



**MYAN NSW**  
Multicultural Youth Affairs Network

1 Olympic Boulevard  
Sydney Olympic Park NSW 2127  
www.myansw.org.au

Senator the Hon. Simon Birmingham  
Minister for Education and Training  
107 Sir Donald Bradman Drive  
Hilton SA 5033

Tuesday 22<sup>nd</sup> March, 2016

RE: Letter of Support for Safe Schools Coalition Australia

Dear Minister,

We are writing to express our support of Safe Schools Coalition Australia and the Safe Schools Program Resources. The Program was devised in response to Australian research demonstrating that same sex attracted, intersex and gender diverse young people experience high levels of bullying and abuse at school. These experiences have an adverse effect on mental health and wellbeing.

In 2014, the Fifth National Survey of Australian Secondary Students Sexual Health found that between 16 and 17% of young people identified as being attracted to people of the same or both sexes<sup>1</sup>. Research from New Zealand, Youth '12, found that approximately 4 out of every 100 students reported that they were either transgender (1.2%) or that they were not sure of their gender (2.5%)<sup>2</sup>. Writing Themselves in 3, a national survey of the health and wellbeing of same sex attracted and gender diverse young people, found that 75% of same sex attracted young people experienced some sort of homophobic abuse and school was the place where most of that abuse took place (80%)<sup>3</sup>. In addition, the report found that 61% of gender diverse and transgender young people had experienced verbal abuse and 21% experienced physical abuse. Of those who had experienced abuse, 80% had thought about self-harm and 81% had thought about suicide. People within the LGBTIQ+ community have the highest rates of suicidality of any population group in Australia, with 15.7 % reporting recurrent suicidal ideation<sup>4</sup>. These numbers are alarming and indicate that we have a problem that needs urgent attention. The Safe Schools Coalition aims to provide that attention.

Safe Schools Coalition Australia provides school communities with greatly needed positive support to assist them in creating more inclusive, supportive and safe schools where all students can meet their educational potential. In particular, it responds to the needs of same sex attracted, intersex and gender diverse young people to feel safe and secure in their learning environment, free from homophobic and transphobic bullying.

Referring to your media release (18 March, 2016), we find a number of the Government's immediate actions troubling.

***Having the lesson plans for Lessons 2, 6 and 7 of the 'All of Us' resource amended to remove those activities identified by the review as potentially unsuitable for some students.***

---

<sup>1</sup> [Fifth National Survey of Australian Secondary Students and Sexual Health](#), La Trobe University, 2014.

<sup>2</sup> [Youth '12 - The Health and Wellbeing of Secondary School Students in New Zealand Survey](#), The University of Auckland, 2012.

<sup>3</sup> [Writing Themselves in 3](#), La Trobe University, 2010.

<sup>4</sup> [LGBTI People, Mental Health and Suicide](#), National LGBTI Health Alliance, 2013.

The Louden review found that the 'All of Us' resource is consistent with the aims of the program, is suitable, robust, age-appropriate, educationally sound and aligned with the Australian Curriculum<sup>5</sup>. While the resource contains some material that schools may not choose to use, the choices fall within the range of reasonable teacher judgement and school policy. One of the strengths of the program is the level of autonomy offered to teachers and schools, allowing them to be responsive to student and parent needs. We believe that removing or amending the lesson plans limits a school's control over how programs are delivered. We urge the Government to maintain the integrity of the 'All of Us' resource and give teachers and schools autonomy to make decisions about what is appropriate for their students.

***Requiring parental consent for student participation in program lessons or activities.***

We strongly disagree with changes to Safe Schools program which will require parental consent for students to participate in program lessons. While we acknowledge that parents have a right to be informed of school policies and programs, many young people struggling with their sexuality, gender identity and intersex status may feel unable to speak to their parents about these issues. It is important to ensure that all young people have access to the program and its resources – particularly those who have not yet 'come out'. We believe that the opt-in measure will foster a school culture of silence that perpetuates homophobia and transphobia.

***Requiring local program managers to ensure the distribution and promotion of Safe Schools Coalition Australia program materials is restricted to secondary school settings only.***

Young people are disclosing their sexuality at increasingly younger ages. Limiting the use of Safe Schools resources to secondary schools excludes primary teachers from much needed professional development. It is essential that primary teachers have a solid understanding of issues related to sexuality and gender diversity; are able to use sensitive and appropriate language; and are empowered to challenge homophobic and transphobic bullying. In addition, sexuality and gender identity do not appear out of nowhere in Year 7. Principals, teachers and parent organisations should be able to advocate for the use of the Safe Schools program in their primary school if they deem it appropriate to their context.

We urge the Government to rethink its response to Safe Schools Coalition Australia and Program Resources and take steps to remedy the damage that is caused to same sex attracted and gender diverse young people each day this divisive debate continues.

Yours Faithfully,



Alexandra Long  
Executive Officer  
MYAN NSW

---

<sup>5</sup> Louden, W. Review of Appropriateness and Efficacy of the Safe Schools Coalition Australia Program Resources, 2016.