$250,000 TO HELP TACKLE HOMOPHOBIA IN SCHOOLS

The Minister for Education and Training, Verity Firth, has announced a $250,000 pilot program aimed at tackling homophobia in schools.

Ms Firth said the pilot program would start this year and that around 12 public high schools across Sydney, the Hunter and the Central Coast would be involved.

The pilot program has been given the working title *Proud Schools*.

The latest national research¹ shows the impact of homophobic attitudes on Australia’s young people -

- Around two in three same-sex attracted or gender questioning young people reported they had been verbally abused because of homophobia.
- About 1 in 5 reported physical abuse because of homophobia.
- Four in 5 of those who were abused because of homophobia were abused at school, and sadly once that abuse had taken place these young people no longer felt like school was a safe place for them.
- Young people who had been abused were three times more likely to think about harming themselves.

“The aim is to build on the culture of understanding and respect in NSW schools,” Ms Firth said.

“Being a teenager can be hard enough, but it can be particularly difficult if a young person is same-sex attracted.

“Ignorance and intolerance can lead to bullying and abuse, with many same-sex attracted young people feeling a sense of shame, fear and isolation.

“We don't tolerate bullying or abuse in our public schools for any reason. That’s why the *Proud Schools* program aims to replace ignorance with understanding, intolerance with acceptance, and shame with pride.

*Proud Schools* recognises that for this change to take place whole school communities will need to work together, with parents and teachers playing a key role in identifying and addressing homophobic attitudes.”

The President of ACON, Mark Orr, has welcomed the announcement.

“We welcome this pilot program as an important initiative not only tackling homophobia and transphobia in schools, but promoting the mental health and wellbeing of same-sex attracted or gender questioning young people, providing safe and inclusive learning environments and helping young people value and celebrate diversity within society,” Mr Orr said.

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¹ Writing Themselves In 3 – The Third National study on the sexual health and well being of same sex attracted and gender questioning young people. Australian Research Centre in Sex, Health and Society, La Trobe University, 2010 Pages 39, 49, 51.
The Proud School pilot program will include:

**Professional development**
In NSW we have sophisticated training materials to help promote awareness among school staff of racial and sexual discrimination, but there are limited training opportunities to help teachers improve their awareness and understanding of discrimination and abuse of same-sex attracted or gender questioning students. Professional learning will be developed that will include key modules for school leaders and school staff.

**Supporting resources**
Work is being conducted to inform the development of the program and to identify the kinds of resources and support materials available to support staff and students participating in the program. It is important that we identify early in the program how best to assist schools build their capacity to support same-sex attracted and gender questioning young people.

**Student workshops**
Two workshops will be conducted with NSW students to find out what they think needs to be done to help address homophobia in schools.

**Parent Workshops**
Experience has shown that when school communities work together real improvements in promoting understanding and reducing discrimination can be made. In every pilot school a parent information workshop will be held to explain the aim and goals of the pilot program and to seek their input about how the pilot program can be tailored to suit the needs of their local community.

**Steering group**
A steering group comprising government and non-government agencies will monitor the pilot program and report back directly to the NSW Minister for Education and Training.

At the end of the pilot it is anticipated that the steering group will provide a series of recommendations to the Minister to inform the development of a final Proud Schools program that can be rolled out across the State.

It's envisaged that the final Proud Schools program would be made available to non-government schools in NSW.