



## QUEENSLAND ACTION GROUP FOR LGBTIQ+ STUDENTS

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### MEDIA RELEASE

The changes to the Safe Schools Coalition program announced by the Federal Minister for Education, Simon Birmingham represent a huge step backwards for young people in Australia of diverse sexuality, gender or bodies and will leave them without the strong support they need to protect them from bullying and discrimination.

Janet Berry, Chairperson for the Queensland Action Group for LGBTIQ+ Students and a member of PFLAG said "Many lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex or queer (LGBTIQ) young people experience some form of bullying or abuse and the most common place for this is within the school environment. The stress and anxiety suffered by these children in non-supporting schools leads very quickly to the need for psychological support." She noted that absenteeism and educational failure compounds feelings of inadequacy and, tragically, suicide can occur.

Further, Dr Berry said "Sadly, the abuse, misunderstanding and lack of support can extend to the home environment. The resulting rejection means young LGBTIQ people may end up leaving home, with the consequential risks of homelessness and an inability to complete their education."

Research has revealed that more than 10% of young people are same sex attracted, intersex or transgender. Children as young as four or five may insist that their gender is other than that on their birth certificate and the number of transgender or gender variant children is increasing according to the health professionals who care for them. Well-informed primary school principals and teachers are crucial in caring for these children and providing support for them and their parents.

"It is our firm belief that the Safe Schools Coalition program has been a ray of hope for LGBTIQ young people in Queensland" said Dr Berry.

Safe Schools Coalition offers professional development, resources and support to equip staff and students with skills, practical ideas and the confidence to ensure schools are safe and inclusive for LGBTIQ students, staff and families.

It is critically important that all children are introduced to information regarding gender and sexuality in safe, supportive and educative environments, by skilled professionals, rather than such important developmental guidance being left to chance.

As the Education Department has stated in its Guide to Social and Emotional Learning in Queensland State Schools, "Students who are happy in themselves, relate well to others and are motivated to learn, achieve better academically and create positive relationships with their teachers, family and classmates."

Queensland's Minister for Education, the Honourable Kate Jones, has expressed support for the Safe Schools Coalition program. "In response to requests from teachers and principals, we made an election commitment to make the Safe Schools Coalition's resources available to school principals to help support students," Ms Jones said.

In Queensland the program is delivered by *true Relationships and Reproductive Health* and more than 100 Queensland schools have applied to receive help from the program.

The Honourable Dr Stephen Miles, MP, encourages Queenslanders who want their schools to be free from bullying to sign an online petition which expresses support for the Safe Schools Program as a vital resource designed to create safe and inclusive school environments for same sex attracted, intersex and gender diverse students, staff and families. The petition can be signed here:

[www.parliament.qld.gov.au/apps/Epetitions/CurrentEPetition.aspx?PetNum=2554&Index=-1](http://www.parliament.qld.gov.au/apps/Epetitions/CurrentEPetition.aspx?PetNum=2554&Index=-1)

For more information about this vital program, see [www.safeschoolscoalition.org.au](http://www.safeschoolscoalition.org.au) or contact *true* at [safe.schools@true.org.au](mailto:safe.schools@true.org.au) to obtain the resources that are freely available for all schools and teachers.

## FOR MORE INFORMATION

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## References

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