

Valuing All God's Children

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Homophobic, biphobic and transphobic (HBT) bullying tackled in new guidance for Church schools

Guidance for the Church of England's 4,700 schools published today aims to prevent pupils from having their self-worth diminished or their ability to achieve impeded by being bullied because of their perceived or actual sexual orientation or gender identity.

The report makes 12 recommendations for schools including ensuring schools' Christian ethos statements offer "an inclusive vision for education" where "every child should be revered and respected as members of a community where all are known and loved by God. "

Clear anti-bullying policies should include HBT behaviours and language, policies on how to report incidences should be accessible, staff trained on recognising bullying, curriculum and collective worship should support the vision and the wider church ensure that schools are responding well to the guidance.

Commending the report, the Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby, said: "All bullying, including homophobic, biphobic and transphobic bullying causes profound damage, leading to higher levels of mental health disorders, self-harm, depression and suicide.

"Central to Christian theology is the truth that every single one of us is made in the image of God. Every one of us is loved unconditionally by God.

"This guidance helps schools to offer the Christian message of love, joy and celebration of our humanity without exception or exclusion."

The advice is an update on Valuing All God's Children, guidance published in 2014 which tackled homophobic behaviour. This update covers a wider range of negative behaviours, incorporates the

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relevant legal and inspection frameworks and reflects the Church's Vision for Education, whose four elements of wisdom, hope, community and dignity form the theological basis of the guidance.

Stephen Conway, Bishop of Ely and lead bishop for education said: "Our vision for education speaks of living life in all its fullness. Our vision has a clear commitment to dignity and hope, both of which can be undermined by any form of bullying. This guidance will help to bring our vision into reality by equipping schools to remove these pernicious forms of bullying that strike at the heart of a child's identity and formation."

Chief Education Officer for the Church of England, Nigel Genders, said: "Providing an education to our 1 million children that will enable them to live life in all its fullness is a big responsibility.

"This practical and thoughtful advice is packed with templates and a comprehensive selection of resources for schools, teachers, families and young people. I hope that it will make a difference to our school communities and individual pupils too."

The report acknowledges that it is likely that not all will agree on issues to do with human sexuality, marriage or gender identity. It goes on to say that: "However, there needs to be a faithful and loving commitment to remain in relationship with the other and honour the dignity of their humanity without 'back turning', dismissing the other person, or claiming superiority."

Ends

Notes

Homophobic, biphobic or transphobic bullying can be defined as behaviour or language which makes a person feel unwelcome or marginalised because of their sexual orientation or gender identity, whether actual or perceived, or because of their association with people who are, or who are perceived to be, lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender. Homophobic, biphobic or transphobic bullying can be in the form of social exclusion, verbal abuse or inappropriate use of language, cyberbullying or physical abuse.

Valuing All God's Children was published in May 2014.

The Church of England's Vision for education was published in 2016. It is deeply Christian, with the promise by Jesus of 'life in all its fullness' at its heart. This is worked out theologically and educationally through four basic elements which permeate the vision: Wisdom, Hope, Community, and Dignity.