



PUBLIC PETITION NO.

PE01573

Name of petitioner

Jordan Daly on behalf of T.I.E. - Time for Inclusive Education

Petition title

Statutory teaching of LGBTI+ issues

Petition summary

Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to make the teaching of LGBTI+ issues and topics statutory in all schools, with the introduction of a diverse and fully inclusive education programme that addresses, acknowledges and highlights such matters relating to the LGBTI+ community in a positive and progressive manner.

Action taken to resolve issues of concern before submitting the petition

I have spoken to an SNP MP who advised that statutory education that encompasses LGBTI+ issues was missing from the curriculum. I have also emailed all MSPs, providing my personal experience at secondary school - highlighting that LGBTI+ youth are being largely excluded within the education system. I emphasised my struggle throughout secondary school and the lack of support or inclusive education that was available. However, I only received helpful responses from two. I then had further correspondence with these MSPs, one of whom replied with advice and provided me with government guidelines which allowed denominational schools to opt out of inclusive teaching programmes such as *Relationships, Sexual Health and Parenthood (RSHP)* education, which - as an ex-pupil of a Roman Catholic high school that neglected such topics - does not address my concerns. I have had conversations with MSPs and MPs about the introduction of a statutory requirement of teaching of LGBTI+ issues in Scottish schools.

Further, I have spoken with a representative of *LGBT Youth Scotland*, who highlighted that this is necessary - as previous action in this area has been unproductive since many schools have opted out. Thus, I believe that a petition of this nature is the suitable option at this point.

Petition background information

The Scottish education system is failing LGBTI+ youth and reform is required. Currently - individual institutions can opt out of progressive, inclusive education programmes, and many do - therefore, messages of support and positivity are not reaching LGBTI+ youth in our society, and efforts to tackle homo/bi/transphobia in schools is largely failing.

Thus, I am calling for the Scottish Government to introduce a **statutory education**

programme that builds on current framework and pays attention to topics and issues relating to LGBTI+ pupils (see examples below).

There are a wide array of LGBTI+ organisations and groups that are supportive of this petition, and have the capability to contribute to the formation of such a programme - I propose that, should this be taken further, the Government utilise these resources and co-operate with such groups when addressing this issue. We would expect such a programme to be prescriptive, reviewed and monitored to ensure that it is effectively enforced.

Some examples of areas to address include:

- Homophobia, biphobia, transphobia.
- A more inclusive and diverse teaching of family types: incl. same-sex relationships.
- The teaching of the Equal Rights Movement; from Stonewall, the Gay Liberation Movement, ACT UP et cetera to the contemporary situation - both globally and nationally.
- Sexualities and sexual orientation, with focus on self-acceptance and support.
- Transgenderism, gender identity.
- A more realistic, comprehensive Sexual Health Education: incl. LGBT+ sexual health issues.

Section 28 was repealed fifteen years ago, yet our educational institutions are still not offering comprehensively inclusive teaching. Homo/bi/transphobia is a massive issue in our schools, and I believe that this can only be targeted and addressed through a legislative change to the education system - it is unproductive to attempt to tackle homo/bi/transphobia in schools, if the institutions can choose not to teach about it. By refusing to acknowledge or teach LGBTI+ issues, what such institutions are essentially doing is candidly ostracising LGBTI+ pupils.

As a homosexual and recent student of a Roman Catholic secondary school, I have first hand knowledge of this: when I was at my lowest point in my struggle with self acceptance, there was no support available. Homophobic language was rampant in the hallways yet it was never addressed. I had teachers discuss the "abomination" that is homosexuality. Whilst we were all made aware that there was zero tolerance for discrimination or abuse on the grounds of gender, race or religion - no one ever mentioned sexual orientation. Homophobia was a phrase that was avoided. Indeed, whilst 69.1% of LGBT+ young people experience direct homophobic bullying in our schools (2), only 12% of schools have assemblies that address homophobic bullying - and 48% of LGBT+ pupils claim that they are never taught about homophobia in their lessons. (1) Further to the above;

- 99% of LGBT+ pupils in Scotland hear phrases such as "that's so gay", and 97% hear derogatory remarks such as "poof" in their schools (1)
- 54% of LGBT+ pupils in Scotland who have experienced direct homophobic bullying are deliberately, regularly self harming (1)
- 26% (1 in 4) of LGBT+ pupils in Scotland who have experienced direct homophobic bullying have attempted suicide (1)
- 76.9% of transgender pupils had experienced homophobic, biphobic or transphobic bullying in school (2)
- 54% of LGBT+ pupils in Scotland do not feel part of their school communities (1)
- 71% of LGBT+ pupils in Scotland regularly skip school (1)
- 49% of LGBT+ pupils in Scotland do not feel that they are achieving their best at school (1)

53% of LGBT+ pupils in Scotland do not feel that there is an adult at school whom they can openly talk to about their sexual orientation (1)

This is a social epidemic that is plaguing our schools and claiming the confidence, esteem and mental wellbeing of a section of our country's youth. It is, fundamentally, a humanitarian problem. Ignorance is perpetuation: by failing to address the issue or opting out of programmes that attempt to, our schools are allowing it to grow. I believe that the only way to remedy this, is to introduce a statutory education programme that is fully inclusive and offers both broad, comprehensive teaching on real life issues and

topics relating to the LGBTI+ community, and support to LGBTI+ pupils who are struggling with self acceptance.

It is the responsibility of our schools to ensure that every pupil has equal opportunity to achieve a high standard education, and feel supported and encouraged whilst doing so - currently, a section of our youth are being excluded.

Further, research carried out by LGBT Youth Scotland has found that; when asked "what they thought helped or could help them or others feel safe and supported within the education system", LGBTI+ pupils responded that "...visibility in the curriculum: subjects normalising LGBT people, same-sex relationships and transgender identities" (2) was a common response. It cannot be underestimated the impact that such statutory inclusion in the education curriculum could have on the lives of LGBTI+ youth. A section of our youth are facing serious struggles; many are self harming, others are committing suicide. It is our responsibility, as a progressive society, to tackle this effectively.

The key starting point is in education; thus, a statutory inclusive education programme that pays particular attention to topics and issues relating to the LGBTI+ community allows us to bypass many of the hurdles in our way in the efforts to tackle homo/bi/transphobia, and to create a safe learning environment for LGBTI+ pupils.

References

1. "The School Report" Stonewall Scotland <http://bit.ly/1IaEJZN>
2. "Education Report" LGBT Youth Scotland <http://bit.ly/1Gjw5ea>

Unique web address

<http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/GettingInvolved/Petitions/tiecampaign>

Related information for petition

Do you wish your petition to be hosted on the Parliament's website to collect signatures online?

YES

How many signatures have you collected so far?

0

Closing date for collecting signatures online

04 / 08 / 2015

Comments to stimulate online discussion

The Scottish education system is failing LGBTI+ youth and a new, radical approach is required. It is one thing for a young kid to be struggling to accept themselves; it is another for them to feel trapped and excluded in an environment where they are supposed to feel safe and nurtured. The current Scottish Education Curriculum allows schools to *opt-out* of progressive teaching programmes that discuss topics relating to the LGBTI+ community, such as the *Relationships, Sexual Health and Parenthood (RSHP)* framework. This is unproductive. If we truly are a forward thinking society, then

we need a progressive and inclusive education system to reflect this.

Some Scottish LGBTI+ organisations have already attempted to tackle this issue, with the creation of lesson plans, workshops, support groups et cetera and have found little success as a result of the fact that institutions have sovereignty over if and how they address such issues - thus, if we are serious about tackling homo/bi/transphobia and ensuring that LGBTI+ youth are included; then we need a statutory framework that all schools adhere to.

Ignorance is perpetuation: refusing to acknowledge the issue at hand allows it to grow. When we have 52% of LGBTI+ kids experiencing homophobic bullying in schools, why is it that only 12% have assemblies that address homophobic bullying? 44% of LGBTI+ pupils in Scotland believe that their school is not an “accepting, tolerant place” where they feel welcome; 71% regularly skip school, 49% do not feel that they are achieving their best - 54% are regularly self harming and 26% have attempted to take their own lives. This is an epidemic and it is unacceptable. It is time to get serious - statutory inclusion is the only way forward.