

Schools don't feel like safe spaces for LGBT teachers

March 3 2020, by Catherine Lee



Credit: AI-generated image ([disclaimer](#))

From September 2020, schools in England will be required to teach relationships, sex and health education (RSHE) that includes LGBT relationships. This means that pupils will, for the first time, learn about all kinds of families and relationships, not just those that are heterosexual.

Some parents and people in faith communities have protested outside school gates opposing the efforts of schools already teaching about LGBT people through the [No Outsiders](#) programme. The protests have been so disruptive that one school, [Anderton Park in Birmingham](#), successfully applied for an injunction to prevent future protests taking place in the immediate vicinity of the school.

The protests and associated media attention has reminded some LGBT teachers of the [Section 28 era](#) (1988-2003), when the Conservative government presided over a state-sanctioned silencing of LGBT identities in schools and local authorities.

Although section 28 ended in 2003, it is clear that LGBT [teacher](#) sexuality continues to create moral panic in schools. Indeed, [my research](#) shows that the principal fear of LGBT teachers is that parents of pupils in their care, will align their LGBT identity with hyper-sexuality and paedophilia.

There are an estimated 50,000 LGBT teachers in English schools. Schools have a responsibility under the 2010 [Equality Act](#), to protect LGBT teachers from harassment in the workplace. But LGBT teachers in my [research](#) report that equality policies do not necessarily make them feel any safer within their schools.

Ongoing fear

The Department for Education (DfE) has attempted to make preparations for the introduction of RSHE. In October 2019 it [published guidance for primary schools](#) regarding the disruption over LGBT teaching of relationships education. In it, the DfE anticipates disruption which includes the public victimisation of teachers through social media or harassment in person. It advocates that if protests or harassment occur, school leaders should engage the police, consider a legal response

where required, and put out clear statements to the media.

The protests so far have shown that LGBT teachers are vulnerable. [Andrew Moffat](#), the assistant headteacher at Parkfield School in Birmingham, was particularly targeted for using story books that had LGBT characters and celebrated difference. He endured death threats and was advised by police on how he should travel to and from [school](#).

Mental impact

With further homophobic protests being anticipated, it is clear this will have a huge impact on LGBT teacher health and wellbeing. Indeed, [my research](#) shows that 64% of LGBT teachers have experienced a serious episode of anxiety or depression linked to their sexual or gender identity and role as a teacher. This compares with just 31% of the overall teaching population experiencing a mental health issue as reported in the 2018 [teacher wellbeing index](#).

During a recent [leadership programme](#) I ran for LGBT teachers, I asked participants what they wanted to focus on in future sessions. The group was unanimous. They wanted personal support to "survive" the introduction of the new LGBT inclusive [relationships, sex and health education](#), fearing what this will mean for them as LGBT teachers.

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