



# Becoming LGBT+ friendly in schools serving faith communities

External Evaluation Report



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# Contents

	page
<b>Introduction</b> .....	4
Acknowledgements.....	4
<b>Executive Summary</b> .....	5
From anti-bullying to usualising .....	5
Pastoral care: a familiar concept .....	5
Working with parents and carers .....	5
Be kind: the compromise .....	6
Teacher confidence: from anxiety to expertise and 'coming out' .....	6
<b>The Evaluation</b> .....	7
Evaluation team.....	7
School contexts .....	7
Policy context .....	8
Purpose and methodology .....	8
Purpose.....	8
Methodology .....	8
School visits .....	8
Student and teacher 'voice'; questions .....	9
Ethical considerations .....	10
Limitations .....	11
Analysing and reporting the evidence .....	11
<b>Findings</b> .....	12
Children's experiences of homophobic, biphobic and transphobic (HBT) bullying ..	12
How schools implemented the programme.....	13
Behaviour management and bullying: a strategic gateway focus .....	13
Schools rely on their legal mandate to do the work: Equality Act 2010.....	15
Schools could build on Ofsted's mandate to do the work, but feel a conflict.....	15
Schools rely on their legal mandate to do the work: British Values .....	16
Should we be serious, or celebratory?.....	16
A usualising curriculum .....	16
Policies .....	17
Supporting LGBT+ students .....	17
Communicating with parents.....	18
Representation and visibility .....	19
<b>Staff confidence and resistance</b> .....	20
Teachers' initial lack of confidence .....	20
Faith, conscience and resistance: strategic management of people and relationships....	22

	page
Improved confidence .....	24
Developing a career.....	25
Should teachers 'come out'? .....	26
<b>Working with parents</b> .....	<b>30</b>
Fear of parental concern.....	30
Parental acceptance .....	31
<b>Children's views: families, religion and LGBT+ issues</b> .....	<b>33</b>
Coming out to your family .....	33
'Be respectful, but don't be gay' .....	34
<b>Conclusions</b> .....	<b>36</b>

# Introduction

**Educate & Celebrate is a charity employing a group of dedicated trainers and specialists. Most share a history of work as schoolteachers. Their roles include teacher educators, children's book specialists, and youth voice workers.**



The programme under evaluation was developed following several years of fine-tuning, first in the founder/CEO's original school, where she was a music teacher and Head of Year, and then in other schools and local authorities, including a large tranche of work conducted in schools across a city in the Midlands and a local authority area in the North of England. The charity's current reach represents a significant scaling-up exercise, working in around five times the numbers of schools previously involved.

The programme model involves certain key elements, designed to challenge prejudice, and, crucially, to 'usualise' LGBT+ people and issues in a sustainable way, and at all levels of the school: training, curriculum, policy, environment, and community/Pride Youth Networks.

This evaluation follows on from a more general piece of work undertaken across several of the schools in which Educate & Celebrate operates in 2016. Its focus on faith and church schools and schools serving faith communities emerges from questions and concerns raised by staff in potential participating schools. The evaluation is intended to inform Educate & Celebrate as to its successes and areas for development in this area.



Photo: Tom Dingley

## Acknowledgements

Thank you to all the school staff and students who worked with us on this project. We are constantly impressed by the abilities of students as young as six years old to make sense of some big philosophical and theological questions, and by the skills of the staff who work with them to elicit this critical thinking.

# Executive Summary

This evaluation collected interview and focus group data from five representative schools. It found as follows:

## From anti-bullying to usualising

Children in the schools we visited at the start of the project all had experiences of HBT (mostly homophobic) bullying in the playground. Perhaps partly because of this, schools initially used behaviour management and bullying as a strategic way to start the programme. Most of the schools began with a one-off anti-bullying assembly, but hesitated before embedding the materials across the curriculum. However, by the end of the year long programme, usualising across the curriculum had been achieved.

## Pastoral care: a familiar concept

Pastoral care is a familiar concept to faith and church schools and schools serving faith communities. Once the schools have engaged with the Educate & Celebrate programme they were able to draw on their established expertise in pastoral care to support their LGBT+ students to come out and be themselves at school.

## Working with parents<sup>1</sup> and carers

School staff were initially hesitant about whether they should forewarn parents about upcoming Educate & Celebrate content. Those schools which did not flag up the issue as potentially problematic experienced fewer complaints. They were able to engage with parents at the school gate as needed. Successful strategies used to work with parents included explaining the universal application of the Equality Act 2010, including in relation to religion; appealing to parents' religious commitment to kindness to one's neighbour; and the process of usualising LGBT+ people and issues across the curriculum.

Some parents held a stereotyped view of a promiscuous 'LGBT+ lifestyle' and worried that the programme might mitigate against the idea of a committed monogamous relationship. There was a bit of work to do around decoupling the stereotyped concept of promiscuity from the idea of LGBT+ people. Another area of concern was related to parents' fear that 'being gay' is a sin against the tenets of their religion.

In most cases parents were reassured that the Educate & Celebrate materials were actually about the different kinds of identities and relationships people could have, and the importance of being accepting of differences between people.

1. We use 'parents' in this report to include anyone in a parental capacity, including foster carers.

Return  
to  
Contents



## Be kind: the compromise

Students in families where faith was important usually felt that coming out as LGBT+ was important for the reason that any kind of lying is very much against the rules. They also said that even if it was not ok to be LGBT+, they and their families knew to be respectful and accepting to people that are LGBT+. Teaching staff accepted this as some kind of compromise and were careful to balance the protected characteristics of religion, sexual orientation, and gender identity in their teaching and discussions. Towards the end of the programme, many students also arrived at a compromise where they said they would be kind to LGBT+ people, but would be unlikely to come out as LGBT+ themselves. Other students felt that they could in fact accommodate an LGBT+ identity within their faith.

## Teacher confidence: from anxiety to expertise and 'coming out'

The now abolished homophobic law known as Section 28 still has an overshadowing effect on teachers. Staff anxiety is often based in a fear of 'saying the wrong thing'. This would often prevent teachers from engaging with the topic at all. Teachers worried that students would not take the work seriously, or that they would say unkind things as a result of contradictions with religious beliefs. Some teachers described their hesitation about working with the Educate & Celebrate methodology as related to their faith. They were also worried about parental concern.

Over the year of the project, teacher confidence improved for a variety of reasons. The Educate & Celebrate resources and training had a tangible impact. The programme's focus on the Equality Act 2010 also gave teachers the understanding that their work was backed up by a piece of legislation which also balanced the rights of people whose identities included characteristics related to religion, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and gender identity.

Many staff members benefitted from inclusive modelling by senior staff allies, and others were encouraged by the open-minded and engaged attitudes of the children and young people they worked with on LGBT+ inclusion. Other approaches to managing people and relationships in what might potentially be an emotionally charged piece of work included pragmatic acceptance of people's differences: some staff members' religion-based viewpoints could be pragmatically accommodated without undermining the programme. Faith could also be a stimulus for a more inclusive approach for many staff members. This included a strong commitment to respecting others, rooted in a faith, which aspired to neighbourly love and forgiveness.

The work of an ECCO (Educate & Celebrate Coordinator) was seen by many teachers as an opportunity to develop their practice and to broaden their skill set towards a leadership and management role. ECCOs felt safer and better supported in the LGBT+ friendly work towards the end of the programme year. Two out LGBT+ ECCOs felt that incidents such as homophobic language were no longer automatically handed to them simply because they were 'the gay teacher', but that staff across the school were also taking the responsibility to address such issues. After the programme had been implemented, staff felt safer being 'out'.

Return  
to  
Contents

# The Evaluation

## Evaluation team

The Goldsmiths Department of Educational Studies has a well-established record of research and research-informed teacher education programmes focused on teaching excellence through attention to issues of student voice and creative expression, social justice, inclusion, equalities and community cohesion in schools. The author of this report is experienced in working with schools, originally working as a secondary school teacher of both mainstream students and those with special educational needs- particularly those at risk of permanent exclusion. Her research has been focused particularly around inclusion in relation to discipline and behaviour management; ethnicity, faith and culture; socio-economic class; gender and sexual orientation; and special educational needs. This has included close analysis of the process through which school policies are created, discussed, and applied, and the ways in which this intersects with or challenges the inclusion of student voice in schools' organizational planning and development.

## School contexts

Of the five schools visited, four were Primary schools. The Secondary school was visited only once, as opposed to the before and after visits to the Primary schools. All five of these schools were already well versed in addressing specific equalities issues other than those related to LGBT+ people. These included racist attitudes deriving from locally popular White supremacy movements such as the British National Party (the BNP); pressures on Muslim communities deriving from global conflicts which have led to Islamophobia in some areas; and resourcing issues related to the need to educate students from many parts of the world with a wide range of linguistic competencies. Most of the schools visited were also working hard to address the effects of poverty and deprivation and lack of local employment. However, all five of the schools served faith communities from many cultural contexts. Summaries and pseudonyms are noted in the table below:

Pseudonym	Age Phase	Notes
<b>Holly School</b>	Primary	Church of England school in a large Midlands city. Serves a mixed group of Pakistani-British Muslim; African-British and Caribbean-British Christian (often Evangelist) and White British Christian students.
<b>Cherry School</b>	Primary	An urban secular school in a very deprived area serving almost exclusively Bengali Muslim students.
<b>Poppy School</b>	Primary	An urban secular school serving students who are African-British (often Nigerian) and Caribbean-British Christian (often Evangelist); White British of no religion; Catholic Eastern European; Bengali British and Somali British Muslim; and Indian Hindu students.
<b>Iris School</b>	Primary	In the same federation as Poppy School, on a nearby street and serving a similar population.
<b>Wisteria School</b>	Secondary	A suburban secular school in a very deprived area on the outskirts of a large Northern city, serving mainly White British families active in Church of England congregations.

## Policy context

There is a history of UK government policy, notably 'Section 28' (of the Local Government Act 1988), which traditionally made it difficult for some teachers to feel able to speak of, acknowledge, or address LGBT+ issues. The law prohibited local authorities from seeking to 'intentionally promote homosexuality or publish material with the intention of promoting homosexuality' or 'promote the teaching in any maintained school of homosexuality as a pretended family relationship'. Although Section 28 was repealed on 18 November 2003 in England and Wales, its legacy has far-reaching effects, and the language of the warning against 'promoting homosexuality' is still evident in many current school policies. It is against this background that the Equality Act 2010 emerged, requiring publicly funded institutions (such as schools) to adhere to a 'public duty'. This duty applies a legal mandate to the requirement for institutions to not only eliminate direct and indirect discrimination and harassment on the basis of a list of protected characteristics (including ethnicity, disability, age, religion, sex, gender identity, and sexual orientation), but to actively advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between groups. Ofsted guidelines also seek to inspect schools for their work in these areas. The result is that LGBT+ people's rights are protected in law, but are still subject to both direct and institutional prejudice deriving from a school culture currently in a state of emergence from the preceding policy context

## Purpose and methodology

### Purpose

This evaluation was designed to find out how children, teachers and parents or carers in faith and church schools and schools serving faith communities responded to LGBT+ people and issues before and after the Educate & Celebrate project had been embedded into the schools.

### Methodology

The evaluation drew on data produced during nine school visits, nine student focus groups and nine teacher interviews.

## School visits

Before the Educate & Celebrate project started in each of the schools, the evaluator held a recorded focus group discussion of about sixty minutes with between two and fifteen students (usually five or six), and a sixty-minute recorded interview with one or two staff members, usually the ECCO, including teaching assistants, teachers, and senior managers. School environments were also observed and notated, including images and welcome messages in school foyers, posters in classrooms, and displays of work in the corridors.

The evaluation plan also involved visits to the sample schools at the end of the project, to establish details of any changes that had occurred. Due to management staff turnover, we were able to visit four of the five schools. The end-of-project visits involved follow-up focus group discussions with students, and sixty-minute interviews with ECCOs, and a deputy head teacher. As well as observing school

Return  
to  
Contents



foyers and welcome messages, the visits also involved four school tours to look at library book and wall displays, and at work students had created around the project.

Before each visit at both the start and end of the project, ECCOs were asked to select around five students for a focus group. We asked ECCOs to use their own judgment in selecting these students, so some of them were already in Pride Youth Networks (that is, they were themselves LGBT+ or allies); in other schools, staff selected particularly articulate students; and in others, ECCOs sought to provide a good cross-section of age, ability and ethnicity in the focus group members.

In total, around twenty-four students and six staff members participated in the recorded discussions across the focus groups and interviews. The students in the focus groups ranged from Year 2 (aged 6-7) to Year 13 (aged 17-18). The focus groups tended to consist of a relatively even mix of genders.

In terms of ethnicity, faith and culture, the focus groups represented a wide range of backgrounds. They involved discussions with students who were Bengali and Somali Muslim; Eastern European, White British and African-Caribbean Catholic; a diverse group of students who attended Church of England churches; African and Christian Evangelist, and Indian Hindu.

The questions to both focus groups and staff members were generally open and designed to generate discussion. In order to find out about general attitudes towards gender and to break the ice, it was usually helpful to begin by asking students to say a bit about their school uniform, and then whether anything related to LGBT+ people or issues ever came up at school. The first question often asked of teachers in their interviews was about how they had become involved with the project. The discussions were semi-structured, allowing participants to raise issues as they felt comfortable. Prompt questions were used to elicit specific information where it had not been covered in the discussions.

## Student and teacher 'voice'; questions

The evaluation was seeking to elicit discussions about the intersection between LGBT+ identities and experiences, and faith. However, the approach taken was designed to place as much control as possible to direct these conversations in the hands of the interviewees. The interviewer therefore asked some open-ended questions about school, lessons, and faith identities to get discussion started, and then moved on to invite the students to come up with their own questions for each other. The questions teachers and students asked are interesting data in themselves. The most common question asked by teachers was:

- What anxieties do staff have about implementing the programme?

Student questions were many, and included:

- Is it okay to be gay, and why?
- Would you be fine if you were married with someone that wasn't gay and turned out to be gay? If you were a woman and you had married a man and that man decided to be transgender, how would you feel? Would you want to stay with the person in a relationship or would you not want to?
- How would people insulting you [in a homophobic, biphobic, or transphobic way] affect you? If someone says you're gay does it mean you are gay?
- How would you feel if people around you were gay or lesbian?

Return  
to  
Contents

What would you do if you were friends with someone who came out as a gay or lesbian or transgender person?

- If you grew up and you realised you were gay, would you be comfortable with that or would you just feel turned out of society? How would you tell your parents? Could you live with it, would you force yourself to do something that you couldn't, or would you just not be gay?
- If your mum or your dad was gay, how would you feel about that?
- If you have a faith or a religion, how would that affect telling somebody that you are gay or lesbian or transgender?

## Ethical considerations

The ethical evaluation for this work addressed issues of sensitivity and emotional wellbeing, confidentiality, and informed consent.

Without wishing to pathologise LGBT+ issues, a project addressing this subject matter has the potential to raise sensitive issues with school students and teachers: people who, because of the particular context of a school, may be particularly anxious to maintain their anonymity. Schools in past iterations of work on LGBT+ issues (for example, SchoolsOut) have received very negative press coverage. In addition, because the project was partially aimed towards a reduction in bullying, the team was careful to put safeguards in place to avoid any exacerbation of the risk. Confidentiality for all parties concerned had to be assured. All names of people, schools, and places have therefore been changed in this report.

The evaluation had also to be designed to be sensitive to the emotional wellbeing needs of all participants. The potential for respondents to discuss their own gender identity and sexual orientation was inherent in the subject matter: these issues can raise concerns related to acceptance or rejection by friends, families, and employers. Further, the history of school-related policy around inspections and around LGBT+ issues (especially Section 28) has generated a level of anxiety amongst some school staff, and this had to be taken into account. The interviewer used very general open questions in focus groups and interviews. These invited respondents to volunteer only that information which they felt comfortable volunteering. Key to the elicitation of the data was the idea that the participants themselves came up with the specific questions for each other.

Because of the issues relating to confidentiality and sensitivity, it was especially important that respondents from Key Stage 1 upwards had to be able to give informed consent. In order to address this need, a Respondent Information Sheet and Consent Form were produced. These were given to participants at each focus group and interview. Depending on the age of the respondents, the evaluator either gave them time to read the documents, read them out loud, or summarized them in language appropriate for the level of the participants. The evaluator's background as a teacher of children and young people with special educational needs informed an opinion as to the best approach in each case. In all cases, parents were aware that the schools were involved with the Educate & Celebrate programme, and understood that discussions about LGBT+ people and issues were taking place.

Return  
to  
Contents

## Limitations

As described above, the evaluator was not able to visit the secondary school after the project was delivered. The main themes can therefore be considered to emerge mainly from the four primary schools visited.

The schools visited should only be taken as a potentially representative sample. Schools vary widely in terms of demographics, management style, location, and philosophy.

Respondents were selected by teachers. This way of identifying focus group participants was deliberately chosen in order to accommodate the complex timetabling, pedagogical and other responsibilities under which schools and teachers labour. The selection process produced a good mix of participants across the range of sample schools.

It is also important to note that the schools had experienced slightly varying levels of prior engagement with Educate & Celebrate. Some of the sample schools had already undertaken some work with the organization, although they had not delivered the full model. This work usually consisted of the attendance of an ECCO at a training session and the running of a Pride Youth Network or similar.

Qualitative judgments made on the basis of the sample used in this evaluation should therefore be understood within these contexts.

## Analysing and reporting the evidence

The evaluator transcribed the focus groups and interviews and then used a computer programme called NVivo to look for common themes that were emerging from the data. For example, over the life of the project, many of the students and teachers gave their opinions on teacher confidence to discuss LGBT+ people and issues and on the idea of whether or not teachers should 'come out' as LGB or T within the context of a faith-based community. There was also a strong theme relating to the difference between how students would treat someone who was LGBT+ and whether or not they themselves would feel able to identify as LGBT+, and how they would negotiate this within their families and religions. Evidence of students' confidence in responding to bullying incidents also emerged.

In writing this report, the evaluator looked for indicative quotes from ECCOs, other staff, and students in order to illustrate and evidence each point. There were many, many quotes that could have been used which addressed the same themes and which said similar things. The quotes chosen for the report were those which best expressed the ideas and thoughts arising in relation to each theme. They were selected to represent the ideas of as many of the staff and student respondents as possible.

Return  
to  
Contents

# Findings

The findings section is divided into several sections. The first of these establishes a baseline of children's experience with homophobic, biphobic and transphobic bullying in the sample schools. The section then moves on to address how schools implemented the Educate & Celebrate programme. Subthemes in this area include addressing behaviour and bullying; drawing on a legal mandate; curriculum; policies; supporting LGBT+ students; communicating with parents; and representation and visibility. The data reveals issues of staff faith, conscience and resistance; a steady improvement in staff confidence; the impact of this work on careers; and coming out as an LGBT+ teacher in a faith community context. We then look at parental responses to this work, addressing the fear and roots of parental concerns, and parental acceptance. The next segment addresses students' talk about LGBT+ issues, including coming out to the family; being respectful, but not being LGBT+; and student philosophies and ideas about LGBT+ people and issues.

## Children's experiences of homophobic, biphobic and transphobic (HBT) bullying

Children in the schools we visited at the start of the project all had experiences of HBT (mostly homophobic) bullying in the playground. A child at Holly School discussed what he had seen:

*On the playground I heard people ... laughing at others because some other people are transgender and they are calling other boys and other girls lesbians, gay and in the class ... I don't even know why they even saying it, someone's just playing, say a boy was playing with a friend that is a boy just saying "you're gay, you're gay" for some reason, even though they were just playing.*

At Iris School, a student described how same sex friendships can be construed as 'gay':

*There's some girl in my class ... and basically we were playing and he said he likes ... boys as a friend and she thought he was gay so ... she had one big group, and they were saying 'oh you're gay', and then basically he said 'I'm not gay I'm just friends with boys, I just like to play with boys', and they thought, because he said 'I like boys', he was trying to say 'I like to be friends with boys', and they said 'you're gay'.*

Another student talked about how clothes-related stereotyping can lead to this kind of bullying:

*Some people are saying to each other that you are a lesbian just because you are wearing a jacket that you have seen a boy in.*

Return  
to  
Contents

Sometimes bullying of this kind was leveraged against children who were also experiencing racist bullying. A Poppy School student had eventually left the school because of this:

**Student 1:** ... he was getting bullied and, and people ... kept telling, teasing him and saying that he wears girls' shoes and saying that he's gay.

**Student 2:** I've actually got something to add; I think ... he came from a completely different country. So, half of the stuff we was saying to him he didn't really understand and also most people use those words as insults to other people.

**Interviewer:** Do you know which country he was from?

**Several students:** Polish.

These repeated incidents functioned to create an environment in which students said that they would not advise a friend to come out. However, in stories about potential situations and where there was space to be supporting 'in secret', they often distanced themselves from homophobia. A Muslim boy at Cherry School explained:

*If someone told me a secret that they are gay or lesbian I would just say, okay just keep it away from other people so that they don't go mental or bonkers. But it will be fine by me ... you only tell one person, like you have to tell a person that you truly trust, and you can tell them like anything like your secret and they will keep it away from everyone ... Some people can get bullied by that, but I don't think that's a reason to get bullied.*

However, in practice the heteronormative environment meant that the students hesitated to challenge HBT bullying. A Willow School student suggested:

*Sometimes if you argue with someone that's saying that and you tell them not to say it, they'll turn against you and say 'is that because you're gay?' or like, I mean for me it is but for other people who are straight they're like 'oh that must be because you're gay then' and try and use that argument as well, or get things shouted at you for being gay.*

## How schools implemented the programme

### Behaviour management and bullying: a strategic gateway focus

Perhaps because of the bullying described by children in the focus groups, some schools initially took a fairly pathologising, bullying-focused approach to thinking about LGBT+ issues. Rather than celebrating and usualising diverse identities, they would think about LGBT+ people only at the point at which it became a behaviour issue. Sometimes this was because staff could not detach the idea of a LGBT+ identity from the idea of an adult sexual relationship. As the findings show below, this was sometimes because people held a stereotyped idea of a promiscuous 'gay lifestyle' which did not align with religious preference for a stable and ideally married relationship. They also understood that a heteronormative environment

Return  
to  
Contents



was also less than helpful for students who were heterosexual and cisgender but nevertheless gender non-normative. Staff thus felt that the bullying approach was more universally applicable. A teaching assistant at Holly School explained:

*Kids this age they're not really going round dating very much erm, homophobic bullying or transphobic bullying is likely to affect straight kids, transgender kids, as anyone else just because it's something thrown around and it's not targeted ... it's the best way to keep all kids safe.*

A bullying approach was also seen by some as a strategic way to get an LGBT+ focus agreed those governors (some of whom were parent governors) who held religious beliefs. The teaching assistant and deputy head at Holly School discussed this in one of the interviews:

**Teaching assistant:** *Governors meeting, they were like aw okay, then, alright, they don't want to really say "yes or no" and I was like "thing is they're the people most likely to get bullied are going to be straight kids because there's just more of them, and we don't want your children being in a school where they're going to get bullied. We don't want your children thinking it's an okay thing to bully about". And mum was like "oh gosh yes, yes, yes" and it's like, your children need to be somewhere safe and happy then we want your children to grow up to not bully. They were like "of course, absolutely" and really behind it... I think most people really want their kids to be in a school where they're happy.*

**Deputy head:** *As a parent that is absolutely key.*

**Teaching assistant:** *Yeah you don't want your kids to bully, you don't want your kids to be bullied.*

**Deputy head:** *Their happiness is far more important than grades and levels and data. You know, generally as a mother as they go through life, full stop, that's all you want for them, you know, is their happiness, so.*

At Wisteria School, 'snitching' was a particular concern, with students often refusing to tell teachers if they heard homophobic, biphobic or transphobic language for fear that they would be further bullied. However, by the end of the project, students in the focus groups were talking about how they felt much safer and more able to go to a staff member if another student used a homophobic, biphobic or transphobic word:

**Interviewer:** *What do you do if someone does bully in this school and they've used that word gay as an insult, what would you do?*

**Student 1:** *I would tell them 'how do you know if they're gay, how do you know if it doesn't hurt them when you say that?, and if you was to go to someone and say that they're gay and then they say it back to you, you wouldn't like it', and then the consequences would be that you might not be able to come to this school anymore because of how you retaliate to people.*

Return  
to  
Contents

**Interviewer:** *Do you think the teachers would take it seriously?*

**Student 1:** *Yeah.*

**Student 2:** *Yeah, someone's been suspended for saying something like that.*

Schools had also worked out how to get to more constructive discussions via a strategic bullying gateway activity. This often meant using Anti-Bullying Week as a way in to talking about LGBT+ people and issues. The Cherry School ECCO explained:

*So, it was Anti-Bullying Week last week and everything we did was about the Equality Flag, so the different children with different colours and we took a picture in assembly and they are all in their colours. We did the Edu-cake and Cel-a-bake ... And talking about equality.*

### **Schools rely on their legal mandate to do the work: Equality Act 2010**

Teachers often invoked the Equality Act 2010 as a mandate for the work. Its inclusive structure, which encourages people of different protected characteristics to develop mutual understanding and respect, includes both people of faith and LGBT+ people, and this is a real strength when it comes to inclusive school practice. The deputy head teacher at Iris School explained that this was helpful when families came to the school with belief systems and cultural norms which were perhaps traditionally less accepting of LGBT+ identities. She explained that some parents were committed to what she described as '... *cultural other laws*'. The school's approach was therefore not to 'promote' LGBT+ people and issues '... as a focus in itself'. Instead, she explained, they '... *focused on it ... in line with the Equality Act ... it's meant that we can do what we need to do and no one can actually challenge us*'.

### **Schools could build on Ofsted's mandate to do the work, but feel a conflict**

While Ofsted does in fact support the work of Educate & Celebrate and other similar initiatives to make schools LGBT+ friendly, schools did discuss some conflict in terms of the time commitment they could lend to this work during an Ofsted inspection.

The deputy headteacher in charge of inclusion at Holly School was asked in her interview whether the school would be holding one of the Educate & Celebrate community celebrations – a bake-off event entitled 'Edu-cake and Cel-a-bake':

**Teacher:** *We might well do, we might well do; it depends what sort of leeway if we get any from HMI monitoring. It really is you know, that will change the face of what our school development plan includes next year.*

**Interviewer:** *But when Ofsted goes to schools that do Educate & Celebrate, they like it.*

**Teacher:** *Of course, they do, they do. But they won't like it compared to pupil progress data, do you see what I mean? So, it's ... it's timetabling, it's energy commitment. We're a one form entry school, so there aren't many of us. So, we all wear lots of different hats.*

Return  
to  
Contents

### Schools rely on their legal mandate to do the work: British Values

The 'British Values' agenda can sometimes provide a route to including the LGBT+ content. One child at Holly School pointed out that the class had been learning about 'British Values', and that these applied to the LGBT+ friendly work '*... because it is like ... they accept the beliefs of others and accept how they work and like accept the different faiths and stuff*'.

The Holly School deputy head explained that the school felt justified in introducing their LGBT+ content '*...through the equality part of British Values and the whole equality policy. That's how we introduced it through student council with the children. We haven't done erm, a big thing in the newsletter to parents "come in you know, we're discussing LGBT+"*'.

### Should we be serious, or celebratory?

Teachers often expressed the concern that students would either not take discussions about LGBT+ people or issues seriously, or that they would be unable to be polite and kind if they were to avoid disrupting their family and culture's relationship with their religion. For this reason, initial approaches to the Educate & Celebrate materials were often quite subtle. A teaching assistant at Holly School talked about just '*creeping in*' the books by '*hiding them*' on the library shelves, as opposed to creating a special LGBT+ section; the headteacher at Cherry School did not want the 'LGBT' acronym on a foyer poster to be displayed; and the Holly School head of inclusion did not '*...want the branded stuff, [or] really want to do a lot of the erm, making rainbow cakes*'. However, once they had introduced some of the Educate & Celebrate books and materials and had the opportunity to talk with some of the children, school staff gained confidence from the children's responses. A teacher at Iris School explained:

*I think the thing that's created the change more than anything is teachers having the opportunity to actually hear children's opinions and hear just how sensibly and how sensitively and respectfully children can talk about LGBTQ issues, and in the same way that they can race issues and the same way that they do religious issues, without being silly, without being inflammatory, and they can do it with real sensitivity and they can do it and still recognise their religion, and I think that teachers have found that really helpful, really useful.*

By the end of the project, schools' walls were covered in rainbow displays about books featuring LGBT+ characters which the classes had read. One teacher at Iris School told us:

*...we're having our Rainbow Day on Friday and we're doing our cake sale*

and students explained their participation in a local community celebration:

*...we sang a song which is for Educate & Celebrate and we met other schools.*

### A usualising curriculum

The start of the project saw most of the schools running the occasional anti-bullying assembly, but steering away from embedding the materials across the curriculum. However, by the end the students were so blasé about LGBT+ people and issues that they could not even remember their presence in the curriculum. This is the goal of the usualising approach, and a senior teacher at Poppy School commented on

Return  
to  
Contents

how little the children had said about the new LGBT+ curriculum content in their focus group:

*Interesting that they really have no idea how much they're learning about it when they're learning about it, so [student 1] and [student 2] who said 'oh we've only done it once', I've looked at their learning, I've looked at their books and I can see that they're doing it every week practically ... I've got some samples, their class teacher is really engaged in the whole project ... She's doing it in loads of stuff, she's doing lots in philosophy ... in their literacy lessons as well, so I know that Year 2 have done And Tango Makes Three and other classes have done other books, they've done The Boy in the Dress ... and I'm really pleased that they answer in that way because it shows me that ... they're not seeing it as standing apart, and when [student 1] said 'maths is maths', that's completely him, all he cares about is maths so if it had two women or two men in the word problem they wouldn't even notice because all he would focus on is the maths, and that's the only thing that was important to him is getting the right answer, you know that's the thing that would matter to him.*

Staff also quickly understood that keeping the LGBT+ content to SRE lessons was problematic. Firstly, it drew an unnecessary pathologising or sexualizing focus onto the topic, which served to maintain stigma and diminished the elements of LGBT+ identity which are about other things, like culture and family. And secondly, parents are legally allowed to excuse their children from SRE, so some would have avoided the content altogether.

### Policies

Schools started the project with some policies to update. The Iris School deputy head explained:

*I think that our policies are fairly gender neutral, I think our policies refer to carers and parents rather than just mums and dads, I think there's a way to go with some things, for example our induction form I think for nursery, when children first join the school, it does kind of clearly indicate mother and father, I think that that needs to change to be parent 1 and parent 2.*

By the end of the project, staff were beginning to see the impact of their policy changes on parents and families in their community. Poppy School had changed its uniform advice in the school planners to say that 'children' could wear clothes from a given list, but not specifying gender. Shortly after this change was made, a teacher at the school explained:

*... we have a new boy whose started in Reception and his sister is in, I think a Year 4 class, but she's not in our school. She's going to be coming to our school next year. She was born a boy, but identifies as a girl. Yes, so mum just wanted to check that that would be fine.*

### Supporting LGBT+ students

Pastoral care is a familiar concept to faith and church schools and schools serving faith communities. So once the schools have engaged with the Educate & Celebrate programme they are able to draw on their established expertise in order to support their LGBT+ students. At Cherry School, a teacher explained:

Return  
to  
Contents

*We have got a little boy in Year 3 who identifies as a girl and wants to, she has got a name that she wants to be called ... and she wears like sparkly boots and things like that ... Her brother is in my class, he is Muslim, mum and dad, well they bought her those sparkly boots, they are happy for her to wear them in school so there is no concerns that they are trying to stop her from being how she is ... So she is getting on with it, what she is doing, there were a few boys that were teasing her at one point then they got taken out of class and spoken [to] about, you know, why are you doing this?*

### Communicating with parents

Schools were initially a bit nervous about whether they should forewarn parents about upcoming Educate & Celebrate content. However, Poppy School's ECCO did not feel that sending letters to parents beforehand would be helpful:

*I know some people in other schools go for the approach of 'we're doing this because of this, if you have any concerns...' I feel personally that's setting yourself up to say that you're doing something that's not okay for the children. ... I just think why, if I had a Black history workshop I wouldn't say 'hi parents, I'm having a workshop about Black history, if you're racist please contact me', like I wouldn't do that so I don't know why I would do that for anybody else, why would I do that?!*

In fact, the neighbouring Iris School did initially send letters to parents, and this resulted in a considerable time commitment spent in around 30 one to one parent-teacher meetings. In comparison, Poppy School's ECCO had two or three discussions at the school gate which resulted in parents feeling less worried about what was being taught.

Schools serving faith communities have had to think carefully about how to balance their students' home –based values against the work undertaken in class. A Holly School TA described her approach to this. Her class was reading a book called 'And Tango Makes Three', a true story about two male penguins who adopt a baby penguin at a zoo in the US:

*... when kids say, 'ooh, that's not right' ... I won't immediately jump into, 'ooh no you're wrong'. You have to be accepting, because the most important people in their lives are their parents and ... it is not really healthy for them to be having this massive great big divide for them and their parents. And yes, we agree you are not going to insult people, but if they say, 'oh, mum says it is wrong' I am not going to go 'well, she is just wrong then!', because that is their relationship that they need. I think half of it is providing another voice and so they are aware that - especially queer kids - that there is ... a different option. And I think that that is just as important a step as everyone going, 'yay, everything is fine'.*

The Poppy School ECCO took a similar approach with parents:

*We put it in our newsletter and everything ... I had about four parents the next day ... it was just 'I don't feel comfortable about you telling my son that it's okay to be gay because that's not what I believe', and I just head it off at the pass, I think the best way is to not make it into an argument or I'm trying to force my views onto somebody, so I just said to this dad, I was like 'no that's fine, whatever you think, obviously as part of our ethos in the school we think that it*

Return  
to  
Contents



*needs to be taught to children, we're not forcing an opinion on somebody, we're just showing them a range of opinions like we do in RE, we show a lot of different religions, like we do with cultures, so it's about learning about different people, it's not to impose a belief' ... and all parents have been fine with it.*

Noting that an inclusive curriculum includes people of a range of faiths and ethnicities as well as gender identities and sexual orientations can be useful in talking directly with parents. The Holly School headteacher said that she had told many parents: *'that's Equality Act, this is what we do now'*. This approach – drawing on the Equality Act 2010 – was one used by all the schools, and is very much in line with the Educate & Celebrate model. The Iris School ECCO described how these conversations with parents helped to make them feel that this work was all part of celebrating the school's diverse community:

*... by the time we'd talked about the legislation and the reasoning behind it and the parallels with race in terms of well actually you know, we're a very multi-ethnic community and how would you feel if your child was in a school where they didn't feel comfortable, where you didn't feel comfortable and you didn't feel recognised, where you didn't feel that your identity was celebrated, I'm sure that you wouldn't feel happy about that so why would you think it should be anything less than for another minority group or any other group.*

Another approach was to appeal to parents' religious commitment to kindness to one's neighbor. The Iris School ECCO explained that this was a really effective approach, and described how:

*... one of the things I used to come back to quite a lot was one of the main tenets of Christianity is to love and respect everybody, I said and that's all we're asking for, I said and if that's what you believe in your religion then surely that's not a difficult thing to do.*

### Representation and visibility

The representation and visibility of LGBT+ people and issues across the curriculum and the school environment is a really important strategy towards the objective of usualising them and addressing stigma. Without actively tackling this, it does not just happen naturally. Iris School students discussed the lack of LGBT+ representation in their history classes:

**Interviewer:** *So they talk about racism in history but not...*

**Student 1 (girl, Muslim):** *Not anything else, because in history, a long time ago everyone was, no-one, yeah they were just –*

**Student 5:** *They were divided, Black people and White people, and Black people were being straight.*

**Interviewer:** *So you've talked about segregation in history, and Halima you were going to say and nobody is what in history, nobody was what?*

**Student 1:** *Nobody was actually saying anything about gay.*

Return  
to  
Contents

Another interesting comment was made at the Cherry School student focus group. The children had asked each other about how they would tell their parents they wanted to marry someone of the same gender. James (a White boy) made a comment which demonstrates how important it is for children to see LGBT+ people within their environment:

*I would tell my parents after like a couple of days, like when you just arrange to get married, because my parents would be open minded they would do it because we have already got gay and lesbian like neighbours.*

School staff knew that representation as important and before the programme had really developed in their school, they were already talking about increasing visibility. The Cherry School ECCO explained:

*...one more thing that I want to get as well is our name cards with the badge of LGBT+ on the back, so that hopefully as soon as you walk through the school and you see that display, you know that we celebrate difference.*

By the end of the project, many schools had worked hard to develop their LGBT+ friendly displays. Visiting Holly School, the researcher was shown round a whole corridor of brightly coloured display boards by students from each year group. Each classroom had been working on an LGBT+ friendly book and the children's written work was pinned up along with detailed displays relating to a range of the books from the Educate & Celebrate Primary selection. The staff were really seeing the benefits:

*... there's an enormous amount of evidence, I mean the boards show a lot of work that's gone into to it, and the children can talk about it very well. Parents have looked at the boards and been very complimentary about the boards, they haven't you know picked up on anything, you know there's an acceptance that all families are different erm, no problem there.*

**(Holly School TA)**

## Staff confidence and resistance

### Teachers' initial lack of confidence

For schools which have not yet undergone their training with Educate & Celebrate, the now abolished homophobic law known as Section 28 still has an overshadowing effect on teachers. The ECCO at Iris School talked about how, fifteen years after it was removed from statute, teachers are still afraid to even mention anything about LGBT+ people or issues:

*I think that teachers do have a great deal of fear over the sort of hangovers from Section 28 and just thinking 'can I say it, can't I say it, do I need to check with the parents first, will I get in trouble, am I trampling on their religion, is it going to just open up a whole can of worms that I just ... haven't got time to deal with?' and 'oh maybe it's just best not to say it'.*

She felt that staff would often close down 'teachable moments' because of their lack of confidence and that this could be really damaging:

Return  
to  
Contents

*The number of times that I have heard teaching assistants say, when the child says 'oh so and so said that he's gay', they say 'oh don't be so silly' or 'don't be stupid' or 'that's disgusting' and not really thinking about their choice of language and their choice of response and how that might make children feel but also other adults feel, because it really makes me angry, not because I think that they think that personally, but I think that they're using it as a shorthand because they don't know how to tackle it with children and they don't know what to say, so they say it to kind of close it down.*

The Cherry School ECCO described how staff worried about what parents of faith might say if they mentioned LGBT+ people and issues:

*... what makes them not so confident to teach it is thinking about if they are going to mention words than they are going to go home to their parents and the children go to say the words and, mainly I think it's the parents. But also there is some teachers I think, it's sometimes their faith holding them back.*

A TA at Holly School identified staff anxiety as being based on the fear of saying the wrong thing, and noted that training can address this problem:

**TA:** *I think there are bits of anxiety. But less so now, now that they have sat down, they have had the meeting and they have used the words, so I am going to say yes, that it is ok to say. Cos a lot of them were saying, '...can I say that? Isn't that naughty? Isn't that like the wrong word to say?' and just to hear you say, 'no, it is ok, you can say it'. And I think you can just see the tension in the room just fade away a little bit.*

**Interviewer:** *Do you remember any of the things that teachers were saying, oh, can I say that?*

**TA:** *Definitely 'queer'. That was the one that really stood out, I think that maybe they were a bit worried about 'gay'. They were like, 'well shouldn't we say homosexual?'*

The lack of confidence can have an impact on teachers' pedagogical creativity and flexibility. The Holly School ECCO gave an example of a class she had been working in as a TA:

*We were looking at poetry ... about cold and ... it was like 'cold as a woman, she is soft snow, she kisses your lips. Cold as a man, he is hard and cruel' and this was to year 6's last year ... and one boy... went 'so, basically, the cold used to be a woman and then became a man', and then another girl ... went, 'what you mean, the word is transgender' and all the class went 'yeah Aisha!'-fantastic! And his teacher, Mr Johns was taking it, he was like 'no, no, no! it's a metaphor, it's a metaphor!' and the kids would go 'no, it's transgender' and he was just like 'oh'. ... Because they know that, that stuff they bring up but we don't as staff, we don't bring it up.*

Return  
to  
Contents

### Faith, conscience and resistance: strategic management of people and relationships

Some teachers' hesitation about working with the Educate & Celebrate methodology was possibly due to ideas about what is acceptable for a person of a particular faith. The Cherry School ECCO described an initial sense of uncertainty among some of the Muslim staff during training:

**ECCO:** *Yeah, I think it's their faith some of them, some of the teachers I think they don't agree so they therefore don't want to put it forward ... I am not saying that they say that blatantly, they don't.*

**Interviewer:** So how do you know?

**ECCO:** *Faces pulled.*

**Interviewer:** Okay, during training you mean?

**ECCO:** *Yeah.*

At the end of the year-long project, two of the three male Muslim teachers at Cherry School had still not undertaken the training or implemented any of the Educate & Celebrate strategies, presumably because they were both Year 6 teachers and had been maintaining a keen focus on preparing their students for SATs. The ECCO identified a male Muslim teacher in Year 3 who had been implementing the Educate & Celebrate programme consistently and who could perhaps support the Year 6 colleagues to implement the inclusive curriculum:

**ECCO:** *...the next thing for me to do is to talk to those teachers and tell them that now that is all over, because they are catching up with everything else that the whole school have been doing, so that needs to be in there... And if they have got any, where again that's the same with me being a woman as well, they might feel a bit uncomfortable coming to me and talking to me about it, so.*

**Interviewer:** Do you think they might? Are you anticipating that or not really?

**ECCO:** *A little bit but I can always, if that is, I am, actually thinking about it now, I might get Tareq who I am quite close to, a Year 3 teacher, I can always get him to come and talk to them about it, where they might feel a bit more comfortable and then he would relay it back to me.*

**Interviewer:** Has he managed it [the LGBT+ inclusive curriculum] okay?

**ECCO:** *Yeah, he just gets on with it.*

This approach to strategically building was an important approach to developing LGBT+ friendly schools across the sample. Other approaches to managing people and relationships in what might potentially be an emotionally charged piece of work included pragmatic acceptance of people's differences. At Poppy School, a teaching assistant whose background was in the African Christian Evangelist tradition was resistant to working with LGBT+ materials as a matter of religious

Return  
to  
Contents

conscience. The ECCO described how the headteacher took the view that this TA's viewpoint could be pragmatically accommodated without undermining the programme:

*One thing that I found quite interesting was that we had one member of staff, I asked to put a display up for me, our Educate & Celebrate display, and she refused because she said it was against her religious beliefs ... She went to my Head who is gay, she knows this, and she said 'Sharon asked me to put a display up, I don't feel like I can because it compromises my religious beliefs, it's not that I have an issue with people being gay but I don't want to promote it', now personally myself, I was fuming and I was like, when he told me I was like 'well I'm going to call her in and say she has to, if she doesn't want to do something, what if she said 'I'm not putting a Black African display up'? You just can't act like that' and I was having a little kick off. Paul's [the head teacher] a bit more tolerant than me, he was like 'why did you ask her, you know how really religious she is', and I was like 'because that's her job is to put the displays up', and he was like 'you're not going to be able to change people's views, if she doesn't want to do it then she doesn't want to do it, just let it go', but to me that surprised me because I didn't want to let it go, I wanted to have a meeting. But then I did calm down and took a few deep breaths, and I was like 'well it's fine, if she's not saying that to children then I suppose I can't ask people to change their beliefs'.*

This exchange illustrates the way school staff discursively negotiate their identities and interests by invoking various characteristics protected under the Equality Act 2010. The school had other strategies in place which meant the staff member could maintain her faith identity without it infringing on other protected characteristics.

Faith could also be a stimulus for a more inclusive approach: other staff members at Poppy school from a similar background viewed the programme very differently to the TA described above. The ECCO explained:

**ECCO:** *There are [three who are] teachers of faith and didn't struggle. In fact, if anything, during the training they were the most committed to it ... one of them, she was really double checking everything with [the trainer]. I mean, stuff that I hadn't even thought about. She was like, 'So, if somebody doesn't identify with any binary, what pronoun do I use?'*

**Interviewer:** *Why do you think the three people who are particularly of faith were that committed? What was it about?*

**ECCO:** *I think just because it's not maybe something that they were used to.*

Holly School staff, many of whom were practicing Catholics, held a similar view in terms of wanting to get it right. The ECCO explained:

*... I know one of them is very worried that she's going to make things worse by saying anything ... and a lot of words that she thinks are slurs now she's finding out are not slurs ... So, she's worried if she used the word 'gay', she thinks ... using the word 'gay' is homophobic in itself. And she doesn't want to do things that will make things worse. So, I know that's something that's going around for a lot of people.*

Return  
to  
Contents



It is not clear how these teachers aligned their faith with their inclusive practice. However, conversations with parents from similar backgrounds as part of this project indicated a strong commitment to respecting others, rooted in a faith which aspired to neighbourly love and forgiveness.

### Improved confidence

Over the year of the project, teacher confidence improved for a variety of reasons. The Educate & Celebrate resources and training had a tangible impact. The programme's focus on the Equality Act 2010 also gave teachers the understanding that their work was backed up by the legislation. Many staff members benefitted from inclusive modelling by senior staff allies, and others were encouraged by the open minded and engaged attitudes of the children and young people they worked with on LGBT+ inclusion.

The Cherry School ECCO described how the online materials recommended by Educate & Celebrate helped to boost teacher confidence:

*... I have given them a resource bank of Proper Knowledge videos that they can use for every teacher, which I think makes them more confident when speaking about it.*

Like all the schools in the sample, Iris School staff appreciated the book resources. The curricular approach to the project really complemented the disciplinary approach:

*... teachers feel more confident in how to address it and challenge it and educate the children on the reasons why it wasn't the right thing to say or why it would be offensive ... so not just kind of a punitive measure, there's much more focus on actually teaching them, and that's where the books have come in really useful as well ... they feel ... more empowered, [and] engaged in trying to educate the children and being confident in talking to the children and answering questions ... around these issues, and not shying away from things.*

Confidence was also raised through the staff training and discussions at staff meetings, particularly on vocabulary. The Cherry School ECCO described the impact:

*... the PowerPoint, basically said, 'gay, lesbian, bisexual, trans; that's what you say because that's what it means', you know. And there was some other words that might come up and it had meanings, so once we gave all the adults meanings and things, I think it took their anxiety away a bit from teaching it.*

Staff at Holly School felt more confident because, as the ECCO explained:

*I think actually they were quite relieved ... because of having the backing of the Equality Act.*

The support of senior staff allies also really helped with the development of general teacher confidence. At Iris School, the ECCO explained about the impact of making LGBT+ acceptance really visible via school assemblies:

*... the Head's led a couple of them as well, I think that's really great and I think that's made a big difference to the project ... the Head's engaged, and*

Return  
to  
Contents

*teachers who are really well respected in the school are really on board with the project, and teachers who the children respond well to, so they want to get engaged, they want to be involved, they want to take part.*

Iris School staff also felt more confident because of the leadership demonstrated by their own students. The ECCO explained:

*I think the thing that's created the change more than anything is teachers having the opportunity to actually hear children's opinions and hear just how sensibly and ... respectfully children can talk about LGBTQ issues, and in the same way that they can [discuss] race issues and the same way that they do religious issues ... without being inflammatory, and they can do it with real sensitivity and they can do it and still recognise their religion, and I think that teachers have found that really helpful ... in some ways that's been the biggest example to teachers ... if the kids can talk about it, then why shouldn't they be able to, and I think it's instilled confidence in them in thinking 'actually do you know what, they did listen really sensibly in that assembly, they have got relevant questions, that is something I feel confident to talk about because they weren't silly, they weren't really all expressing really bigoted attitudes, there are some children in there that will stand up and say 'actually no, that's not right, it's not nice to call people things like that, it's not nice to make comments about people's, who they love'...*

This demonstrates that whilst school staff have the power to initiate change, students (particularly via the Pride Youth Networks) can be real partners and leaders in developing inclusive school environments.

### Developing a career

The work of an ECCO was seen by many teachers as an opportunity to develop their practice and to broaden their skill set towards a leadership and management role. Many teachers who had already developed inclusion practice around SEND or languages felt comfortable to take on LGBT+ content as their next challenge, feeling that they already had an understanding of the positive benefits inclusion can give to a school. The Cherry School ECCO explained how she got involved:

*I have been told that I am quite good with inclusion and within my class I have the lower ability children ... and also because I wanted to do more, so I put myself forward.*

An Inclusion Manager at Holly School similarly explained that she had become involved with the project because of her focus on disabilities and gender-based inclusion. She had over the years developed a solid career as a SENCO. Her background as a member of the local community and of a very traditional Catholic family had given her an interest in the meanings and experiences of traditional patriarchal gender roles. This had led to her interest in LGBT+ inclusion and her work with Educate & Celebrate.

Other staff noted the opportunities available to them through the programme. The Holly School ECCO explained how she was surprised at the responsibility given to her:

*I'm like 'I've never been made coordinator of anything before, I'm a Teaching Assistant!'*

Return  
to  
Contents

In those schools which protected time for ECCO duties, the work was more comprehensive and was taken more seriously.

### Should teachers 'come out'?

Asking whether or not a teacher can or should come out as LGBT+ in school is an illuminating way to test the impact of a programme like Educate & Celebrate.

The Cherry School ECCO recounted how a gay colleague was not 'out' to staff but nevertheless 'known' as gay. Coming out to students did not feel as safe – she explained that:

*... once when he was walking back from school once some children were shouting things out to him that he used to be in his class. He would never had said anything whilst being in school but once they were out of school and they have grown up a bit and not become very nice children, they were being a bit mean.*

Children at Cherry School seemed to know about this risk. In the focus group they advised that teachers should not come out as they might be teased. However, they also felt that it was actually quite important for teachers to be truthful about themselves with their students:

**Student 1:** *... sometimes they shouldn't hide it, sometimes they should ... If you really don't want to tell them and you just, and then one of your students ask you and you just lie then it's going to get even worse and then they ask you and you have forgotten the lie about being gay ...*

**Student 2:** *I don't think they should always tell them, maybe like for example you tell them then they go around telling everybody then everybody might start laughing at you sometimes ... they shouldn't occasionally because sometimes like if the children don't know about LGBT, sometimes they will just laugh and be like, what is that in the world?*

**Student 3:** *I think they should tell the students because they are not going to make fun about them because it's disrespectful and it's going to make them sad ...*

**Student 5:** *I think they shouldn't hide it, they shouldn't be shy because once they start learning about it and they start to know people, they will feel really bad because they will feel like my teacher has said this so nicely to us and we are making fun of her and we shouldn't judge other people about how they feel.*

These students recognised that they would benefit from knowing an LGBT+ person. They noted that children who had not had this experience might be more likely to tease someone who came out. They also felt that coming out indicated honesty in a person.

Coming out is a dynamic process, not a single event. For example, the ECCO at Holly School is bisexual and married to a woman; she explained that she lives and shops in the local community with her partner, and occasionally bumps into families from school. Here she talks about what she does if a family sees her with her partner out of school time:

Return  
to  
Contents

*Usually if I am walking around a shop, I will be holding her hand. And then I do the squeeze and casually let go thing. Because I think it is more comfortable now that school has started doing Educate & Celebrate because I didn't know the school would be so supportive at all and then suddenly, they really, really were. And I think because if I do come out there is a potential it could be a big discussion, so I am really not sure whether that is a discussion I want to have. Or maybe it will be nothing. But because it is the great unknown, I am really not sure about coming out.*

This ECCO is still unsure about how effectively she would be supported if she came out at school. Teaching about LGBT+ issues and being out at a school which serves a faith community seems to be getting easier for staff at schools involved with the Educate & Celebrate programme, but the sense of risk and the need for courage cannot be underestimated. Given the context of the policy history – this data was collected only 13 years after Section 28 was repealed – this is hardly surprising. She explains:

*I think, I'm not out to the children because even if it's one parent who's got an issue, I don't want to be the vanguard facing that, I want everyone... because I, I was really surprised when the school went for this because I was brought up under section 28. I ... said [to the Inclusion manager], 'I was brought up in Section 28 you know; this is quite shocking for me'. She went, 'what's Section 28?'*

It is of note that Section 28 appears to be a key memory for the LGBT+ staff member, but not of noticeable impact for the non-LGBT+ Inclusion Manager. Like the Holly School ECCO, the Iris School ECCO, a lesbian, was wary about being perceived or put in the role of 'vanguard', or being seen as pushing an 'agenda':

*There's a part of me that wonders ... because I'm very clearly gay, do they think that it's something that I'm bringing in and that I'm sort of pushing on the parents, do they see it as me bringing my ideas in rather than this being led by government and being led as a whole Federation decision, so when that's explained to them they do kind of understand it a bit more, but equally I'm not going to shy away from doing it because of that.*

However, like the Holly School ECCO, the Iris School ECCO felt safer and better supported in the LGBT+ friendly work towards the end of the programme year. Both ECCOs felt that this work was no longer automatically handed to them because they were 'the out teacher'. The Iris School ECCO explained:

*The difference it's made to me is that I feel more valued in school ... more sort of a collegiate approach from other teachers in dealing with it, so I don't feel like, you know sometimes when you're the kind of very clearly gay person in the school it can be 'oh well you can deal with that' and it kind of comes your way, I don't feel that way in the same way and ... I don't feel that teachers feel I'm sort of banging a drum or that it should all fall in my bailiwick or anything like that, I think that they kind of feel that it's important to do it, it's right to do it and they are incredibly supportive, so that's been a change for me.*

Return  
to  
Contents

The other issue around teachers coming out is that the senior staff response to student or parent comments is key to the development of an LGBT+ friendly school environment. The Iris School ECCO explained what happened in a former school:

*... if they were to ask me, I would never lie to them ... and children in my last school ... had asked me, and I did answer it quite clearly, and ... one of the children was running round the playground saying 'oh Miss Harry's gay, Miss Harry's gay' and ... some children then ran to tell another adult in the playground 'oh so and so is saying that Miss Harry's gay, oh it's not fair, that's not nice, they're calling Miss Harry names'. And the head teacher at the time didn't quite know how to deal with it, she didn't know me very well, she'd only just started at the school, and she said to another member of staff 'how do you think Jo is going to take it, what shall I do about it?' And the other member of staff who was a deputy just burst out laughing and said 'have you met Jo? She really is not going to care at all!'*

The ECCO explained that a response that failed to understand that 'gay' can be nonjudgmentally understood to be a mere descriptor could in fact be more damaging:

*... the head teacher spoke to the child and sort of said 'it's not very nice to say things'... I think the child probably felt quite bad about it in a way, and so I spoke to her at the end of the day and I said 'yeah you're absolutely right, I am, I know that you see me at the weekends sometimes with my partner and that's absolutely fine, you weren't saying anything unkind, you were telling other children and I know that you're upset because they were saying that you're a liar and you're not a liar, and that's absolutely fine, but maybe just don't tell them because it's not big news, it's not anything important enough to run around tell them, you wouldn't tell them that another teacher was Black or another teacher was married or not married, so perhaps just if you know it that's fine, you're cool with it because mum and dad are cool and they've explained it to you'.*

In line with this the ECCO felt that coming out or not should not be a difficult question:

*I don't think it's a matter of should or shouldn't, I think it's however teachers feel about it, I think that teachers have a right to do what they want in the sense that anybody has the right, and I don't think it's harmful for them to come out, I don't think it's harmful for children, I don't think it's wrong, I think it's entirely up to teachers if they feel confident to.*

For this ECCO, confidence meant feeling safe. After the programme had been implemented at Iris School, she did feel safe as an out lesbian teacher:

*... I feel safe here, I feel safe even if parents display attitudes that are contrary to my beliefs, I still feel safe, I feel as respected in school as other members of staff do, I know that there are some members of staff that probably have more difficulty with it, but by and large they don't display that, well they don't display it with me and if they did I would challenge them on it, so I feel completely confident.*

Return  
to  
Contents



She felt that whether or not a teacher should be truthful about their identity was more important:

*I think it's entirely up to people, I think they have an individual choice, but I don't think ... I wouldn't advocate lying to a child, I'd never advocate saying 'no I'm not' if you clearly are and they asked you, or they saw you and you said 'who was that you were with?', I wouldn't make up a story.*

The fact is, teachers and their students and families often live, work and study within the same community, go to the same shops, parks and swimming pools and ride on the same buses and trains, so it is not realistic to consistently hide one's identity. The Iris School ECCO described an incident which demonstrates this:

*... so one child saw me at the airport in the summer and she said 'who's that?' and I said 'it's my friend', it actually was my friend, and she went 'oh okay' and she sort of just looked at me, and then she went 'oh okay, well I've been following you around', I was like 'clearly, super smooth', and so she came up to me to say hello ... and sort of questioned me on what I was doing and where I was going and who I was going with and how long I was going for, so yeah it doesn't bother me.*

What really emerged from the discussions about teachers coming out in a school serving a faith community was the importance of a committed relationship as opposed to what one teacher called 'a single lifestyle' and another called 'bed-hopping'. The data suggested that often it is not the LGBT+ relationship that parents (and some teachers) are worried about, but the idea of sex outside of marriage or at least a committed monogamous relationship. The Poppy School ECCO, a woman who was engaged to be married to a man at the time of the interview, explained:

**Interviewer:** *Are there any LGBTQ teachers here other than the headteacher ... out to staff?*

**ECCO:** *Yes, to staff, yes.*

**Interviewer:** *Are they out to the kids?*

**ECCO:** *No. The thing is, that's just because we don't discuss our ... We wouldn't be outwardly heterosexual to the children because of the age that they are either.*

**Interviewer:** *Do they know you're getting married though?*

**ECCO:** *They know I'm getting married, but I guess if I was getting married to a woman, I would talk about it just the same. I think they know I'm getting married because it's an event, but I wouldn't be like, 'Oh, I've got a boyfriend.' I wouldn't have discussed a boyfriend. I've discussed that I'm getting married.*

**Interviewer:** *If one of your gay teachers was getting married ...*

**ECCO:** *That would just be discussed the same as anything ...*

Return  
to  
Contents

**Interviewer:** *Would you talk about going on holiday with your boyfriend?*

**ECCO:** *No, we don't really. We don't really discuss things like that at all, to have those boundaries. We wouldn't ever really say anything, we'd say with 'a friend'. Any time that I've ever said anything I've never mentioned a boyfriend. I'd always say I'm going on holiday with a friend. The only time it is ever mentioned really is when someone's getting married or having a child. [A male colleague] recently had a child so he brought in a picture of his child with his girlfriend. I guess if he was having a child with a man, he would have done the same. That wouldn't have been an issue. It's just that the people who are bisexual or homosexual in our school are not married. I think they're all single actually. Yes. Peter is single, who is our head teacher. He wouldn't be discussing like, 'Oh, I went to a club last night and met this guy.' It's just not really a thing.*

There are echoes here of fears of a stereotyped 'gay lifestyle'. This exchange gives a real insight into the concerns held by schools serving faith communities around talking about LGBT+ people and issues. Educate & Celebrate could potentially add materials on marriage and similar relationships between LGBTQ people to their resources specifically to support schools serving faith communities.

## Working with parents

### Fear of parental concern

One of the things which does undermine teacher confidence in talking about LGBT+ issues in faith schools and schools serving faith communities is a fear of parental concern. The scripted response to parents' questions provided in the meetings and training offered by Educate & Celebrate is useful in addressing this. As a Holly School staff member explained, *'I get a bit stuck with my words anyway and I feel like if I was to then, if a parent was to approach me I need to be professional and I need to know the appropriate thing to say'*.

The fear appears to be rooted in the same ideas discussed above in relation to whether or not teachers should come out at school: a stereotyped view of a promiscuous 'LGBT+ lifestyle' which is thought to mitigate against the idea of a committed monogamous relationship. The Holly School Inclusion Manager explained:

*... because we're a faith school this idea of marriage, not in terms of heterosexual marriage but in terms of relationships of sex being erm, part of the committed and loving relationship is really, really intrinsic to the faith. And I think parents I've spoken to at the workshops of different faiths that is really important. So, I think if we can make sure...*

**Interviewer:** *What the idea that sex should be in, within marriage?*

**Inclusion Manager:** *With – within a committed loving relationship. Alright? Erm... i.e. parents and Governors do not want to seem ... to be promoting bed hopping. As, as a life choice for various reasons.*

Return  
to  
Contents

Based on parents' responses to some previous Sex and Relationships Education, the Poppy School ECCO also expected some parental concern about this issue:

*With Educate & Celebrate, it's fine for us to promote that. Our problem is with SRE parents can withdraw children from SRE lessons based on faith. It's that aspect; it's the sex before marriage. It's not the sex.*

There was, then, a bit of work to do around decoupling the stereotyped concept of promiscuity from the idea of LGBT+ people.

Other predictions of parental backlash were actually based on personal knowledge of the parents. The Holly School ECCO described how she predicted a negative reaction to the Educate & Celebrate work from '... one dad who said he didn't want his daughter to play football because it will make her a lesbian and I predict he'd be a dad who'd have issues'.

The children interviewed also anticipated parental concern, although it was not usually warranted. Students at Cherry School discussed telling their parents about upcoming Educate & Celebrate events:

**Interviewer:** ... Have you guys ever told your parents about the LGBT+ stuff that you have talked about in school?

**Student 1:** I told my sisters and they told my dad because I was too scared because my dad was in a bad mood and sometimes he gets really angry with me asking questions ... So, I told my sister to say it because he wouldn't shout at her ... I don't remember what he said but I think he said, 'that's good because you are supposed to be learning about that and even if you are I will support you', I think that's what he said.

**Student 2:** I got the letter, when I got the letter for the conference for me to go, my mum was like 'what's LGBT?' And then my sister saw the letter and everyone paused for a minute so it was awkward and my mum said, 'should you go?' I said, 'I want to go' and then she knew something about what LGBT+ was and I got really scared.

**Interviewer:** And did they let you go in the end?

**Student 2:** Yeah, they did

### Parental acceptance

As mentioned above, school staff anticipated that parents would be worried about their children hearing about sex outside a committed monogamous relationship. There was also some confusion about what was being taught: at Iris School, parents seemed to be worried that their children would be taught about gay sex. The ECCO reported parental concern '... over the content thinking their children are too young to know about these issues, and that we may be teaching their children what people do'.

Another area of concern is related to faith and parents' fear that 'being gay' is a sin against the tenets of their religion. One student at Iris School said in the focus group that a Christian could not be gay because they would 'go to hell'. Some parents seem to be acting to protect their children from participation in Educate &

Return  
to  
Contents

Celebrate curriculum and celebrations as a result of this fear. Teachers understood this and sought to reassure parents. The Poppy School ECCO said:

*I ... had one parent come to me on the gate and he said, 'It's against my religion. I believe that homosexuality is a sin. That's how I bring my son up, I don't want him being told any different.' I said he has to be told different, because it's part of our inclusion policy, it's part of our equality that we have to tell him because that's what we think. Obviously, anything that you educate your son with at home, I don't get involved in that. He was like, 'That's fine.' I think sometimes they just want to say. Obviously, to them, if they do feel that strongly about it I have to respect that. It's a different culture, it's a different religion. I think it must be really sad if you really, genuinely believed that your son would be going to hell if he was gay. That must be a fear that you have. If that's something that you believe and then you think, 'Oh goodness, they're being corrupted by this woman.' That must be a genuine fear. I do respect that.*

Other parents seemed to talk themselves through their own concerns in conversation with teachers. The Iris School ECCO described a discussion she had had with a Christian parent:

*I think it has a lot to do with religion for some people and also cultural background, I met with a parent yesterday from West Indian origin and he said 'look, we just don't like it, we just think it's plain wrong, we just think it's wrong, it's not our belief, my family have always said if someone comes out in our family or someone's gay in our family then we'll disown them, but then again they're talking [rubbish] because two of my cousins are gay and we still talk to them and everyone's fine about it'. He said, 'so we say one thing, as a culture there's a very set belief and a very set expectation, but it's 2016, I'm not quite sure how far they're going to go with that', so he was actually completely different to what I expected him to be.*

There was an idea among some teachers that Muslim families were less likely than some African Evangelist families to keep their children away from school during Educate & Celebrate content. The Iris School ECCO said:

*We did have a couple of parents that chose to keep their children off when some of the learning was taking place that they did know about when we had Educate & Celebrate Week ... largely ... for religious reasons ... it's been predominantly Christians, sort of evangelical Christian families, but some of our Muslim families have chosen to as well, however the Muslim families that we have on the whole, I don't know why, tend to be a bit more relaxed about it in the sense that they express their unhappiness about it but they don't take that move, but I wonder if that's about having more of a value for education in their community and therefore they really feel the overriding point is that they don't want their child to be missing school...*

However, whilst some families did keep children home for a day or two, ultimately, they seemed to accept that nothing negative was happening, and sent their children back to school. In most cases parents were worried until they realized that the materials were just about the different kinds of identities and relationships people could have, and the importance of being accepting of difference. The Poppy

Return  
to  
Contents

School ECCO spoke to a parent:

*Yeah, so this one dad just said ... 'my wife went to meet the teacher yesterday and she said there was a slide about how you're going to be teaching children about being gay, and I'm not happy about my son hearing that because we don't think that that's a normal way to live' ... he didn't do it in an aggressive way, so I just said 'obviously that's your opinion, obviously we're not saying anything that's not part of our curriculum ... we're just helping them to understand about the world, so they're not prejudiced and it's not to impose any kind of view that contradicts what you say at home', and then the dad was like 'oh okay' and I said you know 'if you want me to ever send you any documents, anything that I do in assemblies, if you want me to send you power points' and then he was like 'oh no no that's fine Miss, it's okay'.*

## Children's views: families, religion, and LGBT+ issues

Children in the focus groups often asked each other whether they would be able to come out as LGBT+ in their families. They speculated about what their families would say. Their thoughts and ideas on this were a good indicator about how they balanced their family and school cultures. Two key themes emerged from these discussions. The first is that the students in families where faith was important usually felt that coming out as LGBT+ was important for the reason that any kind of lying is very much against the rules. Secondly, students arrived at the conclusion that even if it was not ok to be LGBT+, they and their families knew to be respectful and accepting to people that are LGBT+. Teaching staff accepted this as some kind of compromise and were careful to balance the protected characteristics of religion, sexual orientation, and gender identity.

### Coming out to your family

Before the Educate & Celebrate programme, some of the focus group students predicted dire consequences for them if they came out as LGBT+ at home. A Cherry School student explained:

*... it can cause a lot of stress because if you are telling your mum or dad they can go bonkers like they can go mental like, 'you're gay?! you're gay?!' literally ... Because some people ... don't want their daughter or son to be gay because they think it's disgusting themselves and if they do become gay, I don't know, the parents might like really crazy like, 'get out of my house, I don't want you anymore!'*

And a student at Iris School explained:

*Like what [Christian student] said, she said her parents would go ballistic, but I think the only reason they'll go ballistic is because in Africa and stuff like that, they're not used to seeing, the worlds not used to seeing black people gay, that's why they go really crazy ...*

Over the course of the year, students began to develop a way of negotiating ethical and philosophical journeys between home and school. A student at Iris School explained the importance of truth in her family culture:

Return  
to  
Contents

*It says it on our wall, it says 'would you rather tell the truth and make someone cry, or would you rather tell a lie and make them happy?', and my mum used to tell that to me all the time, she used to tell me before I used to do anything, if I did something wrong she would tell me 'tell me the truth even if it does make me cry, and don't tell me a lie even though it makes me happy', because lying makes no difference; you could lie to make someone happy all their life, but then you know that you didn't do the wrong thing inside and then you're just going to make yourself feel guilty each time you lie about it, and that's why people say 'never tell a lie' because you end up feeling guilty.*

At Holly School, students agreed that telling the truth was important in thinking about coming out to parents as LGBT+:

**Muslim student 1 (boy):** *If I was to tell my parents I would have to tell them straight away, because if you tell them later on, then they'll just get into more trouble because they will say "well why didn't you tell me before, why didn't you tell me before". So, it is good to tell them when you have just become it, so that they will know.*

**Muslim student 2 (girl):** *If I was to be gay or lesbian, I would have to tell my parents straight away like Afzal said. But if you ... don't tell them straight away they'll obviously get angry and they will probably say "Why didn't you tell me at first? I would be okay with it, but why didn't you tell me at the first?" They want to know straight away, because parents do.*

A student at Iris School felt more optimistic:

*My mum would really, she would love me for whoever I am, whatever I am, because as a Muslim we believe that it doesn't matter who you are, what skin colour you are, your mum and your dad will be there for you from the day you were born until the day you die.*

### **'Be respectful, but don't be gay'**

Towards the end of the programme, students often arrived at a compromise where they said they would be kind to LGBT+ people but would not come out as LGBT+ themselves. Iris School students explained what they would do if a friend came out as gay:

**Student 1:** *I would literally freak out and tell the teacher ... there's no way I would allow someone to call me gay.*

**Student 2:** *No not calling you gay, he's saying that he's gay himself, he's telling you he's gay, how would you react?*

**Student 1:** *I'd just be like 'okay, that's your life'.*

Parents at the schools towards the end of the programme were upholding the same compromise. At Iris School, a student explained what happened at home after he was excluded for using homophobic language in the playground. This same mother had kept her child home from an Edu-cake and Cel-a-bake event:

Return  
to  
Contents



*They said I'm not allowed to play on my Xbox for a month ... and I had to stay in my room and not allowed to watch TV or play with any of my toys ... because even though my religion is against it, my mum doesn't mind anyone who's around Christianity being gay, or she doesn't mind as far as Christianity, but when someone, like if someone in our family says it she gets very serious about it.*

Teachers understood this balance and drew on it as a strategy. The Poppy School ECCO described a discussion with the children about Fox and Owl, a well-known transgender couple who create educational videos and write books about their experiences:

*As part of that, somebody said, one of the girls said, 'I'm a Christian. I told my mum we talked about this and she said that we don't believe in that because it's against my religion.' I said, 'Well, you're entitled to your opinion just like anybody else. I'm not asking you to believe in it and that's what you should do, but how do you think you should act to people?' She was like, 'Oh no, I wouldn't be rude to somebody,' and I was like, 'That's all I can ask you to do.' When she said that, other people in the class then started having a go at her. Being like, 'Oh, that's like being a racist.' I was like, 'No, because now you're just discriminating against her because of her beliefs.' I was like, 'We just need to be open to everybody,' because I didn't want them to start turning on her for saying that. She's allowed to voice her opinion. It's fine. I said to the class, 'If your parents have said to you or if you really strongly believe that it's against your religion,' because she was saying that her mum said she had been born into a body given by God and so it was a sin to say that's not. I said, 'That's fine, if that's what you believe and that's how you identify with yourself and that's what you think, that's fine. What we're saying is, is it okay for somebody else to not think like you?' She was like, 'Yes, that's fine.' That's the only way that I could do it. They are still young to be having too much of an internal discussion about their religious beliefs.*

Schools serving faith communities, which seek, to usualise LGBT+ people and issues must balance a range of needs and identities. This work brings LGBT+ and non-LGBT+ teachers, parents and students to meet at a place of mutual respect and kindness.

Return  
to  
Contents

# Conclusions

It was important to parents to understand that the programme was about usualising the full variety of identities and relationships that children may see in the world around them. Key to managing interactions with parents about the programme was a willingness to listen empathically. However, relationships with parents also worked better where schools did not pre-emptively flag up LGBT+ content as potentially problematic.

ECCOs and other teachers developed confidence over the year long programme. They built on their established expertise in pastoral care, and worked hard to build positive, collaborative relationships with parents. In this work they were led by the students, whose open-minded, creative and thoughtful approach to thinking through the issues faced by LGBT+ people of faith illuminated the way. Essentially, schools serving faith communities found that everyone could agree that no religion condones bullying, and students of all ages became adept at talking through the issues, often independently arriving at the idea that the idea of a higher power and/or a creator could legitimately result in the existence of LGBT+ people.

## **With Educate & Celebrate, schools which serve faith communities:**

1. *Begin with a one-off anti-bullying assembly, which builds staff confidence*
2. *Embed the Educate & Celebrate materials across the curriculum and within the school environment, with full usualising achieved by the end of the school year*
3. *Build on existing pastoral care expertise to support their LGBT+ students to come out and be themselves at school*
4. *Engage with parents at the school gate through explaining the universal application of the Equality Act 2010, including in relation to religion and by appealing to parents' religious commitment to kindness to one's neighbour*
5. *Deconstruct the stereotyped view of a promiscuous 'LGBT+ lifestyle' among parents, providing reassurance that the programme is about respecting and accepting differences in people's relationships and identities*
6. *Balance the protected characteristics of religion, sexual orientation, and gender identity in teaching and discussions through a strong commitment to mutual respect*
7. *Improve teacher confidence through engaging with the Educate & Celebrate training on the inclusiveness of the Equality Act 2010*
8. *Support teaching staff through inclusive modelling of the programme by senior staff allies and pragmatically accommodate some staff members' religion-based viewpoints without undermining the programme*
9. *Support LGBT+ teachers to come out, if they choose to, by ensuring all staff take responsibility to address homophobic, biphobic and transphobic behaviour*
10. *Celebrate the school's inclusivity with the community through joyful bake-off events, Rainbow Weeks, Colour Runs, and Community Showcases*

Return  
to  
Contents



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