

Minutes of meeting 36

Saturday 8 September 2007

This meeting was dedicated to the single topic of the crime and community-safety related aspects of phobic school bullying

Attendees

Andy (Intercom)
Jo (Police Authority)
John (Force Diversity Unit)
Kay (Gender Trust)
Mark 1 (RESPECT Youth Group, North Devon)
Mark 2 (Plymouth Pride Forum)
Michael (Chair)
Paul (Eddystone Trust)
Sorrel (FFLAG)

Guests

Andrew Duncan (Joint Action Against Phobic Bullying)
Dave Woodland (Force Youth Issues Training & Development Officer, supporting the Youth Intervention Officers)
Arnet Donkin (Senior Advisor, Equality & Inclusion, Plymouth City Council)
Jono Madeley (PSHE Advisor for schools, Plymouth City Council)

Apologies

Keith (independent member)
Kevin (Cornwall Switchboard)
Nic (Western Boys)
Rhea (independent member)
Tess (administrator)

Guest apology

Stuart Farmer, Assistant Director of Education, Plymouth City Council, would have been very glad to be present if he had not been moving house that day!

The meeting began with introductions, and a very warm welcome to all our guests, who introduced themselves:

Arnet spoke of PCC's (Plymouth City Council's) strong commitment to diversity. The Children and Young People's directorate is about to become a full Children's Trust, with core involvement from both Health and Police. This will further strengthen the Authorities' ability to mainstream equality issues across all services for children and young people.

It is now recognised that the PCC Children and Young People's Plan 2006 has significant gaps in this respect, but these will definitely be repaired when the Plan is rewritten in 2008. Meanwhile PCC has done a great deal to highlight the issues within the schools, and it is now evident that recognition of these issues is growing within schools and amongst school staff, and though there is real good practice in some schools performance is still very variable across the Authority. The next step is to find a way of

realistically monitoring how successful schools have been in creating a safe environment for young people and staff.

Andy then spoke about his work during his time at the Eddystone Trust in Plymouth: over several years he had meetings in schools with (e.g.) Head Teachers and Chairs of Governors about issues, and found that the outcomes of such meetings were regularly ignored and not followed up.

In one recent local advocacy and support case (not in Plymouth) Andy had responded to a helpline call about a young girl who had been beaten unconscious twice on the same day. Andy had found that the school acknowledged no duty of care in this context at all. The victim had decided to take no further action for fear of reprisals within the school. This case shows the level of change that is needed in the schools system as a whole. Andy deplored the fact that there seems to be no method of ensuring all staff are trained on these issues. Training is needed at primary as well as secondary level.

Jono said that it is vital that local authorities have officers to help schools meet the standards expected under (e.g.) the healthier schools initiative.

Andy reported that during the 18 months he has been Intercom's full-time Advocacy and Support Manager he has received far more requests for help against phobic school bullying from Cornwall, Devon and Torbay than from Plymouth; which may be a positive indicator for Plymouth!

Dave introduced himself as a police officer who had had extensive experience as a rural beat officer, dealing regularly with schools, before moving to headquarters as part of the Youth Intervention Team. He said that whatever local authorities may think or say, some Head Teachers feel they can act as they please once the doors are closed. Governors do not always scrutinise what is going on, or respond adequately where issues have been identified. Dave has observed a worrying difference, as a rule, between the treatment of bullies depending on the school's perception of their academic promise.

Asked about the law on reporting crimes that take place on school premises, Dave said that there is no legal obligation on Head Teachers to report phobic bullying-related crime, but where a crime has been reported it must be recorded by the police in accordance with the national Crime Recording Standards for Schools. He also circulated copies of the Cornwall LEA form for reporting phobic or racist incidents in schools. He reported that Annette Lyons at Devon County Council is developing a similar system for reporting within her Authority.

Sorrel said that where she has been involved in helping people in relation to phobic school bullying, sometimes the police have been involved and sometimes not.

Jono and Dave agreed that if only schools will ask for input from a trained police officer this can be very helpful to all involved. However, all police need relevant awareness-training—not just Youth Intervention Officers.

Andrew introduced himself as Chair of the JAAHB Project, and explained that JAAHB addresses Transphobic bullying on a level of full equality with Homophobic bullying (perhaps the project needs to adjust its name to make this clear). When JAAHB was set up in 1999, in response to the front-page news coverage, right across England, of the inquest into the horrifying suicide of Darren Steele in Staffordshire, it was the first phobic

bullying project in the country that focused on child-protection and the duty of care, rather than taking a (less challenging) equal-opportunities approach. The JAAHB partnership was set up to include young people, police, local government, and the LGB/T community-led sector, and pursued a programme of providing resources and training for schools, challenging school staff, and supporting victims and their friends and families. He felt this continued to be a key model for initiating successful change in local schools.

Sorrel drew the Group's attention to Max Biddulph's recent paper in the Pastoral Care Journal 2006, "Why Every LGBT Child Matters".

Arnet raised the issue of OFSTED and school inspection generally. Increasingly now OFSTED's rôle is to assess each school's ability to self-evaluate. Schools are unfortunately very nervous about any issue that might affect their catchment and academic achievement, and/or might involve difficult issues for parents. Arnet, Dave and Andrew discussed the importance of making sure that school staff are trained to be able to deal with these issues in ways that are positive and effective for young people and staff, and which support rather than being seen to threaten the school's local reputation and standing within its catchment area. Arnet added that it is vital that schools look at what they are actually teaching as part of the curriculum, and ensure that it is inclusive, and taught inclusively.

It was agreed that the Group and its member agencies will look into the OFSTED Self Evaluation Form and contact OFSTED directly to discuss whether or not these SEFs in their present form are in fact returning significant information about the security of the school environment for young LGB/T people.

Jo asked if local authorities provide draft policies for schools to adopt and adapt for local use. It was generally agreed that where this is done, these draft policies are not at present in a state where they will necessarily prove specifically helpful for young LGB/T people.

Jono recommended that the Group also consider the importance of the National Healthy School Standard, which is partially linked to the OFSTED SEFs.

Actions: it was agreed

- Michael will write to each Children's Trust / Local Authority Director asking what they are doing to assist schools to become compliant with the Equality Act (Sexual Orientation) Regulations 2007, which outlaw discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation in the provision of goods and services (and which apply to schools).
- Michael will look into the OFSTED SEFs and report back to the Group;
- we will ask schools to approach Youth Intervention Officers if issues arise; and
- we will try to develop a useful community-based aide-mémoire for Youth Intervention Officers and Children's Services officers to refer to in case of need.

The meeting ended at 13:00, with the Group offering our warmest and deepest thanks to all our guests.