

New research shows homophobic bullying present in primary schools

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One in two primary school principals in Ireland have dealt with homophobic bullying according to new research carried out by the National Anti-Bullying Research and Resource Centre (ABC) at Dublin City University.

The study, which analyses the responses of 238 primary school principals nationwide, looked at whether principals had first-hand experience in dealing with the issue, whether they believed it was a significant problem and how they felt homophobic bullying should be addressed.

The research found that homophobic bullying was a reality in some primary schools in Ireland, with one in two respondents indicating that they had spoken to pupils about the use of homophobic language such as gay, poof, faggot or lesbian.

Findings also show that some principals did not always consider the use of homophobic pejorative terms to constitute bullying, which raises the issue of homophobic language being dismissed too lightly or homophobic bullying being considered as irrelevant in the primary school setting.

In 11% of cases, principals said that they had dealt with this issue either weekly or monthly and some also indicated that teachers and/ or parents had contacted them to raise a concern. One in six (16%) indicated that they had dealt with an incident they would describe as homophobic

bullying at least once during the school year and in a very small number of cases, principals said that they dealt with an incident where one pupil was physically abused because others thought they were gay or lesbian.

Speaking about the findings, Dr James O'Higgins Norman, director of the Anti-Bullying Centre in DCU, said:

"We concentrated our research on the views of [school principals](#) because of the critical role they play in policy implementation. While principals have been given a clear mandate to address bullying, research on homophobic bullying in Irish schools has primarily been focussed on post-primary schools.

It is clear from our findings that further education and training for school leaders on the topic is required as we are at the risk of them contributing further to the many silences that surround the topic in primary schools in Ireland.

We hope that by making this initial exploration into this topic in [primary schools](#) that a greater understanding of the challenges principals face will go some way towards increasing their capacity to respond to [homophobic bullying](#) in schools."

More information: Gerard Farrelly et al. Custodians of silences? School principal perspectives on the incidence and nature of homophobic bullying in primary schools in Ireland, *Irish Educational Studies* (2016). [DOI: 10.1080/03323315.2016.1246258](https://doi.org/10.1080/03323315.2016.1246258)

Provided by Dublin City University

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