



FOR IMMEDIATE USE

Keeping children safe in schools is a separate issue from marriage equality

The Queensland Action Group for LGBTIQ+ Student urges those involved in the campaign around same-sex marriage to stop including children and schools in their messages.

Their spokesperson Dr Janet Berry said, “linking marriage equality to the care of vulnerable children is a tactic to win votes that shows no respect for the children concerned and may load more discrimination and hurt on them, their parents and siblings.”

A significant number of children and young people identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer or questioning (LGBTIQ+).

Approximately 10% are same sex attracted, approximately 4% are gender diverse or transgender and approximately 1.7 % are born with an intersex variation.

These statistics mean that at least 10% of every school population or three children in every classroom identify as LGBTIQ+.

In the past these children invariably kept quiet about their diversity, kept their true self a secret and worked hard at pretending to be straight like their friends in order to stay safe.

Dr Berry said, “imagine the constant daily struggle of masquerading as someone you are not. It is inconceivable to those of us who don’t need to.”

“These days, in the world of 2017, children and young people see diversity all around them, among their idols in the world of music and sport, openly gay politicians in the Australian Parliament and the happiness and exuberance of Pride gatherings and marches. They have a greater expectation of acceptance, hoping to be loved as they are and quite rightly expecting to live their life free of discrimination and bullying.”

“How then can governments and those responsible for education live with the knowledge that the most common place of abuse for LGBTIQ+ children is at school and a large majority of these students do not feel supported by their school.”

It is almost a year since Tyrone Unsworth, a 13 year old attending a state school in Brisbane, ended his life after being bullied for being different. LGBTIQ+ children suffer a higher rate of mental health issues, substance abuse, self-harm and suicidality. Some of them have to drop out of school altogether to be safe. How can these children focus on their education and their future?

Governments and departments of education should lead the development of programs and policies that specifically support LGBTIQ+ children.

All teachers should receive the education and training they need to understand diversity and to incorporate that understanding into all aspects of school and education.

It should be the expectation of all LGBTIQ+ children that they can complete their education in safety, without experiencing discrimination or bullying. This expectation is in jeopardy if these children continue to be negatively highlighted as part of the marriage equality debate.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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