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Gavin Williamson MP and Elizabeth Truss MP
House of Commons
London
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December 2020

We are writing to you to urge you to reconsider the decision to stop funding LGBTQ+ anti-bullying programmes in schools. LGBTQ+ young people deserve to feel safe at school so they can learn and thrive, just like everyone else. These programmes are vital to ensure that children are taught to respect one another, regardless of their sexuality or gender identity.

As a government, you have repeatedly committed to fight global persecution of people based on their sexuality, tackle hate crime and to support LGBTQ+ people in the UK. The Conservative Party's 2019 Manifesto, that this government stood on, promised that investing in schools and the wellbeing of students would be a priority. You committed to creating a learning environment where every child would be happy and fulfilled and to helping teachers to tackle bullying, including homophobic bullying. Over the past decade, the Conservative Party has demonstrated a desire to lead reform that supports the advancement of LGBTQ+ rights in the UK, chiefly by overseeing the passing of the Marriage (Same Sex Couples) Act 2013 and 'Turing's Law'. Cutting the funding for LGBTQ+ anti-bullying programmes now is in direct opposition to these ideals.

A report published in November 2020 by Diversity Role Models found that schools were consistently described as an unsafe environment for LGBT+ individuals or those with LGBT+ families (only 27% of secondary schools were described as safe for LGBT+ people to come out), and that homophobic, biphobic and transphobic language and bullying was prevalent, with 54% of secondary school students reporting such language as common. This report's very first recommendation for the Department for Education and the Government Equalities Office was to make funds available for staff training on confidently delivering effective LGBT+ education. The LGBTQ+ anti-bullying programme that you have just cut was set up specifically to allow this type of training to be provided to schools.

In addition to the Diversity Role Models report, results from the 2018 National LGBT Survey revealed that young LGBTQ+ people are twice as likely to be bullied in secondary school than young heterosexual people. The Government's LGBT Action

Plan to address these issues reiterated the need to tackle homophobic, biphobic and transphobic bullying by investing in the anti-bullying programme. It goes on to promise that, while the programme was originally scheduled up until March 2020, the Department for Education would work with the Government Equalities Office to understand how best to continue this programme of work in a sustainable way, implemented through the school curriculum and national policies, both in the medium and the long term. However, no alternatives to the programme or long term plans have been announced by the government, once again breaking your promises to the LGBTQ+ community.

It has been well documented that LGBTQ+ people experience a much higher incidence of depression, anxiety, suicidality and substance misuse than the majority population. A 2018 Department for Education report on mental health and behaviour in schools included bullying among traumatic experiences which were most likely to contribute to further problems, including mental health problems. It also made clear that early intervention is crucial to identify issues and to provide effective support to young people who experience trauma. The training that was funded by this programme enabled schools to intervene early and effectively and the loss of such training will undoubtedly be felt by the most vulnerable students, not just during their school years, but throughout their lives.

We request the following of the Government:

- Follow through on your multiple promises to reduce homophobic, biphobic and transphobic bullying.
- Reinstate the funding in training programmes for schools, either by reinvesting in the current programme or by implementing long term plans to provide further support and training to schools.
- Set out a clear agenda on how the above will be accomplished.

In light of the above and with your previous promises in mind, we sincerely hope you will reconsider the cut to funding of this programme and recommit to supporting LGBTQ+ young people at school.

Yours faithfully,



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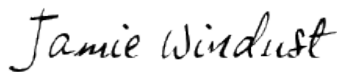
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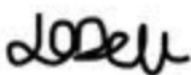
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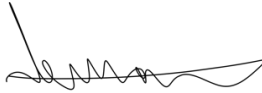


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