just like us

EMPOWERING LGBT+ YOUNG PEOPLE

# Growing up LGBT+

The impact of school, home and coronavirus on LGBT+ young people

cibyl gti

just like us

EMPOWERING LGBT+ YOUNG PEOPLE

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# Foreword

At Just Like Us, the LGBT+ young people's charity, we know that growing up LGBT+ is still unacceptably tough. While the UK has seen many legal changes to LGBT+ marriage and parenthood over the past 20 years, not enough of these have directly impacted young people – many of whom are in families who do not accept them, are in schools where there is no positive messaging about being LGBT+, and have struggled disproportionately during a severely isolating pandemic.

We are proud to release our report, ***Growing Up LGBT+: the impact of school, home and coronavirus on LGBT+ young people***, shedding light on the disproportionate challenges they face and ways we can work together to improve the lives of LGBT+ young people across the UK.

The pandemic has been an unusual and challenging time for so many of us. However, at Just Like Us we raised concerns early on for the wellbeing of LGBT+ young people, who in our experience have been particularly struggling. We knew from our past research that LGBT+ young people typically rely on support from their friends, while non-LGBT+ young people tend to rely on support from their immediate families. We saw this to be an uncomfortable distinction; a reminder that, for many of us growing up, home can be a challenging and difficult place to be, mitigated only by meeting like-minded friends and the forming of a "chosen family".

In the context of the pandemic, many LGBT+ young people across the UK have been separated from these support networks for over a year. Some will have been living at home with families who are either unsupportive or unaware of their identities.

It is for this reason that we commissioned this research, carried out by independent research consultancy Cibyl and sponsored by our partners at J.P. Morgan, to find out more about the experiences of LGBT+ young people in school, at home and throughout the pandemic. We wanted to know whether those experiences are different from non-LGBT+ young people and, additionally, whether different groups under the LGBT+ umbrella have had different experiences. We have also surveyed school and college staff to find out whether they have what they need to support LGBT+ young people and to assess whether the good practices we see in the schools we work with are typical, or whether there are still schools where growing up LGBT+ can be a lonely and challenging experience. The results of both surveys show that our concerns were well-founded.

The research shows that LGBT+ young people today are still disproportionately facing bullying, lack of safety in school, more frequent tension at home and alarmingly poor mental health and wellbeing.

The pandemic has created additional challenges for LGBT+ young people who have been twice as likely to be lonely and worry daily about their mental health and much more likely than non-LGBT+ people to say their mental health has declined since it began.

There were significant differences across the sample of LGBT+ young people, with Black LGBT+ young people, disabled LGBT+ young people and LGBT+ young people who are eligible for free school meals most likely to have negative outcomes.

While some schools are doing fantastic work, there are still many schools in the UK where you will hear nothing positive about being LGBT+ at all. Most strikingly, our research found that in schools that have positive messaging about being LGBT+, all pupils' wellbeing and safety is notably improved – regardless of whether they are LGBT+ or not. We also found that LGBT+ pupils who receive positive messaging are less likely to report feeling suicidal.

We hope this report serves as a call to action for all of us. It's more important than ever that we work together to make sure LGBT+ young people are able to thrive.

**Dominic Arnall**
Chief Executive, Just Like Us

# A note from our partner J.P. Morgan

At J.P. Morgan, we believe in the importance of championing diversity and fostering an environment that includes everyone. This starts with our own people and extends to the communities in which we work and live.

For several years PRIDE, our Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, + and Ally Resource Group, has worked with Just Like Us, the UK charity for LGBT+ young people, to sponsor its School Diversity Week – an annual campaign celebrating LGBT+ inclusion in education. We are delighted to have supported the growth of this initiative, which counters homophobic, biphobic and transphobic bullying, and is now engaging schools representing over two million young people across the United Kingdom.

We are proud to build on our collaboration with Just Like Us by sponsoring this latest piece of independent research commissioned by the charity to understand the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on LGBT+ young people.

While the last year has been a difficult period for many, the impact of the crisis has not fallen equally. This report lays bare the stark and alarming effect of the pandemic on LGBT+ young people, who have been disproportionately affected relative to their peers, particularly from a mental health perspective.

The report makes for sombre reading and rightly calls for all of us to reflect on the significance of the challenges facing the youngest members of the LGBT+ community. Our hope is that these findings act as a clarion call for everyone involved in the care of LGBT+ young people, particularly schools and parents, to take action.

We hope the findings will be taken on board by the public too. As individuals we all have an important role to play in creating a society in which LGBT+ young people can thrive.

**Richard Kaye**
Head of International Public Affairs and member of the EMEA Diversity & Inclusion Council, J.P. Morgan

# About the study

Just Like Us – the LGBT+ young people's charity in the UK – commissioned Cibyl, an independent market research consultancy into students' career thinking, to run this research. Responses were gathered in partnership with Just Like Us and through Cibyl's independent database of pupils and school partners.

The study started with a pupil survey, which will be the main focus of this report, exploring the wellbeing and experiences of young LGBT+ people aged 11 to 18. A total of 2,934 pupils from 375 schools and colleges across the UK were surveyed, 1,140 of whom identified as LGBT+ (39%). For the purposes of this research, the term LGBT+ encompasses respondents who have defined their sexual orientation as gay, bisexual, queer, asexual, pansexual or questioning and/or those who identify as transgender. The remaining 1,687 non-LGBT+ respondents were used as a control group, to compare LGBT+ responses with non-LGBT+ ones, as well as to explore their attitudes towards their LGBT+ peers.

This was supplemented by a survey of primary and secondary school and college staff looking at LGBT+ inclusive education and interventions, with 513 respondents from 111 schools and colleges, 142 of whom identified as LGBT+ (28%).

The report will begin by exploring the wellbeing and mental health of LGBT+ young people and the effects of the coronavirus pandemic. We then consider how experiences can vary between different groups within the LGBT+ community – and why it is crucial that is acknowledged.

This is followed by a deep dive into the experiences of LGBT+ young people in education, looking at bullying and safety in schools and colleges, the existing types of LGBT+ inclusive education and interventions, and what needs to be done next. We also discuss young people's attitudes towards transgender peers and transgender inclusion within schools. The report concludes with a set of recommendations for schools, colleges, parents and carers about how to ensure LGBT+ young people are supported, included and celebrated as they go through primary, secondary and further education.

Just Like Us came together with J.P. Morgan, the charity's partner for a number of years, to commission this study. Cibyl has led on research design and delivery, with the report content produced in partnership with Cibyl and Just Like Us. While this report has been supported by J.P. Morgan, responsibility for the contents of and opinions set out in the report and its recommendations lies with Just Like Us and Cibyl.

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# Key findings

**1 in 4**

LGBT+ young people (25%) are facing daily tension at home, compared to 15% of non-LGBT+ young people.

**68%**

of LGBT+ young people say their mental health has 'got worse' since the pandemic, compared to 49% of their non-LGBT+ peers.

**LGBT+**

young people are three times more likely to self-harm and twice as likely to have depression, anxiety and panic attacks, as well as to be lonely and worry about their mental health on a daily basis.

**84%**

of young people (the majority) are pro-trans but are less likely to think their school's staff are (76% think so).

**43%**

of staff are unsure if colleagues would be comfortable coming out as LGBT+ at their school or college.

**33%**

of LGBT+ pupils (only a third) say there is a clear process for reporting anti-LGBT+ bullying in their school.

**LGBT+**

pupils feel far less safe at school. Only 58% of LGBT+ pupils have felt safe at school on a daily basis in the past 12 months, compared to 73% of non-LGBT+ pupils.

LGBT+ young people are twice as likely to contemplate suicide than non-LGBT+ young people, and Black LGBT+ young people are three times more likely.

**LGBT+**

young people are twice as likely to have been bullied in the past year (43% compared to 21% of their non-LGBT+ peers). 1 in 5 (18%) LGBT+ young people haven't told anyone they've been bullied and just 21% told a teacher at school.

**48%**

of pupils have had little to zero positive messaging about being LGBT+ at school in the last 12 months.

**31%**

of LGBT+ primary, secondary and college staff (a third) say their colleagues and school board are a barrier to doing LGBT+ inclusion work with their pupils.

Pupils in schools with strong positive messaging about being LGBT+ have drastically improved wellbeing and feel safer – regardless of whether they are LGBT+ or not.

# Wellbeing and mental health

The survey showed that LGBT+ young people tend to experience worse mental health outcomes than non-LGBT+ young people. We knew this before we started this research, so sadly some of the findings do not come as a surprise. We wanted to hear directly from LGBT+ young people on how they are feeling, their experiences and personal relationships, and how these can affect their wellbeing and mental health. This is especially important in the shadow of coronavirus. While undeniably a tough time for everybody, it is clear from our research that LGBT+ young people have been disproportionately affected, particularly those who are Black, disabled and/or eligible for free school meals.

## How LGBT+ young people are feeling

Over the past 12 months, LGBT+ young people have been feeling considerably worse than young people who do not identify as LGBT+. Across the board, LGBT+ young people are less likely than their non-LGBT+ peers to experience:

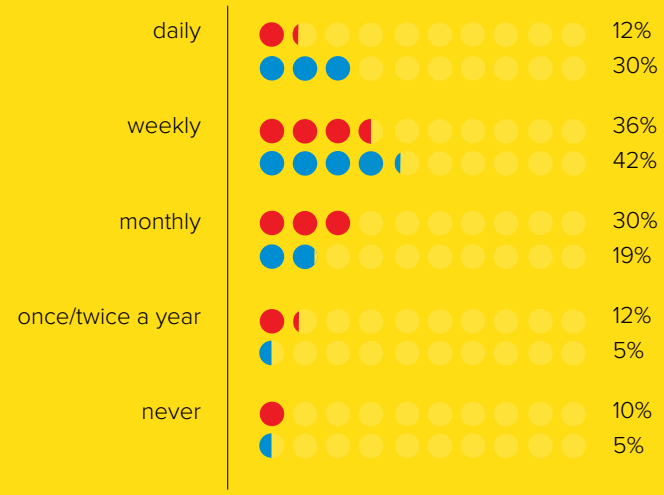
- feeling close to other people
- thinking clearly
- feeling relaxed
- dealing with problems well
- feeling good about themselves
- feeling useful
- feeling optimistic about the future.

In the last year, just 14% of LGBT+ young people say they have felt relaxed on a daily basis, compared to 31% of non-LGBT+ young people, and, while 30% of non-LGBT+ young people report feeling good about themselves daily, only 13% of LGBT+ young people say the same.

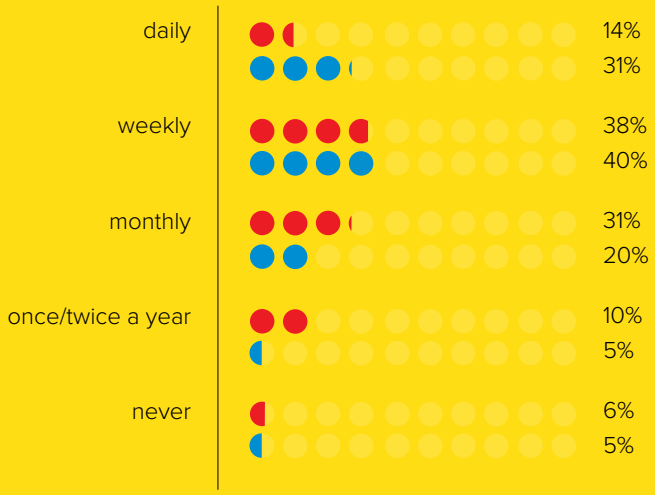
The number of LGBT+ young people who say they have never experienced these feelings in the past 12 months is particular cause for concern. 9% of LGBT+ young people report never feeling good about themselves (compared to 5% of non-LGBT+ young people); 10% of LGBT+ young people say they have never felt useful (compared to 5% of non-LGBT+ young people); and 10% of LGBT+ young people say they have never dealt with problems well (compared to 5% of LGBT+ young people).

# In the past 12 months, how often have you experienced...?

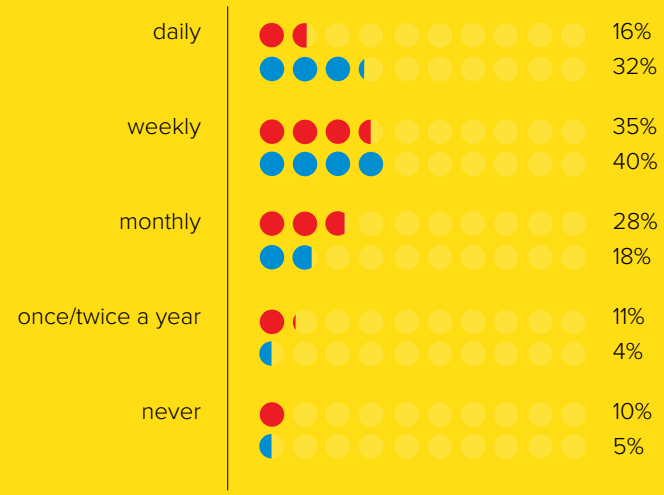
## Feeling useful



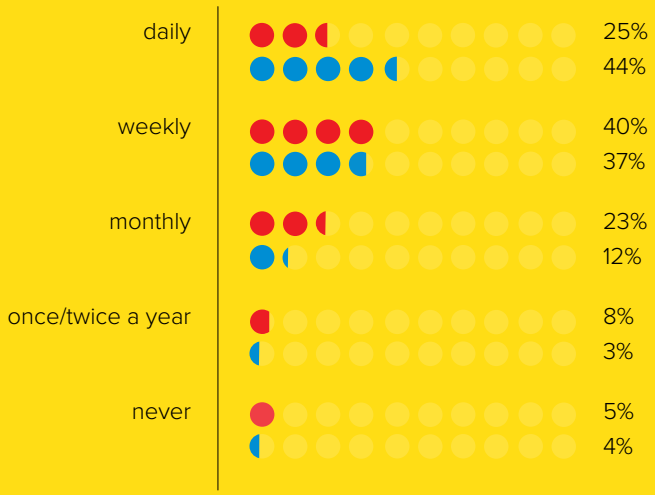

## Feeling relaxed




## Dealing with problems well

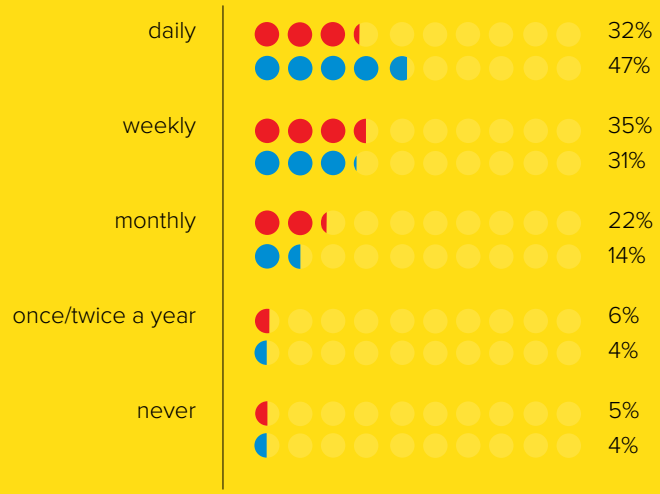



## Thinking clearly

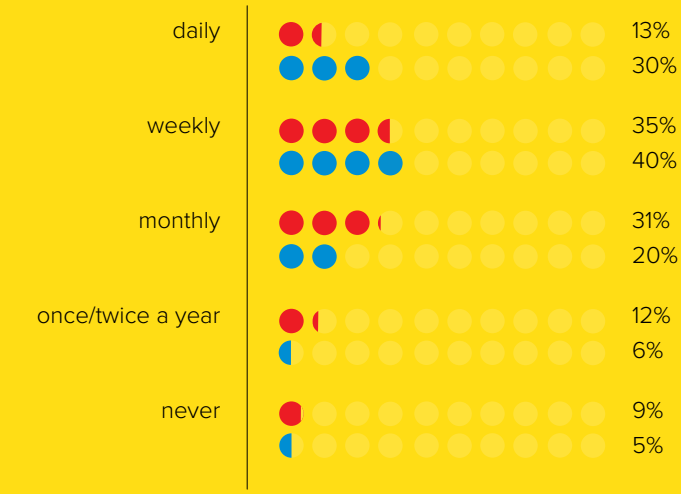



LGBT+ pupils
non-LGBT+ pupils

## Feeling close to other people



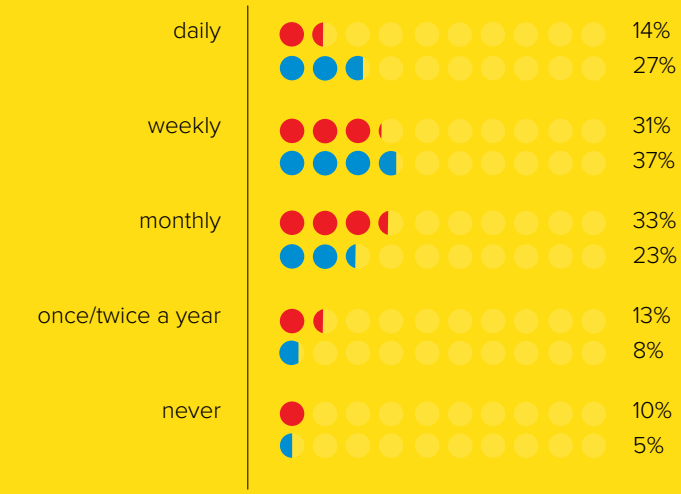

## Feeling good about yourself

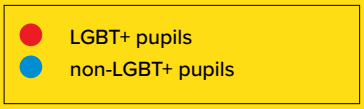



**10%**

of LGBT+ young people have never felt optimistic about the future in the past 12 months

## Feeling optimistic about the future



Many LGBT+ young people are not hopeful about things improving any time soon. Only 14% of LGBT+ young people say they have felt optimistic about the future on a daily basis, compared to almost double the number of non-LGBT+ young people (27%). Furthermore, one in ten (10%) LGBT+ young people have never felt optimistic about the future in the past 12 months, while one in twenty (5%) non-LGBT+ young people say the same.

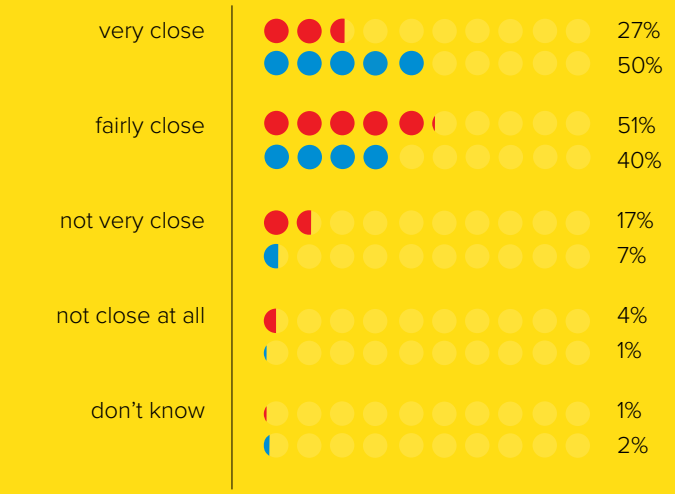
## Relationships with family and friends

LGBT+ young people are less likely to have strong relationships with their immediate family members. Roughly a quarter (27%) of LGBT+ young people describe their relationship with family as very close, compared to half (50%) of non-LGBT+ young people. Just over half (51%) of LGBT+ young people describe their family relationships as fairly close, while 17% say they are not very close to their family and 4% say they are not close at all. The likelihood of non-LGBT+ young people having poor relationships with their family is much lower. Just 7% of non-LGBT+ young people describe their relationship with family as not very close and even fewer (1%) say they are not close at all.

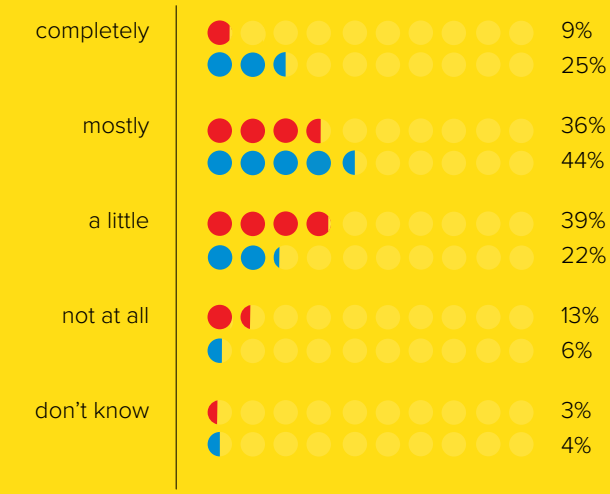
The strength of an LGBT+ young person's relationship with their family is likely to impact whether or not they feel able to be themselves at home or talk to family about what is going on in their lives and how they are feeling. The findings suggest that LGBT+ young people often do not feel that they can talk to their family – or, if they do, that they will understand. While a quarter (25%) of non-LGBT+ young people feel that their family completely understand the things that are important to them, only 9% of LGBT+ young people think that their family completely understand. At the other end of the spectrum, 13% of LGBT+ young people say that their family doesn't understand at all, compared to 6% of non-LGBT+ young people.

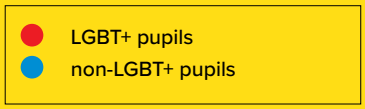
order: completely, mostly, little, not at all, don't know

## How would you describe your relationship with your family?

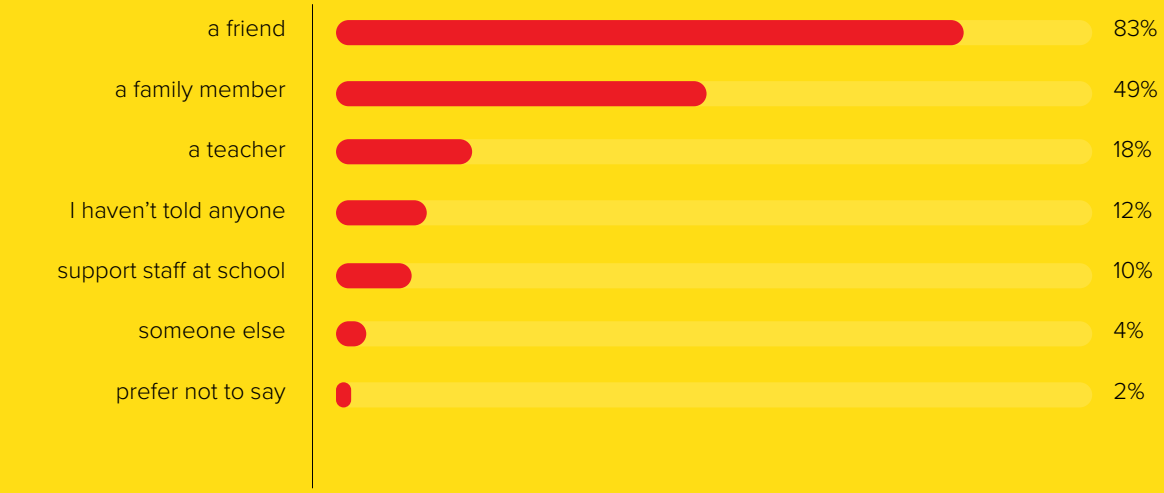



## Does your family understand the things that are important to you?




## Who, if anyone, have you told you identify, or think you might identify, as LGBT+?



Perhaps unsurprisingly then, LGBT+ young people are more likely to talk to and confide in a friend than a family member. 83% of LGBT+ young people say they have told a friend or multiple friends that they identify, or think they might identify, as LGBT+. Meanwhile, just under half (49%) have shared this information with a family member. Fewer still have chosen to tell a teacher (18%) or support staff at school (10%). Some LGBT+ young people (12%) say they have not told anyone, possibly because they are not ready yet or because they do not have anybody they feel able to talk to.

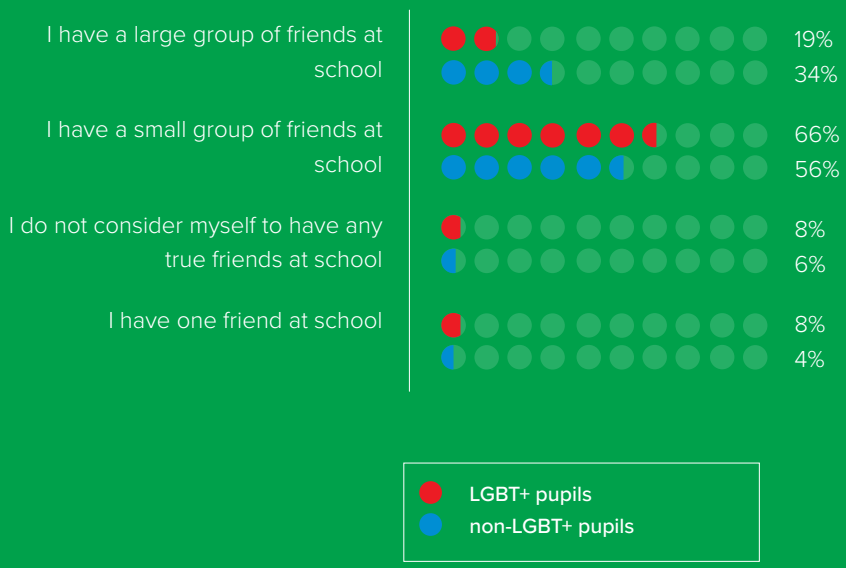
Most LGBT+ young people (91%) say they have friends who are also LGBT+ and almost two thirds (63%) of non-LGBT+ young people say they are friends with somebody who is LGBT+. However, LGBT+ pupils are more likely than non-LGBT+ young people to have fewer friends at school. Two thirds (66%) of LGBT+ pupils say they have a small group of friends, compared to just over half (56%) of non-LGBT+ pupils, and they are almost half as likely as non-LGBT+ pupils to describe their friendship group as large (19% compared to 34%). 8% of LGBT+ pupils say they have one friend at school, double the number of non-LGBT+ pupils with just one friend (4%). An alarming percentage of both LGBT+ pupils (8%) and non-LGBT+ pupils (6%) do not consider themselves to have any true friends at school. Generally, young people with few or no friends are more susceptible to feeling lonely and like they do not belong. They may also be more vulnerable to bullying.

**8%**

of LGBT+ pupils (one in ten) do not consider themselves to have any true friends at school

## Do you have any friends who are LGBT+?

## Which of the following statements is most like you at school?



## Mental health challenges

Many young people in the UK face mental health problems, particularly LGBT+ young people. Half (51%) of LGBT+ young people say they have experienced or are experiencing an anxiety disorder, compared to a quarter (26%) of non-LGBT+ young people. There is a similar pattern across other mental health challenges. LGBT+ young people are twice as likely to have experienced or be experiencing depression (47%) and panic attacks (37%) and are three times more likely to self-harm (31%) and have an eating disorder (20%) or alcohol and drug dependence (6%). For non-LGBT+ young people, the likelihood of experiencing these is notably lower: 20% say they have experienced or are experiencing depression, 15% panic attacks, 9% self-harm, 7% eating disorders and 2% alcohol or drug dependence.

Over two thirds (68%) of LGBT+ young people say they have experienced suicidal thoughts and feelings. On average, they are more than twice as likely to experience suicidal thoughts as non-LGBT+ young people, 29% of whom say they have thought about suicide.

LGBT+ young people (68%) are twice as likely to contemplate suicide than their non-LGBT+ peers (29%)

**51%**

of LGBT+ young people say they have experienced or are experiencing an anxiety disorder

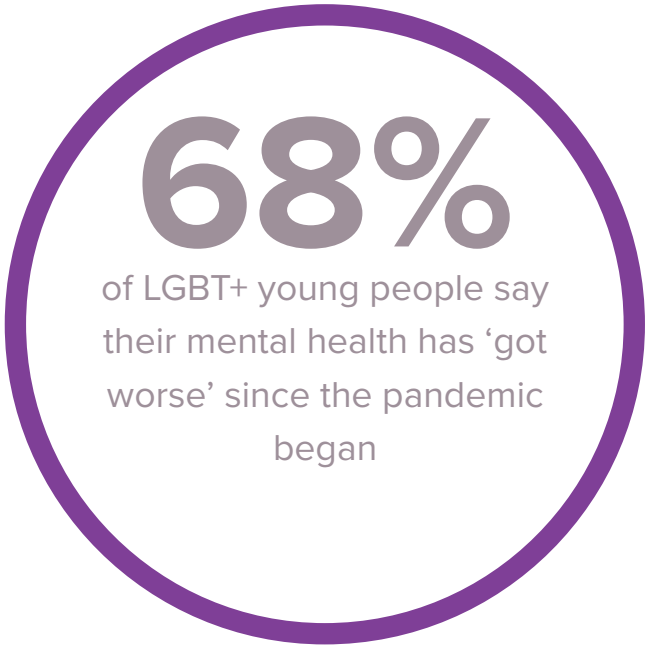
## Have you ever experienced/are you experiencing any of the following mental health challenges?

## Have you ever personally experienced suicidal thoughts and feelings?

## The impact of coronavirus and lockdowns

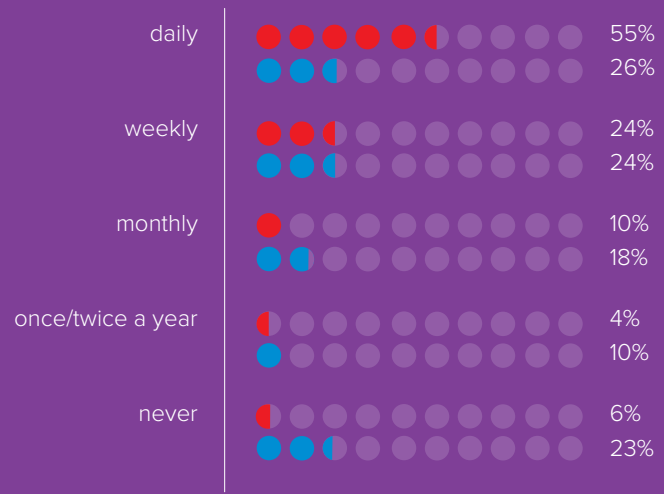
The coronavirus pandemic and lockdowns have had a huge impact on mental health and wellbeing in the UK. Many young people were already facing challenges to their mental health, but we can see that this has escalated since 2020, especially for LGBT+ young people. Two thirds (68%) of LGBT+ young people feel that their mental health has got worse since the pandemic began, compared to 49% of non-LGBT+ young people. Over half (55%) of LGBT+ young people report worrying about their mental health on a daily basis during lockdown, compared to just a quarter (26%) of non-LGBT+ young people.

During the pandemic and lockdowns, LGBT+ young people were twice as likely to feel lonely as their non-LGBT peers. Roughly half (52%) of LGBT+ young people felt lonely and separated from the people they are closest to on a daily basis, compared to 27% of non-LGBT+ young people. For some LGBT+ young people, stay at home rules will have prevented them from seeing the people they are most comfortable around and have chosen to come out to. (Just 49% of LGBT+ young people say they have told a family member that they identify or think they might identify as LGBT+, while 83% have told a friend.) Young people who have not come out to the family members they live with may have been forced to hide their identity for over a year. For other LGBT+ young people, lockdowns may have meant living in challenging anti-LGBT+ environments with little or zero access to support networks or spaces where they could feel safe.

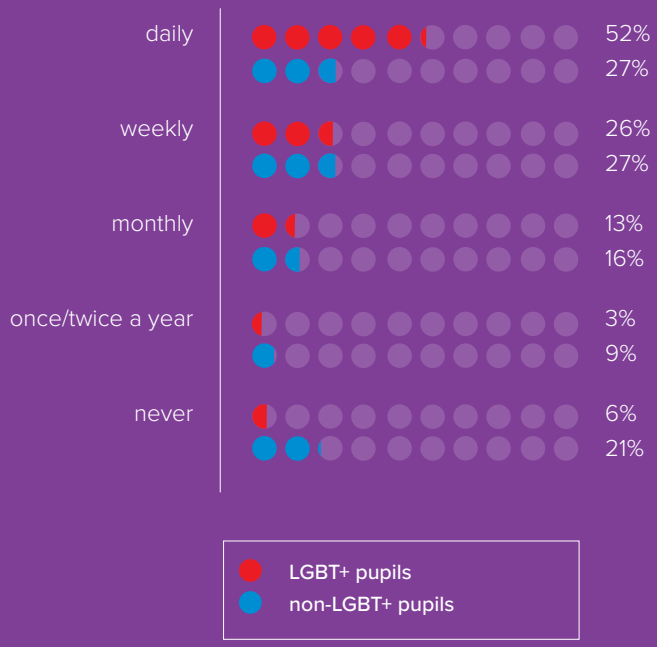


## How has your mental health changed since the pandemic?

## During the lockdown restrictions, how often have you felt worried about your mental health?



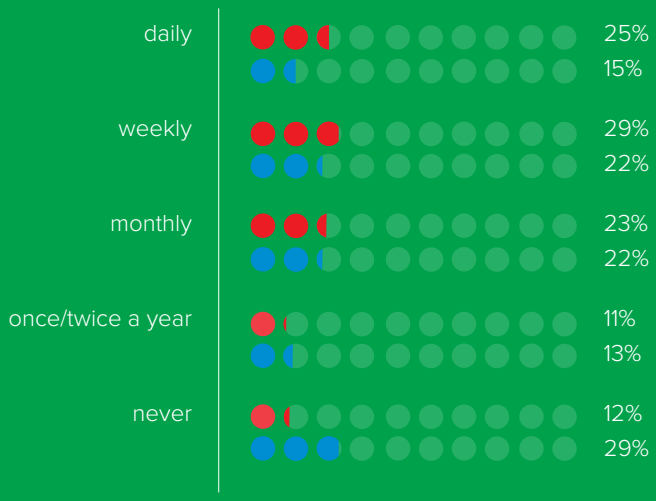

## During the lockdown restrictions, how often have you felt lonely/separated from the people you are closest to?



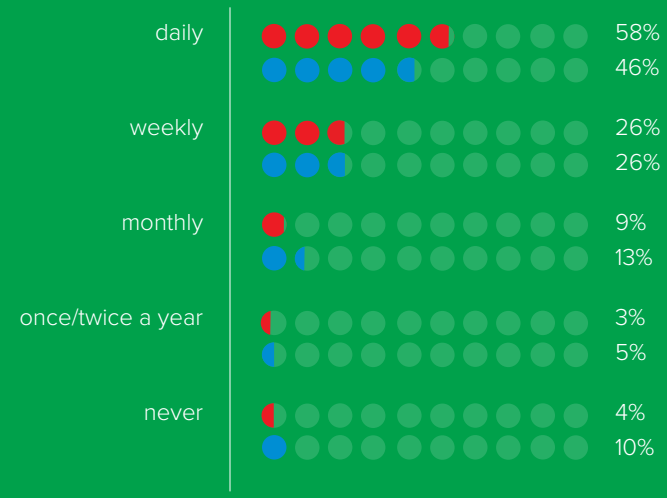
# During lockdown, how often have you experienced...?

LGBT+ pupils
non-LGBT+ pupils

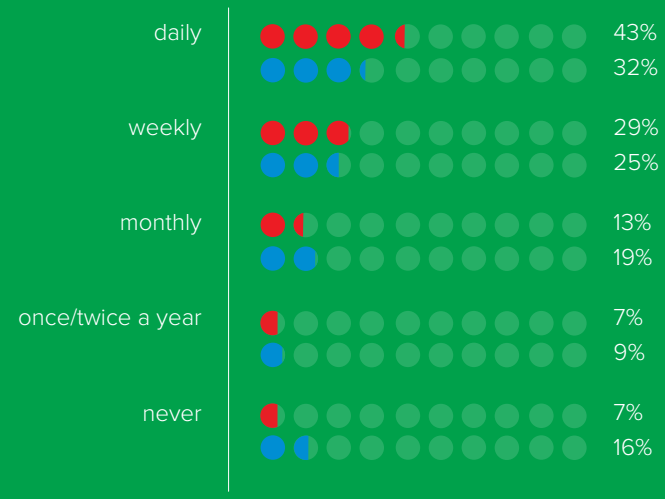
## Tension in the place you are living in



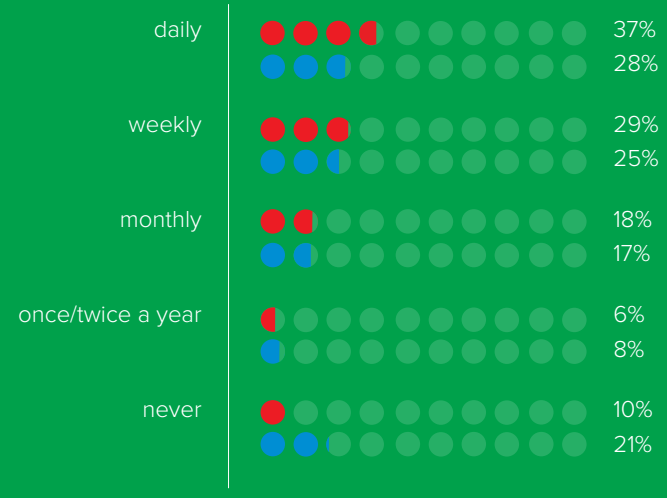

## Worrying about exams or other key deadlines



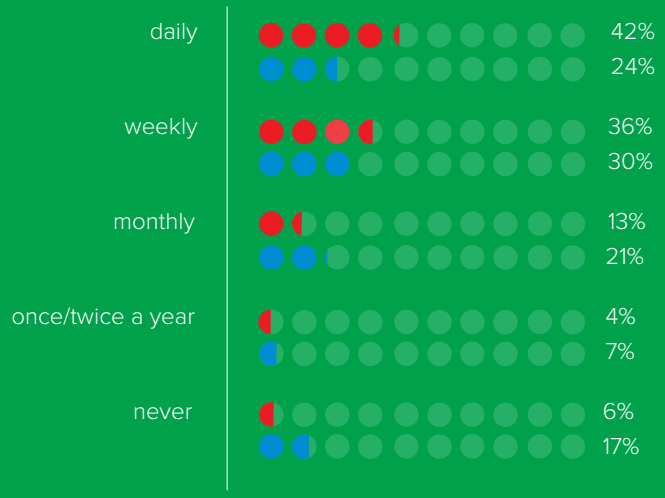

## Worrying about getting into university/the future




## Worrying about your physical health




## Worrying about others' physical or mental health



Some LGBT+ young people will have had no choice but to spend lockdown with family members who they have a fraught relationship with. One in four (25%) LGBT+ young people report experiencing daily tension (e.g. arguments with family) in the place they were living during lockdown, compared to 15% of non-LGBT+ young people. Non-LGBT+ young people were twice as likely as LGBT+ young people to never experience tension in their home during lockdown (29% compared to 12%).

It is important to note that mental health is not the only thing that LGBT+ young people are feeling concerned about. During lockdown, LGBT+ young people were also more likely than their non-LGBT+ peers to worry daily about exams and other key deadlines (58% vs 46%), getting into university and the future (43% vs 32%), their physical health (37% vs 28%) and other people's physical or mental health (42% vs 24%).

**1 in 4**

LGBT+ young people (25%) report daily tension in the place they were living during lockdown

# Differences amongst LGBT+ young people

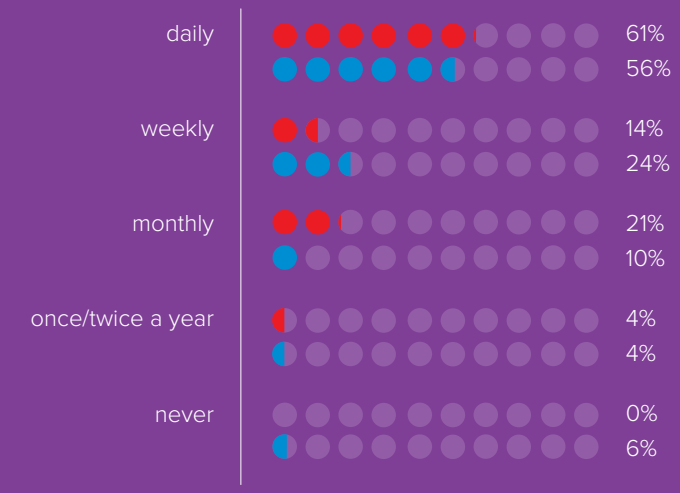
Despite LGBT+ being a widely used umbrella term, it is important to acknowledge the diversity and range of experiences that sit within it. Just because two people are LGBT+ does not mean they have the same – or even similar – experiences. This research shines a light on some very important and considerable differences in the experiences and wellbeing of young people underneath the LGBT+ umbrella – including young people who are lesbian, bisexual, pansexual, transgender, Black, eligible for free school meals, disabled and/or those living in different regions across the UK. An intersectional approach needs to be taken to help us understand those who identify as LGBT+ and how we can best support and champion all LGBT+ young people.

## Black LGBT+ young people

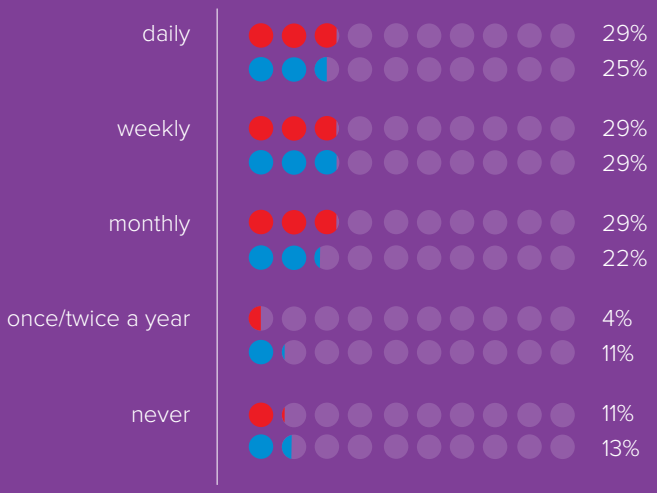
Black LGBT+ young people have been severely impacted by the pandemic. 61% of Black LGBT+ young people report worrying about their mental health on a daily basis, compared to 56% of white LGBT+ young people. They are twice as likely to say they have no true friends at school (15% compared to 7%) and there was a higher chance of Black LGBT+ young people experiencing difficulties at home during lockdown, with a third (29%) reporting daily tension in the place they were living, compared to a quarter (25%) of white LGBT+ young people.

Black LGBT+ young people are more likely to be experiencing depression (61%), anxiety disorders (58%), panic attacks (42%) and alcohol or drug dependence (15%). For white LGBT+ young people, the likelihood of experiencing these is still too high, but lower: just under half (48%) say they have experienced or are experiencing depression, 52% anxiety disorder, 39% panic attacks and 6% alcohol or drug dependence. 89% of Black LGBT+ young people have experienced suicidal thoughts and feelings, compared to 67% of white LGBT+ young people.

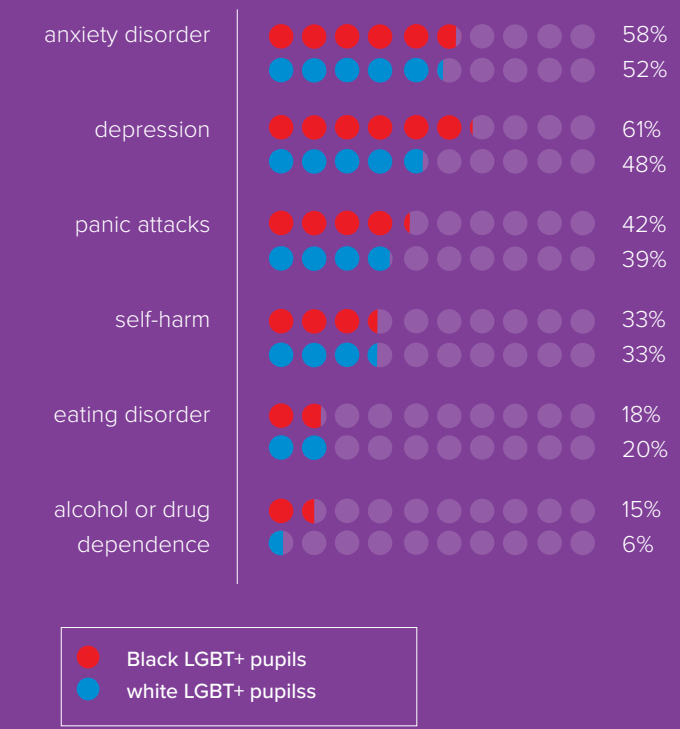
During the lockdown restrictions, how often have you felt worried about your mental health?




During the lockdown restrictions, how often have you experienced tension in the place you are living in?




Have you ever experienced/are you experiencing any of the following mental health challenges?




**89%**

of Black LGBT+ young people have contemplated suicide

## How has your mental health changed since the pandemic?

## During the lockdown restrictions, how often have you felt lonely/ separated from the people you are closest to?

## Young lesbians

Of all young people under the LGBT+ umbrella, young lesbians are most likely to report feeling lonely since the coronavirus pandemic began. Almost nine in ten (87%) young lesbians have felt lonely and separated from the people they're closest to at least once every week during lockdown, and six in ten (60%) have felt this daily. This is compared to 46% of gay boys and 54% of bisexual young people who have felt lonely on a daily basis. It is sad but not surprising, then, that a considerable number of young lesbians have seen a deterioration in their mental health through lockdown. Four in five (78%) young lesbians say their mental health has got worse, compared to 71% of gay boys and 76% of bisexual girls.

## Bisexual and pansexual young people

Like many others within the LGBT+ community, bisexual and pansexual young people are experiencing pressure on their mental health, especially during lockdown. 74% of bisexual young people feel that their mental health has got worse since the pandemic, higher than the average of 68% of LGBT+ young people and second only to young lesbians (78%). 59% of pansexual young people say that their mental health has got worse since the pandemic and they are more likely to report experiencing frequent tension in the place they're living in. A third (31%) of pansexual young people say there is tension on a daily basis (e.g. arguments with family). This is compared to 25% of bisexual young people, which is also the average across all LGBT+ young people.

Bisexual and pansexual young people are more likely to have experienced cyber bullying in the past 12 months (26% and 31% respectively, compared to 14% of gay boys and 21% of young lesbians). Bisexual young people are more likely to have experienced sexual harassment, with 10% of bisexual young people reporting unwanted sexual touching in the last 12 months. For bisexual girls, this figure increases to 12%. 6% of pansexual and lesbian young people and 5% of gay boys have also experienced unwanted sexual touching.

**12%**

of bisexual girls have experienced unwanted sexual touching

**87%**

of young lesbians have felt lonely and separated from the people they're closest to at least once every week during lockdown

## Transgender young people

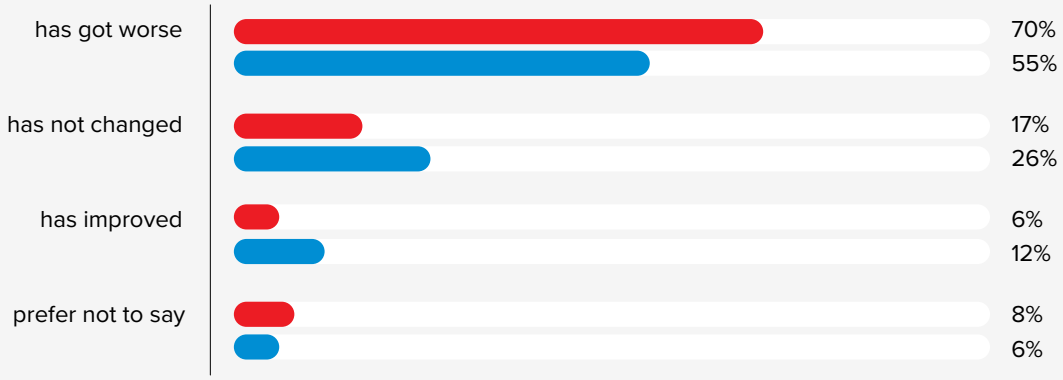
Transgender young people have felt increasingly vulnerable throughout the coronavirus pandemic. They are more likely to say their mental health has got worse during lockdown (70%) than their non-transgender peers (55%) and almost twice as likely to say they worry about their mental health daily (65% compared to 36%). They are also considerably more likely to experience daily tension in the place they are living (29%) than non-transgender young people (18%), which can indicate an increased risk of homelessness.

Transgender young people are also less likely to feel optimistic about the future. 15% say they have never felt optimistic about the future in the past 12 months, compared to 6% of non-transgender young people. Just 19% of transgender young people report feeling optimistic about the future on a weekly basis, compared to 36% of their non-transgender peers.

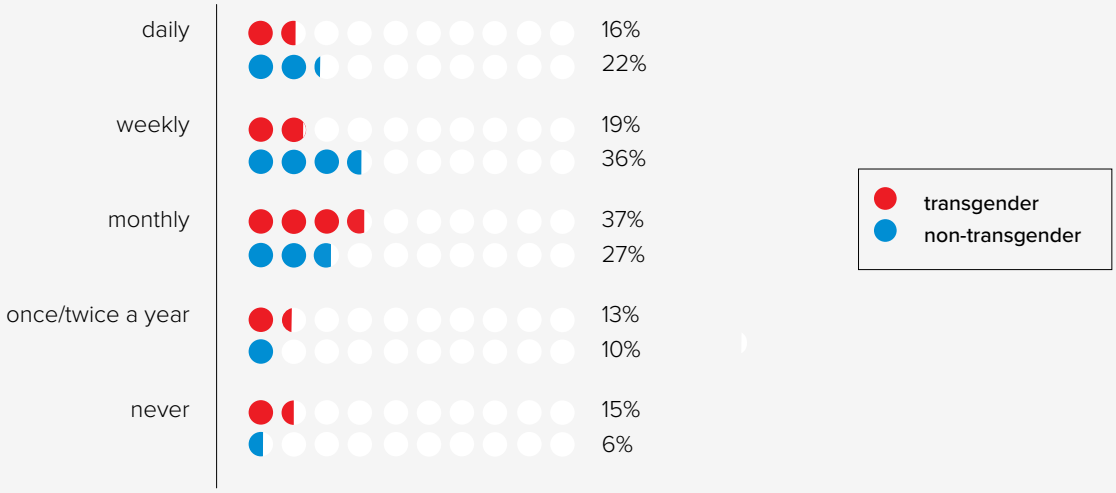
**15%**

of transgender young people have never felt optimistic about the future in the past 12 months

## How has your mental health changed since the pandemic?




## In the last 12 months, how often have you felt optimistic about the future?



## Disabled LGBT+ young people

When asked how they have been feeling over the past 12 months, disabled LGBT+ young people were struggling more than their non-disabled peers on all counts. 61% of disabled LGBT+ young people say they have felt lonely and separated from the people they are closest to every day, compared to 50% of non-disabled LGBT+ young people. 65% of disabled LGBT+ young people worry daily for their mental health but, for non-disabled LGBT+ young people, this figure drops to 49%. Furthermore, 72% of disabled LGBT+ young people think their mental health has got worse since the pandemic began, compared to 65% of non-disabled LGBT+ young people.

## LGBT+ pupils eligible for free school meals

All pupils who are eligible for free school meals are facing increased mental health crises due to the pandemic, but the statistics are graver still for those pupils who are also LGBT+. 62% of LGBT+ pupils who are eligible for free school meals report feeling lonely and separated from the people they're closest to on a daily basis since the pandemic began, compared to 30% of non-LGBT+ pupils who are eligible for free school meals, and 36% of all pupils who aren't eligible. One in four (26%) pupils eligible for free school meals are experiencing daily tension in the place they're living, such as arguments with family. This figure shoots up to one in three (34%) pupils who are both LGBT+ and eligible for free school meals. And, while pupils eligible for free school meals are already more likely to experience depression (37%) than non-eligible pupils (28%), pupils who are also LGBT+ are twice as likely (55%). LGBT+ pupils eligible for free school meals are also more likely to experience anxiety disorders (58%) and panic attacks (45%), and to have self-harmed (38%).

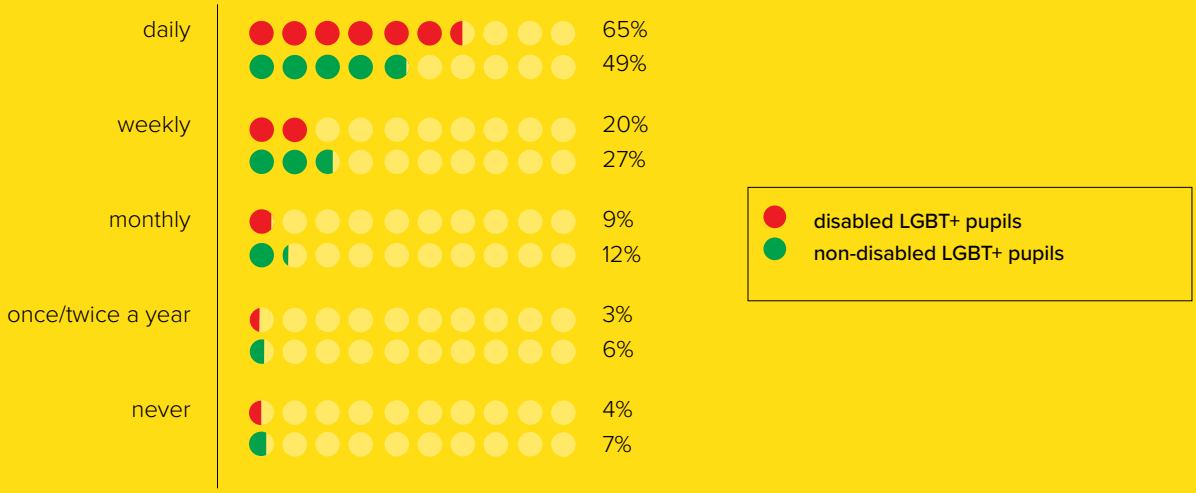
**65%**

of disabled LGBT+ young people worry daily for their mental health

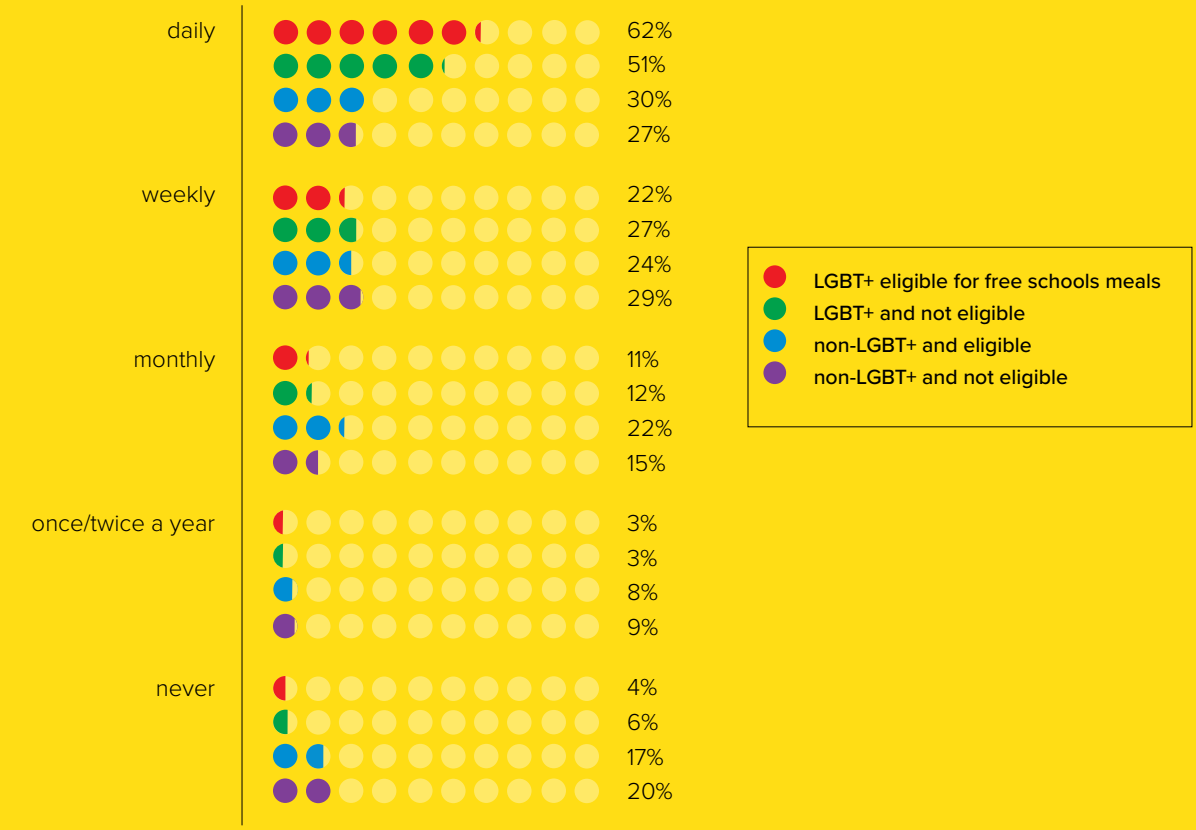
**1 in 3**

LGBT+ pupils eligible for free school meals (34%) report experiencing daily tension in the place they are living in since the pandemic began

## During the lockdown restrictions, how often have you felt worried about your mental health?




## During the lockdown restrictions, how often have you felt lonely/separated from the people you are closest to?



## Regional differences across the UK

There were notable regional differences across the UK, with LGBT+ young people in Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland and the north of England having a particularly tough time. LGBT+ young people in the North East are the loneliest in England, with over half (57%) of young people living there reporting feeling lonely and separated from the people they're closest to on a daily basis since the pandemic began. Over half of LGBT+ young people feel lonely on a daily basis in Wales (60%), Northern Ireland (59%), Scotland (56%), the North West (56%), the West Midlands (52%) and London (51%). In the UK, generally, 52% of LGBT+ young people are feeling lonely on a daily basis, compared to 27% of young people who are not LGBT+. Meanwhile, LGBT+ young people in the North East (32%) and South East (30%) are the most likely to say they have been experiencing daily tension in the place they're living during the pandemic. This is higher than the UK average of 25% of LGBT+ young people experiencing daily tension at home.

LGBT+ young people in the North East are the loneliest in England

During the lockdown restrictions, how often have you felt lonely/separated from the people you are closest to on a daily basis?

# LGBT+ in schools: education and interventions

LGBT+ inclusive education is essential in making schools and colleges safe places where LGBT+ pupils are accepted and celebrated. This includes, but is not limited to:

- tackling homophobic, lesbophobic, biphobic and transphobic bullying
- celebrating annual LGBT+ events and days
- reviewing and changing policy to ensure it meets the needs of LGBT+ pupils
- championing the voices of LGBT+ pupils
- encouraging a school culture that celebrates diversity.

We asked both pupils and staff respondents about the existing LGBT+ initiatives and interventions they are aware of at their school or college, what makes the biggest difference and, crucially, what more they would like to see.

## Existing LGBT+ inclusion in schools and pupils' awareness

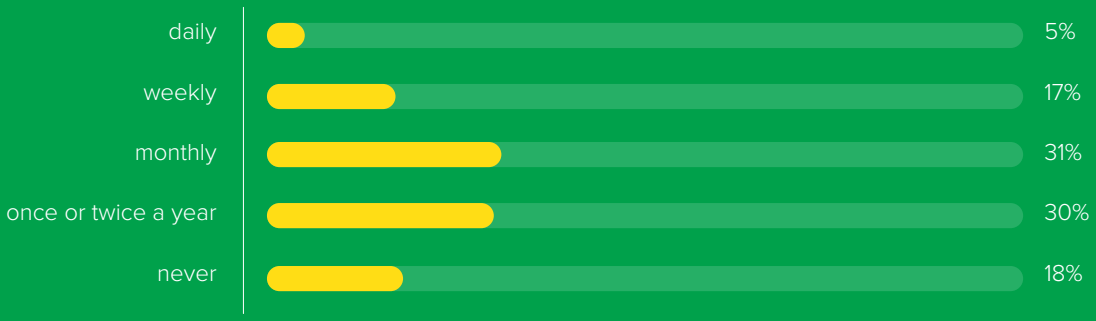
We asked pupils a number of questions around what LGBT+ support and messaging they had seen at their secondary school or college – and found that half (48%) of pupils have had little to zero positive messaging about being LGBT+ in the last year. A third of pupils (30%) say their school has only promoted positive messaging once or twice in the last 12 months and one fifth (18%) have received no positive messaging about being LGBT+ at all. This suggests that a considerable number of schools are not taking action to meet Ofsted requirements of preventing homophobic, lesbophobic, biphobic and transphobic bulling. A third (33%) of pupils also say that there are no visual signs of support for LGBT+ people in their school, while half (55%) say there are some posters, 24% have noticed displays, 13% have seen people wearing badges and 12% have seen people wearing lanyards supporting LGBT+ people.

Pupils, both LGBT+ and non-LGBT+, often do not know about LGBT+ inclusive initiatives at their school. 42% of pupils do not know if their school has an LGBT+/allies student group, 35% say their school has a group and 24% say their school does not have one. LGBT+ pupils are more likely to be aware of the support available for LGBT+ pupils than their non-LGBT+ peers – 46% of LGBT+ pupils say their school has an LGBT+/allies pupils group – but it is surprising that 27% do not know if their school has one. In comparison, 27% of non-LGBT+ pupils say their school has an LGBT+ student group and 51% do not know.

**48%**

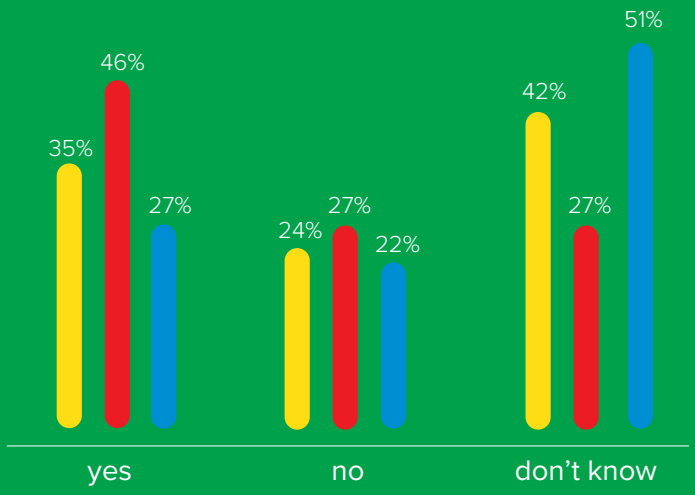
of pupils have had little to zero positive messaging about being LGBT+ from their school in the last 12 months

## In the last 12 months, how often has your school promoted positive messages about being LGBT+?

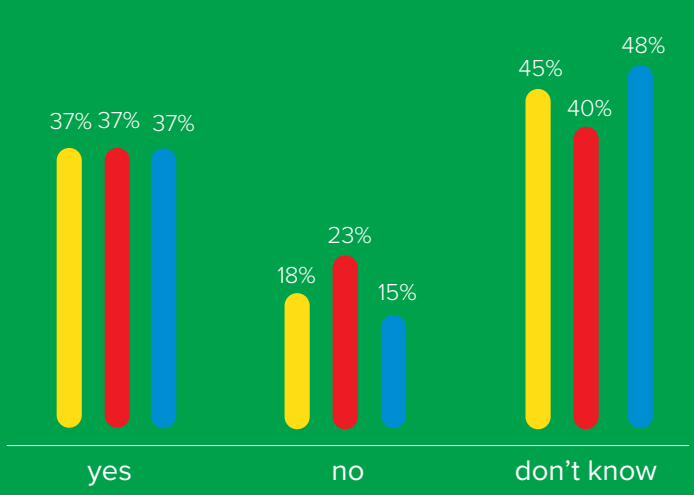



## Are there visual signs of support for LGBT+ people in your school?

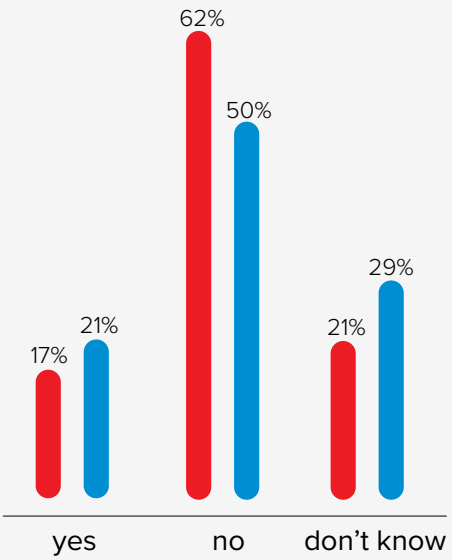
## Does your school have an LGBT+/allies student group?



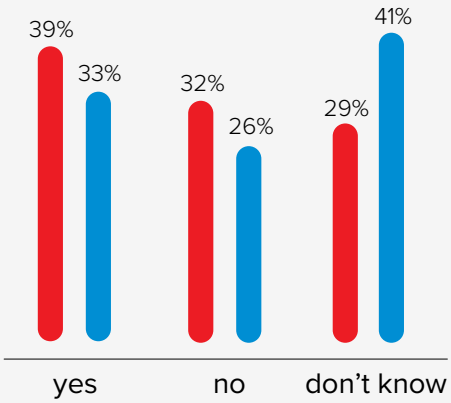

## Does your school have a student group focused on diversity, equal rights or similar?



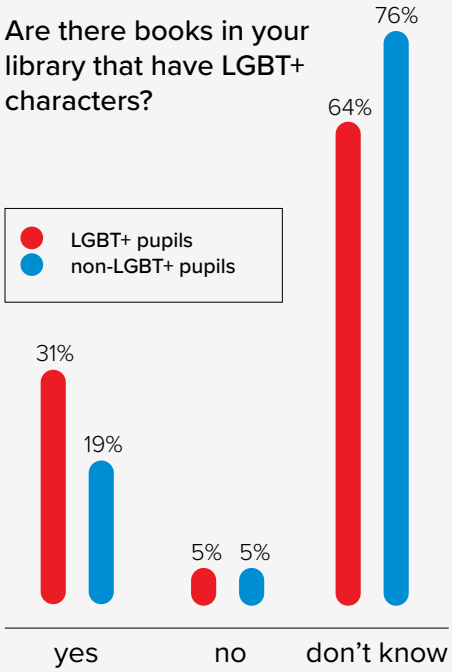
### Have you ever had a speaker come to talk about being LGBT+?



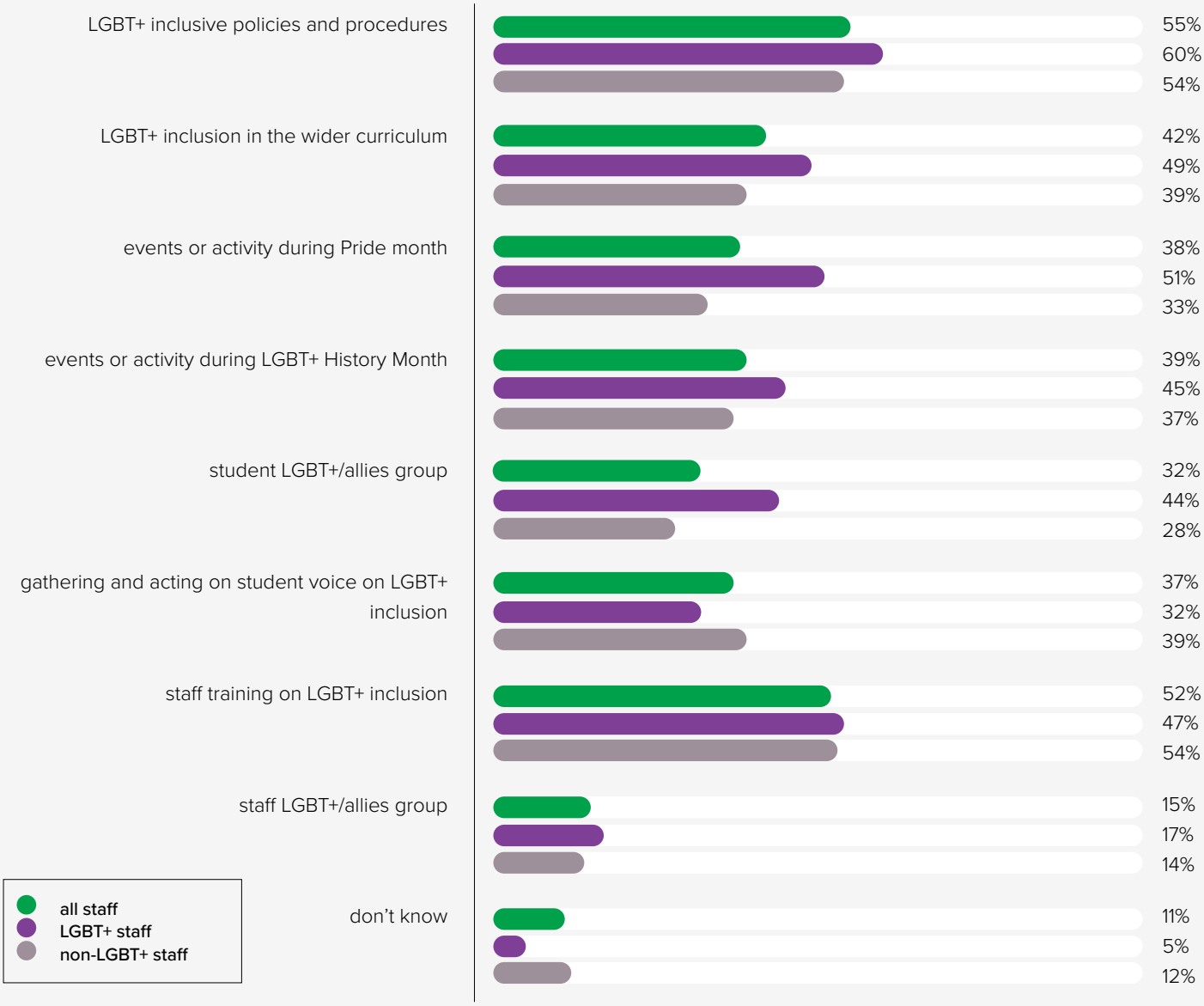

### Does your school celebrate Pride, School Diversity Week and/or LGBT+ History Month?




### Are there books in your library that have LGBT+ characters?




### Which of the following LGBT+ inclusion initiatives are currently run in your school?



Almost two thirds (62%) of LGBT+ pupils and half (50%) of non-LGBT pupils say they have never known their school to invite a speaker to come and talk about being LGBT+. 21% of LGBT+ pupils and 29% of non-LGBT+ pupils did not know if this has happened. Only 35% of all pupils say their school celebrates Pride, School Diversity Week and/or LGBT+ History Month – and 37% do not know if their school does anything on these occasions. LGBT+ pupils and non-LGBT+ pupils are largely in agreement here but, again, while LGBT+ pupils are more likely to know if these events are celebrated or not, more non-LGBT+ pupils do not know (41%).

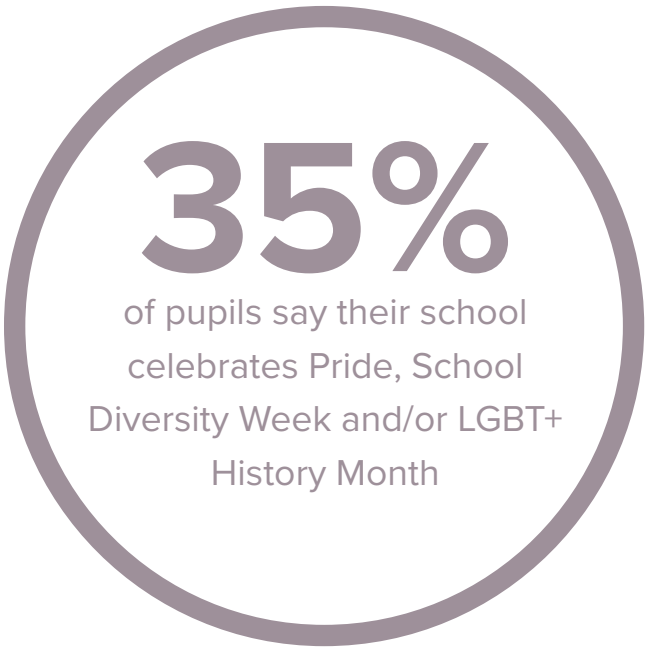
Pupils were also asked if there are books in their school's library that have LGBT+ characters. The majority of pupils (71%) did not know, while 24% said yes.

## Staff experiences and views of LGBT+ initiatives

Mirroring the pupils, non-LGBT+ staff are less likely to know if LGBT+ initiatives exist (12%) than their LGBT+ colleagues (5%). Out of the different LGBT+ inclusion initiatives run in schools and colleges, LGBT+ inclusive policies and procedures are the most common, with just over half (55%) of all staff saying that their school currently has these in place. This is followed by staff training on LGBT+ inclusion (52%) and LGBT+ inclusion in the wider curriculum (42%). Meanwhile, only 38% of staff say that their school puts on events or activities during Pride month or LGBT+ History Month (39%) – and just under a third (32%) say that their school has a student LGBT+/allies group.

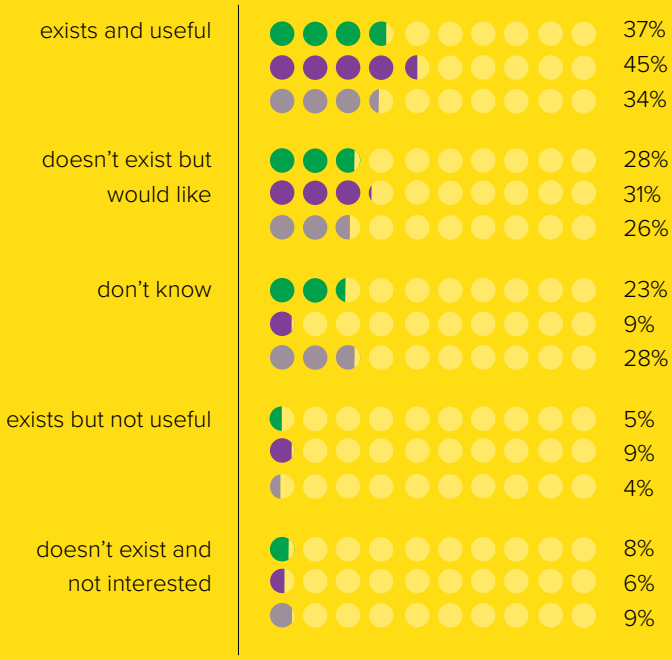
In terms of staff demand for LGBT+ inclusion initiatives, 30% of staff say that their school does not celebrate Pride month but they would like it to, and 28% say the same for LGBT+ History Month. 27% say LGBT+ inclusion isn't currently covered in the wider curriculum at their school but they would like it to be. A third (31%) of staff say that their school currently doesn't run staff training on LGBT+ inclusion, but they would like it.

There is considerable demand for both student and staff LGBT+/allies groups. 37% of staff say their schools run a LGBT+/allies group for students and it is useful. 28% say their school does not currently have a student LGBT+/allies group but they would like to see one set up. Only 5% of staff whose schools already have an LGBT+/allies group do not think it is helpful and just 8% of those currently without a group are not interested in having one. Meanwhile, half (50%) of LGBT+ staff say their school doesn't have a LGBT+/allies group especially for staff members but they would like to see one set up, and they are joined by a third (33%) of non-LGBT+ staff.

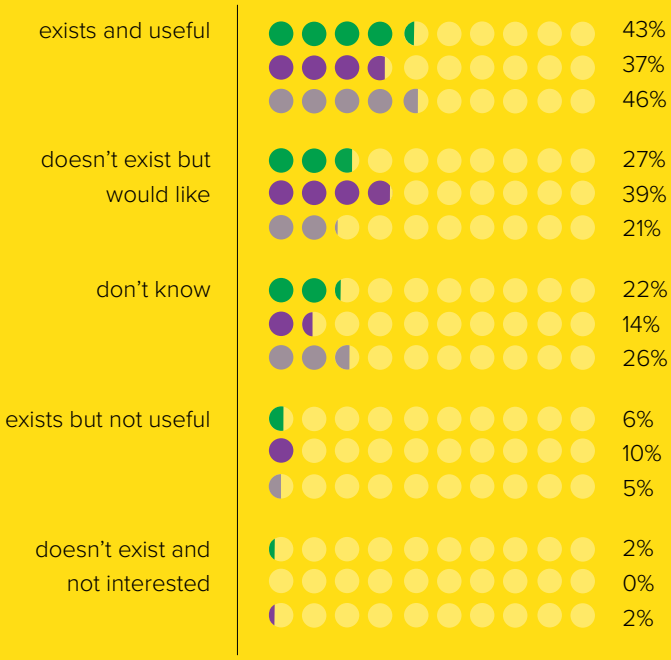


# Staff experiences and preferences regarding LGBT+ inclusion initiatives

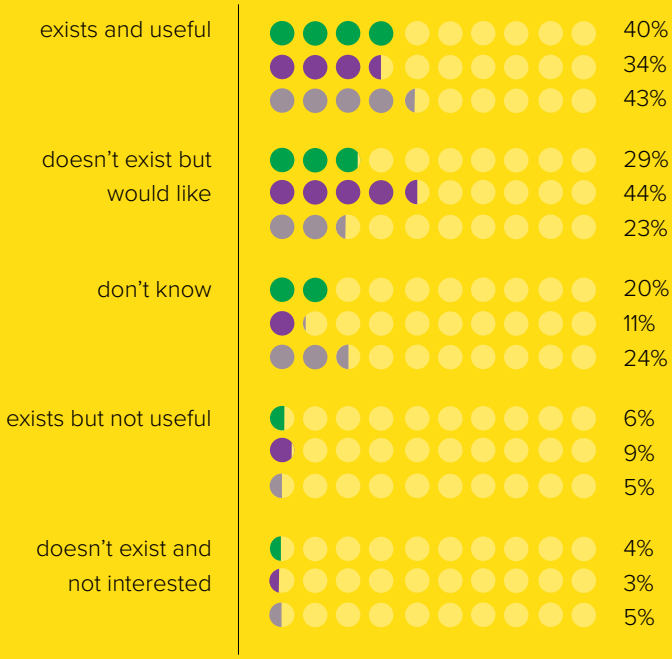
### Student LGBT+/allies group



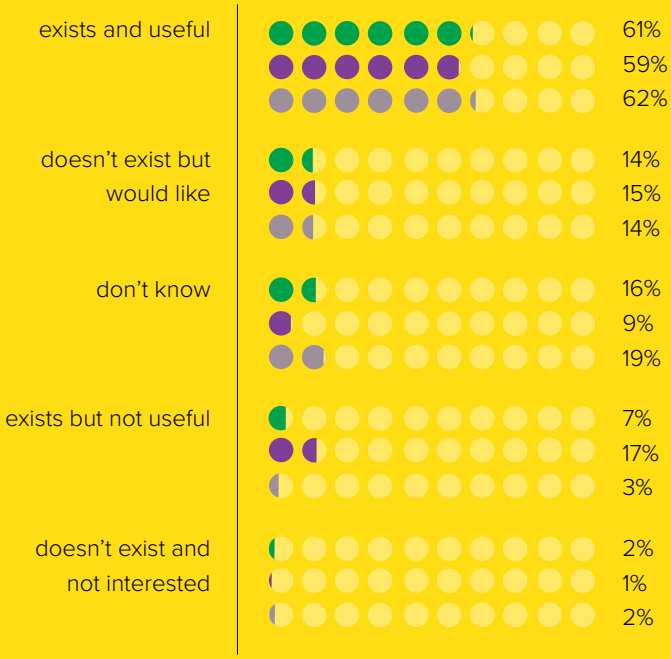

### LGBT+ inclusion in the wider curriculum

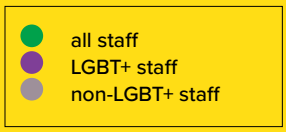



### Gathering and acting on student voice on LGBT+ inclusion

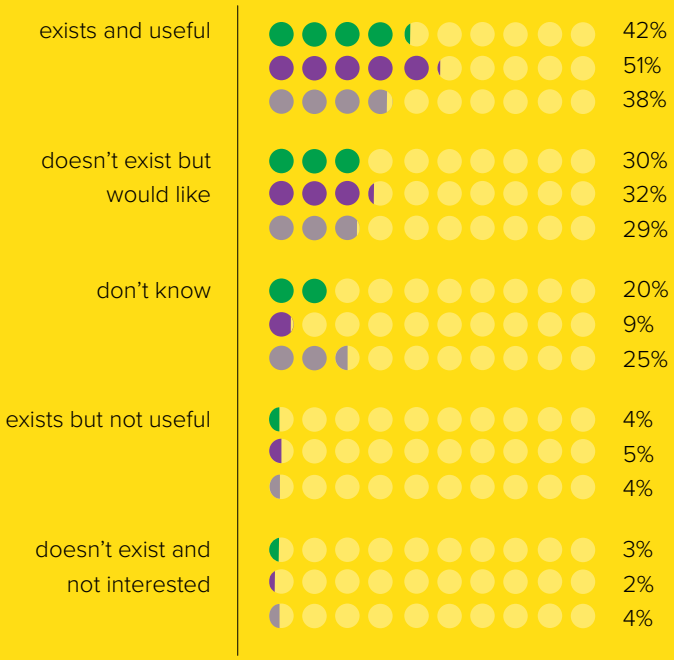



### LGBT+ inclusive policies and procedures

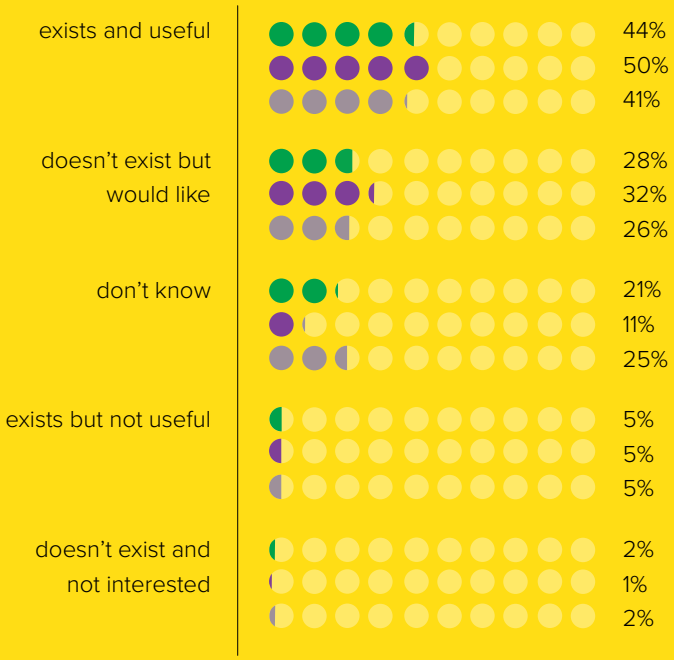




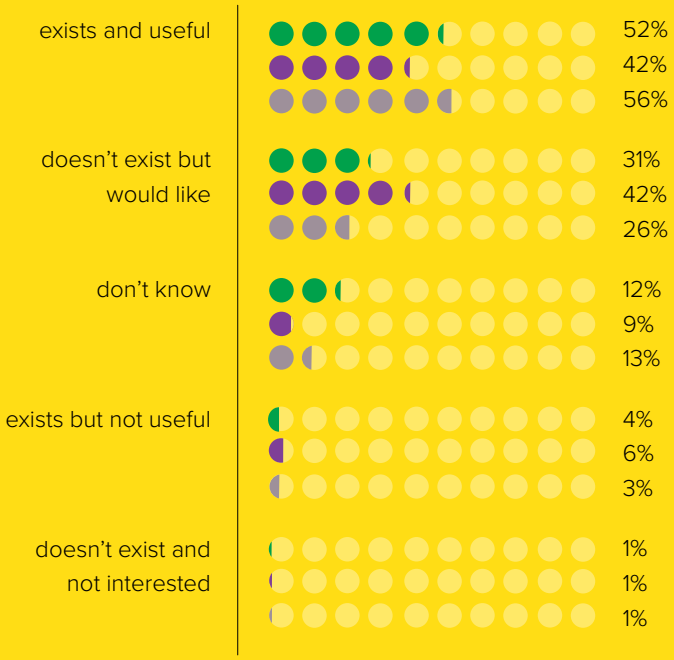

## Events or activities during Pride Month



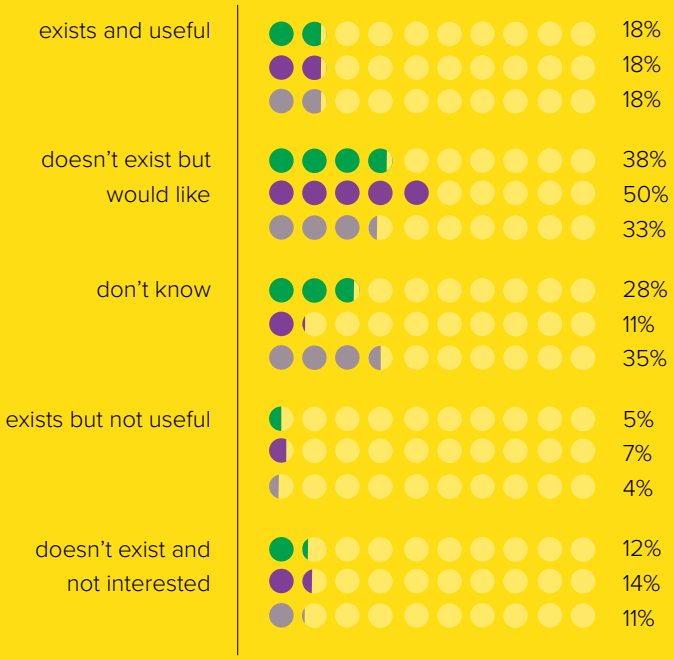

## Events or activities during LGBT+ History Month




## Staff training on LGBT+ inclusion




## Staff LGBT+/allies group



Of the staff who say their school or college has an LGBT+/allies group, 71% say that it was set up to ensure all pupils feel supported and 68% say to provide a space where pupils feel they can be themselves. 40% say it was requested by pupils and 15% say they saw the positive effect a LGBT+/allies group had on pupils from another school or college. 59% of LGBT+ staff say they would have wanted something similar when they were at school.

The majority of staff share the belief that senior leadership teams (SLT) are primarily responsible for driving an inclusive culture, anti-bullying initiatives and an LGBT+ inclusive curriculum at their school or college. Although almost half (47%) of staff considered anti-bullying to be everyone's responsibility, 86% said that the SLT are primarily responsible for the school's anti-bullying messaging. Likewise, 90% think that the SLT are responsible for fostering an inclusive culture and 61% think they are responsible for an LGBT+ inclusive curriculum. Two thirds (66%) of staff also identified heads of year as responsible for anti-bullying measures, headteachers as having an important role to play in establishing an inclusive culture (77%) and curriculum leads for an LGBT+ inclusive curriculum (57%).

"Too often it falls to one or two members of staff to push for or lead LGBT+ inclusion, which puts them in a vulnerable position."

***Non-binary LGBT+ student teacher***

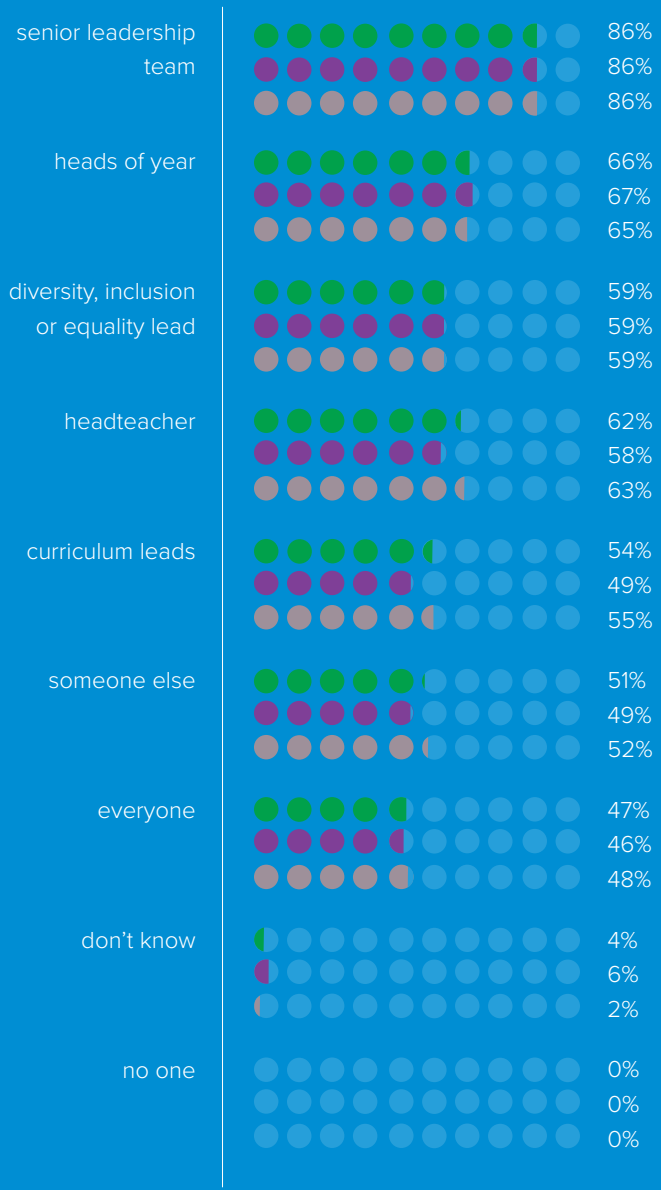
"I think it has been driven by a couple of teachers but doesn't have the full support and I would worry what would happen to it if those teachers were to leave."

***Female LGBT+ teacher***

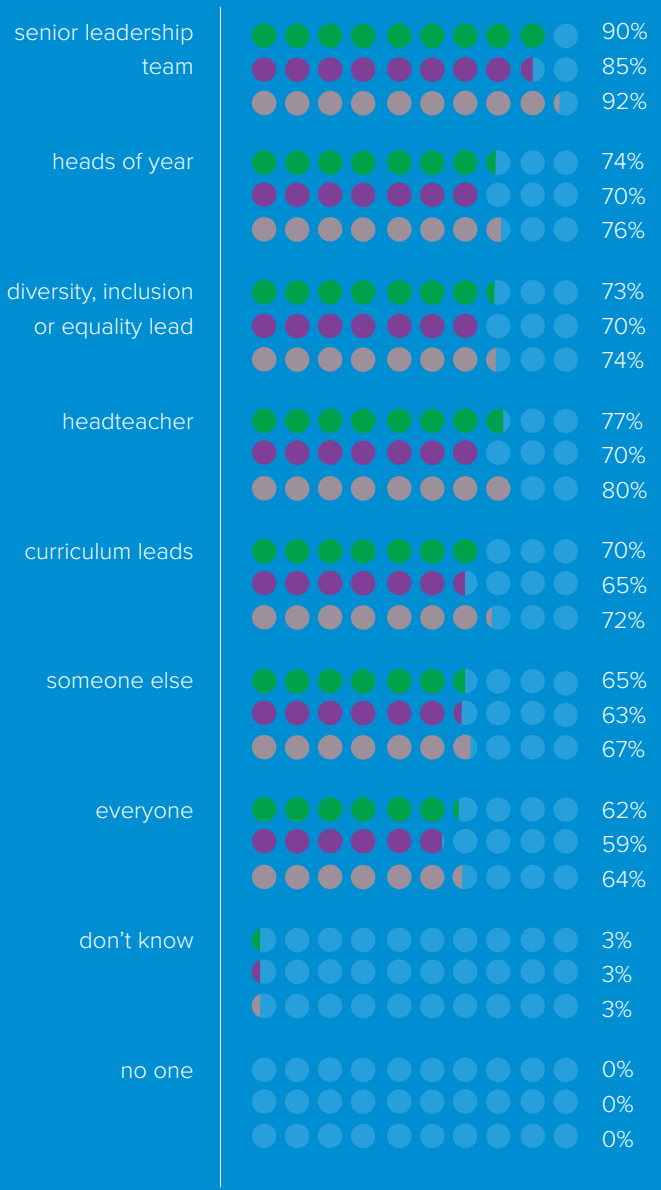
## Why did you choose to start an LGBT+/allies group in your school?

# Who in your school holds responsibility for...?

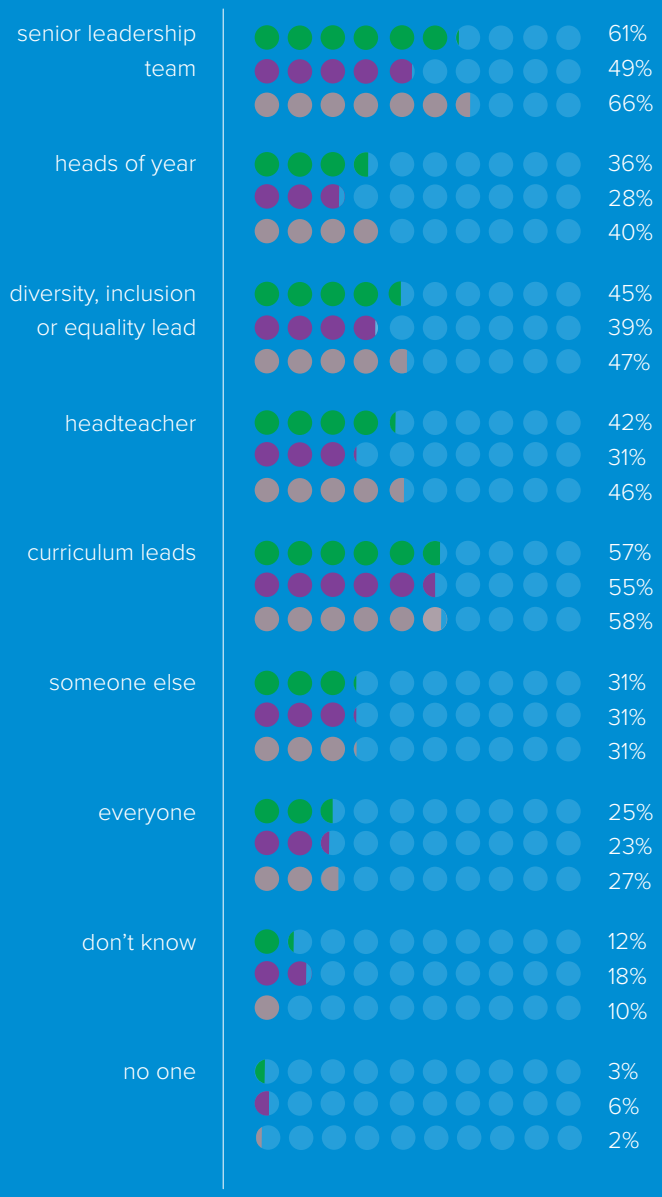
## Anti-bullying



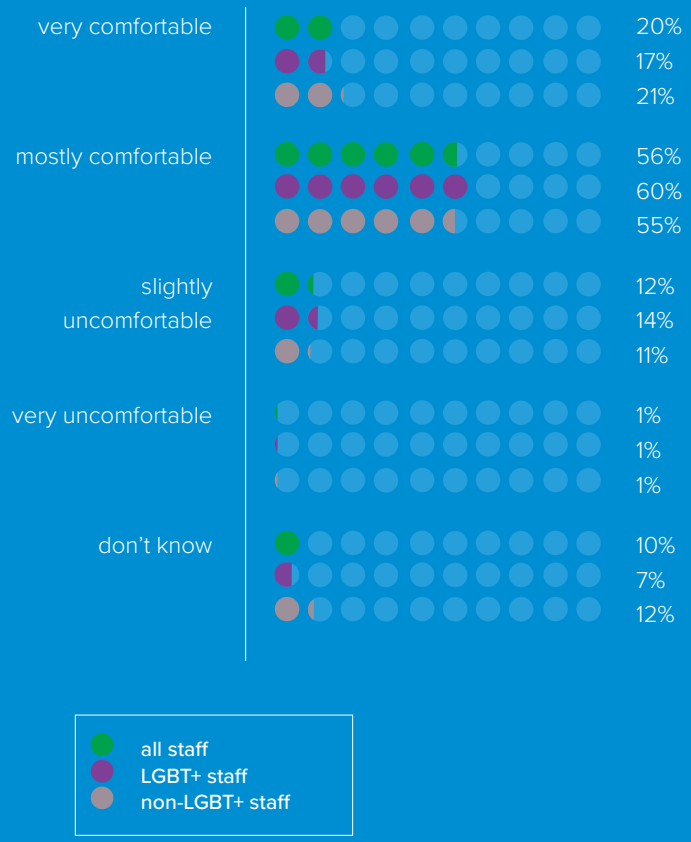

## Inclusive culture



## LGBT+ inclusive curriculum




## How would you describe your colleagues' level of comfort with LGBT+ inclusion work?



## Barriers to LGBT+ initiatives

Time and funding are the biggest obstacles for schools when putting these measures in place. 50% of LGBT+ staff and 35% of non-LGBT+ staff say that a lack of time is most likely to prevent them from running an LGBT+ initiative. 28% of LGBT+ staff and 15% of non-LGBT+ staff say that money is an issue.

LGBT+ staff are more likely to report that individuals are a barrier to implementing LGBT+ initiatives in school. 14% of LGBT+ staff identify parents and carers as a barrier, compared to 10% of non-LGBT+ staff, and a third (31%) of LGBT+ staff say that their colleagues and school board are a barrier to doing LGBT+ inclusion work with their pupils. While just 1% of non-LGBT+ staff think that their headteacher or senior leadership team (SLT) are barriers, 10% of LGBT+ staff identify their SLT and 5% agree that their headteacher is a barrier. 11% of LGBT+ staff also think that other staff members are barriers (compared to 2% of non-LGBT+ staff); 5% say that their governors are a barrier.

Only one in five (20%) staff members think that their colleagues are very comfortable with LGBT+ inclusion work. 56% think that they are mostly comfortable. 12% think that their colleagues are slightly uncomfortable with LGBT+ inclusion work.

"We simply do not have the money to pay for any more external support. As much as we would like it we just don't have the finance."

***Male non-LGBT+ safeguarding lead***

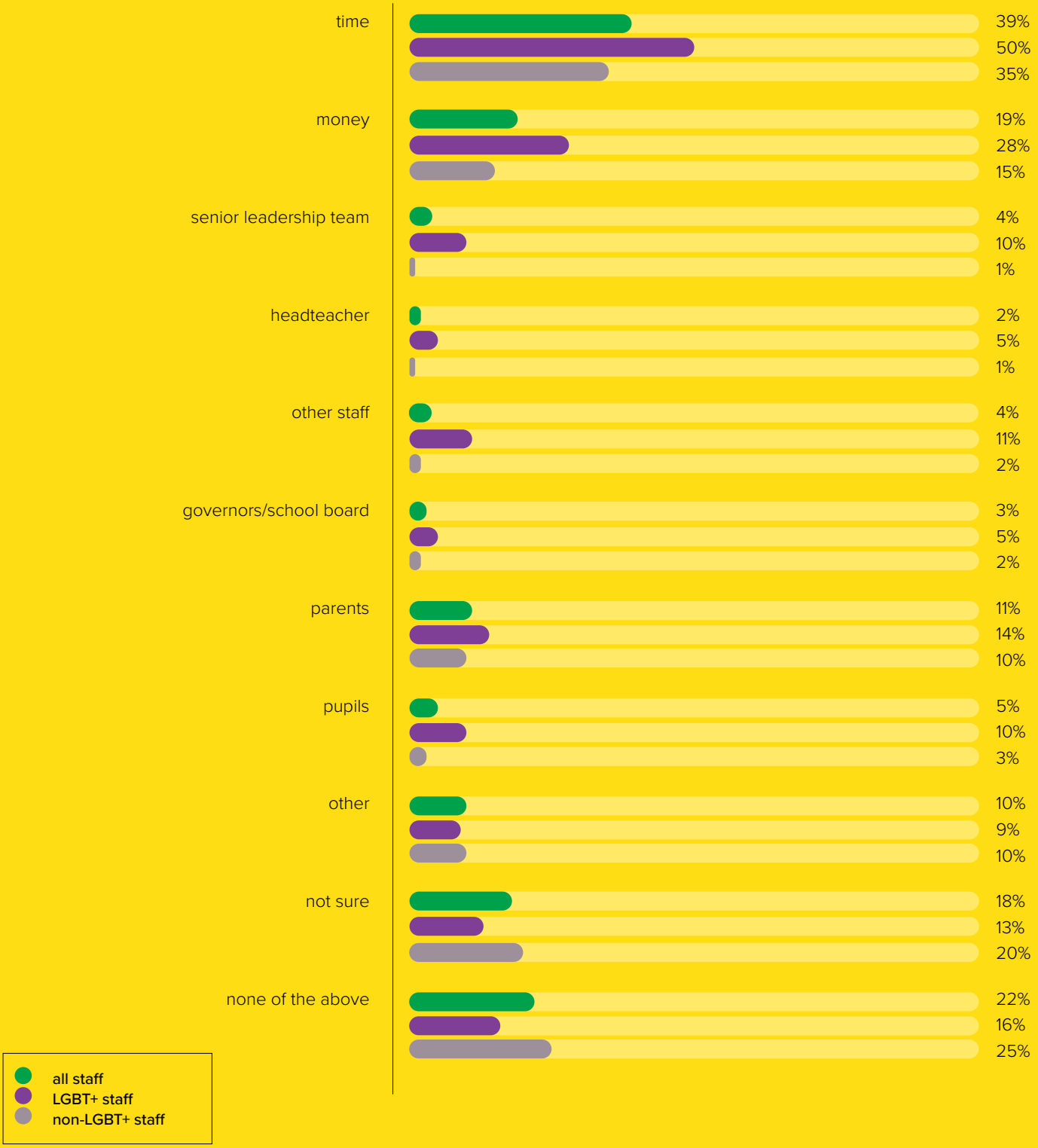
"SLT are against LGBT+ inclusion in principle. That seems to be an insurmountable barrier."

***Male LGBT+ teacher***

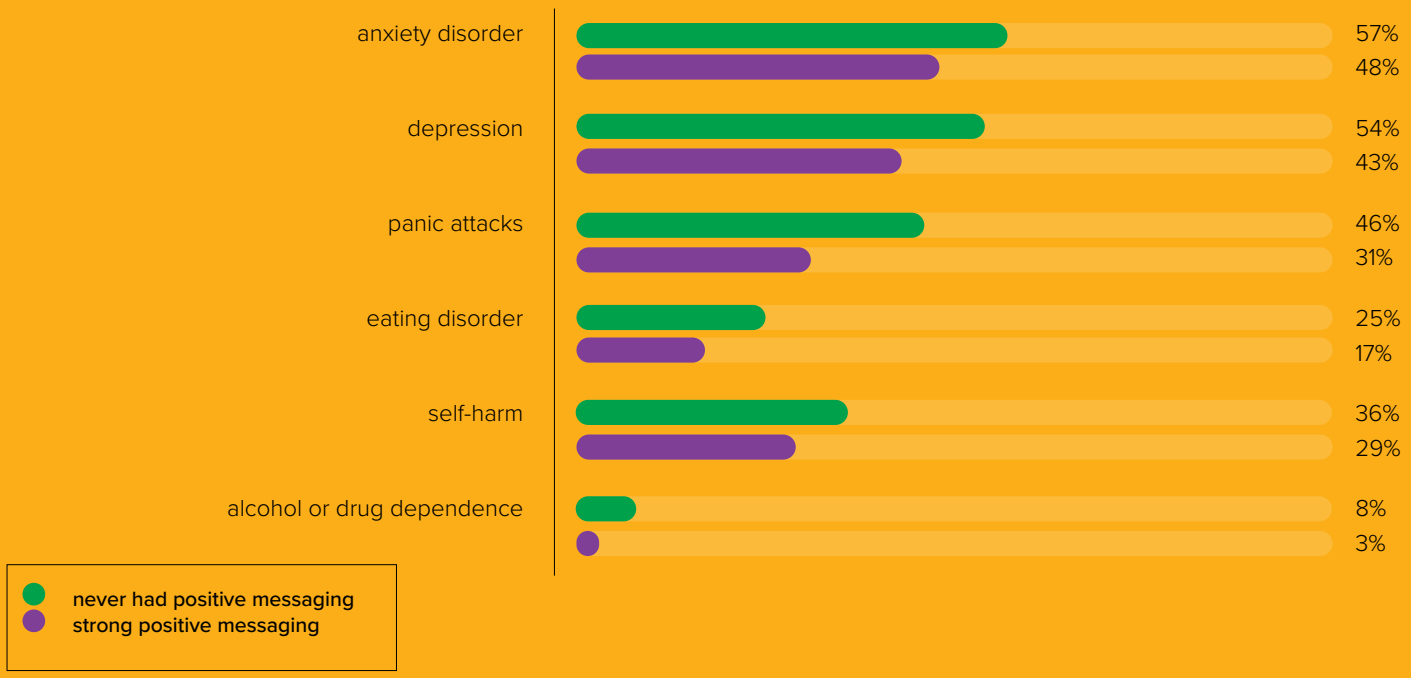
"Time is such a barrier. My school is very academic driven and I feel that anything 'less' academically driven needs to 'prove' its worth."

***Female LGBT+ teacher***

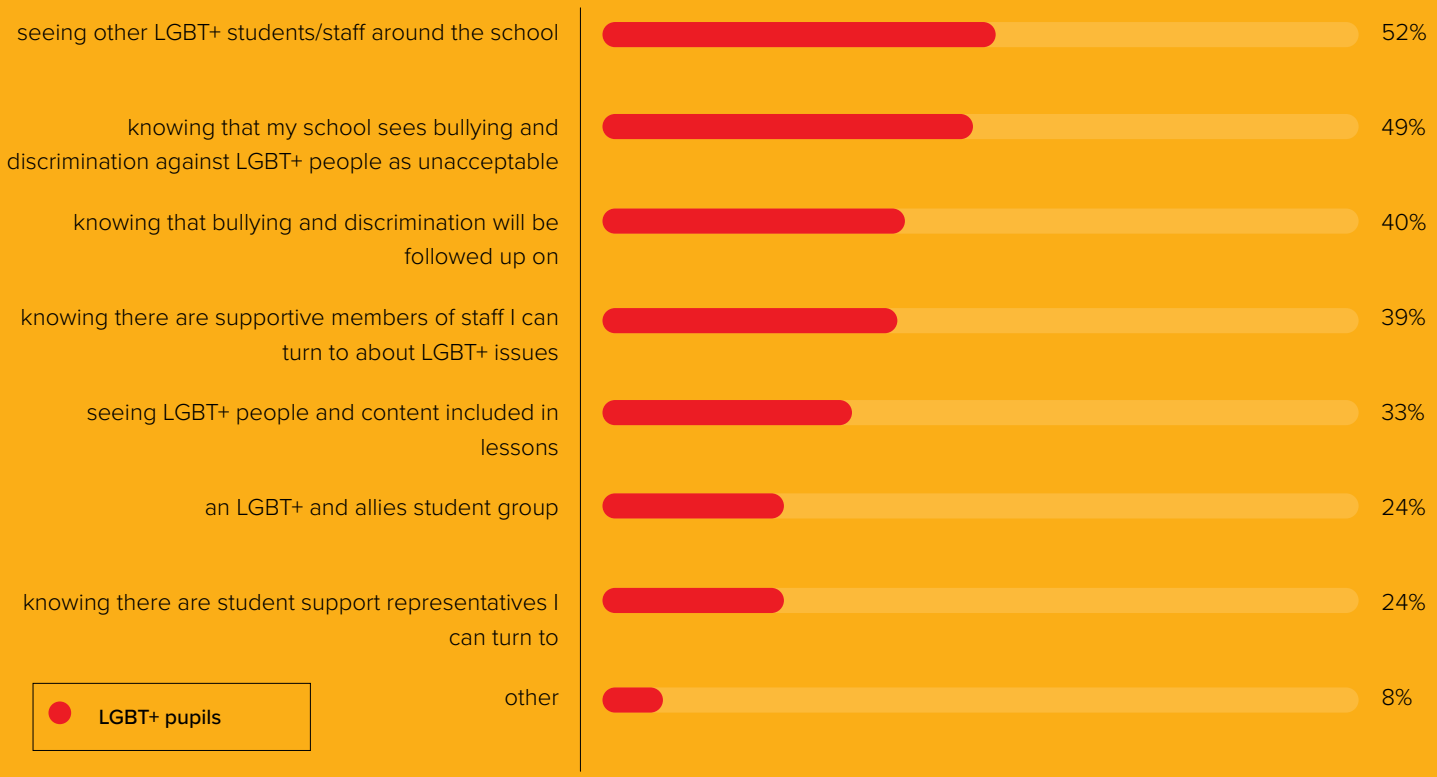
What, if any, are the barriers to you running these initiatives in your school?



## LGBT+ pupils' experiences of mental health challenges vs. the level of positive messaging they've had from school about being LGBT+




## As an LGBT+ pupil, what makes the most positive difference to your daily life at school?



## The difference LGBT+ inclusion makes

It is very important for LGBT+ pupils to be aware of other LGBT+ pupils and staff around their school. When asked to select which initiatives make the most positive difference to their daily life at school, 52% of LGBT+ pupils said seeing other LGBT+ students and staff. They also want to know that their school regards homophobic, transphobic and biphobic bullying as unacceptable. 49% of LGBT+ pupils say that knowing this makes a positive difference to their daily life, and 40% also identified knowing that any bullying and discrimination will be followed up on.

Pupils who have received positive messaging about being LGBT+ feel considerably safer in school, regardless of whether they're LGBT+ or not. Only half (49%) of LGBT+ pupils who have 'never' had positive messages feel safe at school on a daily basis; this increases to 58% with 'few' positive messages and increases again to 68% with 'strong' positive messages. 69% of non-LGBT+ pupils who have 'never' had positive messaging about being LGBT+ feel safe at school on a daily basis. This increases to 73% with 'few' positive messages and rises again to 79% with 'strong' positive messages. Therefore, positive messaging about being LGBT+ drastically improves all pupils' sense of safety in school.

Positive messaging also drastically improves pupil mental health and wellbeing, with notably lower rates of depression, anxiety, panic attacks, self-harm, eating disorders and alcohol and drug dependence. For example, 46% of LGBT+ pupils who have 'never' received positive messages from their school about being LGBT+ report experiencing panic attacks. This figure drops to 36% of LGBT+ pupils who have received 'few' messages and 31% who have received 'strong' positive messages. Furthermore, pupils who have had 'strong' positive messaging about being LGBT+ at school are less likely to have contemplated suicide. 74% of LGBT+ pupils who have 'never' had positive messages from school about being LGBT+ have had suicidal thoughts and feelings – this drops to 66% amongst pupils who have had 'few' positive messages and 65% when there is 'strong' positive messaging.

**52%**

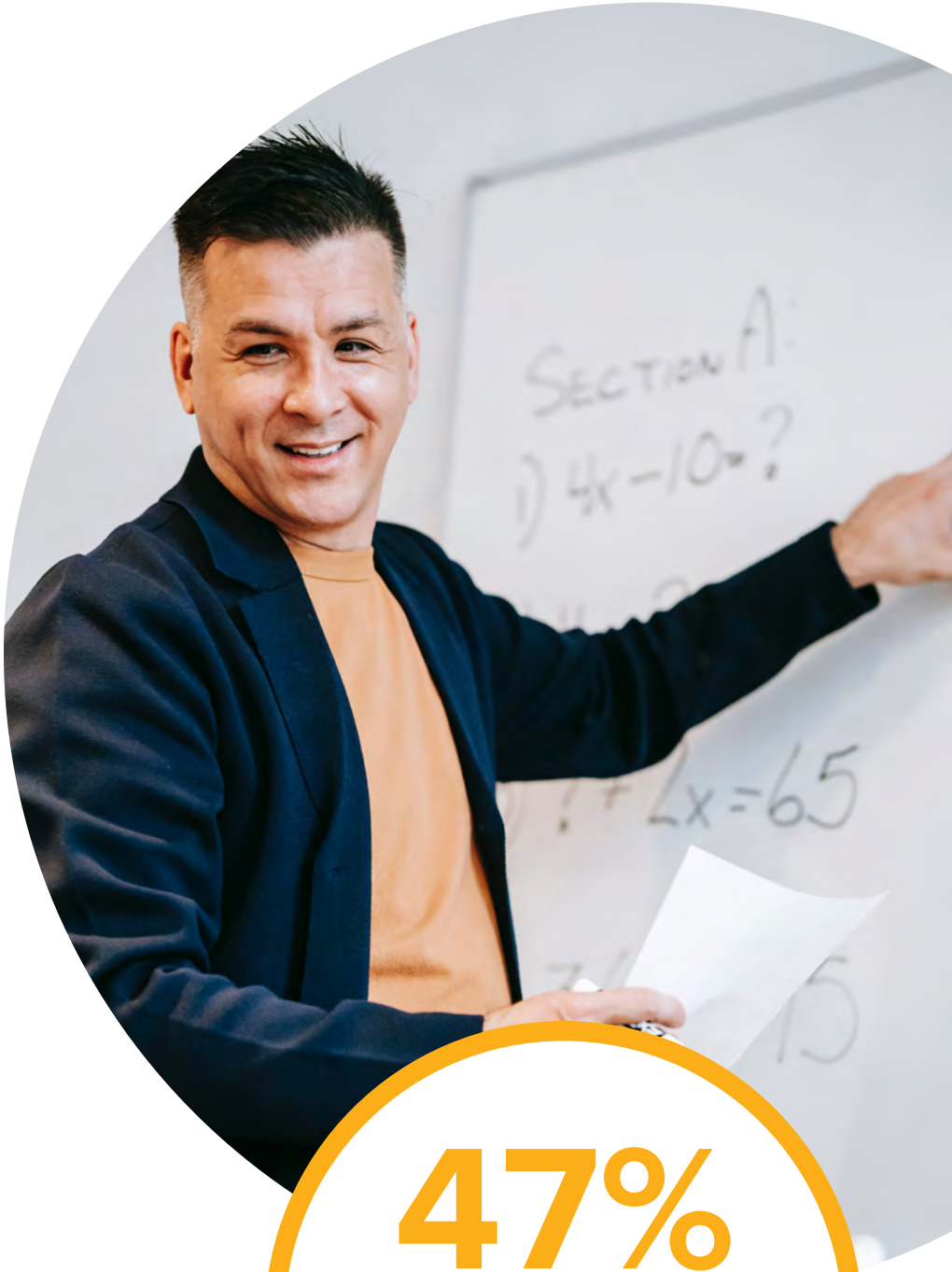
of LGBT+ pupils say seeing other LGBT+ students and staff around makes the most positive difference to their daily life at school

## Visibility of LGBT+ staff

While half (52%) of LGBT+ pupils say seeing other LGBT+ students and staff around the school makes the most positive difference to their daily life at school, they are often unsure if there are LGBT+ staff members. Two thirds (68%) of LGBT+ pupils say they don't know if any staff members at their school have come out as LGBT+.

Staff are more likely than pupils to know if any of their colleagues are out as LGBT+, and LGBT+ staff members are even more likely still. Gay staff are most visible, with 51% of staff saying there are gay staff members who are out at their school or college. This is followed by lesbian staff (42%). Bisexual staff are almost five times less likely to be out than gay staff members (11%) and transgender staff are less likely still (8%).

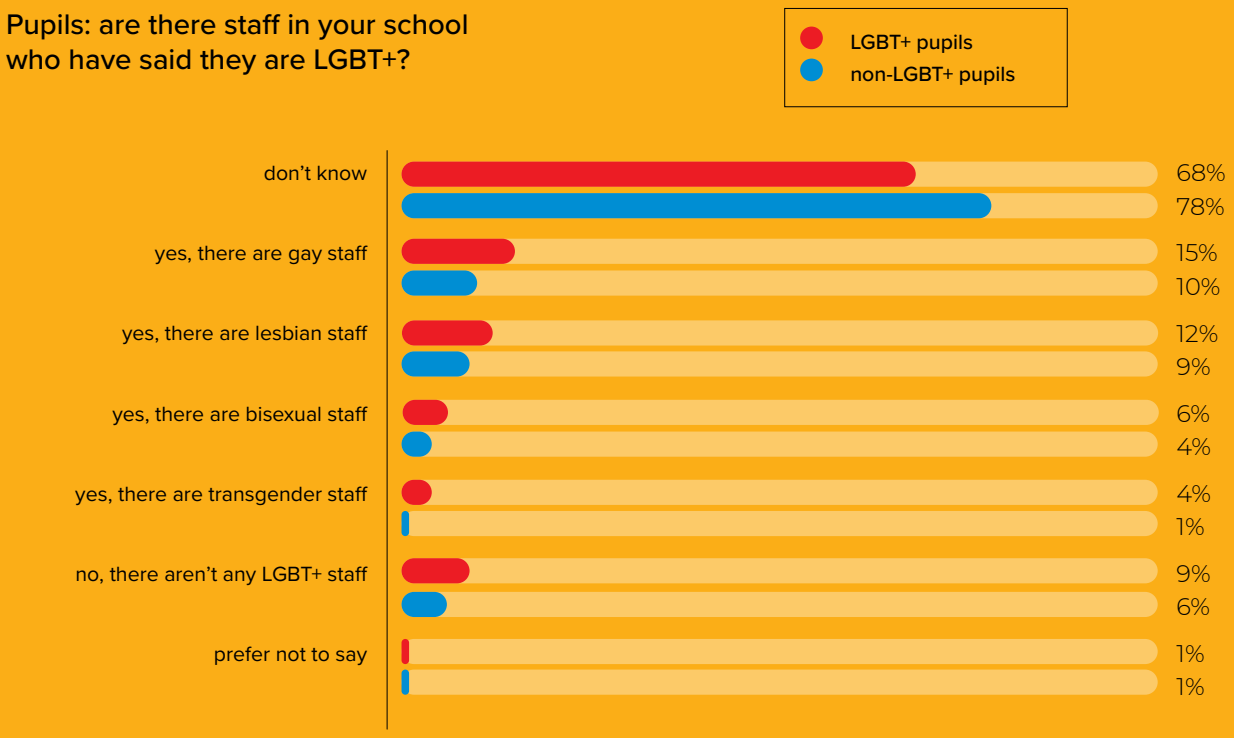
Many LGBT+ staff feel uncomfortable at the prospect of coming out at school, reducing the chances of visibility with pupils. Only 37% of LGBT+ staff think that a colleague would feel comfortable coming out as LGBT+ at their school (considerably less than 51% of non-LGBT+ staff who think the same), and 43% are not sure they would feel comfortable. The benefits of providing more support and encouragement for LGBT+ staff are clear – for both staff and pupils.



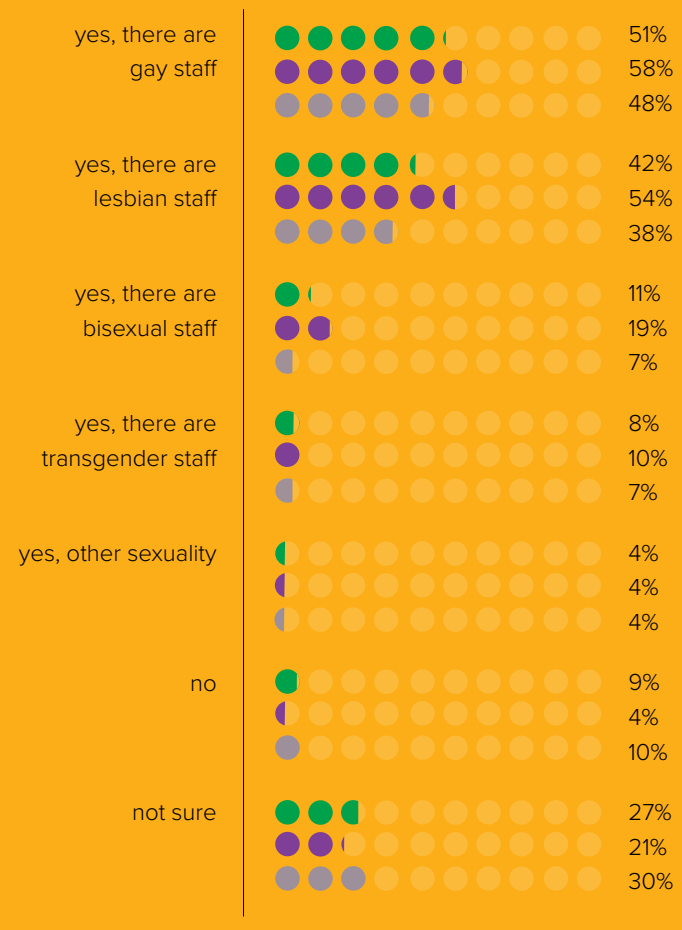
**47%**

of staff (less than half) think that a colleague would feel comfortable coming out as LGBT+ at their school

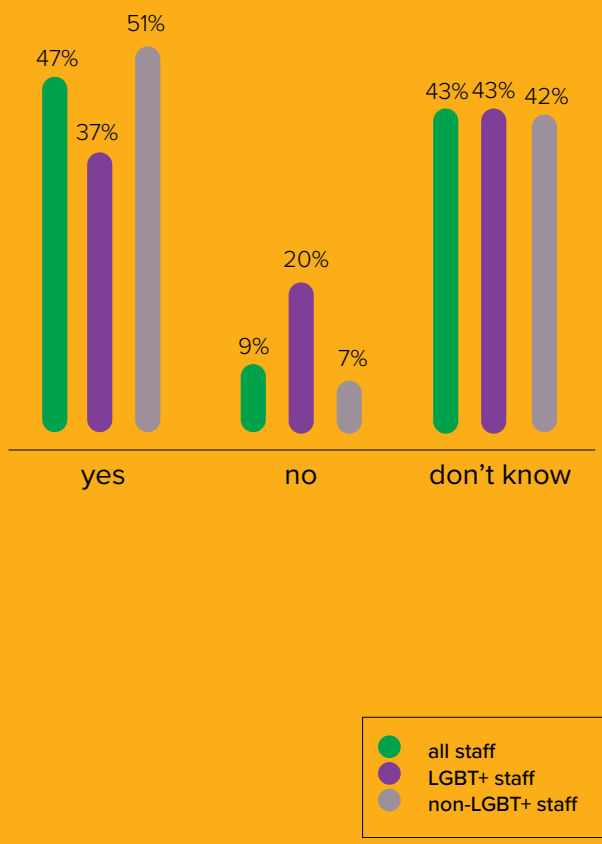
## Pupils: are there staff in your school who have said they are LGBT+?



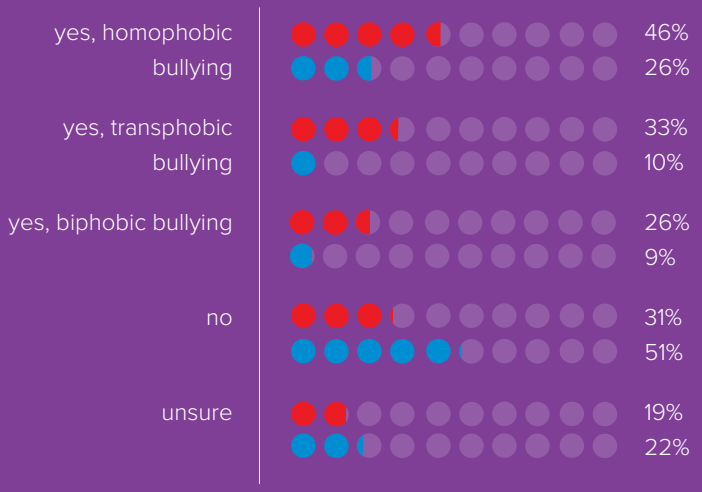

## Staff: are there any staff at your school who are out as LGBT+?



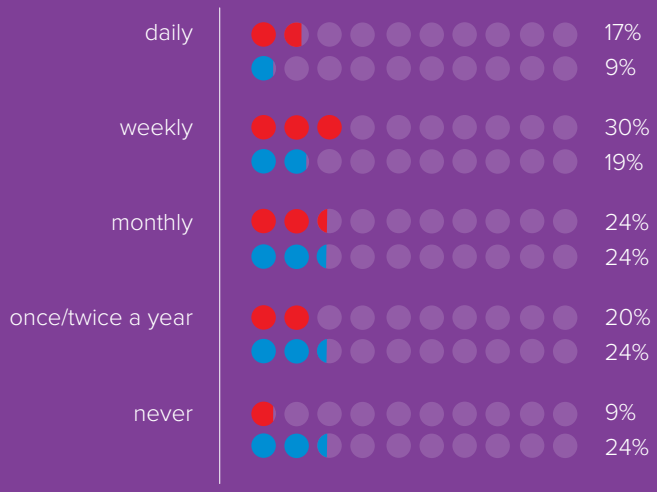

## Staff: do you think a colleague would feel comfortable out as LGBT+ in your school?



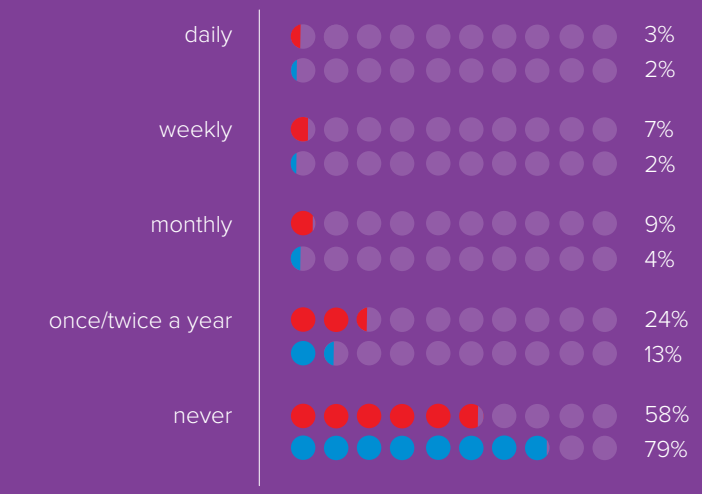
## Have you ever seen homophobic, biphobic or transphobic bullying in your school?



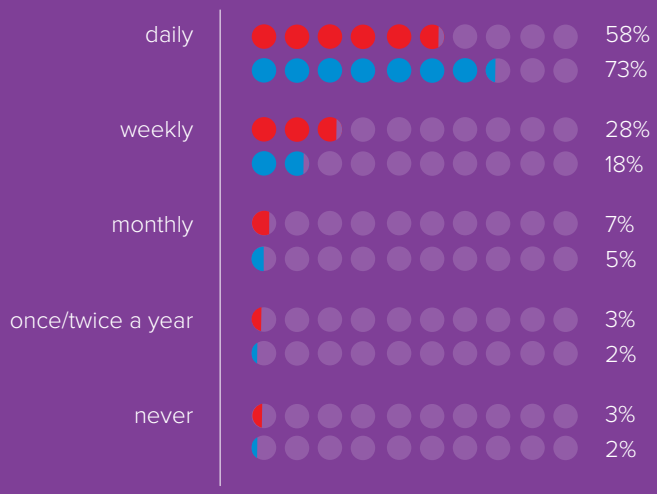

## Over the last 12 months, how often have you heard negative language used about LGBT+ people?



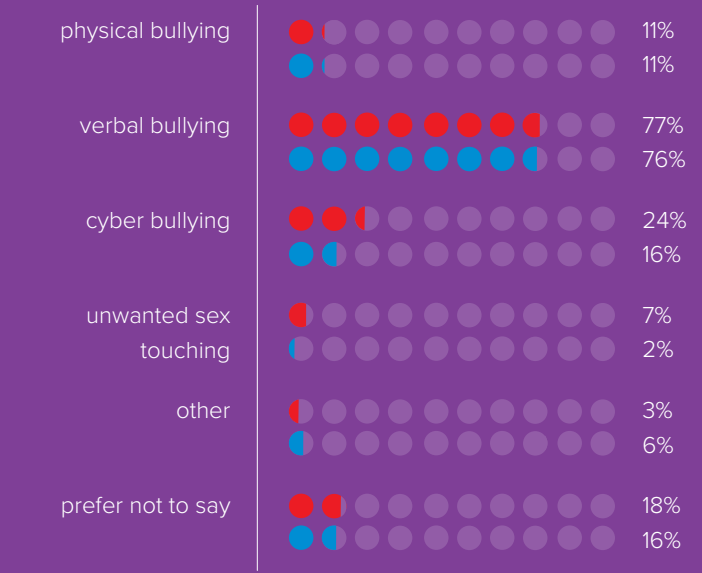

## Over the last 12 months, how often have you experienced being bullied by others?




## Over the last 12 months, how often have you felt safe in your school?




## What form did the bullying take?



**1 in 5**

LGBT+ young people (18%) who have been bullied have not told anyone

## Bullying and safety of LGBT+ young people

LGBT+ pupils are more likely than non-LGBT+ pupils to have witnessed homophobic, biphobic or transphobic bullying at their school – possibly because they or their friends are the targets of this bullying. They are 20% more likely to have seen homophobic bullying than non-LGBT+ pupils (46% vs 26%) and three times as likely to have seen transphobic bullying (33% vs 10%) or biphobic bullying (26% vs 9%). While over half of non-LGBT+ pupils have not seen any bullying at their school, just a third (31%) of LGBT+ pupils can say the same. It is not surprising then that only just over half (58%) of LGBT+ young people report feeling safe at school every day, compared to three quarters (73%) of non-LGBT+ young people.

LGBT+ young people are twice as likely to hear negative language used about LGBT+ people on a daily basis, with one in five (17%) LGBT+ young people hearing negative language every day. More LGBT+ young people are also bullied themselves than non-LGBT+ young people. LGBT+ young people are three times as likely to report being bullied every week over the past 12 months (7% compared to 2% of non-LGBT+ young people). While over three quarters of non-LGBT+ young people say they have never been bullied in the past year (79%), only just over half (58%) of LGBT+ young people have not been bullied.

Verbal bullying is the most common form that both LGBT+ young people (77%) and non-LGBT+ young people (76%) face. This is followed by cyber bullying, which LGBT+ young people are 8% more likely to experience than non-LGBT+ young people (24% vs 16%).

LGBT+ young people are also more likely to experience sexual harassment. 7% of LGBT+ young people and 2% of non-LGBT+ young people say they have experienced unwanted sexual touching over the last 12 months.

**1 in 5**

LGBT+ young people (17%) hear negative language used about LGBT+ people on a daily basis

**24%**

of LGBT+ young people have experienced cyber bullying in the past 12 months

### Why don't young people tell anyone about being bullied?

"If I were to tell anyone then I would have to come out to them or if I told them I guess it might make them more suspicious of my sexuality and sometimes I think 'why bother?' – they probably have enough of their own problems." *LGBT+ pupil, year 13, Northern Ireland*

"When I tried to seek mental health assistance at my school, it was so poor, so I decided to just deal with my problems myself even if that is unhealthy." *LGBT+ pupil, year 13, East Midlands*

"I get told I'm dramatic, that it's not happening, no proof." *LGBT+ pupil, year 13, Yorkshire & Humber*

"I find that typically people regard homophobia with utmost importance on the internet; however in real life it is rarely treated with enough importance, so I find it easier to endure and overcome rather than cause a massive issue." *LGBT+ pupil, year 12, West Midlands*

"My anxiety kicks up and I'm too afraid to tell anyone because I feel like I'm dumping my issues on them." *LGBT+ pupil, year 10, Scotland*

"Regardless of what people say, it would do more harm than good. The bullying at school didn't really affect me too much but the bullying at home affects me a lot." *LGBT+ pupil, year 10, North West*

One in five (18%) LGBT+ young people who have been bullied have not told anyone. While non-LGBT+ young people are most likely to tell a family member (40%), LGBT+ young people are more likely to talk to a friend (52%), which is not surprising based on our findings on LGBT+ young people's personal relationships in 'Wellbeing and mental health'.

Just 21% of LGBT+ pupils told a teacher at school. There is a possible link between this and pupils' confidence that their school will act decisively and supportively. Only a third (33%) of LGBT+ pupils think that their school has a clear process for reporting and following up on LGBT+ bullying, compared to half (50%) of non-LGBT+ pupils. Just shy of half of LGBT+ pupils (43%) and non-LGBT+ pupils (40%) are unsure of their school's reporting and following up procedures, which could also explain pupils' reluctance to come forward about the bullying they are experiencing.

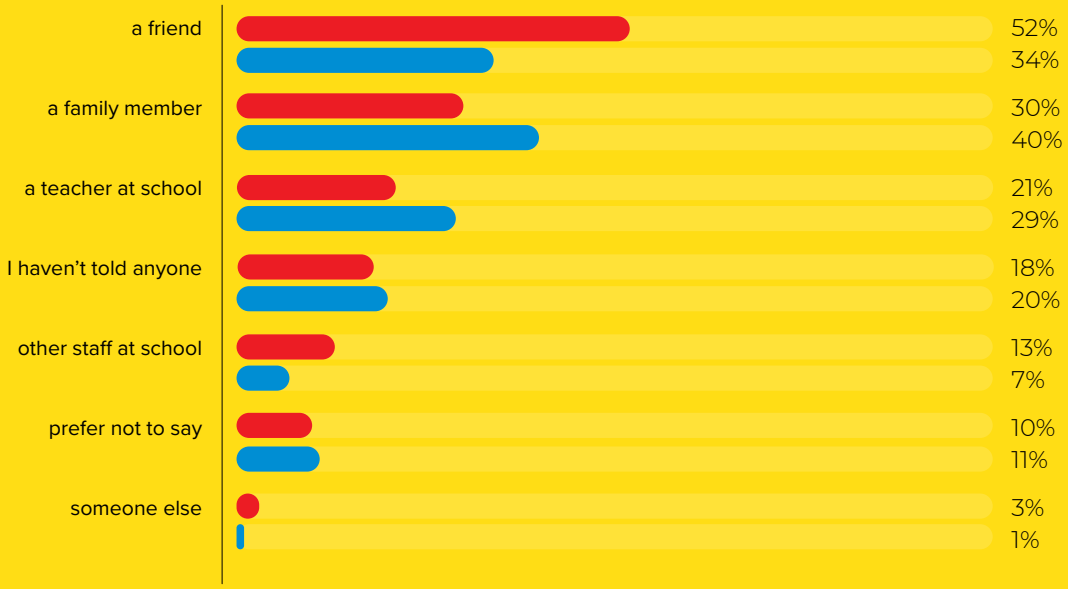
Overall, only 30% of LGBT+ pupils think that homophobic, biphobic and transphobic bullying is taken seriously at their school. This is despite almost half (49%) of LGBT+ pupils telling us that knowing that their school sees bullying and discrimination against LGBT+ people as unacceptable would make the most difference to their daily life.

## What more can be done?

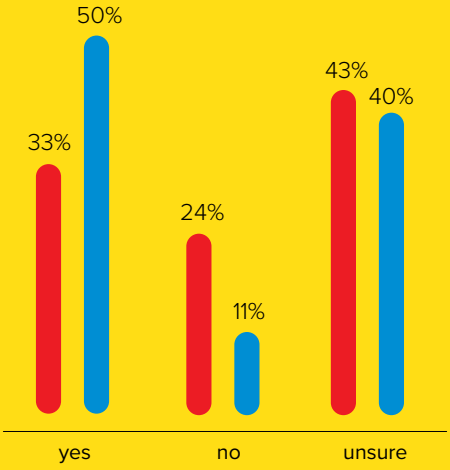
Currently, 81% of LGBT+ pupils think that an LGB young person would be supported by staff at their school or college if they came out. This is certainly progress and almost certainly helped by the steps that some schools have taken towards LGBT+ inclusion and equality in education. However, one in five (19%) LGBT+ pupils are either unsure or do not think their secondary school or college would be supportive of them coming out. There is more to be done to ensure that every single pupil feels they would be supported if they were to come out as LGBT+.

There is also a sharp drop in perceived staff support for transgender pupils coming out at school (63% of LGBT+ pupils think they would be supported), suggesting this needs particular attention. We discuss this more in the following section of the report. For now, we look at what support both pupils and staff are keen to see more of at their schools and colleges.

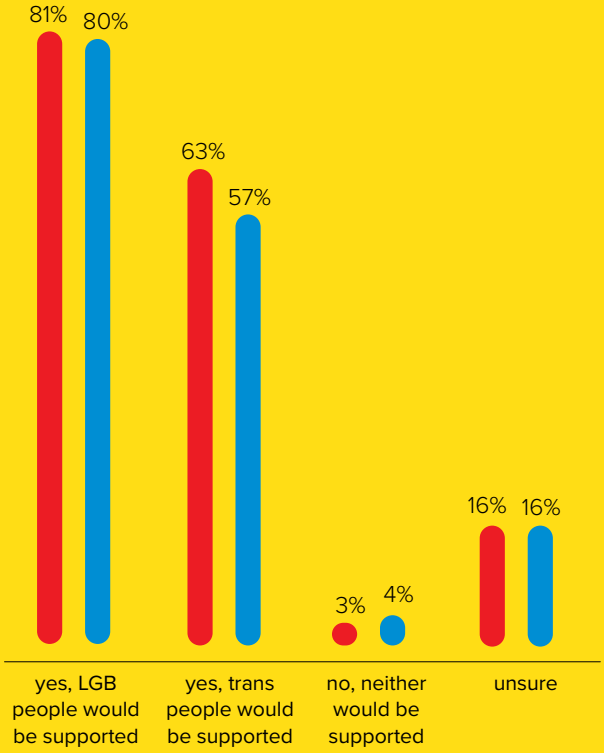
## Who did you tell about the bullying, if anyone?



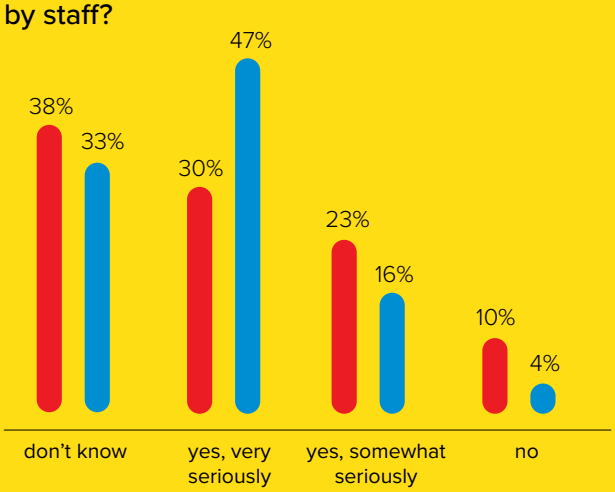

## Do you think your school has a clear process for reporting and following up on anti-LGBT+ bullying?

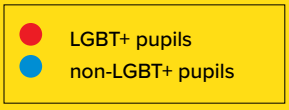



## If someone were to come out as LGB or T in your school, do you think they would be supported by staff?




## Do you think anti-LGBT+ bullying is taken seriously by staff?



## What pupils want

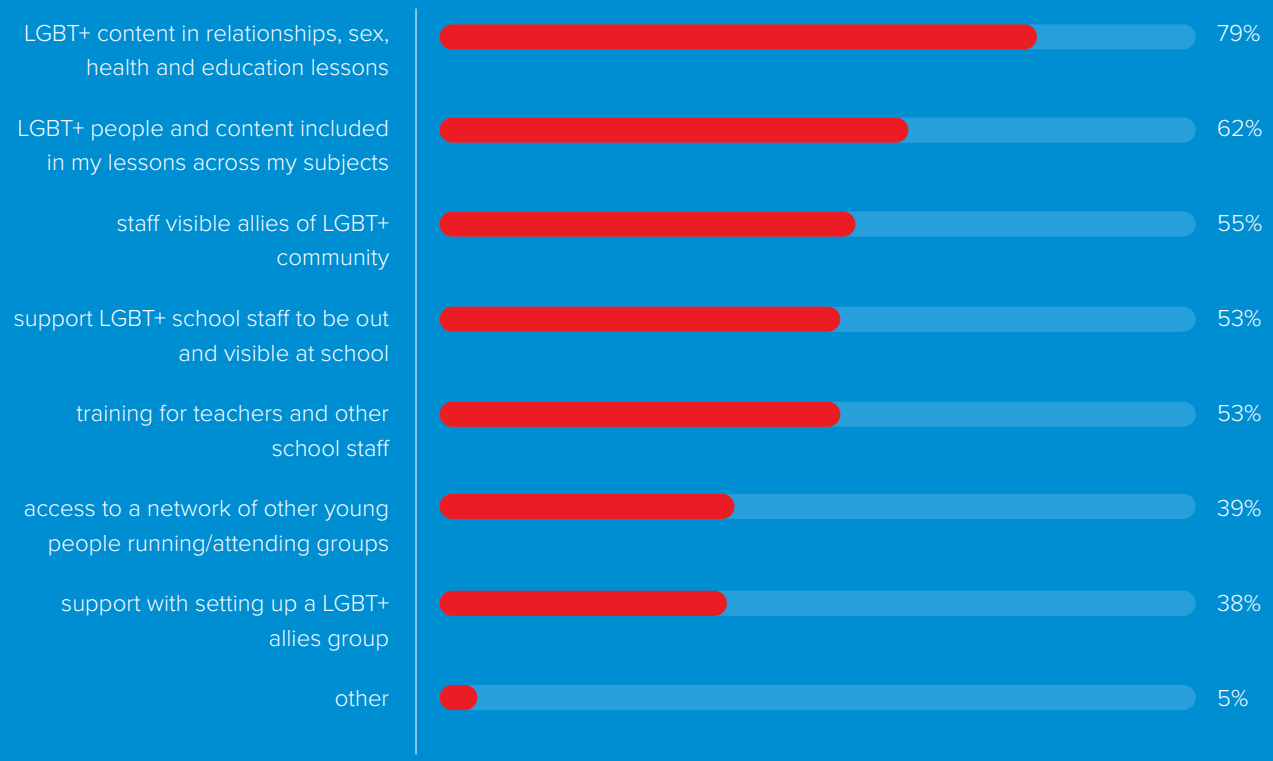
LGBT+ pupils are most interested in LGBT+ content included in relationships, sex, health and education lessons. 79% of LGBT+ pupils would like to see this at their school and 62% would like to see LGBT+ people and content included across all of their subjects.

It is clear that staff are integral to LGBT+ pupils feeling supported by their school. Over half (55%) of LGBT+ pupils want staff at their school to be visible allies of the LGBT+ community and 53% would like their school to support LGBT+ staff members to be out and visible. Likewise, 53% think training for teachers and other school staff around LGBT+ topics is a good idea.

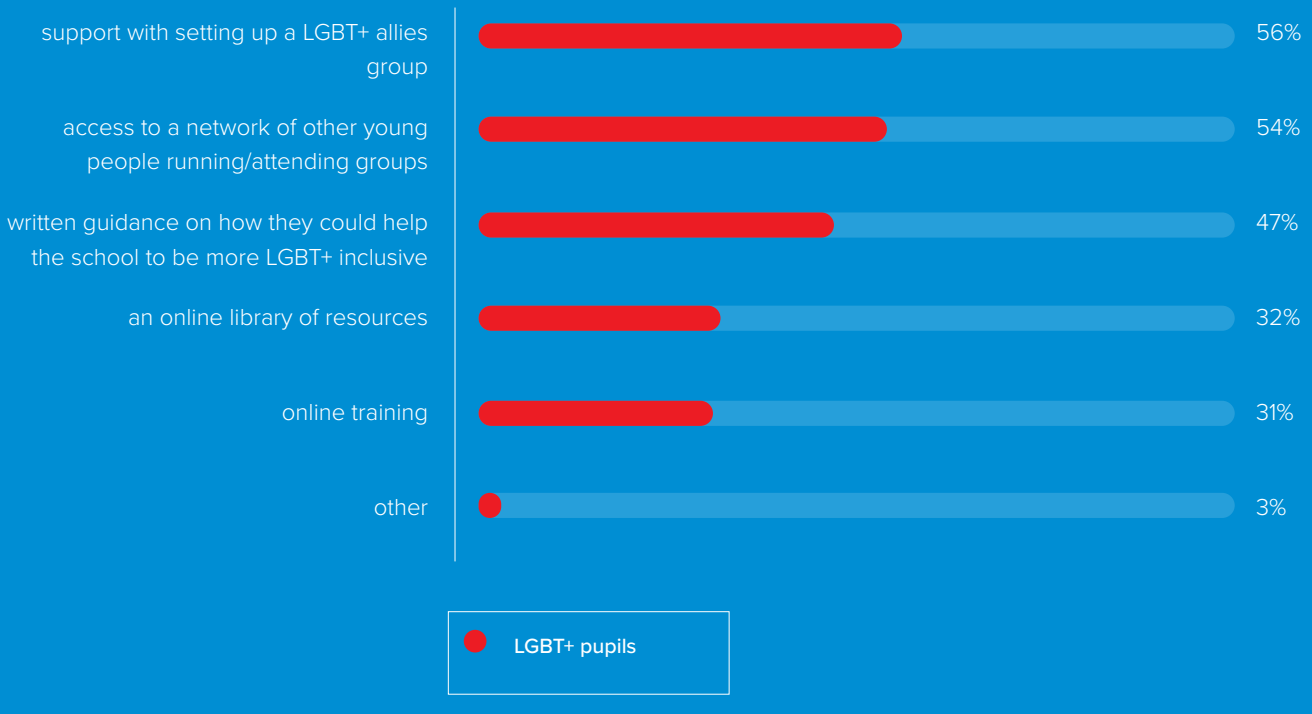
LGBT+ pupils also want to be actively involved in making their school a better place for LGBT+ people, but they need to be given the tools and support that will enable them to do so. 56% of LGBT+ pupils say that support from their school with setting up an LGBT+/allies group would help the most, and 54% would like access to a network of other young people who are running and attending similar groups.

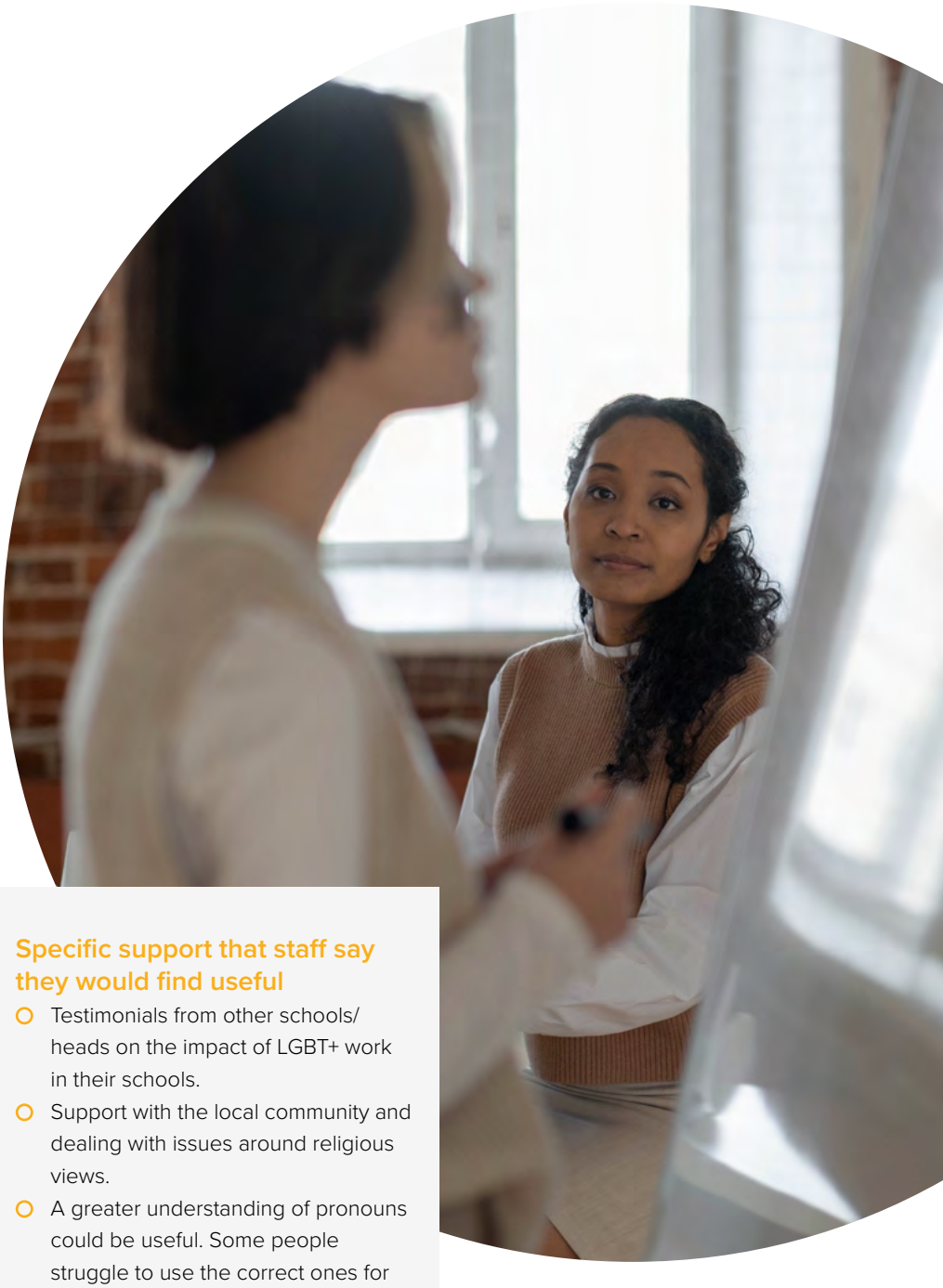
Other support LGBT+ pupils think would be useful for them includes: written guidance on how they could help the school to be more LGBT+ inclusive (47%); an online library of resources (32%); and online training (31%).

## What would you like your school to do to support LGBT+ young people?




## If a young person in your school wanted to make life better for LGBT+ people, which of these would help them the most?





## What staff want

The area that the most staff say they and their school would like support on is engaging effectively with parents, carers and the community, with 50% of staff expressing an interest in support around this.

The three top priorities for LGBT+ staff are: support on tackling homophobic, biphobic and transphobic bullying (56%); LGBT+ inclusion in the wider curriculum (54%); and support with transgender inclusion specifically (50%).

For non-LGBT+ staff, support on engaging effectively with parents, carers and the community (53%) is followed by understanding key LGBT+ concepts (45% compared to just 35% of LGBT+ staff) and LGBT+ inclusion in the wider curriculum (45%).

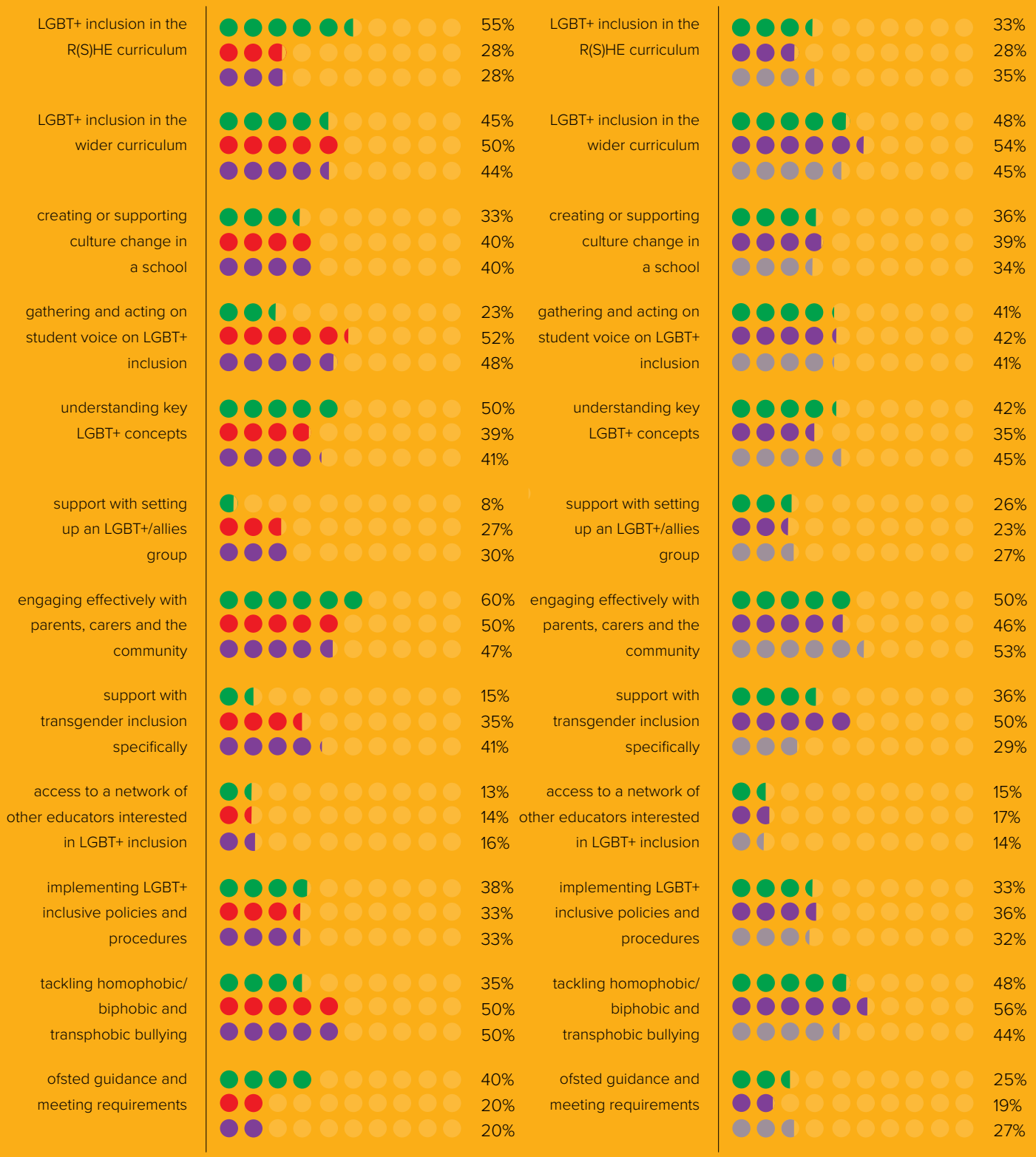
There are understandable differences between the priorities of staff at primary and secondary schools. For staff who teach primary years (11 years old and younger), LGBT+ inclusion in the R(S)HE curriculum emerged as a bigger priority, with over half (55%) saying they would like support on this, second only to engaging effectively with parents, carers and the community (60%) and followed by understanding key LGBT+ concepts and how they relate to their school (50%). In comparison, 28% of staff who teach secondary (ages 11 to 16) and upper secondary pupils (ages 16 to 28) said they would like support on LGBT+ inclusion in the R(S)HE curriculum.

Meanwhile, gathering and acting on the student voice on LGBT+ inclusion was especially important to secondary school staff, with 52% wanting support on this compared to 23% of primary school staff.

### Specific support that staff say they would find useful

- Testimonials from other schools/ heads on the impact of LGBT+ work in their schools.
- Support with the local community and dealing with issues around religious views.
- A greater understanding of pronouns could be useful. Some people struggle to use the correct ones for others and it can cause distress.
- Up-to-date training on the latest issues around young people transitioning – such as the recent Tavistock & Portman court case and its implications.
- Resources for non-PSHE lessons to encourage wider conversation beyond one lesson that pupils do not take that seriously.

## With regards to LGBT+ inclusion, which of the following areas would you and your school like support in?



# Transgender inclusion and young people's attitudes

Public attitudes towards transgender people and transgender rights have received a great deal of, largely negative, press, often painting a picture of hostility and intolerance. However, we know that the media doesn't always give us a true sense of how trans-friendly the UK really is. Research by the Equality and Human Rights Commission, published in 2020, suggests that public attitudes to trans people are broadly positive and identifies young people as more likely to be pro-trans. We wanted our research to further explore young people's opinions and discover how supportive they are of their trans peers.

## Visibility of transgender people

Telling people that you are transgender is a very personal decision and many trans people still feel unsafe coming out in the UK. Despite this, over half (54%) of young people know somebody who is transgender and almost the same number (57%) have friends who are transgender. LGBT+ young people are more likely to know somebody who is transgender (75%) or have a friend who is transgender (71%) than non-LGBT+ young people (41% and 40% respectively).

Across both LGBT+ and non-LGBT+ respondents, the number of young people who know somebody who is transgender and the number who have friends who are transgender largely correlate. This possibly reflects the reality that many transgender people are still likely to only feel comfortable sharing their identity with the people they are closest to.

## Reactions to friends coming out as transgender

The majority of young people are pro-trans. Almost all young people (84%) say they would support a friend if they came out as transgender. 96% of LGBT+ respondents and 76% of non-LGBT+ respondents say they would be supportive of their friend. Only a small minority of non-LGBT+ young people (5%) say they would be unsupportive and no LGBT+ pupil says so. Of the respondents who would not support their friend if they came out as transgender, reasons given include:

"Worried that they might change their expression of their personality to something different to the one I originally became friends with."

"This is not allowed in my religion. I would not make fun of them as that's their choice but I don't think I would be able to be their friend."

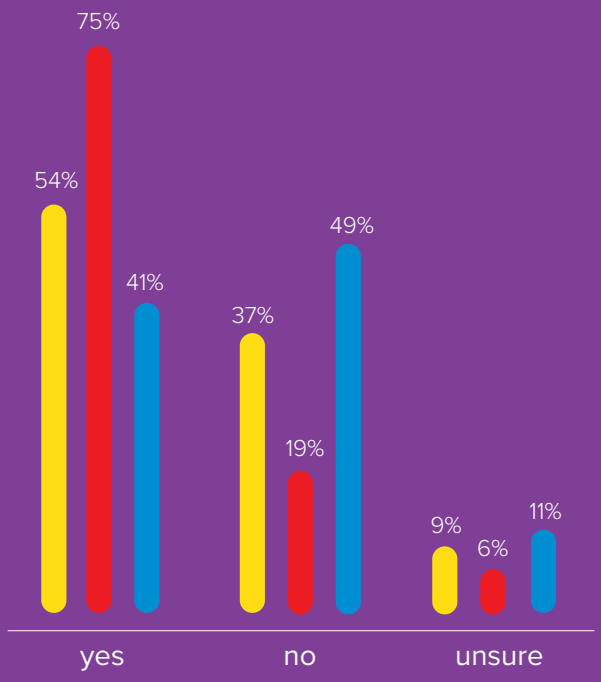
**57%**

of young people already have friends who are transgender

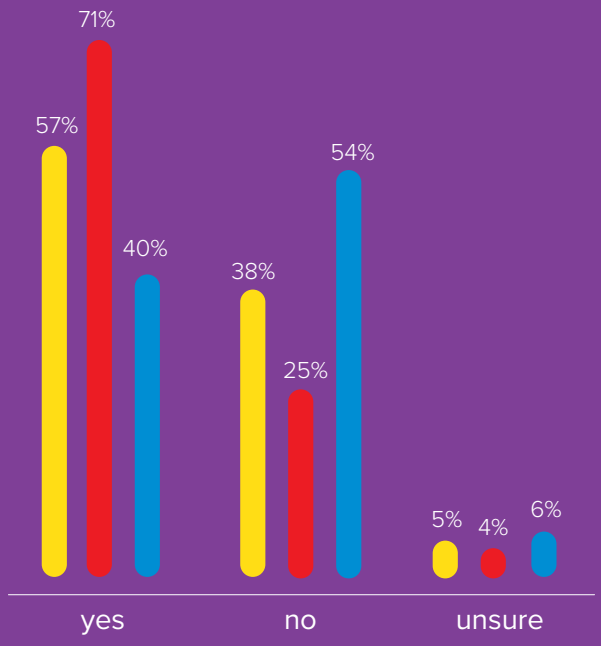
**84%**

of young people would be supportive of a friend coming out as transgender

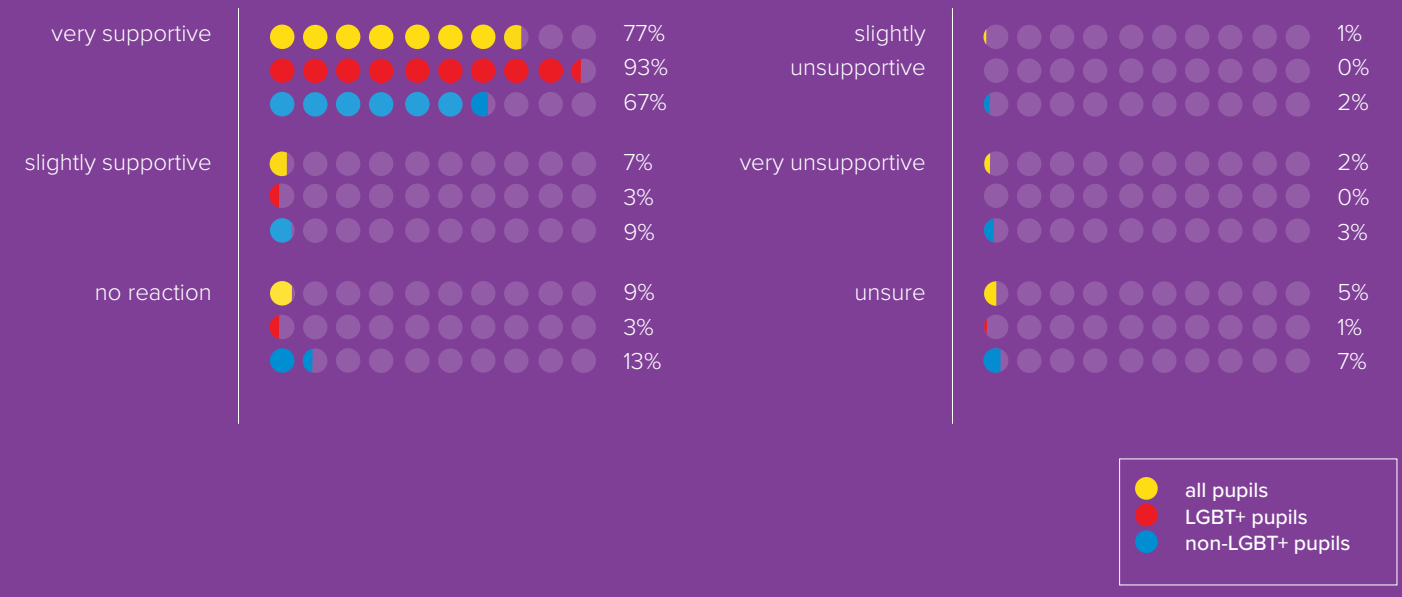
## Do you know anyone who is transgender?




## Do you have any friends who are transgender?




## What would your reaction be if a close friend came out as transgender?



"I don't think it really makes a difference. They're still the same as they were before, just more honest."

**Non-LGBT+ pupil, year 13, East Midlands**

"It's not my business how they identify and I've seen previous friends dealing with transphobia and now want to support others so the same thing doesn't happen as much."

**LGBT+ pupil, year 13, East Midlands**

"Being transgender isn't really a choice. If we are close friends then we are close friends for a reason and them being trans wouldn't change that. It would have no negative impact on my life so there is no reason for me to not be as supportive as possible and make them feel comfortable."

**Non-LGBT+ pupil, year 11, North East**

"It's a really brave thing to do and, seeing as they will meet so many intolerant people, I want to at least be someone who is happy for them."

**LGBT+ pupil, year 12, London**

"I would fully support them because they are embracing how they feel and who they are, which is something to be celebrated. I think it's very importance to support everyone and encourage them to be themselves and not to feel scared that they won't be accepted."

**Non-LGBT+ pupil, year 12, North West**

"Sharing that information with you or anyone else is very personal and obviously important to them. It also implies they trust you with that information, and they deserve to be respected and supported with their decision."

**LGBT+ pupil, year 10, North West**

**49%**

of young people think that their peers would be supportive of a young person coming out as transgender

**76%**

of pupils think that staff would be supportive of a young person coming out as transgender

## Expected responses from other young people

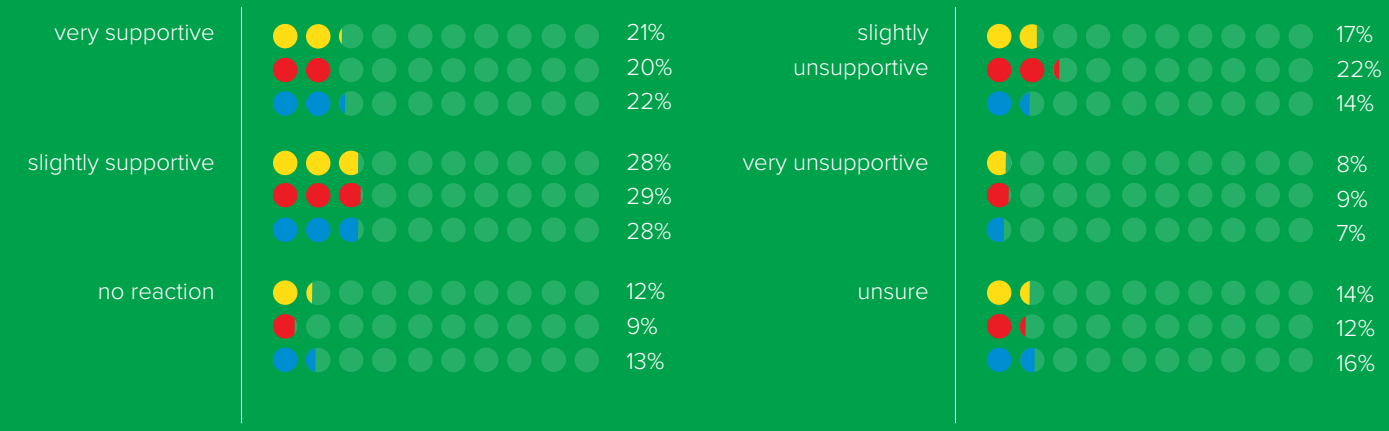
Opinion is more divided around how other young people might react to a peer coming out as transgender. Just under half of young people (49%) think that other young people will be supportive. Overall, even though three quarters (77%) of young people say they would personally be very supportive of their friend, they are less confident in seeing an equally high level of support across their school or college. A quarter of young people (25%) think that other young people would be unsupportive of a peer coming out as transgender.

## Support levels from staff

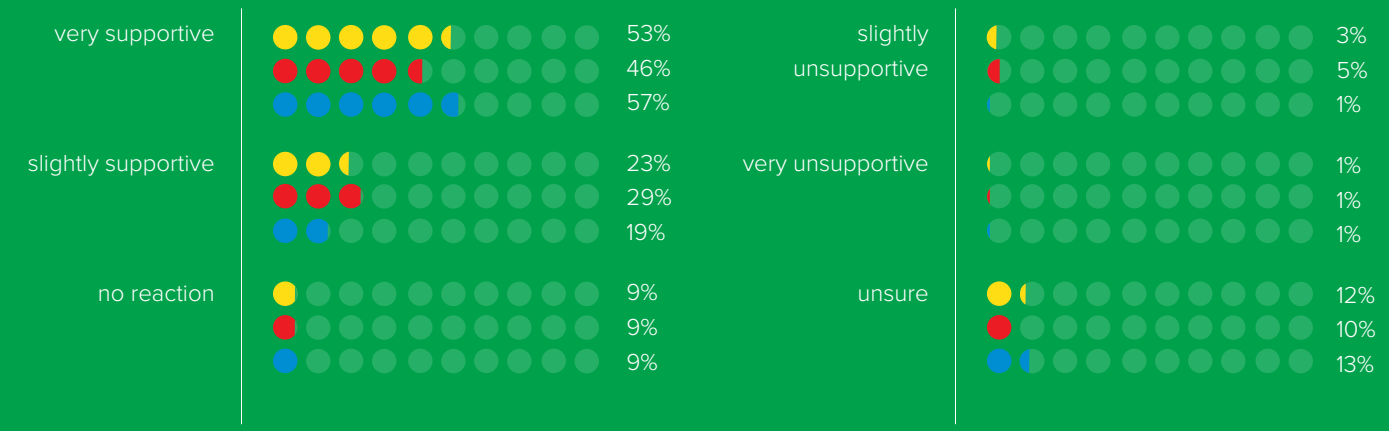
Pupils consider themselves to be more supportive of trans people than their school's staff. Just under half (46%) of LGBT+ pupils say that staff would be very supportive but 29% think it is more likely they'll only be slightly supportive. A slightly higher proportion of non-LGBT+ pupils think that staff would be very supportive (57%).

Meanwhile, 12% of all pupils are unsure of how staff would react and 9% predict that they would give no reaction either way. No young transgender person in school should ever be left in doubt that they will be supported and there is clearly work to be done to assure pupils that they will receive the support that they need.

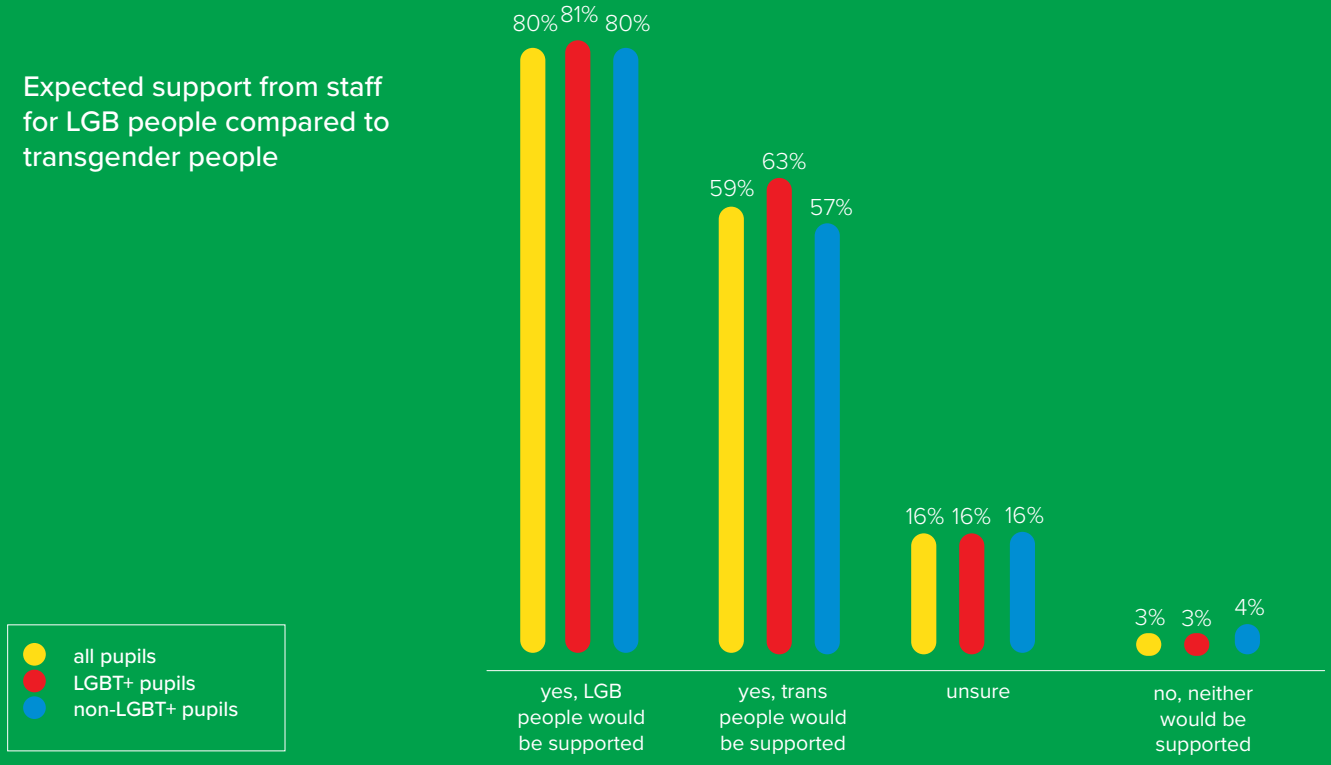
## What do you think the reaction would be from other students if a young person at your school came out as transgender?




## What do you think the reaction would be from staff if a young person at your school came out as transgender?




## Expected support from staff for LGB people compared to transgender people



# Recommendations

## Recommendations for schools and colleges

### 1. Be clear in your fundamental messaging

Some people are LGBT+, and that is both normal and something to be celebrated.

- For leaders this involves being united in your understanding that these are the principles at the heart of inclusive education, and every member of the leadership team being able to articulate them clearly. It means having an understanding of how your school community understands and responds to these messages.
- For all staff this involves understanding how to explain these messages to all pupils – even from the early years – in a way that is appropriate to their age, and talking about your school values and what children will learn with their parents and/or carers.

### 2. Make space to heal from the impact of the pandemic

- For leaders this involves supporting children with a recovery curriculum that helps them deal with the loss of routine, structure, friendship, opportunity and freedom. Take opportunities to celebrate your school community.
- For all staff this involves allowing children, where possible, the chance to rebuild valued connections and friendships affected by the pandemic, and to acknowledge and talk about how they have been affected, and how they can rebuild their sense of self.

### 3. Make LGBT+ visible and celebrated

- For leaders this involves actively creating a supportive environment in which LGBT+ pupils feel able and safe to come out, should they want to. It involves dedicating space to LGBT+ in school life (the school calendar, curriculum, dress code and the building itself) and modelling what this visibility might look like.
- For all staff this involves including LGBT+ representation in other areas of school life – on displays, in lessons and assemblies, or with speakers you invite into school. Normalise introducing yourself using your pronouns. If you're LGBT+ yourself, you may feel able to be open about your gender or sexuality, although there is certainly no obligation to do so.

### 4. Demonstrate that homophobia, lesbophobia, biphobia and transphobia are unacceptable

- For leaders this involves making sure you have policies and procedures on preventing and tackling homophobia, lesbophobia, biphobia and transphobia off and online, and that staff and pupils know about them. Put in place a way of specifically recording instances of homophobia, lesbophobia, biphobia and transphobia, and make sure all staff know how and when to use it.
- For all staff this involves demonstrating that you take instances of discrimination, bullying and abuse seriously – with sanctions for those responsible. It means knowing what kind of behaviour constitutes homophobia, lesbophobia, biphobia and transphobia, and picking up on every instance you encounter.

### 5. Understand differences within LGBT+

Take steps to understand, and demonstrate an understanding, that experiences within your school community will vary, and there will be young people whose challenges are markedly different to others who are also LGBT+. LGBT+ young people who are also Black, disabled and/or eligible for free school meals face greater challenges.

- For leaders this involves an approach that considers different aspects of diversity and inclusion, and may see staff collaborating on wider initiatives that appreciate a fuller range of diversity. It involves meaningfully considering and making provision for the rich tapestry of diverse experiences, avoiding grouping all minorities under one umbrella or framing diversity as something 'other' than the normal.
- For all staff this involves using inclusive language that acknowledges that the term LGBT+ represents a wide range of identities and experiences, including, but not limited to, sexual orientation and gender identity. It means seeking out and sharing the experiences of those who come from a variety of walks of life, and asking questions before making assumptions.

### 6. Centre pupil voice

Take your lead from young people, both as a whole body of pupils and as individuals.

- For leaders this involves putting in place a pupil-led approach with communication at its heart, led by policies and procedures that are understood by staff and pupils. Be very clear about pupils' rights, such as their right not to be outed. Put in place initiatives that embed these practices, such as dedicated staff, pupil representation, pupil groups such as LGBT+ and ally groups and other ways of capturing feedback,

such as a school survey on wellbeing or LGBT+ topics. A survey will allow you to benchmark pupil wellbeing and help guide your strategy and targets for improvement.

- For all staff this involves giving pupils agency, and respecting and accepting them when they describe who they are. It also involves allowing them room to change and figure out who they are, without judgement, and enabling them to make decisions about matters that concern them, even if this must be done in a guided way.

### 7. Provide, signpost and facilitate the giving of information, guidance and support

- For leaders this involves ensuring that those who are responsible for supporting children, parents and carers are equipped to do so at the level appropriate to their role. It involves making sure staff do not see being LGBT+ as a safeguarding issue in and of itself, and are able to identify safeguarding issues. It means obviously and frequently signposting relevant services, as well as having an awareness of and connections to services in your area. Children should be taught digital literacy skills to be able to independently seek information and support. For key stage 2 and up, a peer mentoring system can be effective, as we know that young people are more likely to talk to a peer than an adult.
- For all staff this involves knowing the appropriate place to refer children and their parents or carers, and for form tutors in particular, regularly reminding pupils of the existence of services within and outside of school.

## Recommendations for parents and carers

- Your child might be LGBT+, or might come to identify as LGBT+ later in their life. You can use inclusive language to show them that you're okay with this possibility, and will accept them regardless. For example, if talking about your child's future, you might say that one day they might be in a relationship with someone of their own gender, a different gender, or maybe they won't want to be in a relationship at all – and all of these things are okay. This means that if they are LGBT+, they'll feel supported and it will make their journey easier. If they are not LGBT+, they'll have an open-minded and understanding outlook on the topic.
- Remember that just because a child may not conform to gender norms (for example clothing preferences, behaviours, likes or dislikes), it does not necessarily mean they are trans or lesbian, gay or bisexual. Support your child however they choose to express their gender at any given time. Empower them to dress however they like and engage in the activities they want to, even if they don't align with gender expectations. In some instances it may transpire that young people who don't conform to gender norms are LGBT+, but for many it is simply a case of gender exploration.
- Speak positively about LGBT+ topics and people, such as people you know, or when something comes up in the media. It's important to make positive comments as, if you say nothing, children sometimes assume (or fear) a lack of support. This could include: saying that you're in agreement with progress on LGBT+ equality and representation, disappointed with a lack of progress, glad someone who has come out can be themselves, or happy two people are getting married, or saying you really like a particular LGBT+ character or person.
- Challenge anti-LGBT+ behaviours and language in your child, and speak to them about their friends' behaviour if you know they have expressed anti-LGBT+ sentiments – however trivial it might seem. Encourage them to question the meaning of the language they're using or hearing, and to consider the impact of their words or actions on other people.
- Find out about LGBT+, what it means, and about being LGBT+ today. A great way to do this is by listening to LGBT+ people talk about their experiences, for example in our My LGBT+ Story video series. There are more books, films, programmes, podcasts and social media accounts that feature LGBT+ people and tell their stories than ever before.
- If your child encounters something unfamiliar and mentions it, approach this with the attitude of finding things out together. There are age-appropriate ways to learn about sexual orientation and gender identity, even from the youngest ages. Learning about LGBT+ people, issues and history is important for young people in accepting differences and preparing them for life in the modern world.
- Check your child's school's website for their anti-bullying and Relationships Education policies, and what those policies say about being LGBT+ inclusive. If there is no mention of LGBT+ specifically, ask the school if they can review the policies to ensure they are LGBT+ inclusive.
- As well as enquiring about policies, ask your child's school what they're currently doing to promote an inclusive culture that celebrates LGBT+ diversity in your school and in society. Recommend that the school takes part in LGBT+ inclusive initiatives such as School Diversity Week.

# Methodology and samples

Between December 2020 and January 2021, 2,934 young people (aged 11 to 18) completed an online questionnaire about their wellbeing and experiences at school or college. 1,140 of these pupils identified as LGBT+. At the same time, 513 school and college staff across the UK, 142 of whom were LGBT+, completed an online questionnaire about LGBT+ inclusive education and related interventions at their school or college. The research was administered by Cibyl on behalf of Just Like Us and its partner J.P. Morgan. Participants were gathered in partnership with Just Like Us and through Cibyl's independent database of UK pupils and school partners. Diverse samples were gathered, as detailed opposite, allowing meaningful reporting on the experiences of LGBT+ pupils in secondary and further education across the UK, as well as highlighting differences between demographics.

## The pupil sample

- 2,934 pupils at 375 schools and colleges.
- Respondents between the ages of 11 and 18. 33% in year 13/S6, 33% year 12/S5, 11% year 11/S4, 8% year 10/S3, 5% year 9/S2, 6% year 8/S1 and 3% year 7/primary 7.
- 1,140 LGBT+ respondents and 1,687 non-LGBT+ respondents, with the non-LGBT responses collected for comparison purposes as a control group.
- Out of the 1,140 LGBT+ respondents, 6% identified as gay, 11% lesbian, 44% bisexual, 5% queer and 14% questioning. A number of other terms were used to describe sexuality, including intersex, asexual and pansexual.
- 4% of the respondents identified as transgender (10% of LGBT+ respondents).
- 63% identified as female, 21% male, 9% non-binary and 4% defined their gender in another way. 3% chose not to disclose their gender.
- 7% identified as Asian, 3% Black, 5% mixed ethnicity and 11% belonged to other ethnic groups.
- 21% considered themselves to be disabled.
- 20% were eligible for means-tested funding.

## The staff sample

- 513 respondents at 111 primary and secondary schools and colleges.
- 35% identified their main role as teacher, 8% head of department, 7% pastoral lead, 8% assistant head, 7% deputy head, 7% teaching assistant, 7% headteacher, 3% careers lead and 18% identified their main role in another way.
- 142 LGBT+ respondents and 362 non-LGBT+ respondents.
- Out of the total sample, 7% identified as gay, 7% lesbian, 8% bisexual, 2% queer, 1% questioning and 2% are transgender. A number of other terms were used to describe sexuality, including intersex, asexual and pansexual.
- 2% of the respondents identified as transgender (8% of LGBT+ respondents).
- 35% identified as male, 57% female, 6% non-binary and 1% defined their gender in another way.
- 3% identified as Black, 2% mixed ethnicity and 1% Asian.

*NB: percentage points are rounded to the nearest percent.*

# Bullying rates by pupil identity

| Pupil identity | Bullied daily | Bullied in the past year |
|---|---|---|
| LGBT+ | 3% | 42% |
| Non-LGBT+ | 2% | 21% |
| Transgender | 10% | 54% |
| Cisgender | 2% | 21% |
| Lesbian | 2% | 39% |
| Bisexual | 2% | 43% |
| Gay (male) | 3% | 61% |
| Asexual | 2% | 33% |
| Pansexual | 5% | 52% |
| Heterosexual | 2% | 22% |

**Appendix added after further analysis in March 2024.**

just like us

EMPOWERING LGBT+ YOUNG PEOPLE

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