



State of Play Report II

LGBTIQ+ Young People's Experiences of High School

Acknowledgement of **Country**

The Youth Pride Network would like to acknowledge the custodians of the land we work on, the Whadjuk Noongar people and pay our respects to Elders past and present.

Sovereignty of this land was never ceded, and it always was and always will be Aboriginal land.



About the **Youth Pride Network**

The Youth Pride Network (YPN) is an LGBTIQA+ youth-led advocacy organisation based in Western Australia. YPN uses systemic advocacy to work towards a Western Australia where LGBTIQA+ young people are accepted, included and celebrated by their communities and their human rights are upheld and prioritised by decision makers. YPN has a membership of over 300 LGBTIQA+ young people across Western Australia.

Established in February 2018, the YPN is self-directed and draws upon the views and expertise of its membership to address discrimination and isolation faced by LGBTIQA+ young people. YPN's work is governed by the principles of inclusivity, diversity, respect and equity.



Thank **You**

YPN would like to thank every young person, teacher, parent, and carer who shared their story as part of this report. The YPN will strive to do justice by your experiences. The YPN would also like to thank the LGBTIQA+ community, particularly those who have come before us for their support of our work and in providing space for us to do what we do.

This report was authored by Charlotte Glance and Cheyenne Henderson-Watkins, with assistance from Stefaan Bruce-Truglio, Aidan Maximo, and Hannah Sorenson.

Designed by
Matthew Wong

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CONTENT WARNING

This report contains mentions of mental ill health, suicide and suicidal ideation. It contains experiences of verbal, physical and sexual harassment and violence against young people, and recounts the use of discriminatory and bigoted language.

If you are experiencing distress, we encourage you to reach out to a trusted person, or contact the following numbers for immediate crisis support:

QLIFE: 1800 184 527

LIFELINE WA: 13 11 14

Terminology Used in this Report

AFFIRMED GENDER

The gender a person identifies with. It may or may not be aligned with the sex they were assigned at birth.

ASSIGNED SEX AT BIRTH

The sex a person is assigned by medical staff when they are born.

CISGENDER

A person whose gender identity exclusively aligns with the sex assigned to them at birth.

COMING OUT

The act of a person disclosing their LGBTIQ+ identity to others.

DEADNAMING

The act of using a trans or gender diverse person's birth name or a name that they no longer use. It is a deeply disrespectful act and is usually done to show the person doesn't acknowledge their autonomy and gender identity.

GENDER DIVERSE

An umbrella term for the range of gender identities and expressions that exist across and beyond the gender binary.

INTERSECTIONALITY

The concept of considering how intersections of a person's social and political identities may overlap and compound experiences of discrimination and/or oppression. This may include intersections between sexual orientation, gender, race, class, disability, etc.

INTERSEX

An umbrella term used to describe individuals who have innate genetic, hormonal or physical sex characteristics that do not fit medical or social norms for 'female' or 'male' bodies.

LGBTIQ+

Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex, Queer, Asexual and other diverse sexuality and gender identities.

MICROAGGRESSION

Actions or statements, intentional or unintentional, that covertly or indirectly perpetuate harm against marginalised groups.

MISGENDERING

Referring to someone as the incorrect gender. This often happens to trans and gender diverse people either by accident or because the person does not respect their identity.

NON-BINARY

An umbrella term that refers to a person that does not identify exclusively as male or female, and may sit somewhere within or outside the gender binary.

OUTING/OUTED

When someone's LGBTIQA+ identity is disclosed to others without their consent.

PERSON OF COLOUR

Commonly abbreviated to POC, refers to a person that is not white.

SOGIECE

Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity and Expression Change Efforts, known commonly as 'conversion practices'

SAFE SPACE

Places or environments intended to be free from discrimination and/or other threatening actions and ideas.

TRANSITION

The process a transgender person undertakes when changing their gender. This is multifaceted and can include medical transition (e.g. taking hormones or getting surgery) social transition (e.g. asking people to use a new name or pronouns) and legal transition (e.g. legally changing your name).

Note on pronoun usage in this report

Please note that all young people, staff, and parents/guardians in this report are referred to with they/them pronouns in order to preserve anonymity. This is not a reflection of their gender and assumptions about their gender should not be made from this.

Executive Summary

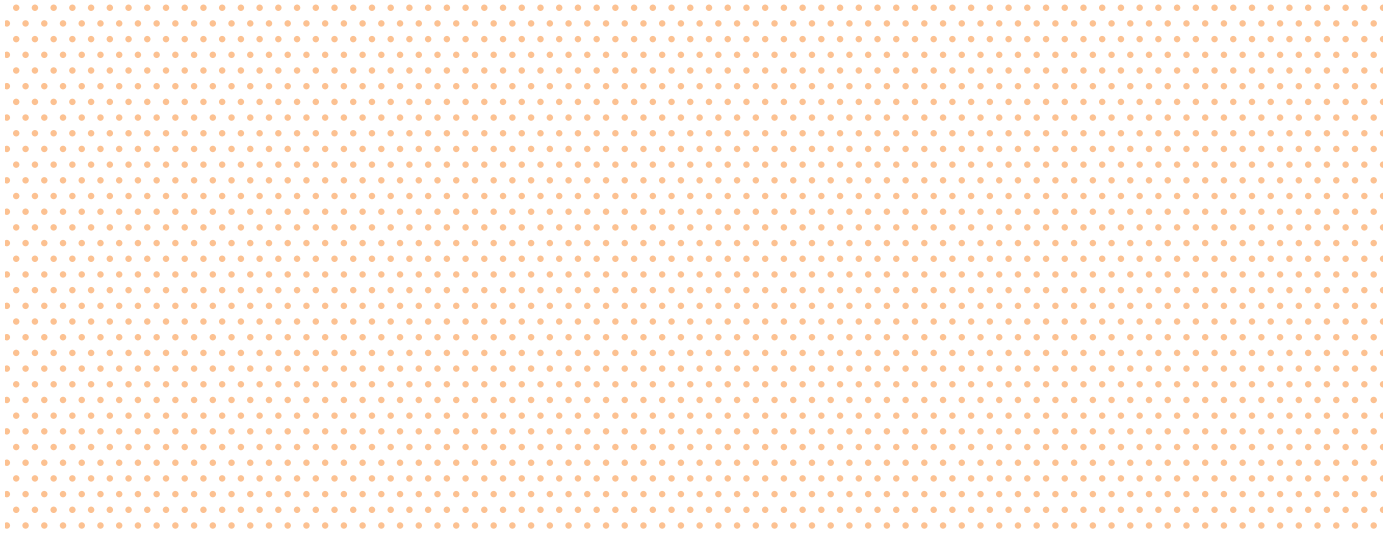
LGBTIQA+ young people have, in recent years, become the focus of an increasingly robust national body of work detailing their experiences and wellbeing in high schools across the country - but little is known about the unique experiences of LGBTIQA+ young people in schools in Western Australia.

The State of Play Report II is aimed at documenting the experiences of LGBTIQA+ young people in secondary education settings across Western Australia. It details their experiences of discrimination and bullying, unaffirming practices by teachers and staff, barriers to creating safe and inclusive schooling environments, and the impact of these negative experiences on students and their families. These experiences demonstrate the ongoing discrimination LGBTIQA+ young people continue to face in many educational settings across the state, perpetrated by peers, teachers, school administrations and school management. It is the second iteration of the State of Play report series, following the release of our 2020 report into LGBTIQA+ young people's experiences of the youth accommodation system.

These experiences have directly informed a series of recommendations intended to enhance frameworks and policies, which guarantee inclusive and safe experiences for LGBTIQA+ young people across both public and private schools. These are located at the end of the document and are targeted towards the Department of Education WA, public and private school management and educators across Western Australia.

In order to inform this report we distributed statewide surveys and undertook consultations with LGBTIQA+ young people, teachers, parents, and carers with experiences across public, private and independent high schools across WA.

The survey and in person consultations discussed in the report intend to paint a clear picture of how schools across Western Australia address LGBTIQA+ inclusion and the provision of affirmative education. Though this report highlights the systemic discrimination faced by young people in the education system, it includes examples of individual supportive staff, and where schools have had effective policies in place which have facilitated experiences of successful inclusive practice.



KEY FINDINGS:

- Only a third (32%) of LGBTIQ+ students felt they could be 'out' at school, where they regularly experience bullying, discrimination, physical and sexual violence, and homophobic and discriminatory language by both peers and staff.
- Many systemic barriers exist within high schools that prevent LGBTIQ+ students from feeling safe and having their identities affirmed both within and outside of the classroom.
- LGBTIQ+ topics are rarely being discussed within classrooms in a positive light, if at all. When LGBTIQ+ topics are included within the curriculum, students are regularly exposed to misinformation and bigoted delivery of content.
- In some cases, LGBTIQ+ students and teachers are facing discrimination from administrative staff, including the denial of inclusion initiatives and refusing to address bullying and discrimination.
- A significant number of LGBTIQ+ young people attending religious schools are being exposed to conversion ideology at school.
- The impacts of the discrimination and systemic barriers LGBTIQ+ students are facing in school has included the onset or worsening of mental ill health, feelings of helplessness or fear, a decline in school performance, and, in some cases, dropping out of school.
- Nearly all (93%) of LGBTIQ+ students without adequate, inclusive supports at school want to see these supports implemented.
- LGBTIQ+ students attending schools with inclusive supports and affirming teachers and staff are able to feel more secure in their identities, safer at school, and experience significant positive impacts to their mental wellbeing.

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

For the Department of Education:

- Provide guidance on how to support students who are transitioning and/or affirming their gender.
- Make explicit the obligations of teachers and schools to create safe environments for LGBTIQ+ students.
- Ensure teachers are aware that they are able to include LGBTIQ+ content in schools.
- Provide funding for organisations to provide teacher training that goes beyond online modules for free or reduced fee.
- Ensure guidance around bullying and safety in schools explicitly includes LGBTIQ+ people.
- Ensure strategies in education include LGBTIQ+ students.

For Schools:

- Take a comprehensive approach to LGBTIQ+ inclusion in your school.
- Create clear pathways and policies for students to affirm their gender in school.
- Ensure all staff - including administrative, leadership and pastoral staff - are trained in LGBTIQ+ awareness and inclusion.
- Take a no-tolerance approach to LGBTIQ+ discrimination from students.
- Include LGBTIQ+ topics in the classroom and ensure teachers are supported and confident to teach these topics.

For Religious Schools:

- Closely examine obligations towards pastoral care, protecting students from harm and creating inclusive, safe learning environments.

Methodology

The aim of this report was to collect the experiences of LGBTIQ+ young people in high school.

This report used a mixed methodology of interviews and online surveys. The majority of data was collected through three online surveys for:

- 1** **LGBTIQ+ young people aged 12-20**
“The Youth Survey”
- 2** **Parents and carers of LGBTIQ+ young people aged 12-20**
“The Parent/Carer Survey”
- 3** **Teachers and school staff members at any WA secondary school**
“The Teacher Survey”

To be eligible to complete the youth survey, young people had to be aged between 12-20, be LGBTIQ+ and have attended a high school in Western Australia. Of 343 initial responses, 263 were eligible.

To be eligible to complete the parent and carer survey, participants were required to be the parent or carer of an LGBTIQ+ Western Australian high school student (or of a young person who has previously attended high school). Of 48 responses, 31 were eligible.

To be eligible to complete the teacher survey respondents were required to have worked at a high school in Western Australia. Of 115 respondents, 96 were eligible.

The survey was developed after a series of pre-interviews with LGBTIQ+ high school students (2), a teacher from a WA high school (1) and a parent of an LGBTIQ+ high school student (1).

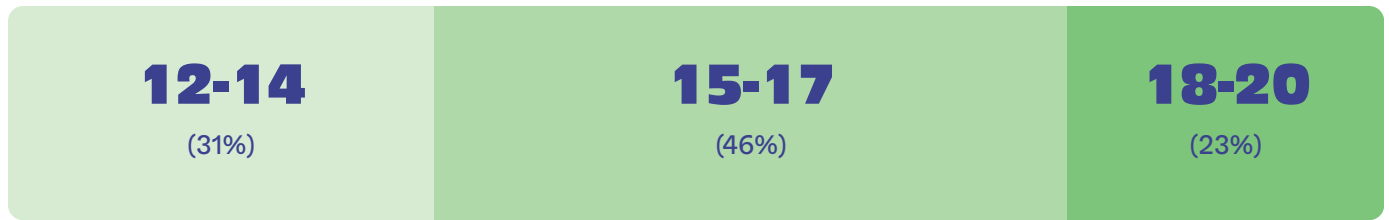
Supplementary interviews were completed with 3 education professionals. These interviews provided specialist knowledge about alternative education pathways and frameworks for LGBTIQ+ inclusion in Catholic schools.

In total, this report comprises the input of 397 eligible people.

Demographics of Participants

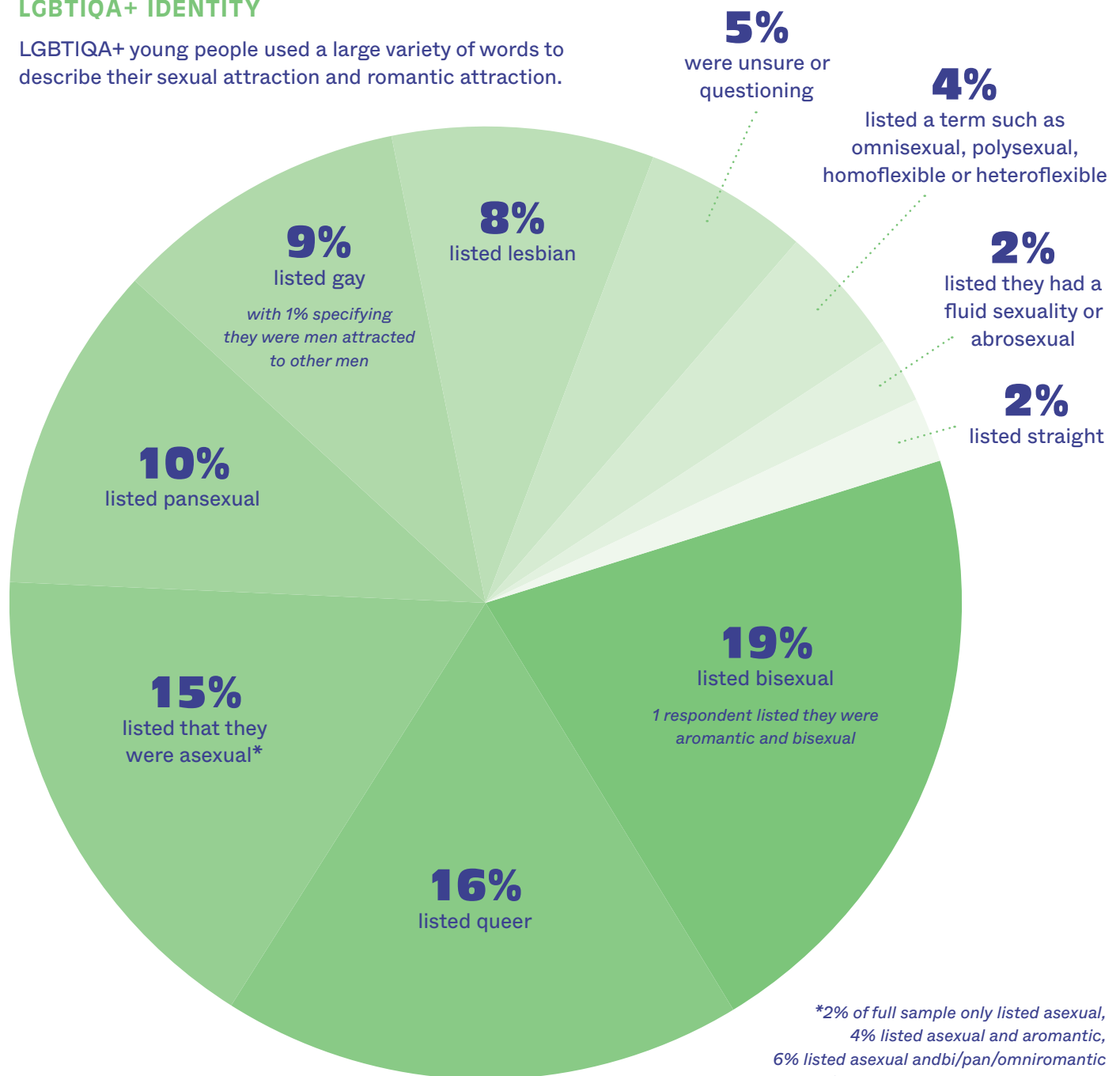
YOUNG PEOPLE

The ages of young respondents were as follows:



LGBTIQA+ IDENTITY

LGBTIQA+ young people used a large variety of words to describe their sexual attraction and romantic attraction.



*2% of full sample only listed asexual, 4% listed asexual and aromantic, 6% listed asexual and bi/pan/omniromantic or queer, 1% listed asexual and homoromantic or lesbian and 1 respondent was asexual and questioning their romantic attraction

"Asexual, demiromantic, polyromantic, biromantic"

"maybe pansexual idk im panicking"

"a mess"

"I prefer to use the term queer but I will usually introduce myself as bi/pansexu"

This data represents a condensation and interpretation of a diversity of ways that LGBTIQ+ young people understand their sexuality.

In regard to gender identity, LGBTIQ+ young people also used a large variety of words to describe their gender.

25%

listed woman or girl

21% were cis women and 4% were trans women

18%

non binary

11%

genderfluid

6%

transmasculine

6%

questioning

4%

agender

3%

genderqueer

3%

between woman
and non-binary
(e.g. she/they)

2%

demiboy

2%

bigender

2

respondents listed
gender non conforming

3

respondents listed other
*(genderfaun, genderfae
and pangender)*

2

respondents listed
demi girl

2% of respondents identified that they had a variation of sex characteristic, also known as intersex

Note some respondents simply listed 'trans' or 'cis' with no other words and as a result we haven't counted them in this data as trans and cisgender data aggregates were counted in a different question. Other respondents simply listed their pronouns and so we've had to make assumptions about their gender identity from what we assume they are trying to communicate (e.g. he/him has been categorised as man).

64% of respondents identified as trans and/or gender diverse. Statistics around LGBTIQ+ communities

are very poorly kept in general, making it difficult to know if our data set is representative of LGBTIQ+ community identities more broadly. However, we can assume that this is an overrepresentation of trans and gender diverse young people within the LGBTIQ+ community. Promotion for the survey was done predominantly through LGBTIQ+ support groups at schools and through LGBTIQ+ safe spaces run by other groups. This likely indicates a trend as to which students attend these support groups, which anecdotally we are aware is predominantly trans and gender diverse young people.

SCHOOL

Of the schools attended:

59%

attended public school

31%

attended a religious private school

7%

attended an independent school

3%

attended an alternative education program (incl. TAFE)

Location of schools:

86%

in Perth Metro (including Peel region)

13%

in regional WA*

7% South West/Great Southern

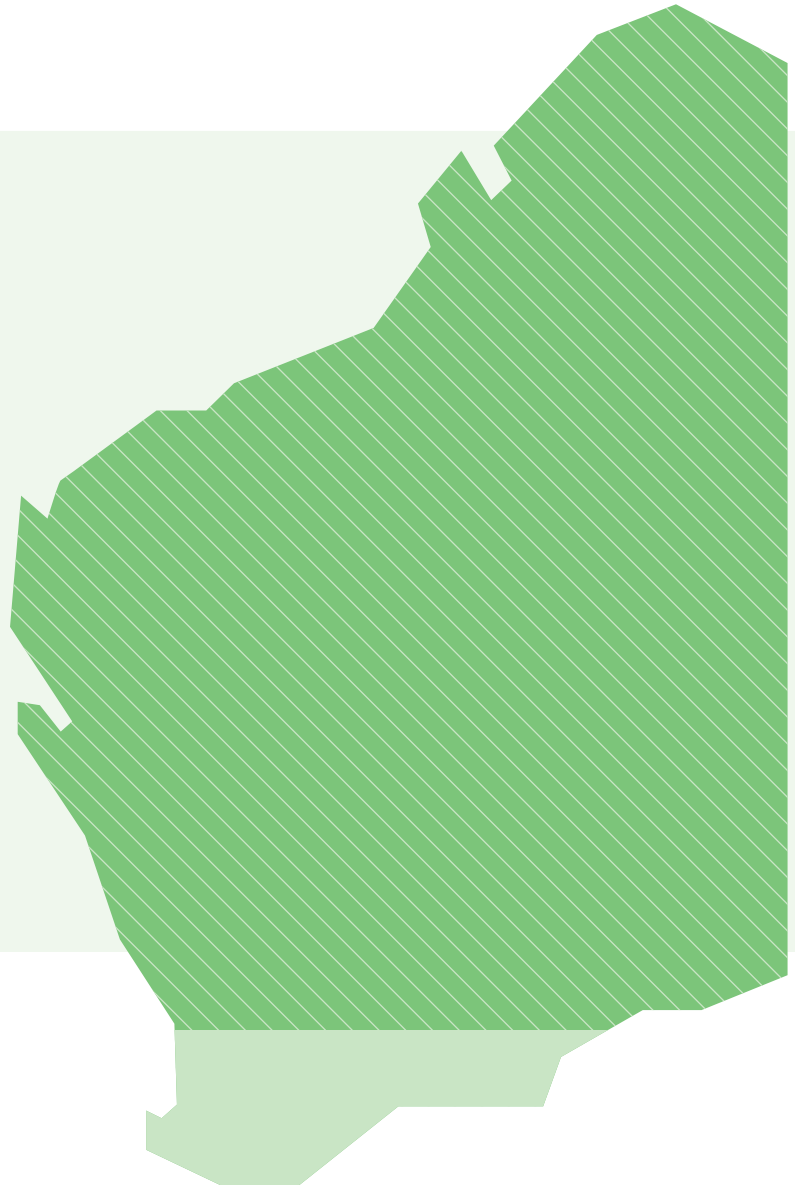
2% Mid West/Gascoyne

2% Pilbara

1% Kimberley

1% Goldfields/Wheatbelt

**includes 2 respondents who had attended schools in both regional and metro WA*



High school completion:

73%

were still in high school

20%

had completed high school

4%

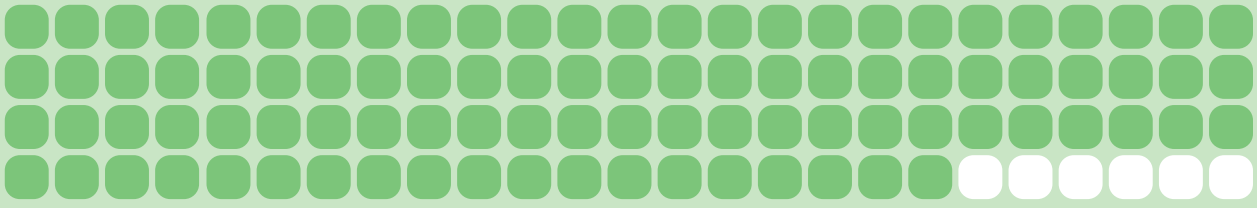
did not complete high school

3%

completed high school through an alternative program (e.g. TAFE, alternative education)

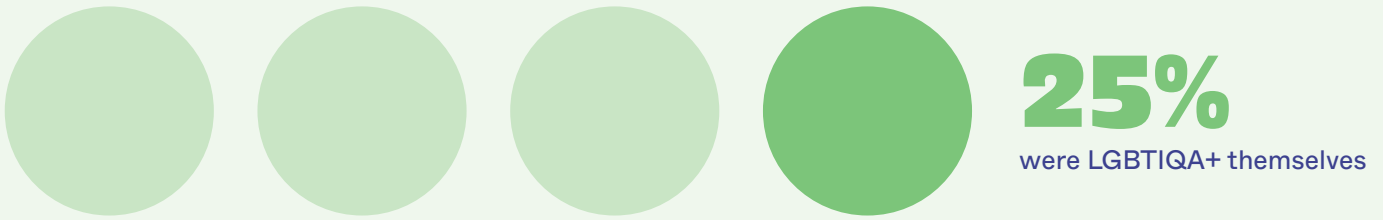
PARENTS & CARERS

Of the 31 responses...



94% were from the child's mother

6% were from the child's father



25% were LGBTIQA+ themselves

Child's identity:

61% had a child that was trans and gender diverse

3% had a child with a variation of sex characteristics also known as intersex

Child's school location:

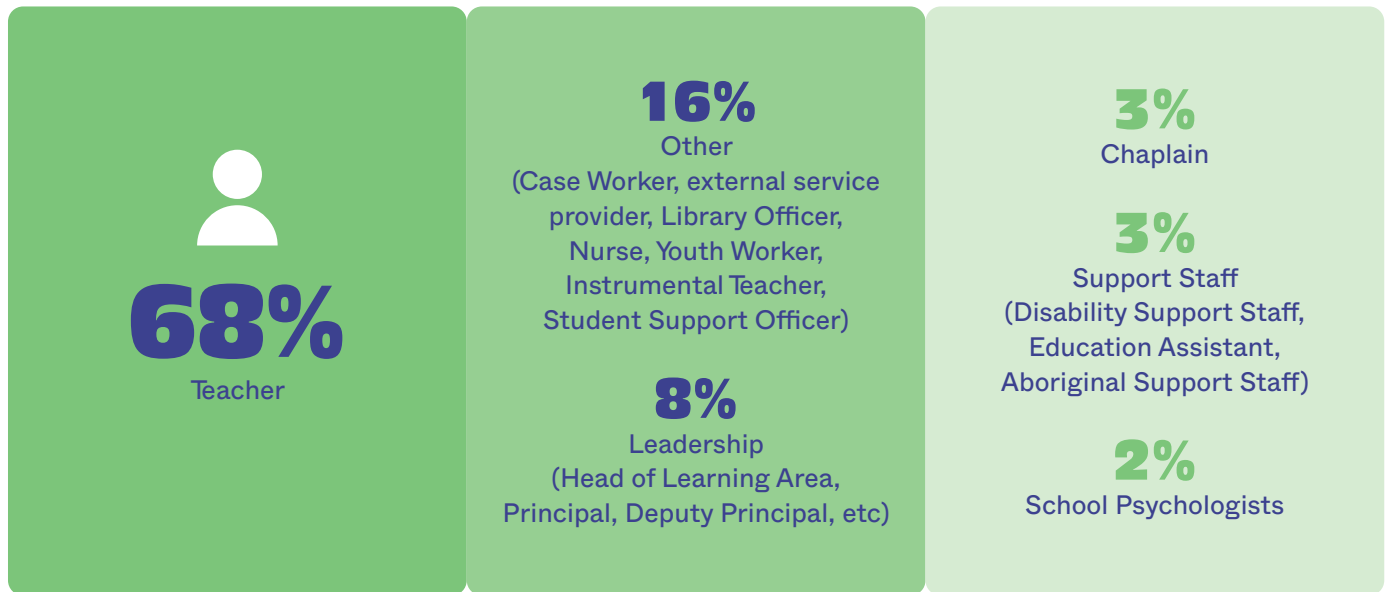
80% were in the Metropolitan Area

13% were in the Great Southern

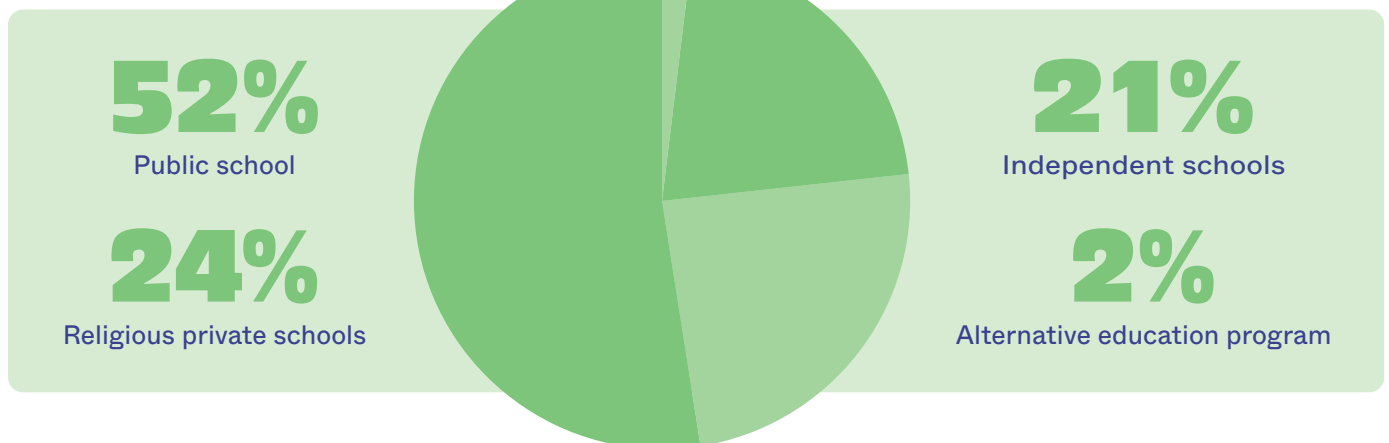
7% were in the Pilbara

TEACHERS

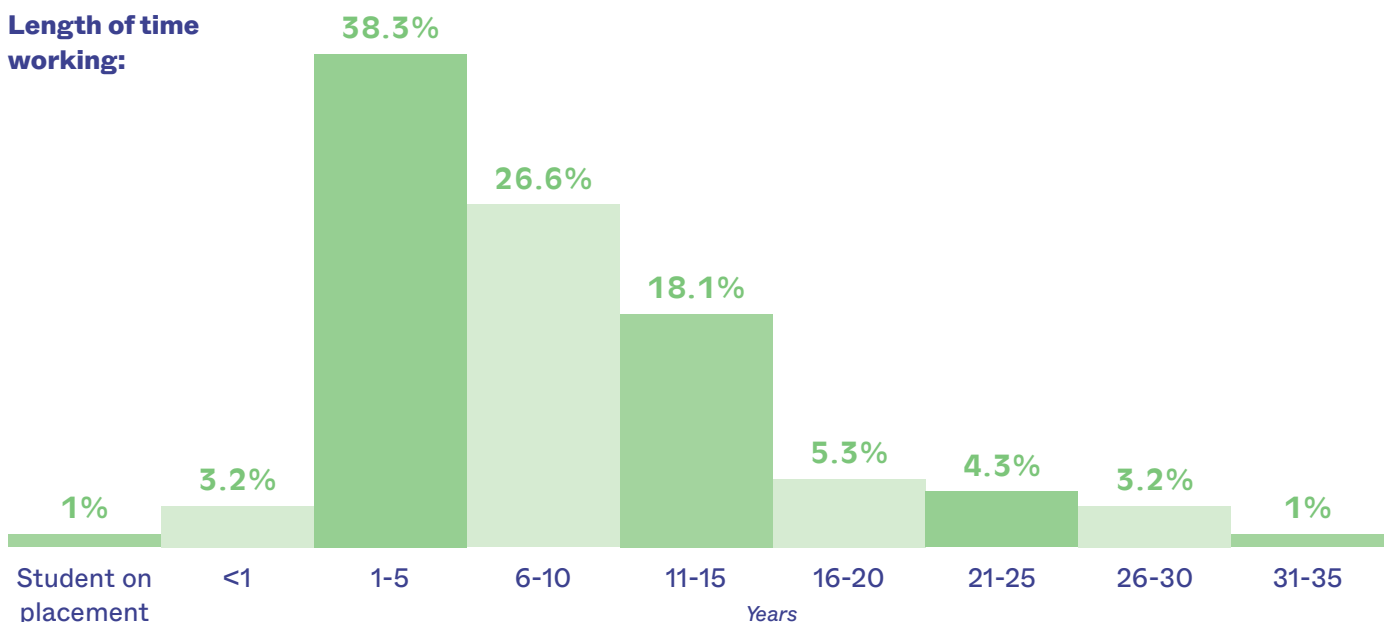
Of the 96 responses...



Type of school:



Length of time working:



Previous Research

For many LGBTIQ+ young people, schools are an unsafe place to be themselves

A growing body of evidence into the experiences of LGBTIQ+ students at schools around Australia suggests educational institutions are the most likely setting for discrimination to occur against LGBTIQ+ young people (4, 8, 9). This discrimination most often takes the form of homophobic and discriminatory language, bullying, harassment, physical assault, and a lack of school protections and supports (2, 3, 4, 8). According to Mission Australia's national survey, this discrimination combined with a lack of school support and an absence of positive LGBTIQ+ representation within the school curriculum were contributing factors to poorer educational outcomes and poor mental health for LGBTIQ+ students in Australia (6). 60% of young people attending schools that participated in the study reported that they did not feel safe or comfortable attending school due to their sexuality or gender identity, with a separate 2020 study finding only 37% of students felt safe enough to come out at school (6, 1).

Gender diverse young people are also more likely to face more significant barriers – such as mental health, discrimination, and a lack of school support - to school participation and educational outcomes than their cisgender peers. 83.2% of gender diverse young people cited mental health as a barrier to education as well being less likely to be satisfied with the mental health supports available at their school (6). Additionally, a separate study on the mental health of transgender young people found those with experiences of self-harm or suicide were nearly four times more likely to have faced issues at their educational institution (5). This is paired with higher educational dissatisfaction rates indicated amongst gender diverse young people, a result echoed in a 2021 study with 64.3% of trans women and 54.4% of trans men, and 44.4% of non-binary young people surveyed reported skipping school due to feeling unsafe or uncomfortable (4). For intersex students, discrimination and bullying has driven many away from attending school altogether – with 18% of intersex students not completing their secondary schooling, compared to the national average of 2% (14). This was largely due to being subject to bullying, harassment, and negative reactions by peers and staff due to disclosures of their intersex status.

Intersectional LGBTIQ+ young people are disproportionately affected by discrimination in schools

Of the LGBTIQ+ young people with intersectional identities surveyed in a 2021 study, over half of students with a disability (56.7%), from a multicultural background (51.8%), and from rural/remote areas (57%) reported feeling unsafe at school due to their sexuality or gender identity (4). Research from the Foundation for Young Australians suggests young people are also most likely to experience racism and racial discrimination within a school setting, with over 40% of ethnically diverse and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people reporting experiences of discrimination from their peers - further compounding their risk of receiving at least one form of discrimination or both concurrently (3, 10).

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander LGBTIQ+ young people participating in the Breaking the Silence report cited visible markers of LGBTIQ+ inclusion – such as flags, posters, pins, etc – and an incorporation of specific indicators for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander queer young people in particular as ways to foster inclusion and ensure their safety and wellbeing (11). This is further supported by a Walkern Katatdjin report that also stressed the importance of increasing service outreach to schools for LGBTIQ+ Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people to have better awareness of and access to safe and supportive services (12).

Studies undertaken on the experiences of disabled LGBTIQ+ young people in school also provide evidence on the effects of intersecting forms of discrimination. While 21% of young people cited having been discriminated against because of their disability, a separate study marked consistently higher levels of dissatisfaction in schooling and feelings of unsafety among LGBTIQ+ students with a disability compared to their LGBTIQ+ peers without a disability (16,4).

Students perform better in supportive, affirmative and inclusive school environments

A common theme found amongst studies documenting LGBTIQ+ student wellbeing is the lack of school support in the face of discrimination. Students' ability to perform academically, feel accepted by their peers, and have better overall mental health were tied to the level of positivity, inclusion and support offered by their school (1). Linkages between mental ill health for LGBTIQ+ young people and educational institutions are

further buoyed by stories from young people in unsafe and invalidating schooling environments. Young people are often in schooling environments where they are frequently exposed to discriminatory language and negative views on LGBTIQA+ issues, with approximately 78% of teachers and students in one study hearing discriminatory remarks about LGBTIQA+ people within a school setting on a regular basis (1). In another study completed the following year, 93% of students reported hearing homophobic language in a school setting and 37% cited this as a daily occurrence (2).

Though the rates of students being exposed to discriminatory language at school were alarmingly high, studies have shown that feelings of connectedness and confidence that would otherwise be damaged by exposure to discriminatory remarks are bolstered when staff intervene in the use of such language (3). Students attending an educational institution with explicit mention of LGBTIQA+ discrimination and protections within their bullying and harassment policies are more likely to see intervention by the school and/or staff in instances of harassment and discrimination (2). Studies have shown a strong correlation between LGBTIQA+ students wellbeing and perceived policy protections against discrimination (7). However, most students are not aware of their schools bullying and harassment policies – with nearly 58% of students attending catholic school citing a complete absence of an inclusive harassment policy (2). According to Jones (2023), religious schools are also significantly less likely to have discrimination and bullying policies in place that protect LGBTIQA+ young people compared to public schools (19.8% compared to 37.6%)(31).

Conversely, the absence of positive language and a lack of LGBTIQA+ visibility within the school curriculum contribute to feelings of isolation and invisibility – feelings that can be counteracted by schools and teaching staff who make proactive efforts to foster an inclusive, affirmative school environment. Nationwide, only 13.7% of LGBTIQA+ young people in secondary school said that LGBTIQA+ people were mentioned in a positive way within their curriculum (4). This lack of visibility and support is, for many students, a direct contributing factor to their ability to remain within school - where trans and gender diverse students are four times more likely to leave school when there is an absence of supportive teachers willing to address discrimination (8). Schools may also choose to celebrate or mark LGBTIQA+ visibility days or other

occasions (such as Pride Month or Trans Day of Visibility) as a way to signal inclusivity. However, for the most popular LGBTIQA+ day among schools - Wear It Purple - only around half (51.1%) of public schools commemorate the day, while a drastically lower percentage of religious schools (9.7%) also choose to celebrate (31). Evidence from other schools in Australia - both religious and secular - show the key role school-endorsed queer spaces, affirmative policies, and supportive staff play in the wellbeing of LGBTIQA+ students (13). By fostering an inclusive environment through school policy schools are able to ensure students have adequate supports that affirm and celebrate their LGBTIQA+ identities.

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Conversely, the absence of positive language and a lack of LGBTIQA+ visibility within the school curriculum can contribute to feelings of isolation and invisibility – feelings that can be reversed by schools and teaching staff who make proactive efforts to foster an inclusive, affirmative school environment. Nationwide, only 13.7% of LGBTIQA+ young people in secondary school said that LGBTIQA+ people were mentioned in a positive way within their curriculum (4). This lack of visibility and support is, for many students, a direct contributing factor to their ability to remain within school - where LGBTIQA+ students are four times more likely to leave school when there is an absence of supportive teachers willing to address discrimination (8).



Frameworks around LGBTIQA+ Inclusion

What the law says

LGBTIQA+ young people have the right to access education in public institutions without discrimination, and schools have a legal duty of care to reasonably ensure the safety of all their students, including LGBTIQA+ students (17, 18).

Under international law, LGBTIQA+ young people are protected under the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) which protects all children from discrimination (19). In Western Australian schools, LGBTIQA+ young people have limited protection under the national Sex Discrimination Act 1984 (Cth) and Equal Opportunity Act 1984 (WA). Protections under these laws include protections against being expelled from, or refused admission to, a school, being denied access to school benefits, and other detriments and disadvantages based on sexual orientation and/or gender identity (20, 21). Currently, both the Sex Discrimination Act 1984 (Cth) and the Equal Opportunity Act 1984 (WA) do not fully protect LGBTIQA+ students from discrimination in private religious schools due to exemptions under these acts.

Single-sex/gender schools

A key difference between public and private schools is the provision of single-sex/gender schools. All single-sex/gender schools in WA are made up of only private and/or religious schools. At present, there are no single-sex/gender public schools in Western Australia (22). Given this, transgender and gender diverse students are less likely to be discriminated against for admission into a public school – as all public schools are co-educational. The same can not be said for private schools, which pose a bigger issue for trans and gender diverse students as protections under the Sex Discrimination Act 1984 (Cth) exempt schools from ‘accommodating’ students in single-sex schools (23). This accommodation can look like a broad range of ideas – from refusing to use a student’s pronouns (24), or even as far as expelling a trans student (25). Therefore, legally, LGBTIQA+ high school students are more likely to have their rights enforced when attending public schools compared to private due to the low probability of these exemptions applying to their situation.

Religious exemptions

Out of approximately 111 registered private high schools in WA, 98 are considered religious or religion-affiliated (26). Because both religious freedoms and protections for LGBTIQA+ students exist almost in competition with each other under the same International Conventions, state, and federal laws, discrimination is more likely to be permitted and not deemed unlawful against queer students in religious institutions, if it is for the purpose of protecting or furthering religious belief (21). In practical application, students attending a private religious school and being taught religious tenets that contain what would be considered to be discriminatory views on the LGBTIQA+ community would be lawfully permissible under these exemptions. Additionally, schools under Christian/Catholic organisation have been outspoken of their favoured amendments in both the Sex Discrimination Act 1984 (Cth) and Equal Opportunity Act 1984 (WA). This includes resistance to prohibiting conversion practices - a specific definition of which is considered by the Australian Associated of Christian Schools (AACS) to be a form of religious or spiritual assistance that should be afforded to everyone (27).

As it stands, there are very few regulations in place to protect young people from discrimination in religious educational settings. The existence of religious exemptions in both the Sex Discrimination Act 1984 (Cth) and Equal Opportunity Act 1984 (WA) do not prioritise the safety and wellbeing of LGBTIQA+ young people in religious schools, and there is a vagueness in the law where religious interest is prioritised and protected first. Because of this, queer students attending religious and/or private schools are at significant risk of discrimination, with their schools less willing to provide them protection. Unfortunately, some religious schools have also been outspoken of their favoured amendments to anti-discrimination laws, and this ‘advocacy’ in combination with existing exemptions contributes to the continued enabling of discrimination against LGBTIQA+ students.

Inclusive teaching and school standards (AITSL)

The Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) Australian Professional Standards for Teachers is a set of seven national standards that provides guidelines for teachers on teaching quality and expected educational outcomes. These underpin the Professional Standards for Teaching in Western

Australia to inform the work of teachers across the state. Key focus areas contained within these standards have been provided as a supplemental resource throughout this report in order to demonstrate the minimum standard of quality of education expected to be delivered by schools.

Whilst these standards are not specific to LGBTIQ+ young people, in 2014 the WA Equal Opportunity Commission published the Guidelines for Supporting Sexual and Gender Diversity in Schools (28), which is a non-legal document intended to assist schools, in both public and private education to effectively address discrimination and bullying specific to sexuality and gender diversity. The guidelines do this by encapsulating key information for schools on best practice that enables all students to feel safe and included in their school communities. This includes a focus on school leadership and staff capacity building to foster a safe and affirming environment across staff, students, curriculum, school policies and processes, and overall school culture and attitudes.

In addition to this, in 2019 the Australian Government published the Australian Student Wellbeing Framework which is aimed at providing Australian schools with a set of guiding principles to support school communities to build positive learning environments, and to consider reviewing their current safety and wellbeing policies and support requirements (29).

These guiding principles are:

1

LEADERSHIP

Principals and school leaders play an active role in building a positive learning environment where the whole school community feels included, connected, safe and respected.

2

INCLUSION

All members of the school community are active participants in building a welcoming school culture that values, diversity, and fosters positive, respectful relationships.

3

STUDENT VOICE

Students are active participants in their own learning and wellbeing, feel connected and use their social and emotional skills to be respectful, resilient and safe.

4

PARTNERSHIPS

Families and communities collaborate as partners with the school to support student learning, safety and wellbeing.

5

SUPPORT

School staff, students and families share and cultivate an understanding of wellbeing and support for positive behaviour and how this supports effective teaching and learning.

All Australian State, Territory and Federal Ministers of Education endorsed the framework, including input from all states and territories, education authorities and a range of national and international experts. Despite this extensive commitment to the Framework, it is currently not supported by any specifically funded national implementation policy, and it is unclear how the framework is being used across Australian schools (30).

The AITSL Standards, Wellbeing Guidelines and Student Wellbeing Framework all provide expectations to schools on creating supportive and inclusive environments that adhere to their legal obligations to student wellbeing. However, for LGBTIQ+ students, particularly with complications provided by legal exemptions within anti discrimination laws, the commitment to their safety and wellbeing varies in its application across schools.

Student Wellbeing

LGBTIQA+ young people face significant discrimination, bullying, and bigotry in educational settings from both peers and staff.

Nationally, studies have shown that 80% of homophobic discrimination happens within schools, often with serious effects on student safety and wellbeing (32). This section highlights the specific experiences of LGBTIQA+ young people experiencing bullying and discrimination in high school. This includes experiences within private religious educational institutions, which is discussed in more depth at a later section in this report.

Bullying & Discrimination from **other Students**

Young people described being excluded, called slurs, sexually harassed or assaulted, and physically abused by other students.

14%

of student respondents had experienced physical violence from other students.

21%

of students had been sexually assaulted or harassed due to their LGBTIQ+ identity.

67%

of respondents had been called a slur or another name at school.

39%

of students had experienced exclusion due to their LGBTIQ+ identity.

Physical and sexual violence

LGBTIQ+ young people reported many instances in which they faced physical or sexual violence from their peers. 14% of student respondents said they had experienced physical violence from other students. Students described having items such as chairs and soccer balls thrown or kicked at them, being spat at or sprayed with water, and having their property damaged by other students. One young person also described having rocks thrown at them by other students. Others reported being 'bashed' or having death threats sent to them. Many described this physical violence as being accompanied by homophobic slurs, name-calling, and other forms of bullying.

21% of students had been sexually assaulted or harassed due to their LGBTIQ+ identity. Particularly trans students had experienced other students touching their chest or genitals, or being asked questions about their genitals as a form of harassment.

"I experience a lot of homophobia at my school, some days it's name calling, slurs, getting spat at, and even people tried to rip the pride pins off of my bag."

- Student

"I was screamed at our of bathrooms Instagram hate pages were made out of me I was often called slurs Boys would ask extremely sexually invasive question I was once mobbed and bashed after being accused of having a crush on someone I attempted to start an LGBT support group in later years and was denied multiple times"

- Student

“Sexually harassed when I use either bathroom (no neutral bathroom options), had my deadname with slurs graffitied on walls, shoved against lockers/walls/pillars/desks, had chairs thrown at me, threaten with death threats”

- Student

For trans and gender diverse students, bathrooms are a place where they are particularly at risk of experiencing violence from other students. Students described having their bathroom use scrutinised, being screamed at and attacked in bathrooms and having things thrown at them or students ‘banging on the toilet stalls’. Some students noted they moved schools because of this violent behaviour. Comparatively 9% of students did not report any instances of bullying at their school with a handful of students outlining their experience has been positive or neutral.

Name calling/slurs

67% of respondents had been called a slur or another name at school. Individual responses outlined experiences of being harassed, called names and targeted by other students. This included being screamed at, having slurs yelled at them, or having other students spread rumours or whisper about them in class. For some their mental health issues, suicide ideation and self-harm also became the target of bullying and harassment, including jokes about these behaviours.

63% of respondents had been asked invasive questions about their identity, such as asking trans students ‘whether they were a boy or a girl’ or asking students invasive questions around other students as a way of belittling them. Students described being teased or questioned about their identity by peers who had little knowledge or understanding of LGBTIQ+ identities, leading to feelings of distress. This included other students assuming and implying they were by default attracted to their friends or other peers, or, in the case of one asexual/aromantic student, insisting that they ‘haven’t found the right person’ yet and that their identity did not exist. When given the opportunity to learn more about LGBTIQ+ issues, one teacher described how there were negative reactions and opposition by some of the students.

49% had been bullied by an individual and 50% had been bullied by a group of students. A significant number of young people spoke of experiences of students using ‘gay’ as an insult or making offensive and derogatory ‘gay’ jokes. One student described their school culture as ‘strongly heteronormative’ and that they were uncomfortable in accepting their queer identity when these insults were made. Others noted slurs being used in casual conversation or their peers generally saying derogatory things about the LGBTIQ+ community, which made them feel unsafe in their school environment. For some students, this bullying occurred online with accounts set up to harass or mock them. Trans students in particular were deadnamed, misgendered or called derogative things like ‘it’ by other students, and in some instances did not stop even after teacher intervention.

Exclusion

39% of students had experienced exclusion due to their LGBTIQ+ identity. Students outlined losing friends after coming out or being left out of their friend group. Their friends also often didn’t want to talk about their LGBTIQ+ identity and generally students would avoid other students when they knew about their LGBTIQ+ identity. One student described that when they started dating another queer student, they lost respect from their peers

Students detailed feelings of loneliness and isolation associated with feeling ‘not human’ or ‘different’ from their peers. Some described feeling dehumanised or confused due to the exclusion. Isolation from friend groups was also coupled with further verbal abuse for some queer students.

"asked me about my genitals, shoved me, asked that i send dick pics to prove that i am a boy"

- Student

"Not direct bullying towards specific student but it is very common for students to say "that's so gay" or use being gay as an insult to each other. I was surprised at the negative reaction of many students when I shared information about IDAHOBIT - there were a couple of stand out comments such as "I don't want to learn about this shit"

- Teacher

"The complete ignorance of difference made them feel like they dont matter, some student used to tell them to 'kill themselves' and of course she tried a few times :("

- Parent/Carer

"Most notable is the occurrence when certain students don't want to sit near or work with others that they believe to be LGBTQIA+."

- Teacher

"was excluded from pretty much everything. isolated from other students with the general feeling that they didn't see me past my gender identity. had very few interactions with other students as they actively avoided me. was told by students directly that they didn't like me, that i'm going to hell amongst other things. was outed to everyone. was told i shouldn't be allowed to use any bathrooms multiple times. very dehumanising having them argue my rights in front of me as if i'm not a person. had some touch my boobs amongst other things. once expressed discomfort at being forced to dance with one bc of him groping my ass and i was told to "grow up and deal with it". was constantly misgendered and deadnamed."

- Student

"I have been called sick, disgusting and been left out of friend group just because of my sexuality and when I came out as Tran [sic] I was faced with a lot of transphobic comments and actions"

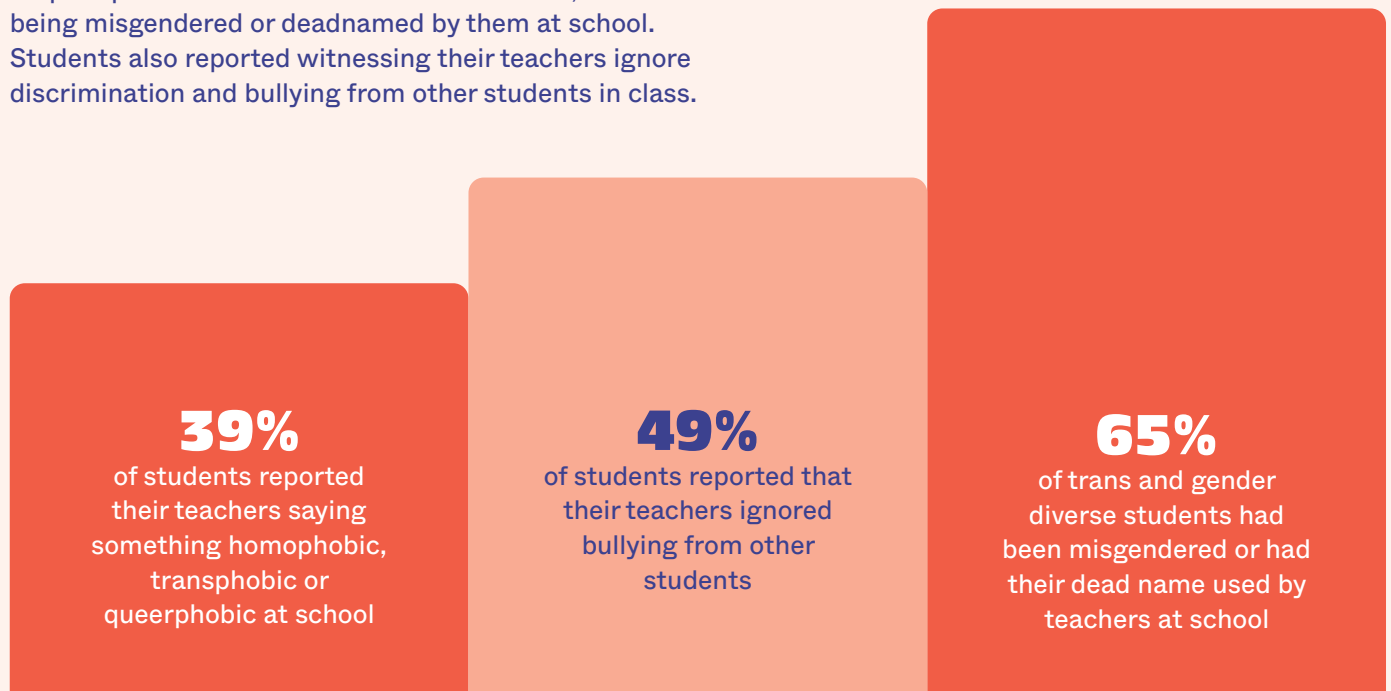
- Student

"My group of friends is very diverse and we are all part of the LGBTQIA community. There's another group of boys in our year. That have been constantly bullying us for two, maybe three years now. They call us slurs, and names and are repeatedly Homophobic and transphobic towards us. Just to get a laugh out of it. They've gone as far across the quad (While we're sitting at a table, not bothering them at all), come up to us and being aggressive, sit behind us in classes and talk loudly about 'how much they hate faggots' or ask questions like "Do you cut yourselves?" or "Wrist Reveal". All in all, they've made school a miserable unsafe place to be ourselves."

- Student

Discrimination & Bigotry from Teachers

Young people described hearing homophobic, transphobic or queerphobic comments from their teachers, and being misgendered or deadnamed by them at school. Students also reported witnessing their teachers ignore discrimination and bullying from other students in class.



Discrimination

39% of students reported their teachers saying something homophobic, transphobic or queerphobic at school. 37% reported a teacher providing bigoted education in class and 6% reported a teacher using a slur or another derogatory name for the community. Students described hearing teachers make offensive and derogatory jokes about the LGBTIQ+ community, and also use slurs in a joking context. Outside of the classroom, school staff rooms were cited by some teachers as points where homophobic jokes and 'close-minded' comments about LGBTIQ+ issues were discussed among staff. One teacher also described that other teachers also refused further education as they expressed that they 'don't need any help on this topic.'

"Teachers have said slurs as a joke and one teacher who was pro life said that if you had to abort only one twin, abort the one that would be gay"

- Student (hateful speech)

Misgendering

65% of trans and gender diverse students had been misgendered or had their deadname used by teachers at school. Students described teachers refusing to use preferred names, pronouns, misgendering students and deadnaming them - at times intentionally. Teacher respondents also noted that other teachers struggled to understand and adapt to new pronouns and that misgendering students was 'often unintentional' or by accident. Students were also misgendered in school activities, such as being placed in the wrong group during gender segregated sex-ed classes.

"Misgendering due to pleading 'it's too hard to keep up', deadnaming mostly by accident, some due to not being bothered to remember."

- Teacher

"many staff have had inappropriate conversations with students based on their religious feelings towards queer people. some staff members have actively deadnamed students"

- Teacher

One student recounted having their identity publicly weaponised against them by a teacher and their deadname used as a form of punishment. This included telling students their identities were wrong, or telling students that they were ‘pretending’ to be queer for ‘clout’. Some respondents noted that even when school administration accommodated LGBTIQ+ young people’s identities (such as using their preferred name on the class role), this was not always respected by teachers. One young person described their teacher refusing to use their name on the role and purposefully deadnaming them ‘because “it’s a sin to be trans”’. When confronting this discrimination, young people described being told not to ‘make it a big deal’ or that they were ‘overreacting’.

“We have had issues with teachers intentionally misgendering him and using his dead name. Once a teacher told me it wasn’t fair that the teacher couldn’t call the class ‘girls’ because it upset my child (who identifies as male) and that it was putting too much stress on teachers.”

- Parent/carer (misgendering, deadnaming, unwilling to accommodate)

Neutral experiences

20% of students did not report any negative experiences with teachers. Some respondents talked about having a select few teachers who were incredibly supportive and positive. Particularly, teachers who would use the student’s affirmed name and pronouns happily and without complaint. These teachers had a significant impact on students and made their school experience much better.

“There were also some brilliant queer and ally teachers who made things much better”

- Student

“I didn’t come out to any of my teachers until year 12, and then it was only to ask them to use my pronouns. I had only asked three teachers to do so, and the happily did, which I very much appreciate”

- Student

Classroom management and ignoring bullying

AITSL Standard 4: Create and maintain supportive safe learning environments

- Focus Area 4.2: Manage classroom activities
- Focus Area 4.3: Manage challenging behaviour
- Focus Area 4.3: Maintain student safety

49% of students reported that their teachers ignored bullying from other students. Many students reported teachers ignoring or pretending not to see the bullying. Some reported filing complaints against other students with no action taken, even over the course of years and irrespective of the seriousness of the complaint. In some instances, students would only report to teachers they had identified as safe for fear that ‘other teachers won’t take them seriously’. Some teachers would minimise the behaviour, treat it as ‘just a joke’ or told students to ignore the bullying as ‘all schools have bullies’ and they should ‘learn how to deal with it’. Some teachers blamed the students for being bullied because they chose to come out. Additionally, 4% of students reported teachers encouraging bullying from other students. One teacher noted that ‘teachers will allow bigoted language and discussion in the name of ‘equality’ and ‘open discussion’.

“Most teachers even if they were right next to you while the bullying was happening they wouldn’t car [sic] and would walk away”

- Student

“We have had multiple teachers ignore homophobia transphobia sexism and racism form [sic] multiple students because they are in sports teams of do well academically and multiple sexual assaults have gone infinite’s [sic] because they were same sex or on the sports teams.”

- Student

“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

Coming Out

Many young people chose not to come out at school due to the risk of discrimination

Only 35% of students stated they felt they could be 'out' at school. Many young people discussed choosing not to come out at school due to the risk of discrimination. Often these young people had observed their more openly queer friends experience bullying and harassment, including invasive questions, queerphobic comments, being excluded or threats of physical assault. 28% of students said they did not feel they could be out at school.

34% of students selected 'other' in response to being asked whether they could be out. For many of those students they reported they only felt they could be out to a small group of people - for example a small group of queer friends. Other students noted that they felt they could be out but only about certain parts of their identity, for example their sexuality but not their gender. For some they have attended multiple schools and felt safe at some and not others. Some students noted they had the option to come out however it was not safe for them to, or they would have been harassed. Other students were outed by their peers or it was 'obvious' that they were queer.

For students who were aware of their identity but did not feel they could be out at school this had significant implications for their ability to participate fully in their school communities.

"I am not out at my school, for a good reason, but that never stops the homophobic [sic] and transphobic comments that even come from my friends, it's always, "omg that's so gay" and "omg you so queer" and "omg why is there pride, no need to run [sic] it in our face." "Being gay is so wrong, I don't understand why people choose to do that" "trans men are women and trans women are men" I hug a friend and im called a lesbian. There have been accessions [sic] in my old school why I was followed around school and threatens [sic] to be beaten up because of who I am, so I moved and I refuse to tell anyone."

- Student

"I did not feel comfortable being out in high school, and the bullying culture actively discouraged students from exploring their identity."

- Student

"Queer students were highly marginalised by students and were singled out to be bullied. They were rarely bullied for their gender or sexuality explicitly, but were excluded on this basis and were harassed or bullied in any other form that wasn't directly slurs. I did not feel comfortable being out in high school, and the bullying culture actively discouraged students from exploring their identity."

- Student

"We do not have any 'out' students at my school. Being a Catholic boys school students do not feel safe to come out."

- Teacher

Intersectional Experiences

For many young people, their LGBTIQ+ identity intersects with one or more other identities.

3% of student respondents identified as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander

12% of student respondents were people of colour

28% of student respondents identified as having a disability

67% of respondents had a mental illness

Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander

AITSL Standard 1: Know students and how they learn

- Focus Area 1.4: Strategies for teaching Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Students
- Focus Area 2.4: Understand and respect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to promote reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians

Young people detailed experiencing both racism and queerphobia from peers, including feeling the need to hide parts of their LGBTIQ+ identity in order to feel accepted. had experienced microaggressions from within the LGBTIQ+ community.

"A lot of Indigenous people are homophobic, transphobic, queerphobic etc and to fit in there is a certain sense of conformity. In order for me to be accepted and feel secure in my ethnicity it is important for me to abstain from discussion of my identity. There is no representation for me because of how unique my identity is and that's ok."

- Student

EXISTING RESEARCH

Though there is a significant research gap on LGBTIQ+ Aboriginal young people's experiences, responses to this survey echo experiences found in existing research on their wellbeing within communities in WA and more broadly.

Most common amongst existing research was experiencing racism and queerphobia concurrently. The 2021 Breaking the Silence report found that a third of the young people said they felt 'invisible' in their communities due to their LGBTIQ+ identity, while over a third said they had not come out

to members of their communities (11). 40% also reported that they had faced microaggressions from within the LGBTIQ+ community. This is reflected by the experiences of one respondent to our survey:

"Yes. I have experience 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

In a separate report of the same year, interview and yarning group participants described fearing rejection from their community due to an expectation of queerphobia and a lack of visible LGBTIQ+ Aboriginal people (12). Additional data nationally has found four-fifths (79.2%) of LGBTIQ+ Aboriginal young people felt they had to educate non-indigenous LGBTIQ+ people about race and cultural issues (35).

Concerns of experiencing both homophobia and racism were also heightened when compounded with an intersection with mental illness. In the same national study, almost all (91.9%) participants were experiencing a high level of psychological distress, and nearly half (48.6%) had experiences with generalised anxiety (35).

One young person responding to our survey described how this experience influenced their feelings of safety at school:

"Well I have severe anxiety, so basically I'm worrying no matter what, it effects me because I'm always worried that someone is going to find out and tell everyone and I won't ever be able to be safe at that school again"

- Student

Person of Colour

Responses related to experiencing both racism and queerphobia at school, as well as having their LGBTIQ+ identity be undermined by their peers because of their race. This included hearing racist jokes and slurs, often from peers that also expressed homophobia.

This is reflective of existing research on multicultural LGBTIQ+ young people's experiences, where they may face racism, homophobia, disconnection from their community and family, and a compounded risk of mental ill health (15). Some young people described having their identity undermined made it difficult for them to 'speak out' on being LGBTIQ+, which had negative effects on self-perception and their mental health. Most commonly noted was students being perceived as 'less queer' than their white peers, or that they did not fit the 'standard' of what a queer young person should be.

"Probably, but unfortunately due to the nature of how these experiences, if this did occur, it was not done overtly. However, I am aware of the casual joke of being called "gaysian", not out of teasing or bullying, but more of a distasteful joke."

- Student

"Being a person of colour and also LGBTIQ+ makes it a lot harder to speak out being LGBTIQ+, and majority of queer people in my school are white so there will be different experiences. A lot of the homophobic students are also very racist, saying racist slurs as well."

- Student

"Mental illness is quite an obvious one — just the whole thing of questioning my identity, and having general anxiety amplified by clinical anxiety. And, being a person of colour who is also part of the LGBT+ community, it was definitely hard. Like, the "standard" or the "stereotype" for bi people that I saw were normally skinny, white, women; a demographic that I just didn't fit. When your representation in media is normally just for the sake of hitting multiple demographics at once, it kinda fucks with your perception of self."

- Student

Person with a disability

AITSL Focus area 1.6 Strategies to support full participation of students with disability

28% of student respondents identified as having a disability. These responses discussed navigating both ableism and queerphobia. This included being bullied for both of these identities, hearing ableist and homophobic slurs, or struggling with school because of ableist barriers which were compounded by struggles with their queerphobia. One young person described feeling they were not the 'more accepted' version of an LGBTIQ+ young person due to this intersection of their identity, which added to their distress. The discrimination students experienced on the basis of their disability often functioned concurrently or in tandem with discrimination against their LGBTIQ+ identity. As one student described:

"i have been mocked for my disabilities and mental illnesses in the same ways that i have been mocked for my trans and gay identity"

- Student

*"yes, i was called homophobic, transphobic and ableist slurs, usually all in the same sentence, calling me a *retreated *frag (you know the words i mean) and things along those lines, usually the word *retreated was used, but i got the occasional effed in the head *frag"*

- Student

One student also described witnessing ableism and homophobia in lesson content delivered by a teacher (quote below).

Some respondents noted that disabled and accessible bathrooms are often used as one of, if not the only, gender neutral bathrooms within their school. Use of these bathrooms was particularly challenging and distressing for students with a disability, as they would be subject to both queerphobic and ableist harassment from peers.

"Not directly. Though I remember a discussion where a Christian Education teacher said that queer people are often also disabled because God is punishing them (which makes absolutely no sense). I was super offended by this but wasn't comfortable enough to call it out"

- Student

"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

Person with mental illness

67% of respondents had identified they have some form of mental illness. This is significantly higher than the 39.4% of young people aged 16-24 who have a mental illness in Australia. Students talked about the fact their mental illness was caused by a result of the queerphobic bullying they experienced from both their peers and teachers. For other students that already had a mental illness that was made worse by the exclusion or bullying they experienced from both peers and teachers for being or coming out as LGBTIQ+. This included no longer being able to attend school due to discrimination, sustained depression and anxiety, and an increase in self-harm and suicide ideation.

Concerningly, many students reported that other students believed that their LGBTIQ+ identity was 'caused' by their mental illness. One student described being told that their sexuality was a result of their mental illness and needed to be 'fixed' by addressing their mental health. Other students were bullied because of their mental illness, self-harm behaviour or suicide ideation.

"Not directly, but the extra pressure and stress from being constantly scrutinised as not worthy or different (and the disassociation from myself by being constantly termed as and expected to be a gender that i was not) and the stress about having to hide my identity (from staff - bc you were not supposed to be fully 'out') resulted in my levels of self harm increasing"

- Student

"Yes, 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

"...It also became a target of bullying as my friends and I were told to do 'wrist reveals' by the bully's and told to kill ourselves when a noose was hung above our bag racks at school (no surprise again nothing was done about this), these people have known that we struggled and used it as a target..."

- Student

Curriculum and LGBTIQ+ Content

Students and teachers described a variety of experiences with learning and teaching LGBTIQ+ content in schools. While the curriculum for schools is determined by the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA), there is flexibility across states and territories, regions, and schools on how the content is delivered (33).

Nationally, very few young people have been taught LGBTIQ+ topics in a positive light - an experience that is further reflected by responses in this section.

Teaching **LGBTIQA+** topics in class

AITSL Standard 2: Know the content and how to teach it

Young people highlighted that LGBTIQA+ topics were rarely taught in a positive light, and most received discriminatory and non-inclusive education, or no reference at all to LGBTIQA+ topics.



Teaching inaccurate or bigoted material

Students reported that teachers would teach inappropriate or inaccurate things about the LGBTIQA+ community. Many students were taught incorrect information about queer people in health class, including transphobic narratives about 'two genders', using harmful or outdated terminology, or expressing disdain that they had to teach anything related to LGBTIQA+ people at all. Particularly, incorrect information about people with variations of sex characteristics (also known as intersex) was taught in health class. Some of these students were attending religious schools and were taught queerphobic religious precepts including that queer people should not have sex, get married or have children - this is discussed further in the chapter on religious schools.

Very commonly, students noted teachers were uncomfortable teaching these topics and that other students would yell slurs or say other derogatory things during these lessons, which teachers would not prevent or correct. Another common experience was having to 'debate' LGBTIQA+ communities and identities in class as a 'controversial current topic', including whether queer people should be allowed to get married or whether trans people are real. This was obviously distressing for LGBTIQA+ students in these classes. Additionally, many teachers openly expressed their own bigoted views about LGBTIQA+ people in class. Students also discussed being censored by their school when they tried to do presentations or school assignments on LGBTIQA+ identities, citing LGBTIQA+ topics as a 'sensitive issue'.

"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

"During health class, incorrect info about LGBTQ identities was taught to us. The teacher who "taught" us told us that she didn't want to teach us this but was being forced to and that she disagreed with it. She continually misgendered people in the textbook and in real life during those lessons, and did not preach acceptance, rather encouraged us to question whether we'd like to play sport / share locker rooms with trans students."

- Student

"The only thing I really remember that put me off from the teachers is one of them telling me that he "didn't really understand it". I was pretty miserable in most of my classes in my last year (year 12) and not a single teacher I had cared."

- Student

"Never in a positive manner. Many teachers lacked an understanding of the LGBTIQ+ community and would say detrimental things out of ignorance."

- Student

"We were asked to complete 'debates' in English and religion classes with topics suggested such as same sex marriage and whether being gay was a sin. These debates were not carried out respectfully, students took them as opportunities to be homophobic publicly and openly and play it off as good school work/ commuting to their debate side. "

- Student

"Some teachers avoid talking about LGBTQI+ topics simply because they aren't educated or comfortable with it."

- Teacher

Students also spoke of having many teachers that were generally ignorant around LGBTIQ+ issues, even when they didn't have animosity towards the community. This included not understanding or being able to adjust to support trans young people's pronouns and names, being uncomfortable around LGBTIQ+ topics or not knowing enough to support students even when they wanted to.

LGBTIQ+ topics not taught

Many young people mentioned that they never heard about LGBTIQ+ people in school. Alternatively, they heard about it in health class but the topic was only briefly addressed. Students acknowledged some teachers did not feel comfortable or educated enough in LGBTIQ+ topics to teach them, while others delivered content jokingly or were dismissive towards LGBTIQ+ topics and their relevance to lessons.

Lessons either contained very little LGBTIQ+ content or only content related to cisgendered people and heterosexuality, making some students feel as though they 'didn't exist'. In some instances, where information was provided this content did not extend beyond basic information on gay and lesbian relationships. At other times, LGBTIQ+ topics were only brought up as they related to other issues, such as the AIDS epidemic or marriage equality laws, or in classes such as history only when it was 'absolutely necessary'. This absence of information prompted some LGBTIQ+ teachers and students to raise the topics in class themselves, or to seek out education from alternative sources within the school, such as a school nurse.

Even in these situations where topics were dealt with briefly, respondents noted that other students still took the opportunity to say harmful, bigoted things during those lessons and were often not disciplined by teachers.

"By most teachers almost never. With some teachers (that were often queer themselves or politically active) its discussed a lot more but usually its other queer students that actually bring up queer characters in my experience."

- Student

"no - only mentioned once in sex ed in reference to anal sex, more as a joke than anything else"

- Student

"No, or they were deemed inappropriate or irrelevant. Students would often say homophobic things, make fun of queer kids. Teachers would turn a blind eye or barely address the severity of the discrimination."

- Student

Teaching accurate information about LGBTIQ+ communities

Students who reported positive experiences talked about being provided comprehensive information that was accurate and supportive of LGBTIQ+ identities and experiences. Some student respondents noted that when LGBTIQ+ identities were discussed in an accurate and positive way, other students were less likely to make derogatory remarks in class. Positive student experiences often included addressing current relevant events around the LGBTIQ+ community, for example discussing with teachers celebrities who had come out. It should be noted that only 6% of students had a positive experience being taught about LGBTIQ+ communities. students had a positive experience being taught about LGBTIQ+ communities.

"Yes, mostly factual dates and information about the history of the LGBTQUIA+ [sic] movement. Occasionally, the debate about the differences between scientific sex and then chosen genders."

- Student

"Health, My first time liking a guy it was just me and the teacher and he did every thing perfectly and I went on to really like this teacher and look up to them. Once i came out as non-binary they tried there [sic] best in using my proffered [sic] name and pro-nouns"

- Student

"we talked about different sexualities in health and no one said anything mean that day:)"

- Student

Teacher Knowledge on LGBTIQA+ issues

Teachers reported mixed levels of knowledge on LGBTIQA+ issues and perspectives on teaching LGBTIQA+ content. Most reported they had not been provided with Professional Development Opportunities relating to LGBTIQA+ students.

Teachers responding to the survey were asked to rate their own understanding of LGBTIQA+ issues:



This likely represents a bias in the sample with teachers already invested in the LGBTIQA+ community more likely to respond to a survey about supporting LGBTIQA+ students. This is reflected in other statistics in this sample. For example, 44% of teachers responding were part of the LGBTIQA+ community themselves. In promoting this survey on social media, some teachers expressed negative sentiment towards the survey, saying it was ‘irrelevant’ or ‘unnecessary’. It is unlikely that many teachers who hold negative attitudes towards LGBTIQA+ people filled out the survey and this should be taken into consideration when observing statistics around teacher practices.

"Most teachers want to support young people where ever they can but there is a lack of information to help them understand what is happening for the student to allow for deep empathy/support."

- Teacher

Teacher perspectives on teaching LGBTIQA+ subjects

44% of teachers reported that they did include LGBTIQA+ topics in their classroom. This included using texts about LGBTIQA+ people in english class, teaching about the contributions of LGBTIQA+ to their area of study, including LGBTIQA+ related

content in health class or teaching scientifically accurate content around sex, gender and sexuality in science class. For other teachers they did not teach anything specifically but tried to be inclusive in the ways they discussed people (e.g. using diverse pronouns) or making reference to same-gender couples. Several teachers noted that they were unsure as to their school's position on teaching LGBTIQA+ inclusive topics. As a result, they had decided not to ask for permission from their school.

"I just do it any way without my school knowing, such as giving a gender diversity 101 chat with my homeroom students for Trans Day of Visibility."

- Teacher

"Yes, study a text (film/novel/play/etc) that covers it as a social issue, diversity/inclusion of perspectives or write a response to stimulus including LGBTIQA+ content."

- Teacher

3% of teachers didn't think LGBTIQA+ content was relevant to their subject area (e.g. maths) and 5% were unsure as to their school's policy on teaching LGBTIQA+ content. For those unsure about the

relevancy of LGBTIQ+ content, there were concerns about the appropriate distribution of content being taught:

"Yes, but within the limits of what is relevant. Spending a large amount of time on this content for all students means we must spend less time on other issues. LGBTIQ+ are a minority in terms of student population, and so there can be an opposite effect when we spend a lot of teaching time on this. Wellbeing and positive relationships are universal and we should balance the curriculum with respect to this foundational area, whilst still provided some time to LGBTIQ+ issues"

- Teacher

15% of teachers did not include LGBTIQ+ topics in their teaching, and 32% of teachers left this question blank. For teachers who did respond some had not considered including LGBTIQ+ relevant content in their lessons. Others said they were not encouraged to include LGBTIQ+ content or would not be allowed to due to the religious philosophy of their school. Others had experienced resistance when they had appealed to their administration to get approval to teach LGBTIQ+ topics in school. Others had been overruled by their administration when they had tried to include LGBTIQ+ topics and texts.

"Not entirely. I would alter school materials & update the teaching in certain subjects to remove bigoted misinterpretations. However that was a long process to get to that & to addressing LGBTI+ students & their needs. It's still an uphill battle to get beyond that."

- Teacher

"We are told to be "apolitical" "

- Teacher

"A head teacher pulled a text on transgender matters because she felt it was "inappropriate" in its content. Specifically transgender matters were deemed not appropriate for students."

- Teacher

Teacher professional development on LGBTIQ+ issues

AITSL Standard 6: Engage in Professional Learning

- Focus Area 6.1: Identify and plan professional learning needs
- Focus Area 6.2: Engage in professional learning and improve practice
- Focus Area 6.3: Engage with colleagues and improve practice
- Focus Area 6.4: Apply professional learning and improve student learning

When asked whether they had been provided with Professional Development relating to LGBTIQ+ students, 74% of teacher respondents said they had not. Some teachers noted that staff had asked for the training and had been rejected by administration, or that they had never been offered training by the school. One teacher noted that having never received training from the school, they had gathered information on LGBTIQ+ inclusion themselves.

"No. And I know that another teacher in the school has petitioned the school to run PL related to LGBT+ and it's affect on students, and they were knocked back. "

- Teacher

"No, I'm [sic] undertaken it myself in the hopes of being able to train others and I've started a support group cause the homophobia at school is embarrassing"

- Teacher

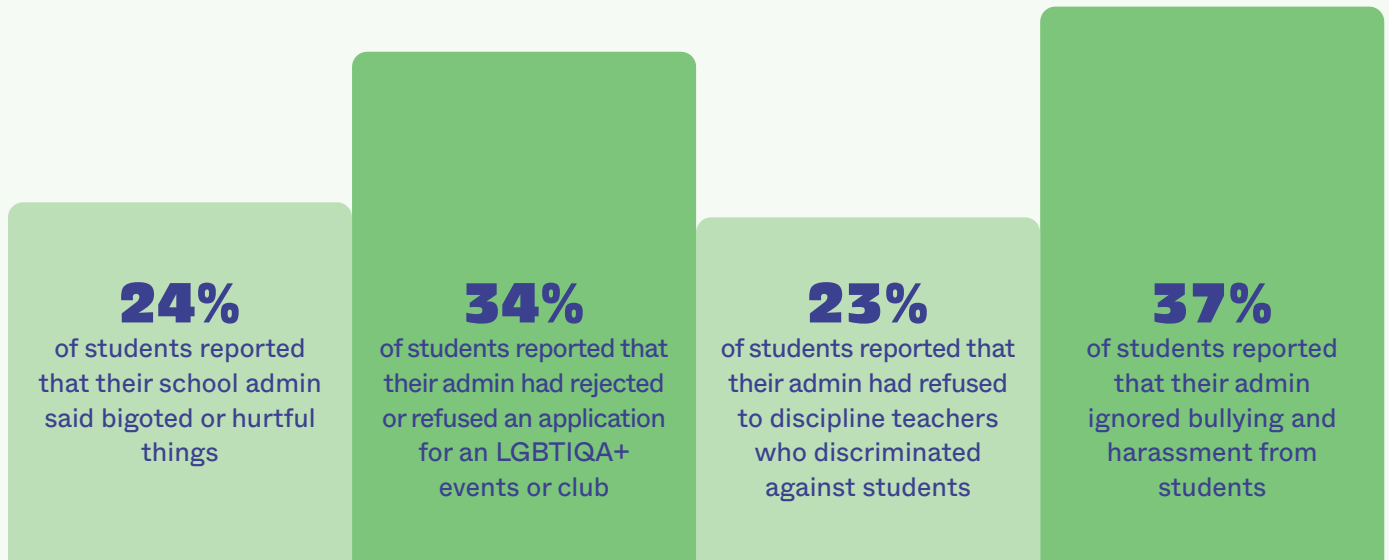
19% of teachers reported they had received some sort of training, however it was not comprehensive. This included the Education Department providing online training, a small section on LGBTIQ+ students included in mental health first aid training, or a guest speaker from an LGBTIQ+ student sharing their lived experience. 7% of teachers had received training they reported as excellent. This was primarily a dedicated professional development session provided by outside organisations with strong connection or relationships to the LGBTIQ+ community.

School Administration

Schools have an obligation to provide a safe learning environment for all students - obligations that school administrations play a pivotal role in meeting. For many LGBTIQ+ students and staff, school processes, policies, and practices delivered by administrative staff provide significant barriers to achieving this safety.

Experiences with School Administration

Many students, parents and teachers who responded to the survey reported witnessing their school administration carry out a range of discriminatory actions towards LGBTIQ+ students. Including refusing to address bullying and discrimination from other students, denying attempts to organise LGBTIQ+ inclusion initiatives and intentionally outing students.



Refusing to address bullying/discrimination

37% of students reported that their administration ignored bullying and harassment from students. Conversely 23% of students reported that their administration had refused to discipline teachers who discriminated against students.

Some students reported their administration denied bullying was occurring or did not act on reports that were made. Students reported being told that administration couldn't do anything about bullying, with some students told to 'stand up for themselves' or 'ignore the bullying'. One student reported that their school administration ignored emails from their parents about instances of bullying, then subsequently disciplined this young person when they stopped attending class due to fear of harassment. Some students were told that they needed to stop 'doing whatever was provoking the bullying' or that the administration couldn't do anything because the student was 'different'.

Additionally, 42% of students reported that their administration expected them to stand up for themselves to teachers or other students and that the school would take no action in support. This included expecting students to correct teachers who misgendered them, or students who were bullying them.

"There was a particular teacher (of many) who said many homophobic/transphobic and other inappropriate comments both in and out of class and the school made no real action to discipline them, despite there being many complaints from uncomfortable students (myself included)."

- Student

"I wore a suit to my Year 11 dance, one of 3 students to do so. Whilst the faculty was very ok with this, many parents weren't and said I should have worn something more "appropriate" (a dress). I received many calls from parents, some which were threatening, and when I brought it up to the school, the school teachers and admin staff said that it was out of their control and I had to deal with on my own as the issue "was something that didn't concern the school"."

- Student

"Only when contact with dept of education and warning that violence experienced by my sons would be reported to the police did the school take action to help them and try to understand."

- Parent/Carer

"Was told by head of year that I was not allowed to call trans student their name/pronouns, even after advocating extremely hard for why I would continue to do so. Catholic school head of religion quote overheard in class "homosexuals are lower than dogs". Colleagues that found out about my sexuality promoted the "don't ask don't tell" approach."

- Teacher

Refusing LGBTIQ+ inclusion initiatives

34% of students reported that their school administration had rejected or refused an application for an LGBTIQ+ event or club. This included refusing to recognise important days such as International Day Against Homophobia, Biphobia, Intersexism and Transphobia (IDAHOBIT), while recognising other days such as Harmony Day. Other students had the name of their clubs rejected or amended by administration if it referenced the need to keep students 'safe'. School staff also noted that they faced barriers to implementing LGBTIQ+ student support groups from leadership and administration.

19% of students attended a school where they refused to allow same-gender partners to attend school social events together (e.g. balls). Students discussed being forced to have mandatory meetings with senior staff, school psychologists or fulfill other red tape, in order to bring a partner of the same gender.

"Even in my school's pride club, they reject ideas for spreading LGBTQ+ awareness and having events by saying that they don't want to attract negative attention from parents or 'force' LGBTQ+ themes on other students."

- Student

"I have requested PL be provided for teachers on the topic many times, but it has not happened. I am concerned about some of the homo- and transphobic comments made by staff. Year 12 councillors have tried to organise support for events (such as wear it purple day) but have been told that it's "too controversial". We have an increasing amount of queer and questioning students who I am concerned about."

- Teacher

Discrimination from administrative staff

24% of students reported that their school administration said bigoted or hurtful things directly to both teachers and students. This included firing teachers for their LGBTIQ+ identities, interfering with students in same sex relationships or pastoral staff telling students their identity was 'just a phase'.

"A teacher was fired after telling students about their recent engagement to a same sex partner. Unclear if they left due to bullying by other teachers or if they were asked to leave due to religious values."

- Students

"My school is same sex and is homophobic, there was obviously queer people and queer couples in the school like anyone else. I have seen some not even open couples get call to the heads of school and being told to break up and that it's not ok for them to be together on school grounds."

- Students

"Schools out LGBTIQ+ issues in the "too hard basket" and dismiss students experiences as just a "phase"

- Teacher

10% of students also reported being 'outed' to their family by school administration. This was done without the consent of the students and therefore putting them at risk. This was sometimes done with intentions that were not malicious but ignorant of the danger and harm this could cause the student as well as denying the student their right to choose who they share their identity with.

"I was very close with my school nurse, she was my support system and was worried about my mental health so she brought my mum in (without my knowledge of it) and told my mum that I'm trans."

- Student

Positive experiences

28% of students did not report any negative experiences with school administration. This likely represents a mix of purely positive examples and situations in which the respondent had no significant interaction with school administration. Students who outlined positive experiences noted feeling that their school 'really cared' about them. This included accepting and supportive school psychologists. These also include instances where schools supported students to change their names or transition/affirm their gender. For some, this support was variable. One student noted that there was often a diversity of opinion among teachers, where they had 'people who worked very hard to support queer students, while others worked very hard to do the opposite'.

Parents and carers were more likely to report having a positive experience with school administration, however a significant number of parents weren't sure if their child had a positive experience. This suggests that schools are more responsive when parents are actively advocating for their child. Those that did have a positive experience described school administration being receptive and accommodating to their needs and suggestions, such as changing the login details for students to their preferred name. Some parents also mentioned the administration staff made an active effort to check in on the wellbeing of their child. Others did note that some changes were hindered by what they were told were required processes in place by the Department of Education. Or by the lack of understanding of LGBTIQ+ issues by administrative staff.

"The school support staff are extremely accepting of LGBTIQ+ students and issues, I haven't dealt with them much as I'm still closeted but when talking to them about other issues they've been really helpful."

- Student

Teacher perspectives on support from school administration

56% of teachers said they felt safe and supported by their school faculty to support LGBTIQ+ students and teach inclusive subjects in class. Many teachers stated that whilst they felt supported there is more that could be done by the school, such as more in-depth training, increased awareness on LGBTIQ+ issues, or a move towards a whole of school approach to supporting LGBTIQ+ students.

22% said they felt they were only partially supported. Some staff said they felt that they would be supported by some staff in their school but not others. In one instance, a teacher described being reported by a librarian for ordering LGBTIQ+ books for the school, but being supported by a senior staff member that encouraged them to continue purchasing the books. Other staff said they felt safe to do so but not supported by their school.

"Some faculty are supportive and the executive are supportive. However some classroom teachers aren't active in challenging homophobic or transphobic remarks made in their presence (as reported by students). I am not comfortable openly discussing my gender diversity with most teachers at school as many teachers have said they "don't get it" and expressed negative feelings on the topic during discussion of Wear It Purple Day."

- Teacher

20% of teachers said they do not feel safe or supported to discuss LGBTIQ+ topics. The remaining teachers were unsure, indicating they likely hadn't considered teaching LGBTIQ+ content or were unsure as to the stance of their school.

"We had to actively fight against the school administration and conservative school board for permission to establish a club for LGBTIQ+ students. We were not allowed to refer to it as a support group."

- Teacher

"NOT AT ALL"

- Teacher

Administration/Policy - Gender Affirmation

Students reported mixed experiences of being able to affirm their gender at school. At times, when the option for affirmation was available, barriers such as parental permission made changes more difficult. For some students, they were able to have their gender affirmed in one way but not others.

28%

of students reported that their school refused to affirm their gender

37%

of students said they had the ability to affirm their gender at school

73%

of teachers said that students were able to affirm their gender at their school

Experiences of affirming gender

37% of students said they had the ability to affirm their gender at school. This included being able to update their name on the roll without a legal name change, being able to wear the school uniform that affirmed their gender, and being able to use the bathroom (including a gender neutral option) that affirmed their gender.

Student respondents raised that they had issues when a name change on the roll required a legal name change and/or parental consent, as well as when they could not choose what uniform they wanted to wear. Additionally, many non-binary students noted that gender-neutral bathrooms (normally a wheelchair accessible toilet) was often locked, which required special access from teachers. For some students who used a gender neutral toilet, it was in an obscure spot on campus, which meant it took them a long time to get there from their class. One student mentioned that they got in trouble for taking so long to go to the toilet when it was across campus. Additionally, parents noted that even when they were able to successfully direct the school to use their child's affirmed name in roll call, this wasn't always passed on to relief teachers. In some instances resulting in the student being outed by these teachers or marked absent if they didn't respond to a deadname to avoid this occurring.

Parents and carers also noted that if there was information on the student's name or pronouns provided to teachers and the teachers refused or did not use these. Administration would sometimes be hesitant to address this with teachers and utilise their authority to ensure proper use of names and/or pronouns for students. Parents and carers reported that administration would expect the student to correct the teacher themselves. Something that many students were unwilling to do, at risk of bringing more attention and scrutiny to themselves from their peers. Additionally, this approach ignored the harm to

"In my experience, a meeting needs to be held with parents/caregivers before a student's name will be changed on the roll. This has been distressing for these individuals. In some cases, we have been able to negotiate with school administrators that the young person is able to change their name informally. This is still distressing, as relief teachers or those whom have not had training/understanding are referring to transgender young people by their dead/birth name."

- Teacher

mental health and wellbeing caused by continuously having to self-advocate and resist microaggressions.

73% of teachers said that students were able to affirm their gender at their school in some way. This is much higher than the percentage reported by students. This likely represents either a sample bias in our teacher respondents, individual teachers' inclusive practice not being reflected across other respondent experiences, or an example of policy being in place but that policy not being understood or accessible to students in practice. For example, around 40% of teachers noted that parental permission was required, which would be inaccessible for many students. Teachers who provided more information on how their school supported students to affirm their gender mostly noted the ability to change names on the roll while only a few noted the ability to use non-gendered bathrooms, and/or be able to adapt their physical education classes or uniforms. Providing these supports for students allowed many to feel more comfortable at school, with one student describing how wearing the 'boys' uniform and having their preferred name and pronouns used made 'being out at school less painful'. This also seems to indicate that there is no consistent approach to supporting students with transition across the education system. Resulting in students and parents having to advocate for themselves.

"yes, we have our first non binary student and so we don't have head boy and head girl we instead have school prefects"

- Teacher

"I know that I have the chance to wear whatever uniform I want, and have access to unisex bathrooms, and a support group if needed and I am very grateful for that and it does make me feel a lot safer at school."

- Student

"1) Removing all safe space posters around the school. 2) Although allowing the Pride flag to fly one day, it was done by replacing the only indigenous flag, despite having 3x Australian flags. This made the LGBTIQ+ students a target due to the indigenous flag being removed."

- Parent/Carer

Refusal to affirm gender

28% of students reported that their school actively and continuously refused to affirm their gender. This included staff refusing to update their pronouns or name on administrative documents, refusing to let them use an alternative uniform, or refusing to allow them to use a gender neutral toilet. These actions were more difficult to pursue when school administrations 'made a huge fuss' about students attempting to make the changes. One student described being able to change their name, but not being able to use the appropriate bathroom.

"The school refused to refer to a student by their preferred name and pronouns so they [the student] just left"

- Teacher

"I was forced to wear thick wool winter pants on 40 degree days because my only other option for uniform was a school dress- shorts were not an option but I was told 'girls' shorts would not be implemented until after I had graduated, and I wasn't allowed to wear boys shorts."

- Student

"Being an all-boys school, it was simply not an option to come out as trans. Every single one of my trans friends either moved schools or graduated before they felt comfortable coming out."

- Student

Students also reported not being allowed chosen names on leavers jackets, or being sorted into the wrong gender when students were split into gendered groups. Additionally, non-binary students reported not being accommodated when students were split into gendered groups. Some students described being unable to take same-sex partners to school events, or being excluded altogether from sporting events after coming out.

Students bullying LGBTIQA+ Teachers

While not the focus of specific questioning, LGBTIQA+ teachers noted experiences where they had been the subject of bigoted comments from students.

In situations where they had faced bullying from students, teachers often felt they were unsupported by the school to assert their identity or challenge these students. Particularly, these teachers found it difficult to support LGBTIQA+ students when they themselves didn't feel supported in their own identities.

"I feel unable to be myself in a school environment, however I desire to be a support individual for students who are part of the queer community. I struggle to balance both of these or find opportunities for my voice to be heard in a way that is comfortable for me."

- Teacher

Providing this support was also difficult if being vocally supportive would make them the subject of further targeting and abuse.

One teacher described that they only 'lasted in the school system for 2 years' before they had to leave given they 'could not sustain a career that did not support my identity or allow me to advocate for my students in the way I wanted'. Some teachers had also been outed to the school by students. One teacher respondent described this experience:

"There is certainly not enough education for staff regarding these issues. I am not publicly out to students as I genuinely feel as if it would impact my credibility and relationships with many students. I was somehow outed by a student last year in front of a class and was really hurt and upset. This student somehow saw me around our small town with my girlfriend and weaponised this information against me because he had a detention. Other staff were empathetic but had no clue how to adequately support me - one staff member compared being outed to having a student know her car's number plate (one is slightly more traumatising than the other lol). If staff cannot support other adults with issues relating to their sexuality, how can they support students? There needs to be significantly more mandatory education and regular PD for staff."

- Teacher

"There was once bullying by two students towards a teacher after he left his job on social media. It was dealt with by the school, but I don't think the teacher was satisfied with the response."

- Teacher

Religious Schools

Current exemptions within the national Sex Discrimination Act 1984 (Cth) and Equal Opportunity Act 1984 (WA) put LGBTIQ+ students and staff at religious schools at increased risk of discrimination.

Nationally, studies have shown religious schools to be the most likely place for LGBTIQ+ young people to receive harmful anti-LGBTIQ+ and SOGIECE messaging than any other setting (such as public schools, work, home, or a religious setting)(31).

Experiences with Religious Schools

Students described being frequently exposed to classroom debates on their identities, bigoted attitudes toward LGBTIQ+ topics in religion classes and subject to elements of conversion ideology.

Only 12%

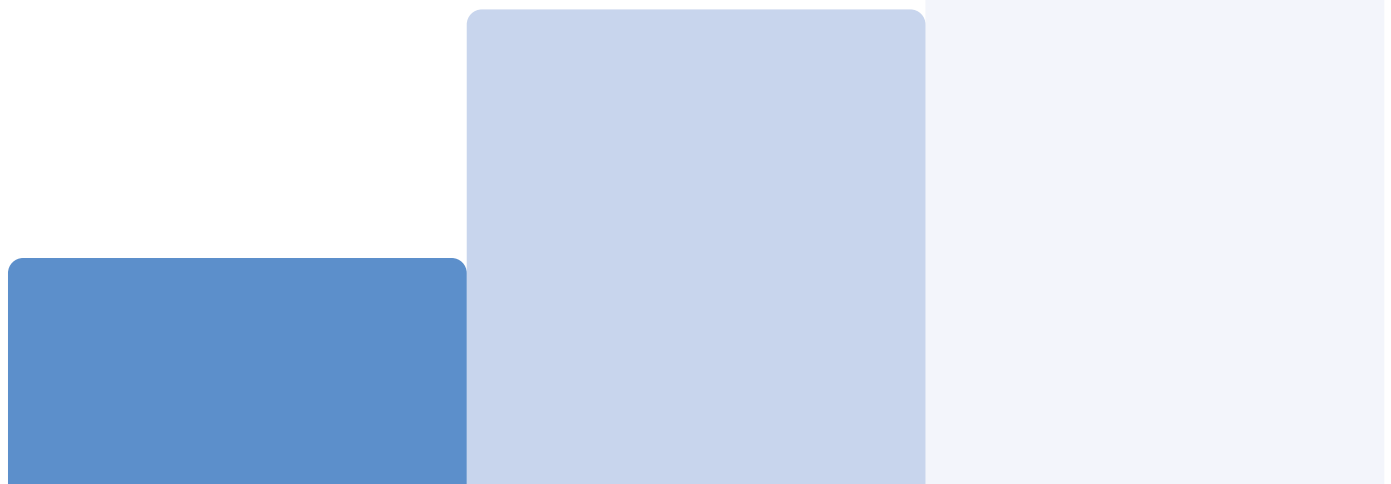
of students said they had a positive experience at their religious school

25%

of students said they had never had their identity affirmed by faith leaders in their school

72%

of students from religious schools said they had to 'debate' LGBTIQ+ identities in religion classes



	Anglican	Baptist	Catholic	Christian (non-denominational or not specified)	Uniting Church	Non-Christian*	Blank
Students	43 (45%)	4 (4%)	32 (34%)	10 (11%)	3 (3%)	1 (1%)	2 (2%)
Teachers	12 (34%)		16 (45%)	1 (3%)	4 (11%)	1 (3%)	1 (3%)

***Note:** As there is only 1 school related to each non-christian religion in WA, disclosing this would make apparent the school this individual attended and so we have corroborated this in order to protect their identity.

Conversion ideology

Conversion practices are driven by a set of interconnected assertions that together form conversion ideology. As is noted in existing research on this topic, as conversion practices are often subtle, difficult to recognise and diverse it is important to better understand and identify this ideology. Though the ideology itself is not definitive evidence that practices are occurring, it is an indication that young people in these faith communities are vulnerable to conversion practices both in school and outside of school in their faith community. It is also well known that the ideology and practice of conversion causes insidious and long-term damage to LGBTQA+ people.

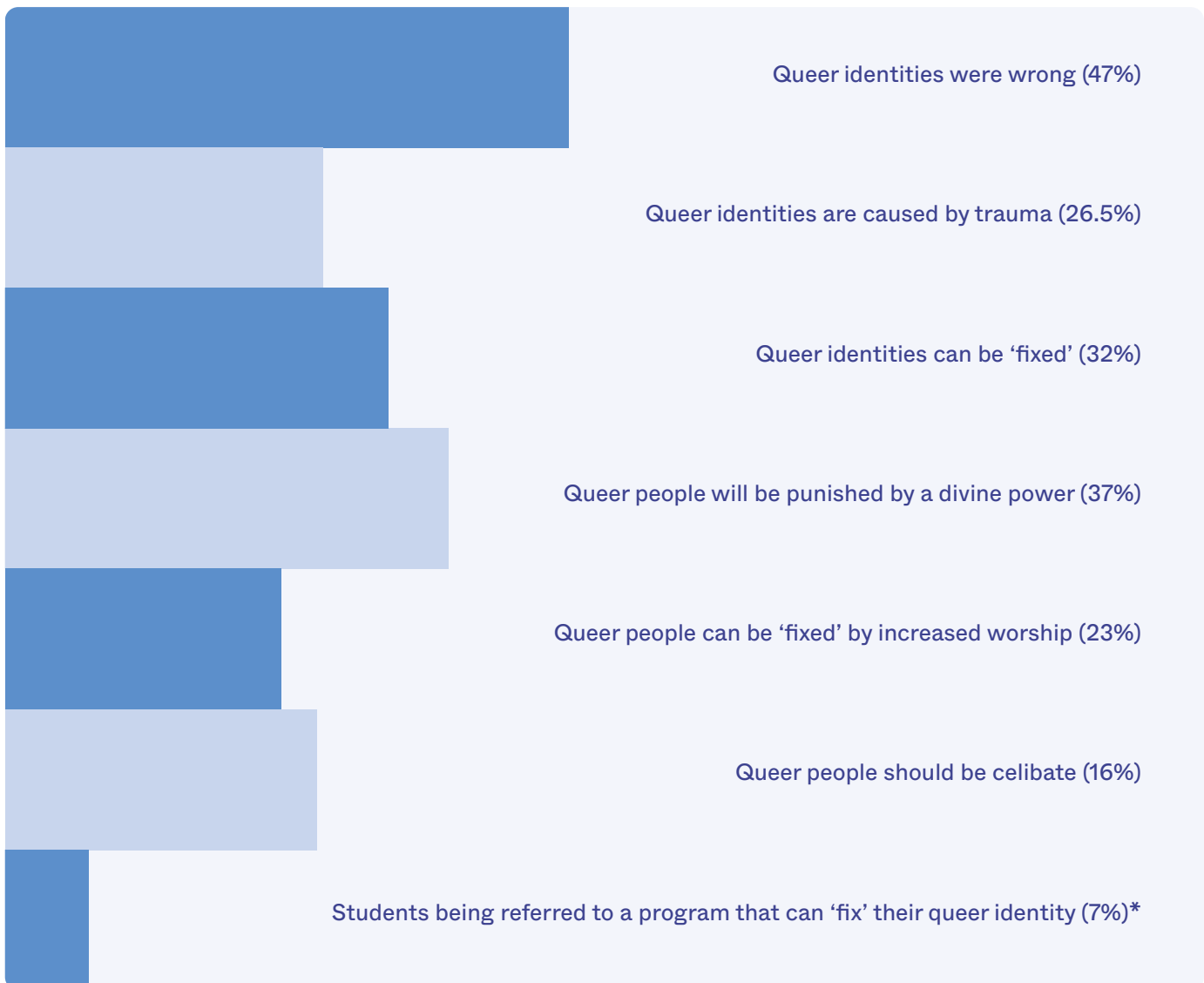
Students were asked whether they had been told any of the following components of conversion ideology:

"I never really "came out" whilst in school (only a few close friends were aware) because I had heard some of the above (ie lgbt+ is wrong) from religion classes and didn't want to deal with any more tension/trouble at school"

- Student

"They always went back to that we can't address it because we have to go along with Catholic teachings."

- Teacher



***Note:** it is likely that some students misunderstood this question as they subsequently referenced programs that affirmed their identity

Religion Classes

For students at religious schools, religious education classes were a particular point of focus for discriminatory beliefs. Teachers often used this as an opportunity to say that LGBTIQ+ people weren't 'morally right,' that queer people weren't fit to parent, that marriage was between a man and a woman and trans people are sinful. Students described hearing teachers promote such things as celibacy for gay people, that LGBTIQ+ people would not go to heaven or were 'going to hell,' that they were 'against catholic values' and that LGBTIQ+ identities were against God's creation. In one instance, a student reported that asexuality was described as 'abnormal' and 'inhuman.'

These classes were also used as a place to debate LGBTIQ+ issues, which made students feel incredibly distressed to have their identities and rights debated by their peers and teachers. Some noted that teachers facilitating these debates would take a position of neutrality, either playing 'devil's advocate' or advocating that 'everyone's voice should be heard.' 72% of students from religious schools noted that they had had to 'debate' LGBTIQ+ identities in religion classes.

"The religious booklet we use (Come Follow Me) mentioned that Christians stay as their birth gender as that is how God made them."

- Student

"Gay leaders were kicked out and 'discussions' were had to say that gay sex was a sin and acting on being gay was not okay and gay people should be celibate and that we couldn't support anyone gay who wasn't repentant"

- Student

"Due to the fact that I attend a religious school, teachers have used religion class as an excuse to share their beliefs against gay marriage and gay relationships. I no longer feel safe in my religion (and sometimes my school) because of this, and have recently stopped attending church because of some of these remarks."

- Student

"one teacher said being gay was a sin so I asked "then why did god make the gays?" And she said "he didn't the devil did"."

- Student

"Occasionally LGBTQIA+ people were brought up in religion class when discussing vocation- a big part of vocation that we were taught is that God calls us to get married and have kids. Some people would raise the question of 'what about people that aren't straight' and this would usually stem into a long conversation about how God made man and women for each other, that queerness is a sin, all the examples from the bible, and so forth, usually ending with the teacher proclaiming that despite their views they love queer people and hope that they can find their way to God."

- Student

When asked if students had ever had experiences where their identity had been affirmed by their faith leaders in their school 25% said never.

These negative beliefs also impacted LGBTIQ+ teachers at religious schools.

"Working in a Catholic school was incredibly stressful. I felt unsafe in expressing my identity and I'm sure the students felt worse."

- Teacher

Positive Experiences

15% of students at religious schools noted they had a small number of teachers who were supportive of their identities. These teachers put effort into protecting and supporting LGBTIQIA+ students. For those students, these teachers made an enormous difference to their mental wellbeing and a significant impact on their feelings of safety in class. Overt, visible signs of inclusion also contributed to students' feelings of acceptance, with one student describing seeing a pride flag outside a teacher's office and how they 'detoured to walk past it everyday'. Many students detailed how the use of inclusive language, preferred pronouns and names, actively discouraging discrimination by teachers and other staff members within their classrooms had been crucial in creating safe spaces for LGBTIQIA+ students, where they did not exist elsewhere in the school.

"Two particular teachers (amongst others) were very queer friendly at the same time as being strong in their faith. They expressed the sentiment that their God and Jesus etc. is all about loving everyone no matter what and the exclusion of queer people doesn't align with that 'love all' mindset. They were also very strongly against all bigotry and homophobia/transphobia and never excused peoples' actions because they were religious. It made me feel super safe and affirmed and those teachers have had a continuing positive impact on my life and perception of myself."

- Student

"She [a teacher] asked me my pronouns, and accepted my answer unquestioningly. I felt seen. I felt like the person I am was real."

- Student

12% of students had a positive experience at their religious school, with their identity being affirmed by their faith leaders. This often included the school having an LGBTIQIA+ space at school, creating a space for students, and being active advocates. Students noted that when priests or faith leaders were openly affirming, this often allowed other staff at the school to follow. These experiences had a positive effect on the students and on their perception of faith.

"Definitely. The priest at our school was an absolute gem. He was so inclusive, he actively disagreed with a lot of the Catholic church's practices, advocate for more positive masculinity and wanted to move away from the church's stigmatic beliefs around gender and sexuality. I could see that almost all of the staff agreed with him and wanted to follow his example."

- Student

"Yes, as an Anglican school we are affirming of LGBTQA+ students and teachers. Students are aware that the Anglican Church, including the Archbishop, is LGBTQA+ affirming."

- Teacher

"Our school values have come to us from a Christian tradition and the values of respect, integrity, empathy, knowledge and synergy all help us support our diverse student body. As Chaplain, I support our SGA leadership and have helped the group to develop a partnership with a local LGBTQIA+ charity."

- Teacher

“Eventually yes. It wasn’t outright & open, but if a student opened up about being LGBTI+ or a parent came to us about their child, it was supported & we accommodated the student as best as we could. In my time there, we had 11 students come out as gay & seek support in the form of LGBTI+ education, as well as religious support for being who they are, as well as 7 students transition socially & medically, with little issue from other students, other staff & parents.”

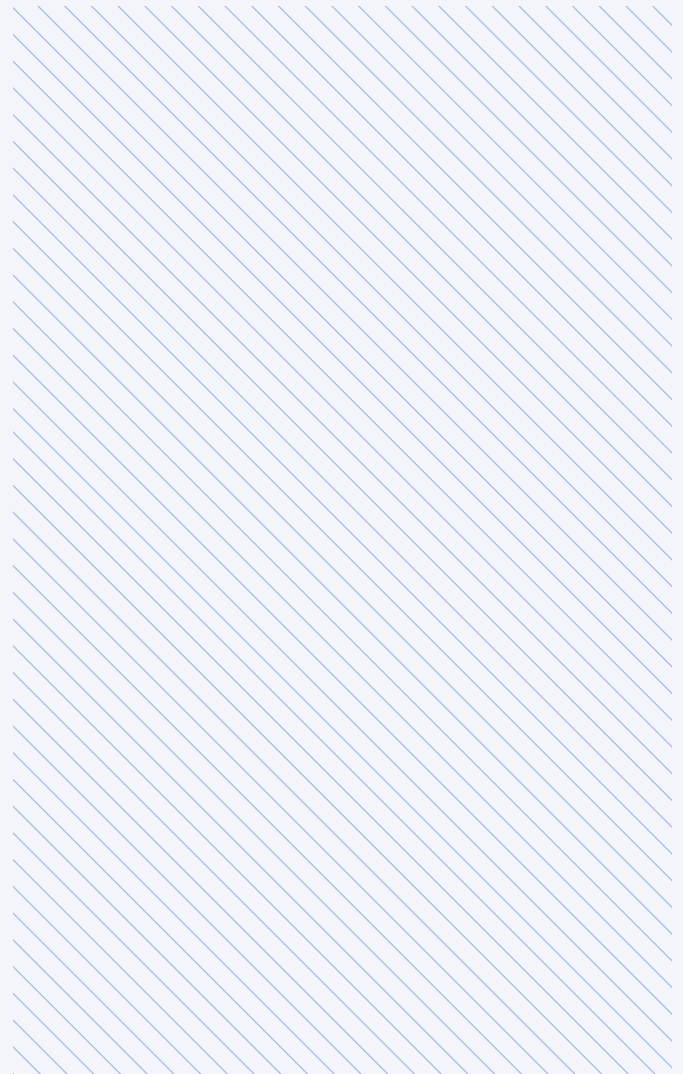
- Teacher (Non-Christian School)

Professional perspectives

YPN consulted former ministers of religion and religious scholars for this report. Even within denominations that did not accept LGBTIQA+ people all noted the strong religious commitments to pastoral care. Previous work in this area has focused on the need to protect all students from violence, bullying and to promote their mental wellbeing. This requires compassion, kindness and empathy towards LGBTIQA+ students to create as safe an environment as possible, ensuring they are free from harassment and discrimination.

“A relevant factor in most Catholic schools is that life is meant for flourishing. This imposes an obligation on all leadership team-members to ensure that staff and students are, first and foremost, affirmed in their God-given identity. This, despite some of my negative experiences above, has kept me in the Catholic fold.”

- Teacher



Impacts and Supports

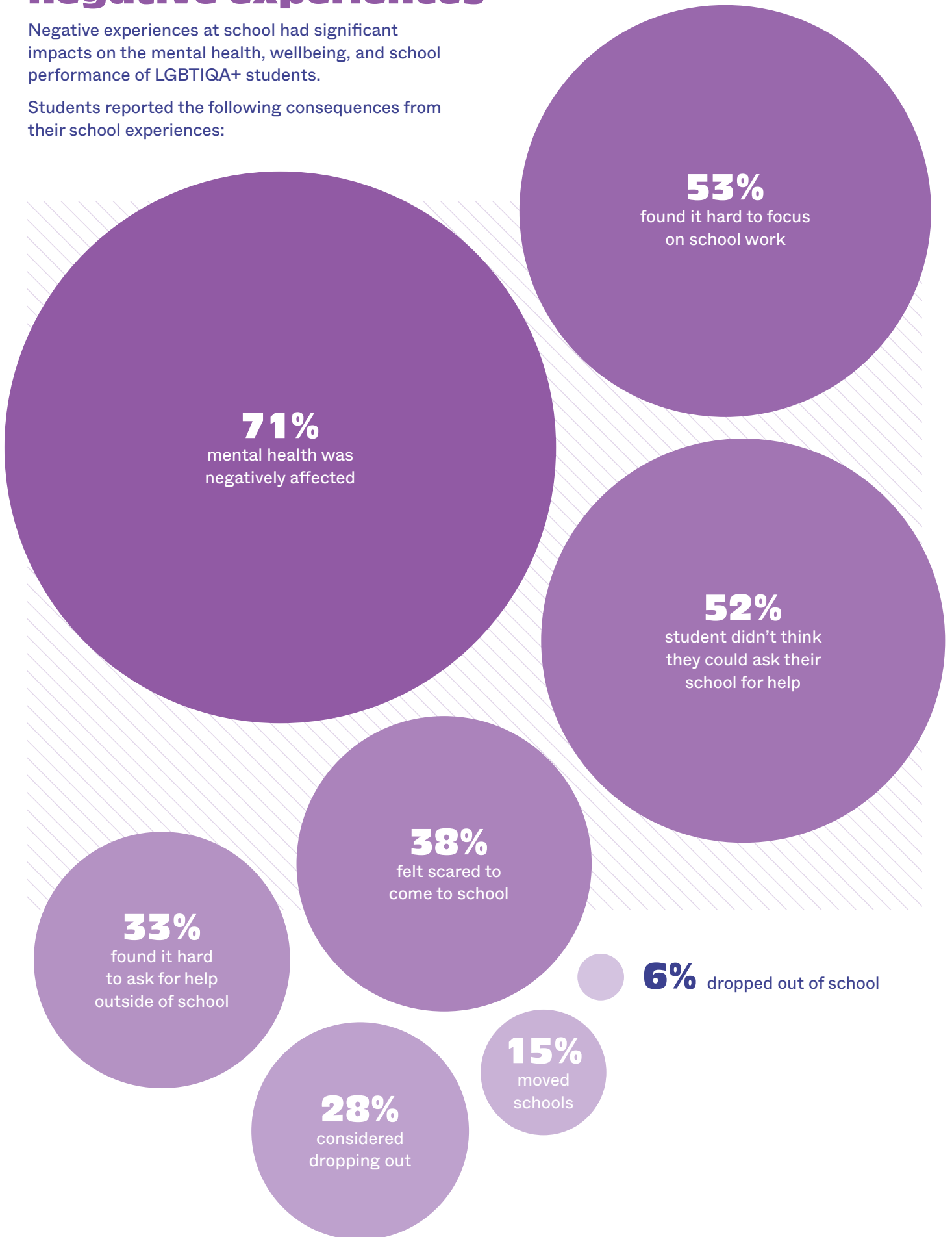
Persistent discrimination and systemic barriers at school have concerning implications for the capacity of LGBTIQ+ students to succeed and their levels of educational attainment.

Because of these experiences, they are more likely to skip classes and school activities, drop out, and have poorer academic performance, as well as see significant adverse effects on mental and physical health (34).

The impact of negative experiences

Negative experiences at school had significant impacts on the mental health, wellbeing, and school performance of LGBTIQ+ students.

Students reported the following consequences from their school experiences:



“All of this. Many students do not disclose identity unless there is a culture of senior kids who are ‘out’. If this isn’t in the school many students will not feel safe”

- Teacher

Many students were unable to ‘cope’ with attending school, where many either considered or followed through with dropping out of school before year 12 to pursue alternative education, vocational education, or work. Parents and teachers cited poor school attitudes towards the school system, both in terms of the structure of schooling as well as the ‘social dynamics/pressures of highschool’, as driving factors for students leaving school before year 12. Fears around coming out at school and at home also contributed to feelings of unsafety in remaining at school. For some students that pursued vocational training or alternative education after leaving school early, they saw marked improvement to their wellbeing. Others who had previously established support networks at school felt removed from these once they had left.

“He left school at year 10. Was high performing student won awards but couldn’t cope with the school attitude. Atar student listed for 5 subject. Now doing tafe courses to gain entry to uni and does not have friends in peer group. Focused on helping others to help himself and raise awareness.”

- Parent/Carer

“My child has had to leave the school and move to alternative education setting. My child almost didn’t survive their experience at [school]”

- Parent/Carer

“A few of the students considered dropping out but it was mostly due to fear of coming out at home, so they wanted to drop out so they could work full time & move out. Almost all hide their identity at school, even if they were transitioning or had transitioned.”

- Teacher

Impact of negative experiences on parents

AITSL Standard 7: Engage professionally with colleagues, parents/carers and the community

- Focus area 7.3 Engage with the parents/carers

The majority of parents, carers and guardians who responded to reporting that the experience of supporting their child through school had a negative impact on their own stress and wellbeing. Many described feeling worried, upset and helpless as their child experienced instances of bullying, skipping school due to anxiety, and self-harm and suicidal ideation. These fears stemmed from anxieties around their child possibly being outed and subsequently bullied at school, losing learning time from missed school hours and distress from the school administration's inaction.

Even in instances where the school had supported the child, they felt significant anxiety about their child's wellbeing and safety as there still remained significant risks of exposure to discrimination. For other parents, their child's experiences of bullying were incredibly distressing and they struggled to address this to provide effective support without action from the school. For some this led to more significant consequences, such as having to reduce work hours in order to be able to support their child.

"its incredibly upsetting as a parent to have your child bullied for nothing, and then the school do nothing, how do you help your child with that? how do you keep telling them that some people are just assholes, and to stay cool and keep your head up...it is tiring"

- Parent/Carer

"I'm always advocating for their needs. I'm worried about them being outed and teased because the school isn't as accommodating as it could be."

- Parent/Carer

"Traumatic as my child constantly engage in self harming activities and attempt suicide. Would avoid school at all costs by running away or hiding."

- Parent/Carer

However, for other parents their child being provided with support from school administration and having an inclusive peer group was a significant factor in reducing their anxiety.

"The support from the school has infinitely reduced anxiety and some worries about my child's safety. There is so much to manage for your child in their transition that knowing the school was supportive and actively playing a role was a huge weight off my shoulders."

- Parent/Carer

"I feel good knowing she is (not) being bullied or treated differently because of her sexuality or because she is proud of who she is"

- Parent/Carer

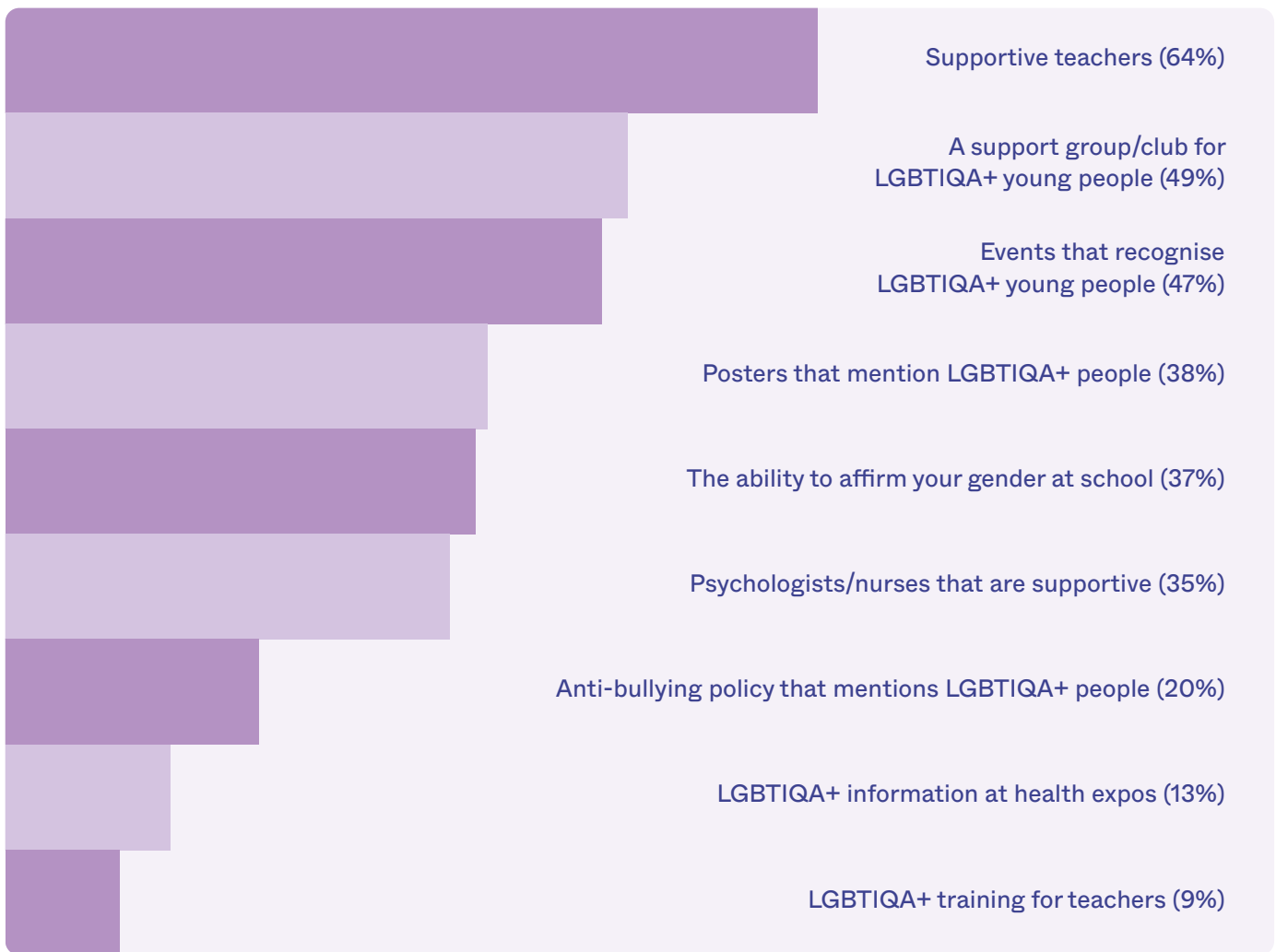
"My child barely went to school for most of 2020 and has attended sporadically since then. As a result, I had to quit my job and now work only occasionally. Between my husband and I, we make sure that one of us is available at all times of the day."

- Parent/Carer

School supports for LGBTIQA+ students

A significant number of students said they had access to some level of LGBTIQA+ support at school but noted some of these were tokenistic in nature. 93% of those without adequate support wanted significant improvements to inclusive practice in their school.

Student respondents were asked if their school had the following supportive practices in place:



Supportive teachers and staff

64% of students reported they had one or more supportive teachers. Students described these teachers as having a significant impact on their feelings of safety and security in their identity. Students with openly LGBTIQA+ teachers described feeling less insecure and more comfortable in their identity due to the presence of an adult role model. Additionally, students who had LGBTIQA+ affirming school psychologists or chaplains felt significantly more comfortable talking to these staff than to those who did not clearly display that they were inclusive.

One student described how having an openly gay school psychologist available who would informally engage with students during their breaks in a way that made him 'approachable and relatable' made students feel comfortable in talking about their struggles with him. Some students noted that they were able to access queer inclusive information about safe sex and healthy relationships with the assistance of a supportive nurse. Others noted that while they appreciated having a few supportive teachers, it wasn't enough to combat the discrimination they felt at school more broadly.

"When I saw that there were teachers like me, and others around me like me, it allowed me to just exist in the space, with less insecurity and put up less of a facade, due to the mutual understanding common between queer people. This sometimes extends to allies."

- Student

"The psychologist at my school is supportive with my Queer identity, it was amazing to see. Having an older figure in my life who new and accepted my identity felt like a weight off my shoulders."

- Student

LGBTIQA+ clubs

49% of students indicated their school had a club for LGBTIQA+ young people. One of the recruitment strategies for this survey was to contact schools who had LGBTIQA+ clubs in school - it is important to note this statistic is likely an overrepresentation due to sampling bias. Those students who discussed these experiences found their clubs to be helpful places where they felt safe to be themselves and like they weren't alone. It was also a place where many students found friends who became a supportive network of peers, as well as affirming teachers. One parent described the club their child attended as a space where students were able to not only connect with their peers, but also find LGBTIQA+ role models and help students realise they weren't alone. Oftentimes, these groups offered reprieve from non-affirming home environments, contributed to feelings of safety and community, and made attending school 'more bearable'.

These groups also tended to be where events such as 'Wear It Purple Day' were organised and where other positive changes were advocated from. They were also spaces where students could connect with aspects of their LGBTIQA+ identity, including through learning about queer history or engaging with queer media. For some students, these clubs were a safe space where they could disclose and

report the bullying they experienced. For trans and gender diverse students, these pride clubs created a space where they could be confident they would be referred to as their affirmed name and pronouns.

"I was seriously suicidal in year 9. GSA (Gender and Sexuality Alliance) was what got me through each week. I lived for those meetings."

- Student

"These all helped enable him to identify the feelings he had and what options were open to him. Diversity club helped him find his tribe and helped him realise he wasn't alone and he wasn't as different as he once thought. It gave him role models, he found his people."

- Parent/Carer

Tokenistic supports

Some students noted that despite having positive strategies in place they often felt tokenistic or were not fully implemented. For example, some schools had comprehensive policies around bullying, however these were not enforced by teachers and administration. Commonly, available supports were provided with caveats or other barriers. Responses noted instances where LGBTIQ+ training was made available for teachers but was optional, gender neutral toilets were provided but far away or frequently locked, and school administrations requiring parental permission for name changes at school to be approved.

Other students noted that their administration would listen to suggestions from an LGBTIQ+ club, however wouldn't implement any of these suggestions. Some students noted their school promoted itself as LGBTIQ+ affirming but did not support LGBTIQ+ students in practice. For schools that did have LGBTIQ+ student groups, some students noted that they either felt they 'needed to be out to be in the club' or feared that participating in the group or queer events would make them become 'even more of a target'. One parent also described how the queer group at their child's school had to be run after hours by a teacher due to a lack of support by the school administration. Some initiatives were also student run, but 'required a lot of fighting for by queer school groups' to be implemented.

"These programs and policies exist however the degree to which they are implemented is variable and it feeds [sic] as though the school are very much testing / experimenting their policies on a vulnerable 12 year old. When we met with the school, they spoke about 'tolerance'. I think we need to move beyond tolerance to a place of acceptance, understanding and celebration of diversity."

- Parent/Carer

"I have joined to school board and got Wear it Purple day at the school. this took me 4 years to get happening. they have had pronouns training but i feel like a lot just ignore this or dont follow up with training"

- Parent/Carer

Student desires for LGBTIQ+ supports

93% of students who did not have supports available indicated they wanted more inclusive practices in their school. In particular, students wanted more education on LGBTIQ+ identities in health class, more LGBTIQ+ inclusion training for teachers, chaplains and psychologists, LGBTIQ+ clubs and better options for students to transition. One student noted that other 'simple' barriers, such as a lack of unisex toilets, had 'made it very hard to accept myself'.

"Yes!!!!!! I was at the school before and after they were implemented and life for students in the lgbtq+ community improved so much. We were only able to get them as there was a change of principal from a homophobic one to an accepting one"

- Student

"Yes, I would have wanted all of them. I graduated in 2019, we thought society was progressive then. It wasn't. Public schools in low SES areas didn't do enough to protect or support kids or staff like me. Other teachers mentioned how the only out gay man they had as a teacher was bullied out of the job by students - death threats and harassment. How is that okay."

- Student

"Having more (correct) education about LGBTQ+ identities and health/sexual education would be very beneficial, and might help with normalising the ideas and reducing homophobia and transphobia from other students."

- Student

"The ability for my child to actively participate in celebration days and be referred to correctly makes a massive difference to his confidence and sense of safety. I think he would love an LGBTQIA+ group at school and specific training for the whole school staff complement would absolutely be of benefit for him and other kids"

- Parent/Carer

Teacher Perspectives - **Being a safe teacher**

Teachers and school support staff provided a range of unique answers when asked how they made it clear they were a safe person for LGBTIQ+ students. The majority of teachers did this by using explicit signals that they were LGBTIQ+ affirming in their classroom.

This included:

pride posters

introducing themselves with their pronouns

asking students for their pronouns or providing them ways to nominate a chosen name/pronoun

wearing pins,

actively disrupting bullying in the classroom

Many teacher respondents also ran the LGBTIQ+ safe space in their school. For other teachers, they ensured they had open discussions with students, including about LGBTIQ+ issues, addressed bullying, included relevant LGBTIQ+ texts in their teaching and used gender neutral language when appropriate. They felt these were ways to clearly signal that they were an ally in their classroom. For some teachers who were LGBTIQ+, they would openly talk about their own identities, in a way that was appropriate for students, in order to create visibility and be a role model for their students.

Other teachers did not use these inclusion tools, however built individual relationships with students that made it clear they were a safe and kind person to talk to about any issue. For other teachers, they didn't

think they needed to do anything active however would ensure they were not tolerating discrimination in their classrooms.

For teachers from religious schools, some talked about the limits they experienced in their school policies (e.g. they could not talk about LGBTIQ+ openly or disclose their own LGBTIQ+ identity). In order to still support students, they would assist students privately, through confidential discussions and safe referrals, or would actively show they were an ally, even though they couldn't disclose their identity.

Recommendations for Schools

Take a comprehensive approach to LGBTIQ+ inclusion in your school

LGBTIQ+ inclusion requires a comprehensive strategy sitting across all elements of the delivery of education, including teaching, classroom engagement, student engagement (both with the school and each other), school leadership and administration. Whilst the development of this strategy to implement inclusion across the school is important, it will only be successful if appropriate time and resources are dedicated to its implementation. This will involve reviewing policy, organising training, and implementing school supports. Importantly this process should involve listening to LGBTIQ+ students and teachers about their experiences and suggestions for inclusion, and acting on their recommendations.

Create clear pathways and policies for students to affirm their gender in school

All schools will have a trans or gender diverse student in them. It is important to have clear policies in place so you are prepared to support a trans or gender diverse student and/or staff member. To prevent and/or deal with discrimination, and for them to feel included and seen within the school. This may involve finding ways to support that student to change their name and/or gender in the school system, reviewing uniform policies and providing training for teachers. Additionally, these policies should consider situations where a student may not have parental consent to implement these changes. In this case, schools should be aware of how they can still support this student informally in the school environment.

Ensure all staff - including administrative, leadership and pastoral staff - are trained in LGBTIQ+ awareness and inclusion

Teachers and school staff need to be trained on LGBTIQ+ awareness and inclusion. This should be seen as a core competency for teachers and should not be treated as optional. While online modules are good, they won't be a supplement for in person and comprehensive training from LGBTIQ+ training providers.

Take a no-tolerance approach to LGBTIQ+ discrimination from students

Schools need to take a zero-tolerance approach to LGBTIQ+ discrimination and bullying. This must include being responsive to reports of bullying/

discrimination and equipping teachers with the skills to interrupt this when they see it. Equally, students must be aware of what anti-bullying policies are in place to protect them from discrimination at school in order to empower them to seek the protection and assistance they are entitled to, including clear means for families to support them in this process.

Include LGBTIQ+ topics in the classroom to ensure teachers are supported and confident to teach these topics

Teachers should be trained and resourced to discuss LGBTIQ+ topics in their classrooms as appropriate. LGBTIQ+ people have been part of all areas of society, and by including relevant LGBTIQ+ content, it accurately reflects the society we live in. It is not political.

This is particularly important for health classes. Teachers need to be able to provide accurate information about LGBTIQ+ identities, sexual health and healthy relationships. If teachers are not comfortable or able to do this then appropriate incursions need to be resourced and planned.

Recommendations for Religious Schools

Closely examine obligations towards pastoral care, protecting students from harm and creating inclusive safe learning environments.

Religious schools have a duty of care towards creating safe learning environments for all of their students. This should be considered, as well as resources that provide LGBTIQ+ inclusion strategies within the appropriate religious framework of the school. All policies should centre around the ultimate responsibility of the school to create nurturing and safe environments for students. Resources, such as the Australian National Rainbow Catholic Pastoral Care Guide, should be actively utilised by schools to support teachers and staff to pursue effective LGBTIQ+ inclusion strategies within the existing religious framework of their school.

Recommendations for the Department of Education

Making explicit the obligations of teachers and schools to create safe environments for LGBTIQA+ students

Creating a safe learning environment for LGBTIQA+ students and teachers is an obligation under state and federal anti-discrimination law. Schools and administrators need to be given clear direction that this inclusion is not an optional activity but an expectation of all schools. From the experiences provided through this report, it is also clear that schools are not actively working to the AITSL standards. Obligations under these standards must be made clear to teachers and staff, including their direct applicability to LGBTIQA+ inclusion within schools.

Providing guidance on how to support students who are transitioning and/or affirming their gender

The Department of Education should review current guidance and frameworks in place to support students who are transitioning and/or affirming their gender, in schools and support schools trying to facilitate supportive actions towards transition. This includes reviewing Department of Education frameworks for opportunities to improve inclusion. This looks like providing options for students and teachers to indicate a gender other than man or woman and providing options for students to use preferred names without a legal name change in the system. This work should support the development of a full LGBTIQA+ inclusion strategy for schools, which will incorporate guidelines on supporting transitioning students.

“trans issues are going to be significant over the coming few years, schools need to be more aware and not leave it to chance that we have supportive staff driving policy”

- Teacher

“I’d like a general government policy that guides schools on implementing an inclusive environment.”

- Teacher

“WA Curriculum Authority need to allow preferred name to be used and not use ‘other’ for non binary. This includes data management companies such as SEQTA and Synergetic”

- Teacher

"The department of education seems reluctant to encourage schools to do more, likely for fear of some electorate or other. Why not encourage more curriculum inclusion of queer figures? Why not encourage something around pride? Why not include lavender panic when teaching the cold war? Why not correct misconceptions/gross simplifications like "testosterone is the male hormone"?"

- Teacher

Ensure teachers are aware that they are able to include LGBTIQ+ content in schools

This should provide guidance around how to teach LGBTIQ+ topics, including being aware of negative comments this may elicit and being sensitive to the needs of LGBTIQ+ young people. This needs to ensure staff are aware of how LGBTIQ+ awareness features in the curriculum and the expectations around how this should be taught in schools.

Provide funding for organisations to provide teacher training that goes beyond online modules for free or reduced fee.

Schools need options for in person and consultation training. This includes working in collaboration with LGBTIQ+ organisations for this training, which providers cannot produce for free. It's important that LGBTIQ+ organisations are able to provide training to schools and are equipped to meet the demand.

Ensure guidance around bullying and safety in schools explicitly includes LGBTIQ+ people.

General education strategies towards bullying and safety in school should include LGBTIQ+ people and specific strategies that address bullying involving discrimination. This needs to include understanding around the specific forms of bullying that LGBTIQ+ people may face. For example misgendering, or general negative, dehumanising and/or derogatory comments.

Ensure strategies in education include LGBTIQ+ students.

All strategies regarding educational attainment and educational outcomes within the Department of Education should include priority areas focused on LGBTIQ+ students and the specific needs and challenges that they face in the school environment.

RECOMMENDED SUPPLEMENTARY RESOURCES

To support the delivery of the above recommendations, we recommend schools engage with the following resources to inform their LGBTIQ+ inclusion efforts.



[Rainbow Network Resources](#)

[Acceptance Perth LGBTQ+ Catholics](#)

[Youth Pride Network: Resources for Schools](#)

[Minus18: All of Us](#)

Recommendations for further research

While we were able to connect with a significant number of LGBTIQ+ young people, teachers, parents and carers with experience of the high school education system in WA, more research is recommended to capture a broader range of experiences.

Exploration of similar studies is suggested, particularly with broader reach and input, with a focus on the experiences of LGBTIQ+ young people in high schools across regional Western Australia. A more detailed review of effective policies and programs that work well to promote LGBTIQ+ inclusion and wellbeing in schools should be completed. Recommendations should be captured into an updated framework for best practice, to be utilised by schools and Government.

Proposed changes to the Equal Opportunity Act 1984 (WA) and the current review of federal anti-discrimination laws also warrant further study once enacted on the implications for students and staff, particularly for those attending or employed at religious schools.

Other suggested reforms for LGBTIQ+ young people with intersecting identities are lacking given a significant gap in research in this area. In particular, there are notable research gaps on the experiences of intersex, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and multicultural LGBTIQ+ young people within secondary education settings.

Conclusion

All young people deserve access to an education. As it stands, LGBTIQ+ young people do not have equitable access to education. The education system, specifically schools, are failing in their obligations to support them.

This report highlighted the continued discrimination LGBTIQ+ young people face in high schools across Western Australia. It showed that at all levels, from classroom interactions, to curriculum content, and from administrative processes, to school infrastructure - LGBTIQ+ young people are facing significant barriers to accessing safe, inclusive and affirming education.

It highlighted that high schools are not a safe environment for young people to 'come out' in and be themselves due to persistent discrimination and violence from peers, teachers and school staff, where they are seeing poorer mental health and educational outcomes as a result.

LGBTIQ+ issues are not 'political', an 'inconvenience', or 'inessential' to the education of young people. They are vital to ensuring the safety and wellbeing of all students in school and beyond. Significant changes must be made to secure this safety in schools. However, as evidence in this report shows, even small changes can have significant and long lasting positive impacts on LGBTIQ+ young people's lives.

As one young person told us:

“I’m grateful(sic) for the supportive teachers I had, but there’s still **a lot of work that needs to be done** so that other queer kids can have a school experience just as safe as the non queer kids.”

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