Allocation of funds for schools and colleges to update toilet (and, where applicable, changeroom) facilities to make them safe and accessible for all students, with a set of DECYP guidelines to schools to follow and a move away from large, open "girls" and "boys" toilet blocks and open changing areas.

Exploration of a model in which senior student leaders in schools are given the opportunity to engage in LGBTIQA+ allyship training, with a view to developing / fostering a more inclusive school environment from the 'ground up'

The development and distribution of high-quality, Australian Curriculum aligned, DECYP-endorsed, LGBTIQA+ inclusive curriculum resources for use by teaching staff in Tasmanian schools

**What efforts are being made and should be made by Tasmanian schools towards meeting their obligations and duties under the Anti-Discrimination Act 1998 (and other relevant statutes and policies) in regard to students and staff?**

Some schools are engaging professional learning for staff that covers DECYP's *Supporting Sex, Sexuality and Gender Diversity in Schools Policy* and *Inclusive Language Guidelines* documents.

### **What other legislative or policy reforms may be required to address discrimination and bullying in regard to students and staff?**

Greater support for schools in the effective disciplining and meaningful educating of students who make homophobic, transphobic and queerphobic remarks.

Updating school uniform policies to remove mention of gender.

Requiring teacher training courses at UTAS to include content / units on LGBTIQ+ inclusion, cultural safety and valuing diversity.

Adding specific language to employee agreements / contracts that explicitly states DECYP employees are expected to overtly abide by the antidiscrimination act and to not bring any personally held beliefs.

### **What impact does discrimination and bullying have on student participation, retention and educational outcomes?**

I know LGBTIQ+ students who drop specific subjects / courses / pathways they are interested in, good at, or passionate about because they do not feel safe due to their marginalised identity.

I know LGBTIQ+ students whose attendance rates plummeted by virtue of direct and indirect discrimination and bullying, missing days of school due to the subject / teacher / classmates / activities scheduled on a given day.

I know students who have changed schools in a bid to get a fresh start, to leave behind a situation where bullying was occurring and not being adequately dealt with.

I know LGBTIQ+ students who have turned to part-time enrolments and/or 'alternate' educational options (Indie Schools, Big Picture Schools, home schooling, eSchool, etc.) due to not feeling welcome, safe or included in the 'traditional' contemporary school setting.

I know LGBTIQ+ students who have 'dropped out' and not completed their formal education due to ongoing bullying, harassment and discrimination.

### **What impact does discrimination and bullying have on staff recruitment, retention, workplace safety and career development?**

I know of passionate and highly knowledgeable educators who have transferred schools, changed sectors / systems, or left the profession altogether due to treatment from students, ostracization from colleagues and a lack of support from leadership.

I know LGBTIQ+ people who would make wonderful teachers and educators who have said to me they could never be a teacher because they:

- had such a negative experience in schools as a student
- know an already difficult job would be made immeasurably harder by being LGBTIQ+
- feel they would have to be closeted in the workplace – to colleagues and to students.

Yours sincerely,

A black rectangular box redacting the signature of Daniel Howard.

Daniel Howard (he / him)

LGBTIQ+ School Inclusion Officer

A black rectangular box redacting contact information, likely a phone number or email address.