Response by A/Profs. Tania Ferfolja and Jacqueline Ullman, Western Sydney University, May 2021

Question on Notice, Page 4: Yellow Highlighted Text

Question from the chair was: "How did you weight it [national survey of Australian parents of government school students]?"

Our response:

Participants were recruited via paid advertisements on social media platforms (Facebook and Instagram). This enabled us to carry out targeted diversity sampling advertising, sourcing a nation-wide sample of parents living in Australia. Speaking to the chair's observations about Facebook recruitment, we wish to note the following. 96% of households with children under the age of 15 have access to the internet at home (ABS, 2014) and Pew Center research showed, at the time of the funding submission to the ARC, that 75% of parents use social media - significantly higher than the general adult population (Duggan et al., 2015). With over 11.4 million users as of 2021 (https://www.statista.com/statistics/304862/number-of-facebook-users-in-australia/), Facebook is the largest, fastest growing, social media platform, with nearly 63% of the population possessing an active account – the closest methodological equivalent to the random digit dialling of yesteryear in terms of participant access (Cowling, 2016). Although online recruitment often uses convenience methods to recruit participants, Facebook allows for participants with a range of with demographic, geographic and lifestyle/affinity variables to be sourced via focused recruitment. This recruitment method has been demonstrated to be a feasible approach to representative sampling for hard-to-reach populations (Bhutta, 2012).

The initial volunteer cohort of n = 1579 was supplemented with a remunerated sample (n = 514) who were sourced through Qualtrics double-opt-in market research panels to meet our aim of more than 2000 participants. This resulted in enough analytic power for multivariate statistical analysis. As is a general practice in quantitative research, surveys with more than 40% incomplete data (n = 3119) and those with visibly patterned responses on the included multi-dimensional scale (n = 9) were removed through the data screening process (Ullman, Ferfolja & Hobby, 2021, under review).

Our final sample (N = 2093) was obtained through an opt-in mechanism. As outlined during the hearing, and as cited in our forthcoming paper (Ullman, Ferfolja & Hobby, 2021, in review) "non-probability samples such as ours have an unknown selection mechanism and cannot be used to make design-based inferences with respect to the target population (Elliott & Valliant, 2017). Further, simply weighting a non-probability sample on 'primary' characteristics (age, gender, location) can in fact decrease accuracy across other characteristics and behaviours (Yeager et al., 2011). An alternative approach is to use a high-quality reference (probability) sample to estimate the selection mechanism for the non-probability sample and to align it as closely as possible with the probability sample on key survey items. For this survey, the nationally representative reference sample was Life in Australia™, which is an online probability sample of Australian adults (Kaczmirek et al., 2019)".

With the support of expert statisticians at the Centre for Social Research at the Australian National University, we "combined the two samples and derived propensity weights from a model predicting membership in the non-probability sample, conditional on survey responses available for both samples (Elliot, 2009; Rosenbaum & Rubin, 1983). The propensity weights were then formed into classes (Cochran, 1968) to reduce the extent of extreme probabilities. Finally, the propensity class weights were adjusted to align with the reference sample for both key demographic characteristics ([1] gender, [2] location, [3] language spoken at home) and substantive research field responses ([4] endorsement of content in relationships and sexual education curriculum) that were most different between the two samples and most correlated with the survey's key outcome variables. The

adjustment was done using regression calibration (Deville et al., 1993) which limits variation in the weights at the same time as ensuring they align with the target population. While non-probability samples are generally not as accurate as probability samples, the derived weights reduce errors as much as possible and enable inference with respect to the target population. Thus, and most importantly, our final, weighted sample yields estimates that are *as representative of Australian parents of children attending government schools as possible* and which *can be described as (approximately) nationally-representative*. As is the case with any survey, however, some level of bias will always remain" (Ullman, Ferfolja & Hobby, 2021, under review).

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Free2Be... Yet?

The second national study of Australian high school students who identify as gender and sexuality diverse

APRIL 2021

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UNIVERSITY

Design and Aims

Free2Be...Yet?, a follow-up to the 2015 *Free2Be?* report, details the findings from a second nationwide survey of gender and sexuality diverse Australian secondary school students. The name, while also intended to signal the continuation of the original line of research, was designed to highlight the central research question for teenagers: Is your school a place where it is safe for you to be yourself? Are you *free to be* you?

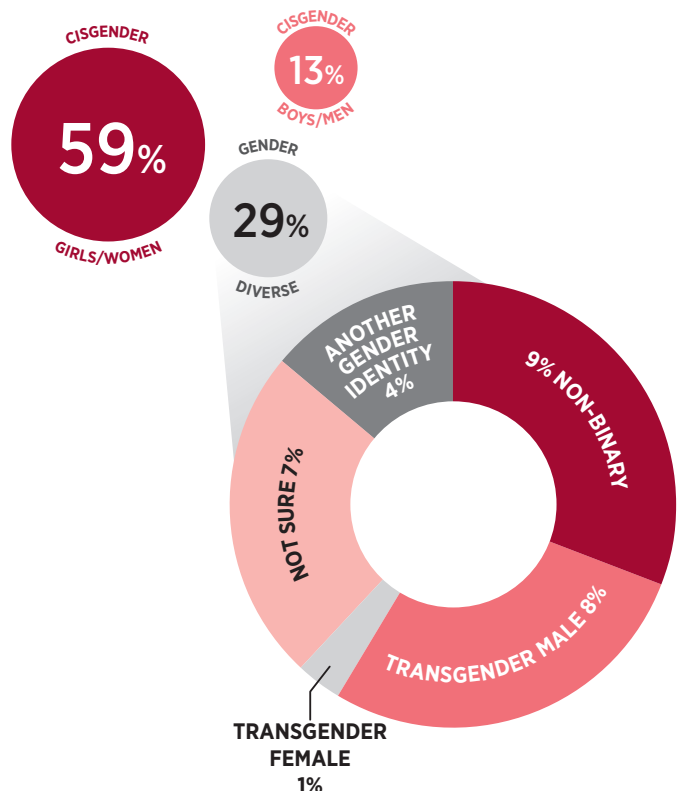As with the previous iteration of the research, the project's core aims were to:

1 Gain a better understanding of how gender and sexuality diverse students experience their school environment(s) with regards to treatment of gender and sexuality diversity.

2 Investigate links between students' reported school climate and various measures of their school wellbeing and associated academic outcomes.

Demographics

2376 young people, aged 13–18 years and representing every state and territory in Australia, participated in the online survey.

In terms of reported sexuality, the largest cohorts identified as bisexual and as lesbian or gay, with a sizeable minority of participants identifying as pansexual and queer.
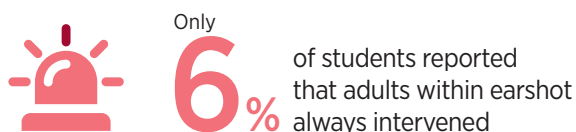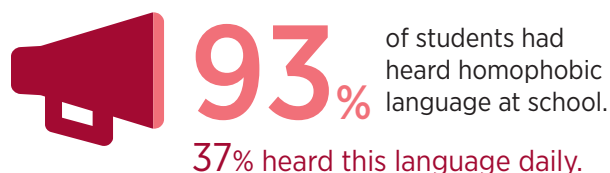
Most participants identified as female or male, with almost 9% of participants identifying as non-binary.

CISGENDER **59%** GIRLS/WOMEN

CISGENDER **13%** BOYS/MEN

GENDER **29%** DIVERSE

9% NON-BINARY

TRANSGENDER MALE 8%

TRANSGENDER FEMALE 1%

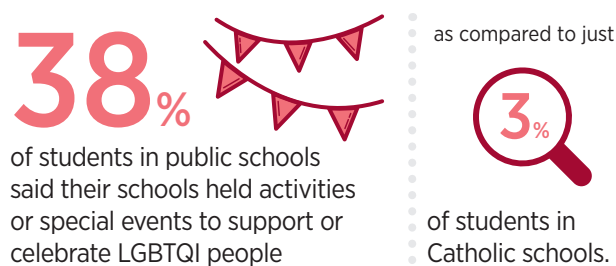NOT SURE 7%

ANOTHER GENDER IDENTITY 4%

Schooling Experiences

While the young people in this study attended schools from across the sector, the majority of participants attended government schools (57%).

PARTICIPANTS OVERWHELMINGLY DEPICTED A SECONDARY SCHOOLING ENVIRONMENT IN WHICH HOMOPHOBIC LANGUAGE WAS A WEEKLY, IF NOT DAILY, OCCURRENCE AND WHERE SCHOOL STAFF DID NOT RESPOND WITH CONSISTENCY.

93% of students had heard homophobic language at school.

37% heard this language daily.

Only **6%** of students reported that adults within earshot always intervened

Participants depicted inconsistencies in adults' responses to school-based marginalisation ranging from purposive ignoring – and, in the worst cases, active participation in the marginalising behaviours – to issuing a warning or otherwise intervening to stop the marginalising language or behaviours. A minority number of young people described their teachers' acknowledgement of homophobia/transphobia and unwillingness to accept such language or behaviours. Many noted variations within their schools across school staff members' approaches to dealing with such incidents.

38% of students in public schools said their schools held activities or special events to support or celebrate LGBTQI people

as compared to just **3%** of students in Catholic schools.

Relationships between School Climate and School Wellbeing

Students in school environments where peers used homophobic and transphobic language with greater frequency and with less positive adult intervention reported feeling:

- significantly less connected to school
- less confident their teachers were able to manage bullying and keep them safe
- less assured that their teachers were personally invested in them and their academic success

GENDER AND SEXUALITY DIVERSE STUDENTS IN SCHOOLS WITH HARASSMENT POLICIES THAT WERE INCLUSIVE OF SEXUAL ORIENTATION SCORED BETTER THAN MAINSTREAM GOVERNMENT SCHOOL STUDENT COHORTS ACROSS MANY MEASURES OF POSITIVE SCHOOL CULTURE.

Compared to published averages for 15-year-old students worldwide using the *Programme for International Student Assessment* (PISA) data, 15-year-old gender and sexuality diverse students from across Australia reported very low school-based belonging and high rates of school-based isolation, with scores notably far worse than even the lowest performing countries.

When compared to mainstream cohorts of Australian students, the participating cohort of gender and sexuality diverse students reported feeling:

- significantly less connected connected to their schooling environment
- less likely to say their peers and teachers respected diversity
- and indicated lowered wellbeing scores across a range of measures of positive school culture

Academic Outcomes

Several self-report measures of academic outcomes were used to examine relationships between participants' sense of their own academic abilities and their reported school wellbeing and school climate. Participants describing a more positive schooling environment where they felt more personally connected to school and cared for by their teachers had stronger reported academic outcomes, including higher academic self-concept, greater intentions to attend university and fewer reported incidences of truancy. Taken together, these findings highlight the link between school climate, school wellbeing and academic outcomes and behaviours for gender and sexuality diverse students.

Where their schools were viewed as **positive** and **inclusive** towards **gender and sexuality diversity**, participants felt more **personally connected to school**
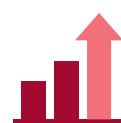
Participants who were **more connected** to school had **stronger reported academic outcomes**

including **higher academic self-concept**, **greater intentions to attend university** and **fewer incidences of truancy**

Free2Be... Yet?:

The second national study of Australian high school students who identify as gender and sexuality diverse

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The Centre for Educational Research

The Centre for Educational Research sits within Western Sydney University's School of Education. The research work of Centre members is driven by the quest to understand how the potential of education can be harnessed so that it can 'work' for all in socially just, inclusive, sustainable and powerful ways to drive innovation and change.

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Executive Summary

Design and Aims

Free2Be...Yet?, a follow-up to the 2015 *Free2Be?* report, details the findings from a second nationwide survey of gender and sexuality diverse Australian secondary school students. The name, while also intended to signal the continuation of the original line of research, was designed to highlight the central research question for teenagers: Is your school a place where it is safe for you to be yourself? Are you *free to be* you?

As with the previous iteration of the research, the project's core aims were to 1) gain a better understanding of how gender and sexuality diverse students experience their school's ethos, referred to here as *school climate*, with regards to gender and sexuality diversity in the broad sense, and to 2) investigate links between students' reported school climate and various measures of their school wellbeing and associated academic outcomes. Where possible, the research intended to generate comparisons across the two studies, to investigate shifting trends. This research complements and extends numerous recent Australian studies which underscore the discrimination experienced by gender and sexuality diverse students in particular environments as well as the positive impact of a supportive school climate, as experienced by others.

Demographics

Nearly 2,400 young people (*N* = 2,367), aged 13–18 years and representing every state and territory in Australia, participated in the online survey. In terms of reported sexuality, the largest cohort identified as bisexual (35%) and as lesbian or gay (27%), with a sizeable minority of participants identifying as pansexual (18%) and queer (7%). Most participants identified as female (59%) or male (21%), with almost 9% of participants identifying as non-binary. Twenty-nine percent of participating students reported a gender identity which was not aligned with the sex they were assigned at birth. The term *gender and sexuality diverse* is used throughout this report to signify the array of gender and sexuality identities with which participating young people identified.

Twenty-nine percent of participants reported that at least one or both of their parents were born overseas and 79% indicated that they always spoke English at home. Sixty participants (2.5%) identified as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander.

Schooling Experiences

While the young people in this study attended schools from across the sector, the majority of participants attended government schools (57%). Participants overwhelmingly depicted a secondary schooling environment in which homophobic language was a weekly, if not daily, occurrence and where school staff did not respond with consistency. A startling 93% of students had heard homophobic language at school, with 37% of these young people reporting hearing this language daily. Of those who reported classmates using this language within earshot of school staff, merely 6% reported that these adults always intervened to put a stop to its use.

While transphobic language was reported with less frequency overall, with 71% of students reporting ever hearing such language at school, teachers were described as far less likely to intervene positively to stop students' use of this language than they were in instances of homophobic language, with nearly 57% of students reporting that their teachers never, or hardly ever, positively intervened.

Although less commonly reported, 29% of participants indicated that they had witnessed school-based physical harassment of classmates perceived to be gender and sexuality diverse, with 7% of participants witnessing such harassment on a weekly basis. Only 11% of young people who witnessed physical harassment which occurred within view of school staff reported that these adults always intervened.

Participants depicted inconsistencies in adults' responses to school-based marginalisation ranging from purposive ignoring – and, in the worst cases, active participation in the marginalising behaviours – to issuing a warning or otherwise intervening to stop the marginalising language or behaviours. A minority number of young people described their teachers' acknowledgement of homophobia/transphobia and unwillingness to accept such language or behaviours. Many noted variations within their schools across school staff members' approaches to dealing with such incidents.

Similar inconsistencies were apparent in students' reports of related curricular inclusions. Approximately 39% of students reported that they knew where to go to locate information and support regarding gender and sexuality diversity. While 64% of students reported that it was at least "somewhat true" that their teachers were positive about same-sex

attraction, less than 10% of the cohort (8.5%) reported that their teachers had definitively discussed diversity of gender expression. On one hand, 40% of participants reported having discussed LGBTQI history or current events at school; however, on average, merely 6% of students reported that it was "definitely true" that they had learned about LGBTQI identities during their Health and Physical Education instruction. Findings suggest that some school staff work intentionally to support gender and sexuality diverse students in a variety of informal ways, including general positivity with regards to related topics and the provision of inclusive resources, but that formal curricular inclusion is far less common.

Participants attending schools in which their school harassment policies explicitly included sexual orientation as a named and protected cohort of the student population (17% of participants) were significantly more likely to report their teachers' intervention in instances of verbal and physical marginalisation of gender and sexuality diverse students, as well as teachers' general positivity towards, and support of, their identities.

Relationships between School Climate and School Wellbeing

Where possible, national and international baseline trend data was used to get a better sense of how gender and sexuality diverse students are faring as compared to their peers. Compared to published averages for 15-year-old students worldwide using the *Programme for International Student Assessment* (PISA) data (ACER, 2018), 15-year-old gender and sexuality diverse students from across Australia reported very low school-based belonging and high rates of school-based isolation, with scores notably far worse than the lowest performing countries.

When compared to mainstream cohorts of Australian students, the participating cohort of gender and sexuality diverse students were much less connected to their schooling environment; less likely to say their peers and teachers respected diversity; and had lowered wellbeing scores across a range of departmentally endorsed measures of positive school culture. Importantly, findings point to the positive impact of communicating the existence of proactive policy to this cohort; where students reported that their schools had harassment policies in place which specifically named sexual orientation as a protected

category, their average wellbeing scores were higher than reported mainstream student averages across nearly every measure.

Students reporting higher frequency of homophobic and transphobic language use and physical harassment of gender and sexuality diverse students at their school reported feeling less connected to school, less confident that their teachers were able to manage bullying and keep them safe, and less assured that their teachers were personally invested in them and in their academic success. These relationships were even more pronounced where students reported less frequent positive intervention by teachers during instances of verbal and physical homophobia and transphobia.

The converse was likewise true; where students reported teacher and school leaders' commitment to the wellbeing of gender and sexuality diverse students in the form of inclusive policies and curriculum and general, informal positivity about gender and sexuality diversity, they felt safer, less isolated and more likely to report that their schools respected diversity and student voice. Most importantly, students in these positive, proactive environments felt that their teachers cared for them and wanted to see them do well in school. It is notable that students attending Catholic and independent, religious schools reported the least inclusive environments across all included measures.

Academic Outcomes

Several self-report measures of academic outcomes were used to examine relationships between participants' sense of their own academic abilities and their reported school wellbeing and school climate. Participants describing a more positive schooling environment where they felt more personally connected to school and cared for by their teachers had stronger reported academic outcomes, including higher academic self-concept, greater intentions to attend university and fewer reported incidences of truancy. Taken together, these findings highlight the link between school climate, school wellbeing and academic outcomes and behaviours for gender and sexuality diverse students.

Conclusions and Recommendations

As with the previous iteration of *Free2Be?*, findings suggest that a minority number of gender and sexuality diverse young people attend secondary schools in which inclusive pedagogical practices are the norm and in which homophobic and/or transphobic language and behaviours are not tolerated. These students are more likely to attend schools within the government sector. However, this is not the reported experience for the majority of gender and sexuality diverse students across Australia, who attend secondary schools in which marginalising language is used on a weekly, if not daily, basis and where formal curricular inclusions of gender and sexuality diversity and are the exception rather than the norm. Project findings highlight the relationship between gender and sexuality diverse students' perceptions of their school climate with regards to gender and sexuality diversity and their own sense of their place at school – including their connection to their teachers, their sense that diversity is valued at school, and their investment in the schooling environment more generally. Results from this work reiterate those found previously: school climate, institutional recognition and teacher positivity towards gender and sexuality diversity are linked to gender and sexuality diverse students' sense of their school wellbeing and academic capability.

Given such findings, the following recommendations arise from this research for educators at the local school level. Notably, these themes are virtually identical to those reported within the 2015 *Free2Be?* report.

- School leaders, teachers and all school-based adults require professional development that addresses expectations for inclusivity of gender and sexuality diversity and provides guidelines for inclusive language and related curriculum resource integration;

- Local school wellbeing and harassment policies must articulate gender and sexuality diversity as protected identity characteristics. All members of the school community must be aware, not only of the existence of these policies, but how they will be uniformly implemented by school-based adults to identify and prevent bias-motivated harassment of gender and sexuality diverse students;

- Schools must implement a whole-school approach which prioritises the affirmation and acceptance of diversity, including gender and sexuality diversity, and educative responses to bias-motivated harassment over punitive responses.

Of course, local schools exist within broader systems, at both the state/territory and federal levels, and within communities. Accordingly, more detailed and inclusive recommendations are located within the concluding section of this report.

Free2Be...Yet?

The second national study of Australian high school students who identify as gender and sexuality diverse.

Project Background

Free2Be...Yet? is the second national study of the schooling experiences of gender and sexuality diverse Australian high school students. In 2015, *Free2Be?* explored how this cohort of teens viewed gender and sexuality diversity-inclusive education at their schools, both in formal classroom learning and through informal, social encounters. Critically, the 2015 report highlighted the clear-cut, positive impact of inclusive curriculum and teacher positivity about gender and sexuality diversity on students' sense of connection to school, teachers and peers, sense of safety and their school wellbeing. *Free2Be?* likewise drew attention to the frequency of homophobic and transphobic language used in Australian schools and the negative impact of teachers' inaction during such instances on these same key outcomes for students. Given the study's confirmation of the relationship between participating gender and sexuality diverse students' sense of school connection and perceived teacher empathy and their intentions to attend university, *Free2Be?* underscored the significance of cultivating positive relationships with school-based adults through visibility, support and affirmation of gender and sexuality diverse identities. Importantly, *Free2Be?* drew attention to the particular challenges experienced by gender and sexuality diverse teenagers in the younger years of high school (years 8 and 9).

Free2Be...Yet? sought to explore these same experiences and relationships with Australian high school students, five years after the initial survey. In the main, this study was interested in shifts in how gender and sexuality diverse young people communicate their gender and sexuality identities as well as any notable changes in trends related to school climate around gender and sexuality diversity and perceptions of teachers' knowledge, behaviour and positivity around these topics. As with the *Free2Be?* study, *Free2Be...Yet?* sought to make relevant comparisons to known population-level data on key variables of interest, as an additional marker of how gender and sexuality diversity high school students are tracking in comparison to their peers. Furthermore, to gain additional detail about how gender and sexuality diverse young people experience those first, transitional years of high school, *Free2Be...Yet?* was expanded to include 13-year-old students, primarily attending year 7 of high school.

Mirroring the previous iteration of the survey, this research aimed to:

i.   Better understand how gender and sexuality diverse students experience their high school climate with regards to both inclusive and marginalising practices related to gender and sexuality diversity; and,

ii. Explore the relationship between reported elements of high school climate for gender and sexuality diverse students and students' school-based academic and non-academic wellbeing outcomes.

The Need for "*Free2Be…Yet?*"

Since the release of the *Free2Be?* report (Ullman, 2015a), gender and sexuality diversity, including the rights of gender and sexuality diverse individuals, has received considerable media attention in Australia. The 2017 political and highly publicised debate around marriage equality, the subsequent postal vote and eventual passing of legislation meant that all Australians were encouraged to express their opinion on this human rights issue. Further, moral panic about the gender and sexuality-inclusive curriculum developed as part of the federally funded, national *Safe Schools Coalition Australia* (SSCA) initiative reached its pinnacle across 2016-2017, with more than 90,000 words addressing SSCA published in *The Australian* newspaper alone (Law, 2017). More recently, the proposed *Religious Freedoms Bill* (Australian Government, 2019), drafted in response to the marriage equality debates and the perceived need to protect individuals' freedom to express their religious beliefs, has generated relevant dialogues; the Bill does not articulate restrictions aligned with existing anti-discrimination laws which would safeguard the mental health, wellbeing and safety of gender and sexuality diverse adults and youth (Jones, 2020), and thus has important implications for gender and sexuality diverse young people and educators located in religiously-affiliated schools.

While, on the positive side, the Australian public is arguably more familiar with the concepts of gender diversity and the fluidity of sexuality than they likely were five years ago, these heated debates have had a tangible impact on the health and wellbeing of the gender and sexuality diverse community (Ecker & Bennett, 2017) and young people in particular (Gartrell, 2017). Educators' inclusion of gender and sexuality diversity in the classroom has traditionally been at their discretion (Johnson et al., 2016); thus, it is no surprise that, within the current political context, educators fear parent and community complaint and often remain silent on these topics (Cumming-Potvin & Martino, 2014; Ferfolja & Ullman, 2020; Ullman & Smith, 2018).

Recent research tells us that, while gender and sexuality diverse youth are working together as activists (Smith et al., 2014) and community building within digital spaces (Byron & Hunt, 2017), overall, their gender and sexual identities continue to remain marginalised within formal school education in Australia (Robinson et al., 2014; Ullman, 2015a). This issue remains of critical importance, since teachers' positivity towards, and inclusion of, gender and sexuality diversity within the curriculum has a tangible impact on the school-based outcomes of gender and sexuality diverse young people. Gender and sexuality diverse students in schools with a gender and sexuality diversity-inclusive curriculum are less likely to personally experience homophobic and transphobic abuse, and more likely to feel welcome at school (Bradlow et al., 2017). The positive impact of an inclusive curriculum has been shown to extend through to the entire student body, with all students reporting less homophobic and transphobic harassment and more positive intervention in schools with a gender and sexuality-inclusive curriculum (Baams et al., 2017). Conversely, where gender and sexuality diverse students report limited curricular visibility and experience homophobic and transphobic victimisation, they report significantly lowered school belonging, attainment and aspiration (Kosciw et al., 2018). As outlined, the previous iteration of this survey highlighted similar associations; where students experienced a marginalising school climate, they were less connected to school and less likely to consider further education (Ullman, 2015a).

As with *Free2Be?*, this project focused squarely on the schooling experiences of high school students, seeking to understand their current – rather than retrospective – impressions of their schools and their places within them. Accordingly, the target group for this research was secondary school-aged Australian youth aged 13–18 years. Furthermore, a key goal of this work was to explore students' school wellbeing outcomes using validated, quantitative scale measures from the Australian schooling milieu and to examine relationships with students' reported school climate. *Free2Be…Yet?* presents notable associations within the data, both descriptively, and where appropriate, using statistical confirmation and measures of effect size.

Ethical Approval and Considerations

Approval for this work was obtained from Western Sydney University Ethics Committee (approval number H12613). As with the previous iteration of the survey, due to the sensitive nature of gender and sexuality expression for teenagers who may not want to, or feel that they are not able to, share such information with their parents/carers, parental consent was waived for all participants. At the conclusion of the survey experience, young people were provided with a list of relevant national contacts, including general wellbeing support for teenagers as well as support services specifically for gender and sexuality diverse youth. State and local agencies were named within these sites to enable local and face to face support, if desired.

Names of participants and their schools were not requested and in instances where these were provided by young people within responses to open-ended survey items, these have been omitted from the reporting.

> **Gender and sexuality diverse students in schools with a gender and sexuality diversity-inclusive curriculum are less likely to personally experience homophobic and transphobic abuse, and more likely to feel welcome at school**
>
> (Bradlow et al., 2017)

Survey Design and Recruitment

In line with the above project aims, *Free2Be…Yet?* centred on the following content areas:

- Students' personal demographic information, including gender and sexuality identity(ies);
- Students' school demographic information, including affiliation and composition (e.g. government, single-sex, etc.);
- Students' attitudes towards school, including their sense of safety and inclusion, sense of school connection and belonging, and their relationships with teachers;
- Students' reported school climate with regards to gender and sexuality diversity, including:
  - Negative (homophobic/transphobic) language;
  - Physical harassment of gender and sexuality diverse students;
  - Teacher intervention during instances of students' use of negative language and physical harassment;
  - Inclusion and positivity in curriculum, policy(ies) and via other formal support; and,
- Academic outcomes, including academic self-concept, truancy and future schooling plans.

Survey items included both closed-ended (e.g. multiple or dichotomous choice) and open-ended (e.g. text response) questions. The closed-ended items included a combination of previously validated and author-generated items: specifically, student-focused subscales from the *Attitudes to School Survey* (VIC Department of Education and Training [DET], 2018); the *Programme for International Student Assessment's* (PISA) measure of school belonging (Australian Council for Educational Research [ACER], 2018); a measure of general academic self-concept from the *Academic Self-Description Questionnaire II* (Marsh, 1990); and a number of items from the author's previously-conducted national survey of gender and sexuality diverse students (Ullman, 2015a). Open-ended items were used to provide students with a space to expand on their responses to select school climate and academic outcome items.

Given that 80% of Australian teens aged 14–17 years use personal smartphones to access the internet (Australian Communications and Media Authority [ACMA], 2019) – a 2015 figure which is growing exponentially, year on year – coupled with near-universal levels of online access in households with children under the age of 15 years (97%; Australian Bureau of Statistics [ABS], 2018a), online surveys offer an ideal method for connecting with young people where they already are: online. Furthermore, online spaces are viewed as safe and informative by gender and sexuality diverse young people, who often use these spaces for social connection specifically related to these elements of their identity (Byron & Hunt, 2017; Robinson et al., 2014; Smith et al., 2014); accordingly, online survey methods, which can also offer anonymity and access independent from adults, are particularly useful for this cohort. Given the ethical challenges posed by recruiting gender and sexuality diverse students via their high schools, targeting this cohort outside of school via online spaces is a logical choice.

A targeted Facebook campaign was launched, wherein Facebook users who fit a set of specific criteria according to their Facebook profiles: 1) aged 13–18 years, 2) 'interested in' people of the same (reported) sex and/or 3) had 'liked' Facebook pages or groups for organisations which specifically service gender and sexuality diverse communities, were shown an advertisement which linked to the survey URL. Additional parameters built into the online survey itself were used to ensure that only secondary school students aged 13-18 years living in Australia were able to participate. Participation was further restricted in terms of gender and sexuality diversity; cisgender[1] participants who identified as heterosexual and indicated their exclusive attraction to members of the opposite sex were taken to an early survey exit. Excluding duplicate and malicious respondents, as well as participants who failed to correctly answer one or more of the three 'attention checks' placed within the survey, final numbers were reduced to 2,376 usable responses.

Data Analysis

The online survey was hosted by Qualtrics, allowing for simple downloading of the data into SPSS for quantitative analysis using both descriptive and inferential statistics for the closed-ended survey responses. Statistical analyses presented here include frequencies, mean comparisons (t-tests; ANOVAs) and correlations to explore key relationships of interest. Open-ended survey responses were moved into the NVivo program for ease of searching and organisation of the qualitative data. Various coding iterations were conducted as appropriate, moving from descriptive to thematic coding (Saldana, 2009) of the open-ended responses.

Limitations of this Research

As with all research which uses convenience sampling techniques to locate and recruit gender and sexuality diverse young people, it is possible that some selection bias occurred here, with project participants more likely to be open and comfortable with their gender and sexuality identities. Other young people who, due to their lack of connection to gender and sexuality diverse-inclusive community interest, support and outreach services via Facebook, or their non-indication of sex-specific romantic interest or a gender-diverse identity as part of their Facebook profile, may have missed out on participating in this study.

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1   Three items were used to investigate gender diversity: (1) gender assigned at birth, in conjunction with (2) current description of gender identity, inclusive of non-binary and free response options; and (3) an item which asked participants to describe their gender expression in terms of masculinity and femininity. Participants were also asked whether they had an intersex variation. Responses from participants who indicated both exclusive heterosexual attraction and identity were kept in the study provided they also indicated diversity of gender and/or biological sex characteristics across one or more of these items

Participant Demographics

Age, Gender Identity and Intersex

Two thousand, three hundred and seventy-six (2,376) gender and sexuality diverse high school students provided usable responses to the online survey, with the majority of young people identifying as female (59%) and in the middle ranges of the age continuum, with 52.2% aged 15 and 16 years (Figure 1).

Of the 102 students who indicated another gender identity not listed in the response options as shown in Figure 2, the largest subgroup (*n* = 46; 1.9% of the total sample) wrote that they identified as 'gender-fluid' and/or 'gender-flux'. Other identities indicated by students included 'agender' (*n* = 6), 'androgynous' (*n* = 4), 'gender-queer' (*n* = 8) and 'demi-gender'/'demi-girl'/'demi-boy' (*n* = 10). Several young people also wrote about not identifying with any set labels (*n* = 5).

Comparisons of the item which asked participants to identify their gender at birth alongside the item which asked for their current gender identity (Figure 3) allowed for identification of any transitions or shifts in personal sense of identity. As shown in Figure 3, while the majority of the sample could be described as cisgender, with their sex assigned at birth aligned with their gender identity at the time of survey completion, 29% of the students did not identify with the sex they were assigned at birth. This represents significant growth in numbers of trans/gender diverse identifying youth, up from 7% of the cohort sampled in 2013 (Ullman, 2015a). Given the predominance of participants assigned female at birth (84% of the total sample), it is notable that 31% of these participants (*n* = 623) either were not sure of their gender identity or self-identified as trans/gender diverse.

Figure 2: Participant Gender Identity (*N* = 2,376)
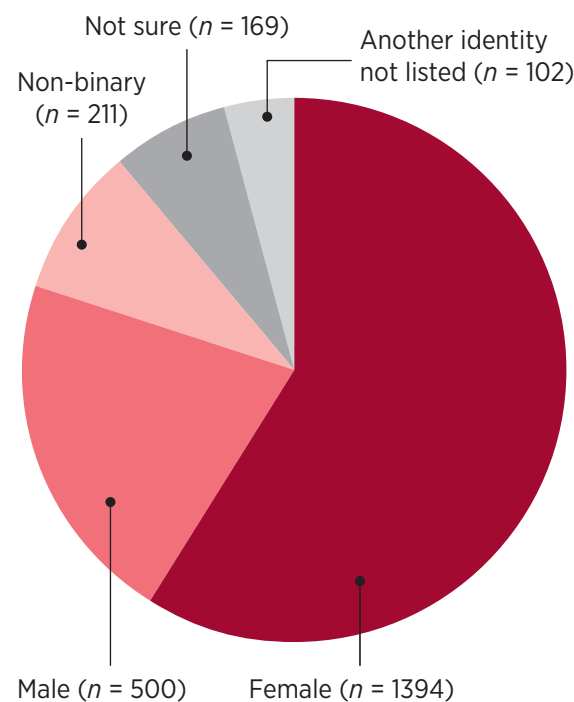
Figure 1: Age of participants (*N* = 2,376)
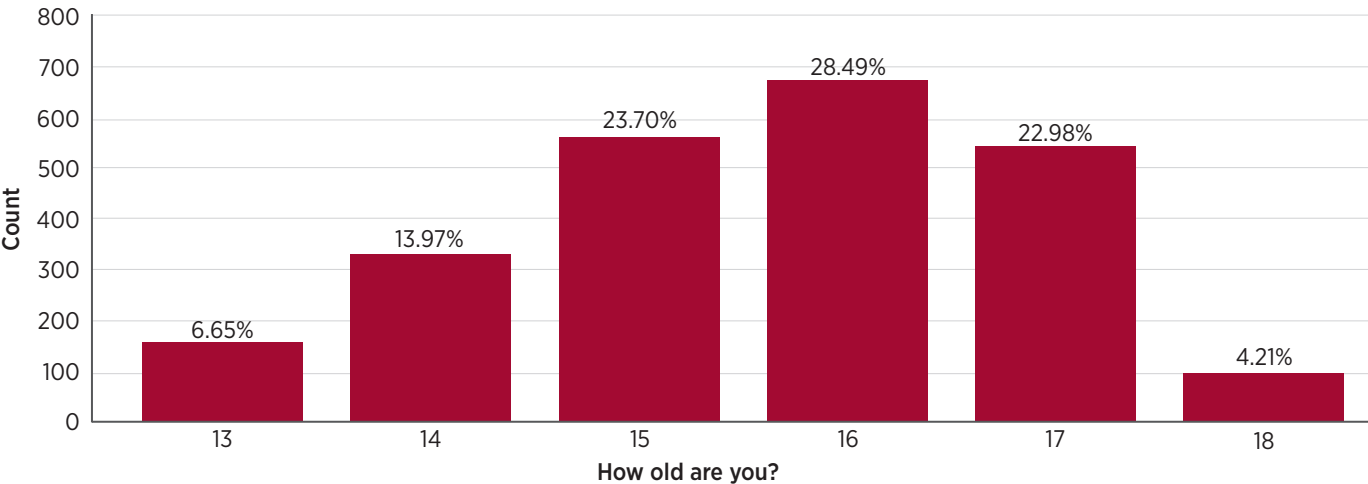
Figure 3: Identified Shifts in Participant Gender Identity (*N* = 2,376)

71%
Cisgender (*n* = 1,690)

29%

8% Female to Male (*n* = 189)

0.6% Male to Female (*n* = 14)
0.6% Male to Non-Binary (*n* = 15)

8% Female to Non-Binary (*n* = 196)

0.9% Male to 'Not Sure' (*n* = 22)

6% Female to 'Not Sure' (*n* = 147)

0.4% Male to 'Another Identity' (*n* = 10)

4% Female to 'Another Identity' (*n* = 91)

0.08% Neither Male nor Female at Birth (*n* = 2)
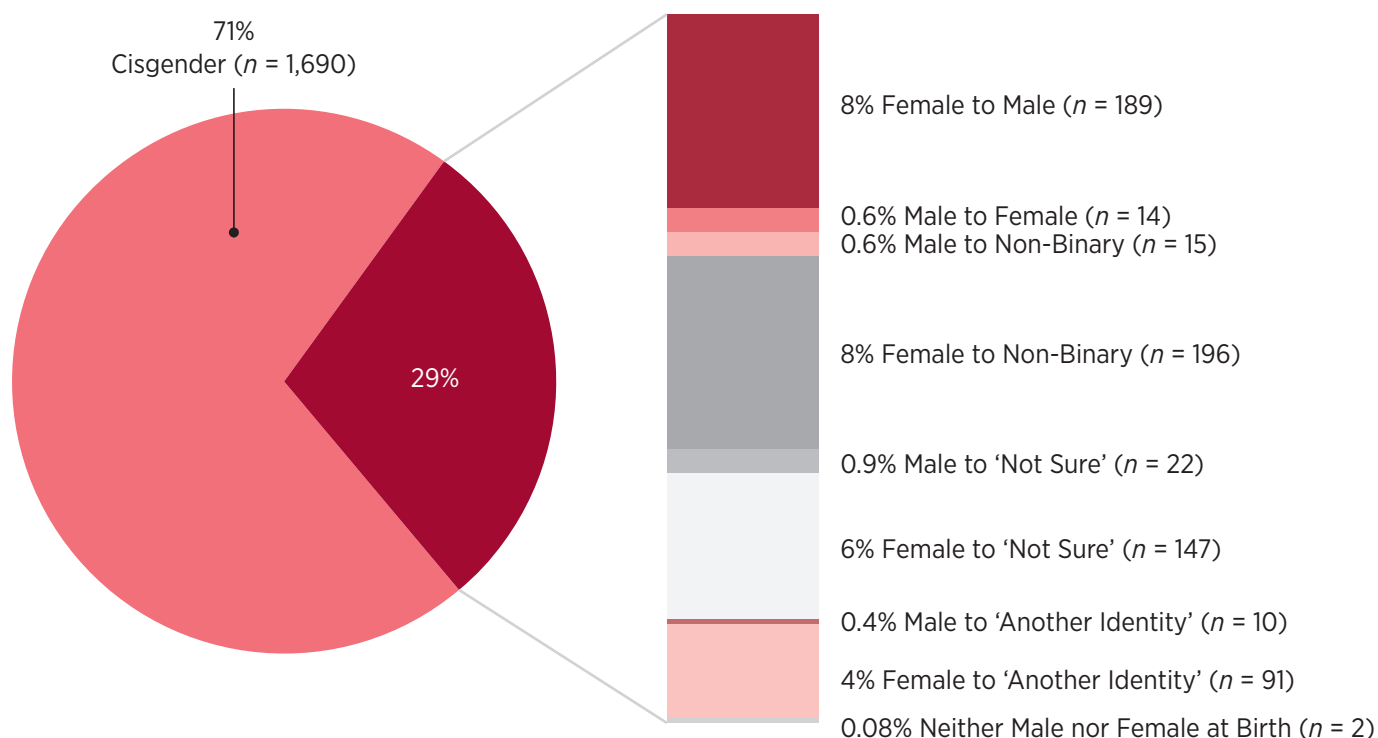
After providing a short definition to offer clarification[2], an additional item asked participants whether or not they had an intersex variation. Eighteen participants (0.7%) indicated that they did have an intersex variation, with another 18 participants indicating that they "preferred not to say". A further 12.7% (*n* = 303) indicated that they did not know whether they had an intersex variation. As can be seen in Figure 3, two participants indicated that they were not assigned either male or female at birth. Of these, one indicated that they were not sure if they had an intersex variation.

2   The definition provided to participants read, "Intersex is a term for people born with atypical physical sex characteristics. There are many different intersex traits or variations."

Sexual Attraction and Identity

When asked about their sexual attraction, the majority of participants indicated attraction to more than one sex/gender (n = 1,412; 59%), with members of the same sex/gender the second-most common response (n = 685; 29%). These results echo recent research with mainstream populations of Australian high school students, which show that young women are more likely to express attraction to more than one gender (Fisher et al., 2019); 64% of participating young women indicated such attractions, in comparison with 43% of young men. Other participants indicated that they were "not sure" to whom they were attracted (n = 161; 7%), that they did not "feel attracted to anyone" (n = 70; 3%), or that they were attracted only to individuals "of a different sex/gender" (n = 48; 2%).

In terms of the use of labels to describe their sexuality, as shown in Figure 4, 35% of participating young people identified as bisexual (n = 823), with another 18% identifying as pansexual (n = 422). Twenty-seven percent of the sample identified as either gay (n = 266) or lesbian (n = 376). *Free2Be...Yet?* included an asexual option, given increasing numbers of young people who identify with this label (The Trevor Project, 2020); 4.4% (n = 105) of participants identified their sexuality using this label. The 15 participants who self-identified as straight/heterosexual also self-identified as gender diverse and/or unsure about their sexual attractions.

Participants who indicated that their sexuality was "something else not listed" (n = 82) were given an opportunity to provide their sexual identity in an open-ended field. Additional identities specified included 'demisexual' (n = 16); 'polysexual' (n = 8); 'omnisexual' (n = 5); and 'abrosexual' (n = 4). Several participants wrote that they preferred not to use a label for a variety of reasons, such as being uncertain, changing feelings, or the challenges of precisely explaining their feelings (n = 9). A number of young people also indicated much more specific identities which included a combination of descriptors indicating both sexual and romantic attractions (e.g. 'panromantic and asexual').

Figure 4: Participant Sexuality Identity (N = 2,376)

11
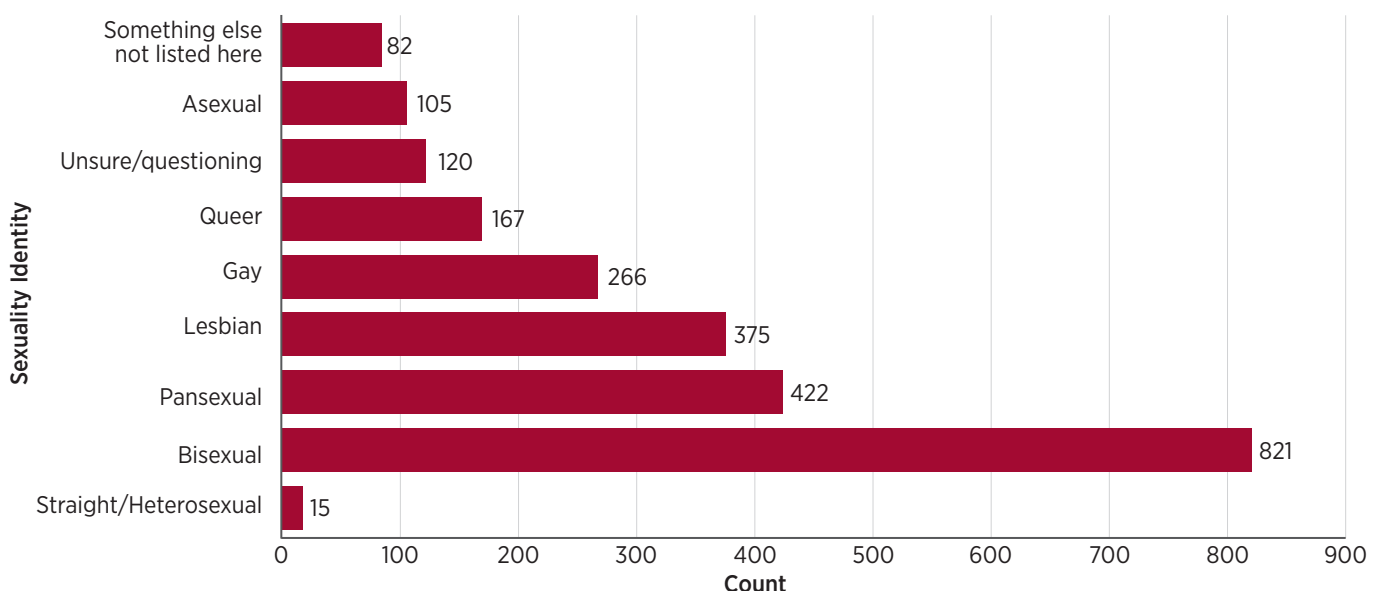
Location and Background

Young people from across Australia participated, with approximately 34% of the sample (*n* = 803) from locations in inner/outer regional and remote Australia[3]. The distribution of participants' location by state and territory was a near-perfect match with population distributions for secondary school students across Australia (Australian Curriculum and Reporting Authority [ACARA], 2018; see Figures 5 & 6).

Eighty-one percent of participants (*n* = 1,925) were born in Australia with other named birthplaces including countries in the United Kingdom (3%), New Zealand (1.3%), South Africa, United States, Philippines, India and China. Twenty-nine percent of participants (*n* = 685) reported that at least one or both of their parents were born overseas, a similar figure to the 26% of Australia's population born overseas (ABS, 2017). Furthermore, 79% (*n* = 1,874) indicated that they always spoke English at home, in comparison with the 73% of Australian households reporting the same in the 2016 census (ABS, 2017).

Sixty participants (2.5%) identified as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander, substantially lower than Australian census data from 2016, which indicated an estimated 4.6% of the 15-19-year-old population identified as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander (ABS, 2018b).

Participants' were asked about their parents' highest level of education as a proxy for their socio-economic status. The majority of young people reported that their parents had some form of non-school qualification, including a TAFE Certificate or Diploma (approximately 14% reported for both Parent 1 and 2) or a university degree, inclusive of either a Bachelors or Masters degree (38% reported for Parent 1; 30% reported for Parent 2). Assuming accurate reporting by participants and given that these percentages skew somewhat higher than the those reported in the most current Australian census[4], this points to this cohort's relative socio-economic advantage.

Figure 5: Location of Residence by State/Territory (*n* = 2,117)

Note: 11% of participants (*n* = 259) did not provide postcode information. Percentages above exclude this missing data.
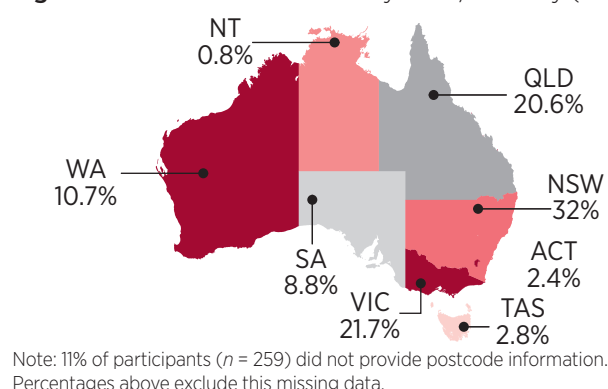
Figure 6: Distribution by State/Territory Compared to Population Distribution (*n* = 2,117)

Note: 11% of participants (*n* = 259) did not provide postcode information. F2BY percentages above exclude this missing data.

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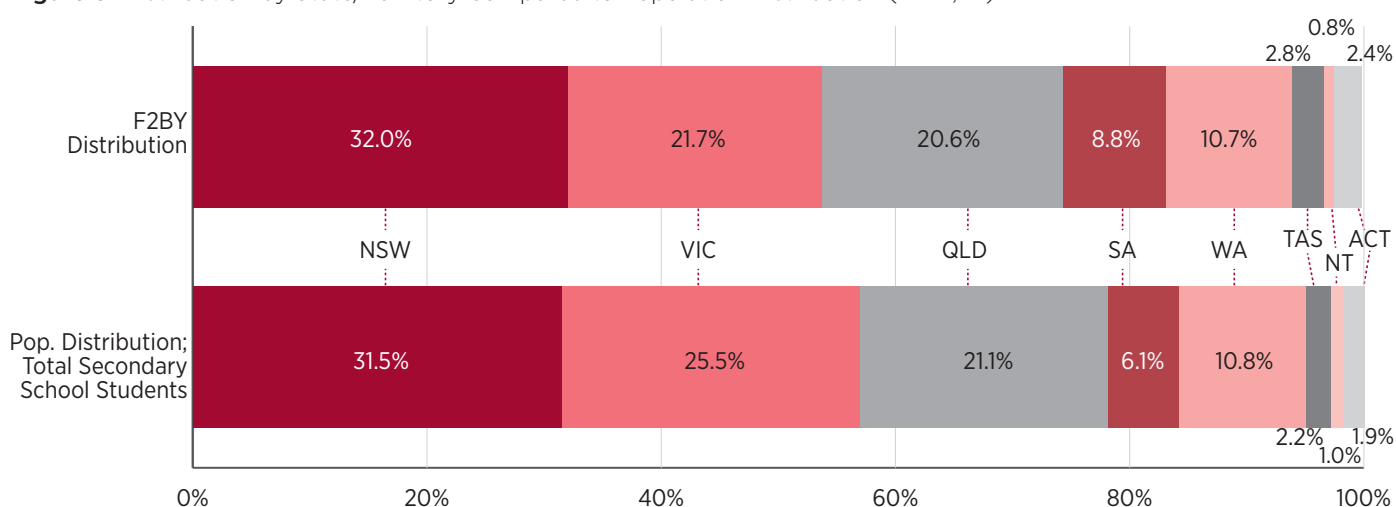
3   Participants' postal code were used alongside the Accessibility/Remoteness Index of Australia (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare [AIHW], 2004) to identify young people living in regional, rural and remote areas of Australia, based upon proximity to urban centres with a population of 5,000+.

4   Taking the 2016 ABS census age categories of 35-59 years as an approximation for participants' parents/carers, 33.4% of the population reported obtaining a Bachelor Degree or higher postgraduate degree qualification, as compared to 51.6% of participating young people who reported the same for their primary parent.

Participants' School Demographics

Of the 2,376 participants, 4.3% (*n* = 102) were no longer in school at the time of survey collection. Of these, 79 (78.2% of this sub-cohort) had completed year 12, with another 22 students (21.5%) being early school leavers. These participants, primarily aged 17 and 18 at the time of data collection, were asked to complete the survey retrospectively, writing about their most current secondary school experience. The remaining 2,274 participants were current secondary school students at the time of data collection, spread across years 7–12 of school (Figure 7).

The majority of participants attended government (public, state) schools (*n* = 1,357; 57%) with a smaller number from Catholic (*n* = 498; 21%) and independent (*n* = 521; 22%) schools. Compared to 2018 Australian distribution data (ABS, 2019), this cohort was more likely to attend secondary school outside of the government sector, with higher enrolments in independent schools in particular (Figure 8). In keeping with schooling options across the sector, participants attending single-sex schools were located primarily in independent and Catholic schools (Figure 9).

Young people attending independent schools were asked a series of follow-up questions related to fee structure and religiosity of their independent schools. Accordingly, this cohort was further separated into private, non-religious, lower fee schools (e.g. Montessori, Steiner schools; *n* = 47), *high fee schools*, some of which may have included a religious element (e.g. tuition more than $20,000 per annum; *n* = 221) and *non-Catholic, religiously-affiliated, lower fee schools* (e.g. Anglican, Jewish, Muslim schools; *n* = 253). Of the 498 participants who attended a Catholic school, 96 also described their school as a *high fee* school, with tuition of more than $20,000 per annum, for a total of 317 young people attending *high fee* schools across the independent and Catholic sectors (13.3% of the cohort).

Figure 7: Participant Year of School (*N* = 2,376)
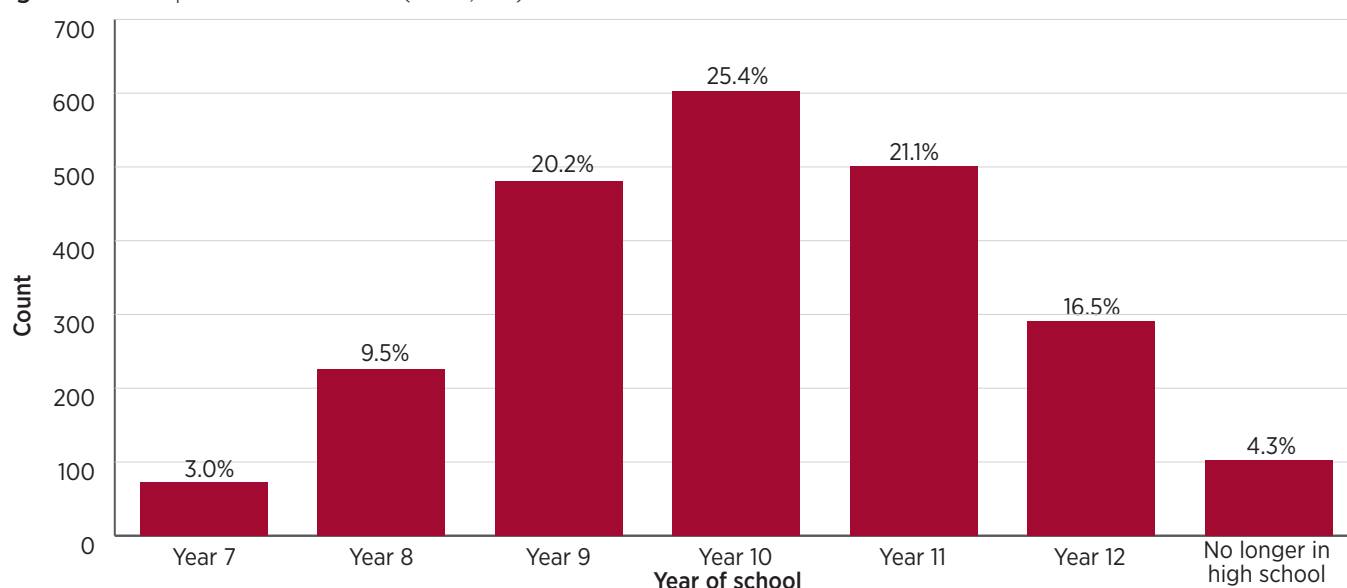
Figure 8: Distribution by School Sector Compared to Population Distribution (*N* = 2,376)

	Government School	Catholic School	Independent School
F2BY?	57.1%	20.9%	21.9%
Pop. Distribution	65.7%	19.7%	14.6%
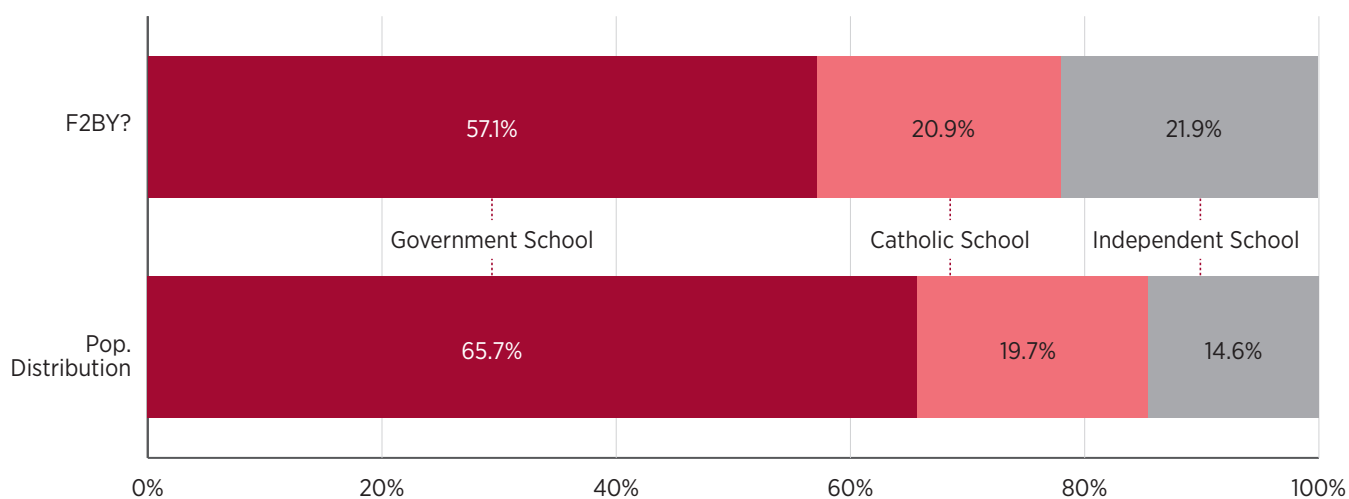
Figure 9: Participants' School Type, by Sector and Composition (*N* = 2,376)

	Government School	Catholic School	Independent School
	1267	313	358
	13	20	35
	77	165	128
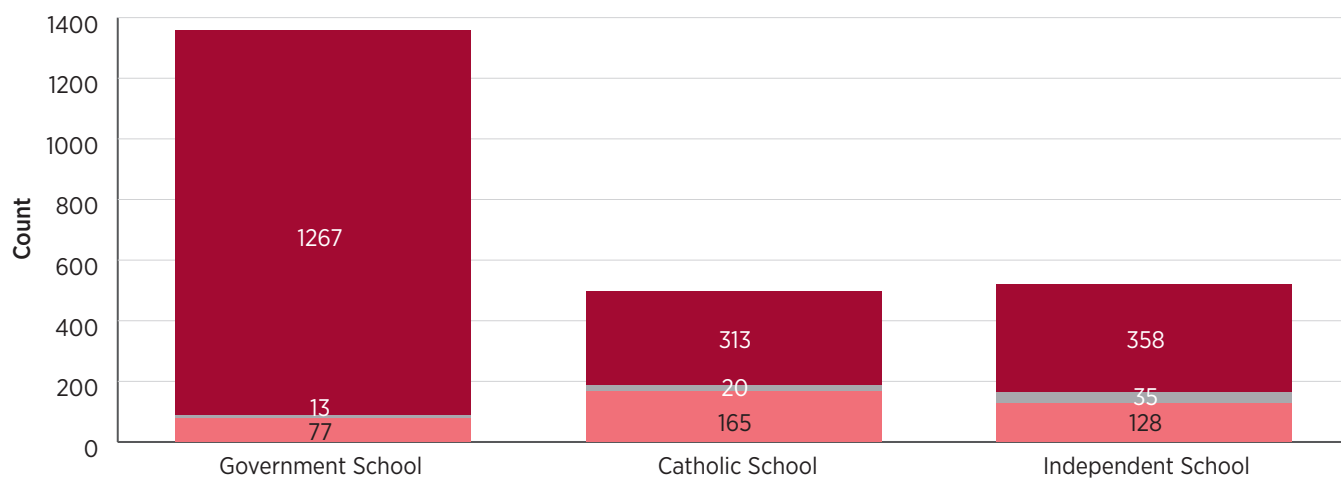
Wellbeing at School

A growing body of international research has focused on the elements of perceived school belonging and attachment for gender and sexuality diverse students, illustrating links between school-based stressors and lowered levels of social and academic investment in school (Bos et al., 2008; Bradlow et al., 2017; Kosciw et al., 2018; Lucassen et al., 2014; Pearson et al., 2007; Ullman, 2017). Relationships between students' sense of connection to school and their academic outcomes were, likewise, highlighted within the 2015 iteration of *Free2Be?* (Ullman, 2015a).

Accordingly, in order to investigate these and other key school wellbeing outcomes, a series of eight subscales from Victoria's Department of Education and Training *Attitudes to School Survey* (ATSS; DET VIC, 2018) were used to serve as a general marker of overall school wellbeing for survey participants (Table 1).

As the state department encourages Victorian government schools to collect and submit their school-level data on an annual basis, an additional affordance of choosing subscales from the ATSS was the ability to compare group mean scores from secondary school students attending government schools across the state of Victoria[5] with gender and sexuality diverse students from across Australia.

While direct statistical comparison is not possible due to differences in cohorts, timing and circumstances of the data collection, general cohort comparisons highlight diminished school experiences for gender and sexuality diverse students. As can be seen in Figure 10, with the exception of the "high expectations for success" variable, students completing the *Free2Be…Yet?* survey fared poorer, on average, across every one of the seven subscales presented below.

Table 1: Subscales of the *Attitudes to School Survey* (ATSS)

ATSS Subscale	# of Items	Measurement Scale	Sample Item	Internal Reliability
High expectations for success	6		"My teachers think I can do well at school."	a = 0.91
Teacher concern	4		"My teachers look after me."	a = 0.90
Advocate at school	6		"At my school, there is a teacher or another adult who cares about me."	a = 0.91
Sense of connectedness	5	5-point Likert scale: 1 = "strongly disagree" – 5 = "strongly agree"	"I look forward to going to school."	a = 0.93
Student voice and agency	7		"I feel like I have a voice in my school."	a = 0.86
Respect for diversity			"Students in my school respect each other's differences."	
Sense of confidence	4		"I am good at learning."	a = 0.87
Managing bullying	4		"At my school there is support for students who are bullied."	a = 0.89

Figure 10: *ATSS* Subscale Mean Score Comparison, VIC Data (yrs. 7–12)
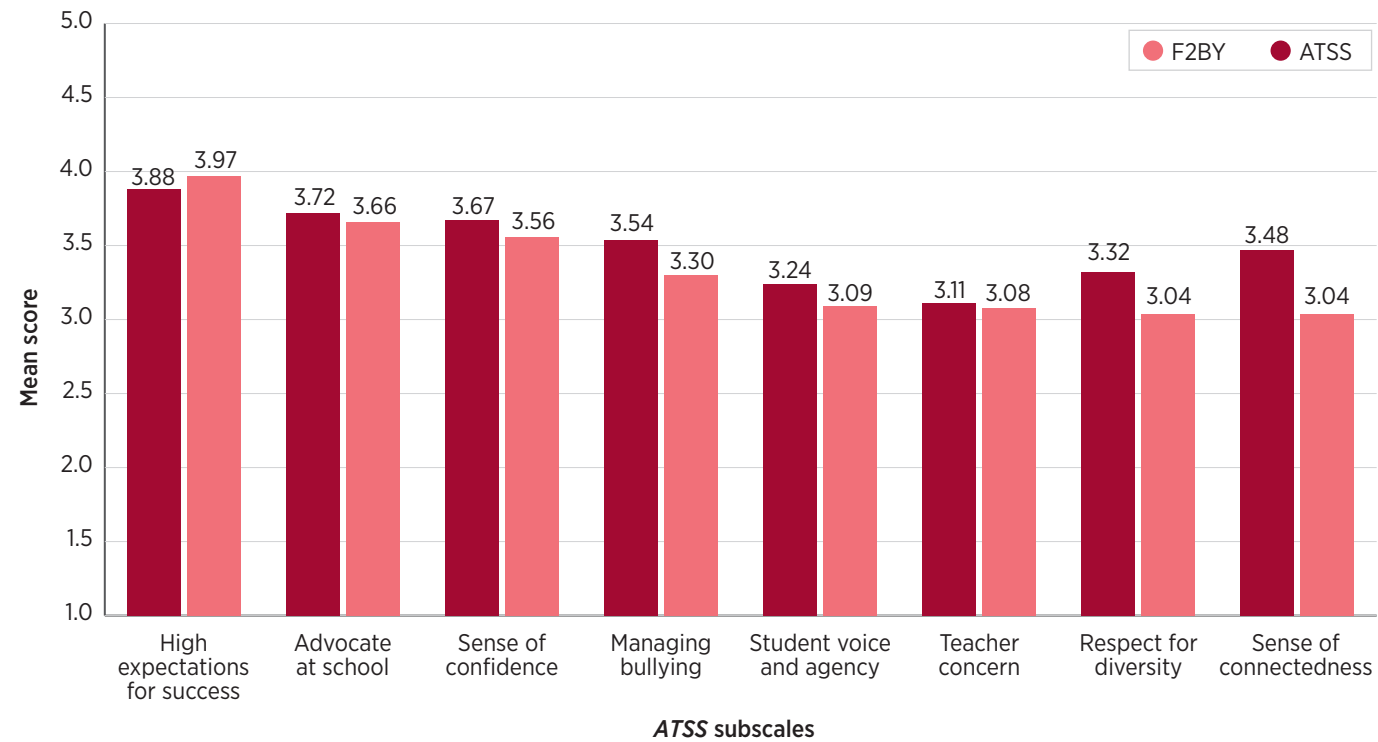
Note: Higher scores indicate a more favourable outcome. Victoria data source: School Reporting and Data Services Group, Performance and Evaluation Division, Department of Education and Training (2018).

Year level comparisons of these two cohorts reveal further trends in the data (Figures 11-18). While some variables, such as students' sense of school staff members' ability to manage bullying (Figure 14) and students' voice and agency (Figure 15) are consistently different across the six years of secondary school, year by year comparisons of other variables highlight particular challenges for gender and sexuality diverse students during the early years of secondary school (years 7-9). Gender and sexuality diverse students' sense that they have a teacher-advocate at school (Figure 12), their confidence in their own learning capabilities (Figure 13), and sense that their teachers are interested in their wellbeing (Figure 16) are notably lower than the ATSS cohort during years 7 and 8 in particular.

Looking at students' sense that differences are respected at their school ('respect for diversity'; Figure 17) and the extent to which students have a sense of belonging at their school ('sense of connectedness'; Figure 18), reveals the largest differences, year by year, between the gender and sexuality diverse and general Victorian student cohorts. While mean scores for the gender and sexuality diverse cohort are lower across each of the six years of secondary school, these are again most pronounced in the earlier years of school. Most concerning, the gender and sexuality diverse student cohort was nearly a full point lower on the 5-point measurement scale on the measure of connectedness in year 7 (*M* = 3.87 for Victorian students vs. *M* = 2.95 for the *F2BY* cohort).

Figure 11: *High Expectations for Success*, Mean Score Comparison by Year

Figure 15 : *Student Voice and Agency*, Mean Score Comparison by Year

Figure 12: *Advocate at School,* Mean Score Comparison by Year
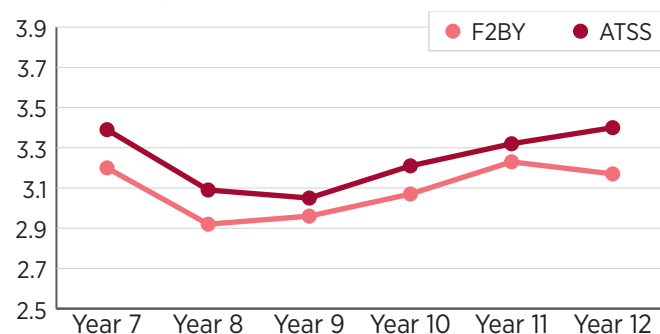
Figure 16 : *Teacher Concern*, Mean Score Comparison by Year

Figure 13 : *Sense of Confidence*, Mean Score Comparison by Year
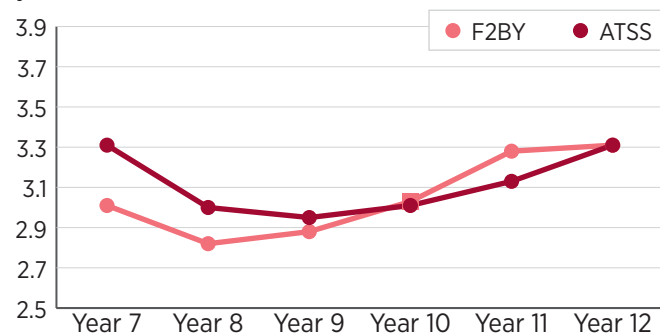
Figure 17 : *Respect for Diversity*, Mean Score Comparison by Year

Figure 14: *Managing Bullying*, Mean Score Comparison by Year
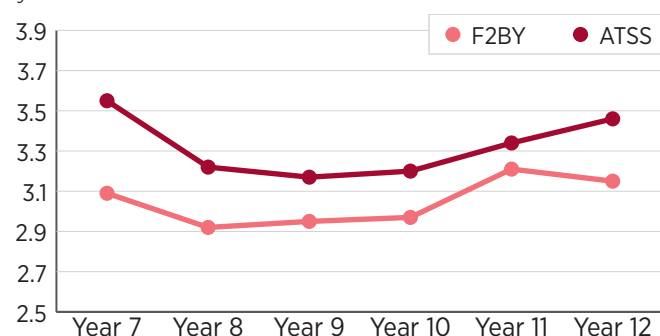
Figure 18: *Sense of Connectedness*, Mean Score Comparison by Year
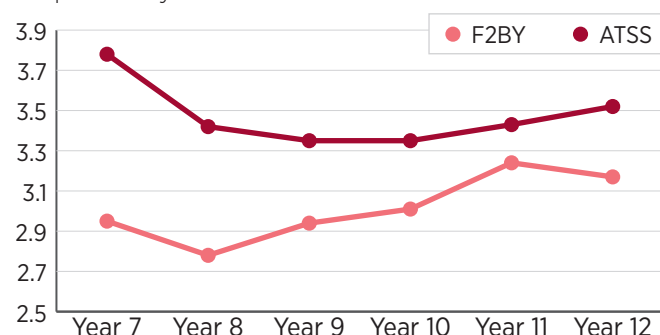
Note: Higher scores indicate a more favourable outcome. Scale score range (1-5) truncated here for improved visualisation.

As another point of comparison, the 6-item "Sense of belonging at school" validated measure from the *Programme for International Student Assessment* (PISA; ACER, 2018) was used to investigate gender and sexuality diverse students' sense of whether they fit in at school, were able to make friends easily or felt lonely. This measure is comprised of three items investigating school belonging and three items investigating experiences of school isolation. Such measures are deemed important as students' sense of belonging promotes positive attitudes towards learning (Ladd et al., 2009) and has been shown to directly affect students' academic achievement (Juvonen, 2006). To enable a meaningful comparison with the PISA data, which takes a representative sample of 15-year-old students from across 72 countries, the cohort of 563 participants aged 15 years were examined separately across these 6 items.

As shown in Table 2, 15-year-old gender and sexuality diverse participants in the *Free2Be...Yet?* (*F2BY*) study (*n* = 563) fared substantially worse across each of the 6 items, pointing to major discrepancies in how this cohort of students is experiencing school social life as compared to general cohorts of matched-age peers, both in Australia and internationally. Figures demonstrate that, while 72% of Australian 15-year-old students report feeling like they belong at school, merely 44% of Australian 15-year-old gender and sexuality diverse students report feeling the same. Half of Australian 15-year-old gender and sexuality diverse students say that make friends easily at school, compared with 79% percent of the Australia-wide cohort. Majority numbers of 15-year-old gender and sexuality diverse students report feeling lonely at school (54%) and feeling like they are left out of things at school (56%).

Table 2: PISA Sense of Belonging Items (6), comparisons with *F2BY* cohort

	Item 1		Item 2		Item 3		Item 4		Item 5		Item 6	
	I feel like an outside (or left out of things) at school (DISAGREE)		I make friends easily at school (AGREE)		I feel like I belong at school (AGREE)		I feel awkward and out of place in my school (DISAGREE)		Other students seem to like me (AGREE)		I feel lonely at school (DISAGREE)	
	%	SE	%	SE	%	SE	%	SE	%	SE	%	SE
OECD average-35	83%	0.1	78%	0.1	73%	0.1	81%	0.1	82%	0.1	85%	0.1
Australia-wide	77%	0.4	79%	0.5	72%	0.5	78%	0.4	88%	0.3	84%	0.4
F2BY Student Cohort	**44%**	**0.04**	**50%**	**0.04**	**44%**	**0.04**	**40%**	**0.04**	**65%**	**0.03**	**46%**	**0.04**
Ranked best country	88%	0.4/0.5	81%	0.7	82%	0.6	88%	0.5	89%	0.5	88%	0.5
	Finland/Japan		Hong Kong (China)		Japan		Japan		United States		Estonia/Japan	
Ranked worst country	75%	0.7	69%	0.7	60%	0.8	76%	0.4	66%	0.7	80%	0.7
	Hong Kong (China)		Japan		Macao (China)		Canada		Macao (China)		Macao (China)	

School Climate:
Experiences of Marginalisation and Inclusivity

In line with other leading international research (Kosciw et al., 2018), for the purposes of this work *school climate* is defined as the general ethos and 'feel' of participants' schooling environments with regards to treatment of diverse sexualities and genders. Accordingly, measures of participants' school climate included both frequency and typology of marginalising experiences – both social and curricular – and experiences of overt inclusivity from teachers and peers.

Use of Marginalising Language

Participants were asked about the frequency of marginalising language used to describe gender and sexuality diverse individuals as overheard from their classmates and peers, and their teachers' responses in these instances. As can be seen in Figure 19 below, 93% of students had heard their classmates use negative terms to describe lesbians, gay or bisexual people (examples provided included: "poofter", "fag" and "dyke"). In comparison, 71% of students had heard their classmates use negative terms to describe people who identify as transgender or genderqueer or whose gender expression is more ambiguous (examples provided included: referring to someone as "it" or asking, "What are you – a boy or a girl?").

The prevalence of homophobic and transphobic language in the school setting was investigated through the second item in the two sets, open to individuals who had indicated 'yes' to the previous item, asking about the monthly frequency of the use of such language at school. As shown in Figure 20, 37% per cent of participants who had heard homophobic language at school reported hearing this almost every day, with nearly another 41% of the cohort reporting hearing this language on a weekly basis (e.g. "several times per week" – 20% and "once or twice per week" – 21%).

Transphobic language was reported with less frequency (Figure 21); however, it is notable that, of the cohort who had heard transphobic language at school, almost half of these students (46.6%) reported hearing such language on a weekly basis (e.g. either "almost every day" [10.5%], "several times per week" [13.6%] or "once or twice per week" [22.5%]).

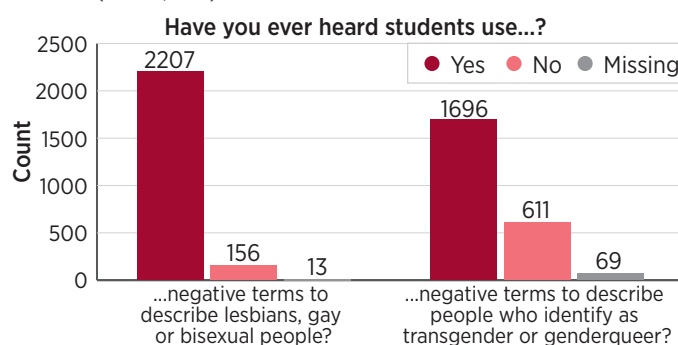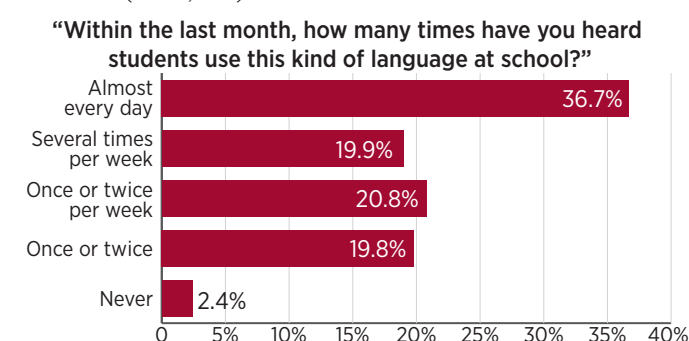**Figure 19:** Homophobic/Transphobic Language Use at School (*N* = 2,376)

Figure 20: Frequency of Reported Homophobic Language at School (*n* = 2,207)

Note: Missing data (0.4%) were excluded from this graph.

Figure 21: Frequency of Reported Transphobic Language at School (*n* = 1,696)
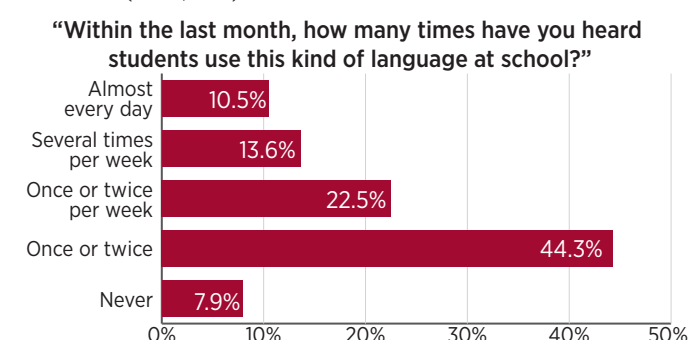
Note: Missing data (1.2%) were excluded from this graph

While a number of students indicated that negative language used to describe gender and sexuality diverse individuals was reserved for student-only interactions (i.e. not used in presence of adults at school), where participants reported that this type of language was used in front of teachers and other school staff members, a series of follow-up questions asked students about the frequency with which these adults intervened to stop the use of this language. Participants were asked how often adults at school "do or say something positive, like stop the student(s) or talk to them about using this language". Almost 84% of students (n = 1,850) who had heard homophobic language used at their school said that this language was used in the presence of adults at their school; however, only 6.2% of this cohort indicated that these adults "always" intervened in a positive manner. Comparatively, 69% of participants (n = 1,174) who had heard transphobic language at school reported that their classmates used this language in front of adults at their school. While trends in the percentage of young people who reported that school staff "always" intervened during instances of transphobic language use (5.2%) were similar to percentages during instances of homophobic language use, students were more likely to say that their teachers intervened during instances of homophobic language than during instances of transphobic language overall, as can been seen in Figure 22.

This line of questioning concluded with an opportunity for young people to tell a story of an incident of negative language use in the presence of a school staff member. Of the students who said that they had heard homophobic language at school in front of an adult, 88.7% (n = 1,641) provided an open-ended text response to say more about this. Of those who had heard transphobic language at school in front of an adult, 82.8% (n = 972) provided an open-ended text response. Collectively, almost half (46%) of these responses (n = 1,200) included references to their teachers doing nothing to stop or respond to students' homophobic or transphobic language. This percentage is in keeping with percentages of young people who reported that school staff "never" or "hardly ever" intervened during these instances (Figure 22).

Figure 22: Frequency of Reported Adult Positive Intervention, Marginalising Language
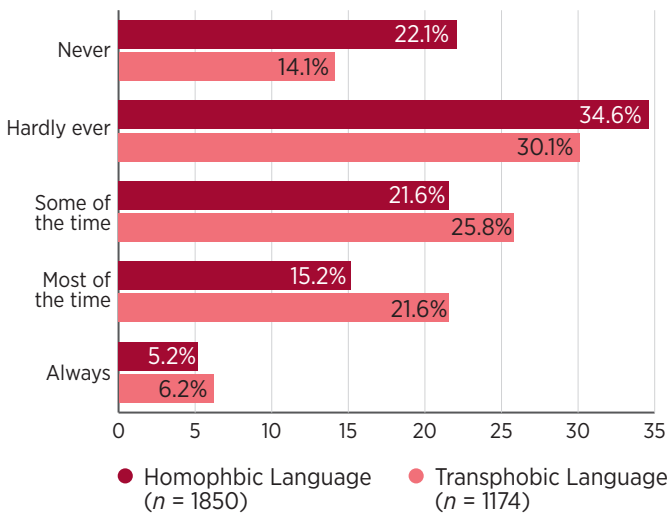
Within this subset of responses, many young people described their teacher(s) as ignoring this type of language (n = 341), with most commenting that this reaction differed from teachers' responses to other forms of negative language, such as swear words. Young people often had the sense that teachers did hear their peers using homophobic and transphobic language, given their proximity within the classroom or hallway, but pretended not to hear as a way of avoiding engagement with the issue.

> » *Literally nothing. If it's not a usual expletive...then they don't really care.*
>
> » *Nothing. Then a student said 'fuck' in this same teacher's presence and everyone got an entire lecture on not using swear words because they can be hurtful.*
>
> » *We get in more trouble for swearing than using that type of language.*
>
> » *Either they didn't notice because it is so normalised or they pretended not to notice and just kept walking.*
>
> » *My classmates call everyone faggots all the time and the teachers just pretend they don't hear it.*

An additional 35% (*n* = 922) of the open-ended responses outlining teachers' reactions to homophobic and transphobic language used in their presence described some form of superficial response from staff (e.g. *"They shook their head"*; *"They quietly told them to stop"*), wherein the negative language was acknowledged but the marginalising implications of the language were not addressed and no further conversation ensued. In this sense, action was taken by the adult which acknowledged that some element of students' behaviour was not acceptable, primarily talking out of turn or using inappropriate language, without articulating why the language was inappropriate or making any mention of discrimination, homophobia/transphobia or the gender and sexuality diverse community.

> » *Two rowdy boys were imitating a gay couple using lewd gestures and profane language. The teacher only told them to 'quiet down'.*
>
> » *A boy in my class said if he had a son and he found out he was gay, he would 'curb stomp' his son. The same boy said he would rather do meth than be gay. The teacher didn't do anything except said it was inappropriate. I had to leave the classroom in tears.*

Several of these responses articulated students' sense that teachers were actively avoiding confrontation and/or further conversation about gender and sexuality diversity.

> » *Most of the time it's met with disapproval but still an avoidance of the topic (i.e. the teacher will tell the student not to use it [homophobic language], but very passively). It gives the impression the teacher is doing it [intervening] because they know they 'should', even though they prefer not to be involved. This is a big contrast to other offensive language, like swearing or racist remarks, where the teacher is often much more actively involved in the discipline.*
>
> » *A guy in my class called me a 'pussy licker'. My teacher (who I think is a closeted lesbian) looked mad at him but didn't say anything. I think she was scared he would do the same to her.*

> » *We were working on a school project and two of the boys were looking up bad pictures and making horrible jokes about LGBT+ people. The whole class ended up getting involved in the jokes and stuff and I was one of the only people not engaging...they spent a solid 5 min laughing about the suicide rate of trans people. Our teacher didn't really know what to say in this situation so she just told them to focus on their work.*

A subset of these responses outlined incidences of victim-blaming, where the gender and sexuality diverse young person received some form of negative consequence from the teacher as a result of identifying their peers' homophobic and transphobic language. Such responses often detailed experiences of students' exclusion from the classroom, the activity or the peer group, serving as a form of secondary marginalisation.

> » *The teacher acted like it was just a word, and when I started defending LGBTQ+ people because the use of the word 'faggot' and 'homo' are not ok, I started being asked if I was a lesbian in an insulting and degrading way. When I got mad and raised my voice, I got sent out.*

Most disturbingly, roughly 10% of open-ended responses (*n* = 252) detailed instances of teachers' active participation in the use of homophobic and transphobic language, often in front of a classroom of students. Of these responses, the majority described teachers laughing along with students or otherwise participating in the 'joke', as a form of bonding with their students.

> » *People calling me tranny or a faggot, though I might not identify as transgender. The teacher now calls attention to the class by saying, "Boys, Girls and Others." I don't know if the teacher takes it as a joke, but the students sure do.*
>
> » *I've definitely heard slurs here and there, mostly ignored by those around them to avoid uncomfortable situations. The person I've heard the worst of this from is actually a teacher herself, who passes these hurtful things off as though it's funny. This teacher is an isolated case, but a continuous one, and though I have told other staff members, it's something they prefer not to hear, and so nothing gets done.*

Merely 6% of open-ended responses across these two items (*n* = 154) outlined a proactive response from teachers or other school staff, wherein the discriminatory nature of the language was acknowledged and addressed in some manner.

> » *My teacher told the people that same sex relationships are ok and that you shouldn't make fun of people who are same sex attracted or use same sex attraction as an insult.*
>
> » *Teacher scolded the student and told him not to use the word. When the student tried to say he was just kidding and he thought it was stupid, the teacher explained to him exactly why he couldn't use the word and they had a civil talk about it until he apologised.*
>
> » *The teachers are so supportive of me and other transgender students so they always try to explain how hurtful the things they're doing/saying is and want them to stop behaving that way.*

Figure 23: Reported Physical Harassment at School (*N* = 2,376)

28.6%
Yes (*n* = 679)

4.7%
Missing (*n* = 112)

66.7%
No (*n* = 1585)
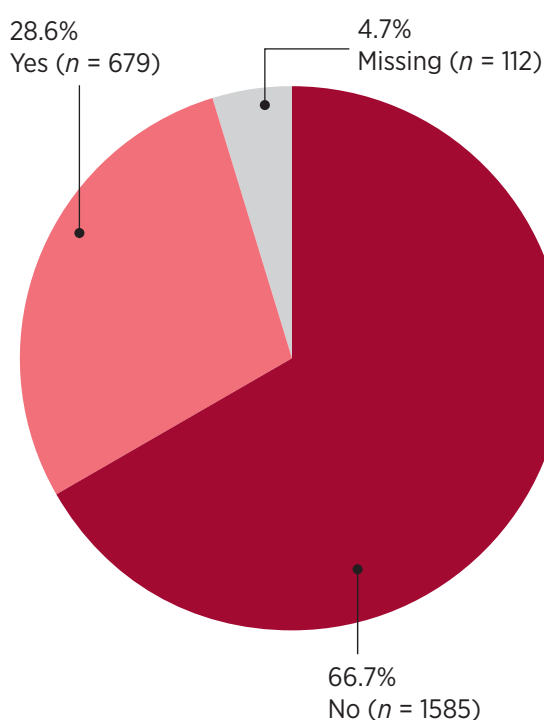
Note: Missing data (*n* = 16) were not included.

Physical Harassment of Sexuality and/or Gender Diverse Students

As an additional indicator of school-climate towards gender and sexuality diversity, participants were asked about instances of "physical bullying or intimidation" of students who were perceived to be gender and sexuality diverse. As shown in Figure 23, approximately 29% of the sample (*n* = 679) had witnessed such bullying; however, reported occurrences were much more infrequent than instances of verbal harassment, with the majority of these students having witnessed such behaviours once or twice in the month preceding the survey (54% of the subsample, *n* = 365). Nevertheless, it is worth noting that 7% of the total sample (*n* = 173) reported witnessing physical harassment of gender and sexuality diverse students on a weekly basis (e.g. "almost every day"; "several times per week"; and "once or twice per week") – a small, yet concerning figure, given the nature of the behaviour (Figure 24).

A follow-up item asked the students about school staff members' intervention during instances of physical harassment of gender and sexuality diverse young people. Of the total number of young people who reported adult presence during these student activities (*n* = 384), only 10% (*n* = 40) said that their teachers "always" intervened to "do something or say something to try to prevent it" (Figure 25).

Figure 24: Frequency of Reported Physical Harassment at School (*n* = 674)

"Within the last month, how many times have you seen this type of physical bullying or intimidation?"

Almost every day	4%
Several times per week	7.6%
Once or twice per week	14.1%
Once or twice	54.2%
Never	20.2%

Note: Missing data (*n* = 5) were not included.
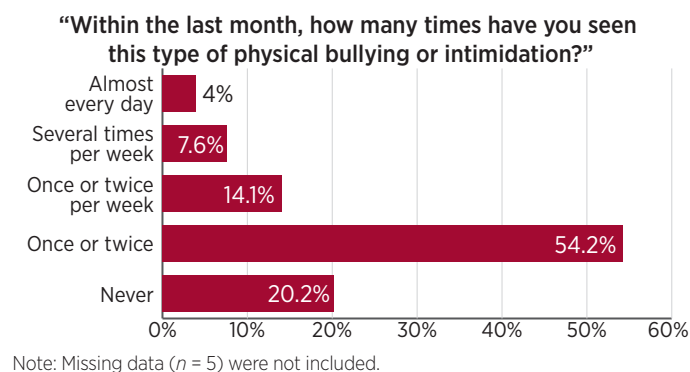
Figure 25: Frequency of Reported Adult Positive Intervention, Physical Harassment (*n* = 368)
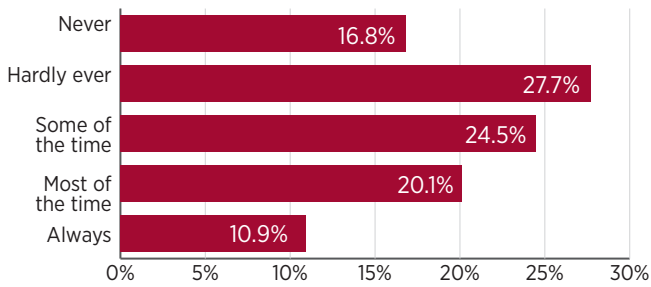
Note: Missing data (*n* = 16) were not included.

Students were asked to provide a story about an incident where they saw this form of physical harassment and a teacher or other school staff member was present. Just over 300 young people (*n* = 304; 12.8% of the total sample) provided an open-ended response to this item. Of these, more than half (*n* = 157) described situations in which the teacher intervened in some way but did not inquire about or acknowledge the bias-motivated (e.g. homophobic/transphobic) nature of the harassment, with multiple students specifically commenting on this omission.

> » *Stopped it, generally. No lgbtqi+ discussion.*
> » *I've been hit, shoved, kicked and more. Teachers would stop it but never bring up the fact that they're being a bigot.*
> » *They would be in trouble for the violence but not because of the homophobia or transphobia, etc.*

In these responses, teachers were commonly depicted as focused on 'breaking up' the physical incident, removing the students from the rest of the cohort and doling out some form of punishment to all students involved. With regards to this latter point, many students within this cohort specifically pointed out that all involved students were punished or removed from the environment, including the victim who was either gender and sexuality diverse or perceived to be gender and sexuality diverse by their peers.

> » *A student hit an openly gay student and a teacher intervened and gave BOTH detention [student's own emphasis].*
> » *A trans girl had worn a skirt to school, a group of boys started pushing and shoving her, getting increasingly more violent. Teacher noticed and sent them all to admin.*

In other recounts, students described incidents where the gender and sexuality diverse student appeared to be positioned by teachers and other school staff as the locus, or cause, of the incident. In many of these responses, students described the adults in their school as annoyed by the disruption – and, accordingly, annoyed by the gender and sexuality diverse student positioned at the heart of the disruption – as opposed to invested in student wellbeing or safety.

> » *I was in, what is known as, the common room…a very homophobic a-hole named [name removed] threw a rotten apple at the back of my head after telling me that the common room is for 'normal straight people only'. The teacher present then told me I had to leave because I was causing trouble by being there.*
> » *She [the school staff member] pushed the bully away, death glared the queer student then she told them to sit down and stop disrespecting the classroom.*
> » *I kept getting poked by two girls and eventually one stomped on my foot, they kept calling me a lesbian… and the teacher said really loudly to stop, so they did and left. They did not get punished. The teacher asked if I was okay with a big sigh and he glared at me, like I had annoyed him, and when I was about to ask if he could get me ice, he faked a cough and left to go eat lunch. Like he legitimately started fake coughing, hunched over, then tried to give me some sort of fake weak smile, and he just walked off.*

A further 84 responses (28% of open-ended responses to this item) outlined instances of teachers or other school staff members being described as doing "nothing", or "ignoring" instances of physical bullying or harassment.

> » *They turn a blind eye to it.*
>
> » *My friend who is gender-fluid was standing in line, and some girls who have always been rude to her just because of her preferred pronouns and such, threw a bunch of rubbish at her and YET AGAIN the teacher did nothing [student's own emphasis].*
>
> » *A student threatened and attempted to break another student's arms after discovering they were a lesbian and the teacher present watched the event unfold without moving from his seat or saying anything.*
>
> » *When I was walking into my Maths class, there was this popular heterosexual couple that everyone respected a lot, and the girl had knocked the books and pencil case out of my hand and it fell on the floor. I squealed in shock because it happened so suddenly and I scurried to pick it up and get to my desk. Then the guy just laughed at me and said "Stay out of our fucking way, faggot". The teacher just avoided eye contact with me and acted like it never happened.*

Within the most troubling set of responses (*n* = 27; 9% of the open-ended responses to this item), young people described instances where school staff members actively participated in the physical harassment, through various verbal or non-verbal means. In this group of responses, adults did not stop the physical harassment; instead, they were portrayed as further alienating the victim or otherwise contributing to the harassment during or immediately after the incident.

> » *A gay kid in my class was shoved in a locker and the teacher waited until the kids left to let him out.*
>
> » *A friend of mine was beat up then sent home because they believed the bully was a good kid defending himself from being offended.*
>
> » *A group of girls ganged up on a girl who just came out to them and they started to punch her. The teacher walked away, saying it would cause more harm than good for her to stop it.*
>
> » *I was pushed to the ground and kicked repeatedly to the face. A staff member saw and laughed then walked away.*

Of the 304 open ended responses, merely nine responses detailed active investment by the adults present at the time of the physical incident in the form of speaking with the students involved and trying to work out the impetus for their actions. Of these, just four (1.3% of the open-ended responses to this item) included any mention of engagement related to the homophobic or transphobic nature of the incident.

> » *A student was carrying a gay pride flag the day same sex marriage was passed and that student was verbally abused and spat at. The next day an assembly was held addressing the issue.*
>
> » *The teacher stopped the students and engaged in educating them about the topic. They were faced with repercussions from the school.*
>
> » *A kid younger than me got slapped and was told that "that's what you get for being gay". A teacher stopped the guy who slapped the kid and was told that it was inappropriate and disrespectful and was force down [sic] to apologise to the kid.*

Associations with Marginalising Behaviours and Teacher Intervention

Further investigations were conducted to ascertain the strength of the relationship between students' reports of school-based homophobic and transphobic marginalising behaviours and their sense of school connection, care and representation, as measured by selected scales from the *ATSS* (DET VIC, 2018) and the *PISA* belonging measure (ACER, 2018). Bivariate correlations allowed for an examination of the strength of association between key variable pairs and the associated level of statistical significance of that association. It is noteworthy that every subscale of both the *ATSS* and *PISA* belonging measures was statistically, significantly negatively correlated with each of the six measures of marginalisation: frequency of homophobic language, transphobic language and gender and sexuality diversity-related physical harassment (1–3); and, teachers' intervention in each of these instances (4–6). Given the coding of the marginalisation variables, where a higher value was assigned to negative outcomes (i.e. more frequent negative language; less frequent teacher intervention), correlation coefficients are represented as negative. These findings show that, as reports of marginalisation and teacher inaction increased, students' connection to school and perceptions of teacher care decreased. Appendix A shows the complete table of these relationships.

Across the large majority of all three 'typologies' of marginalisation – homophobic language; transphobic language; and physical harassment – the strength of the association was larger for reported teacher intervention than for the reported frequency of the behaviour[6]. These results show that, for gender and sexuality diverse students, their sense that their teachers view these behaviours as negative and intervene to stop them has a stronger association with their personal school connection and perceived teacher care than the prevalence of the behaviours themselves. For instance, while students' sense of personal voice and agency at school was significantly correlated with their reports of the frequency of homophobic language (r = -.22, p < 0.001), this association was notably stronger for teachers' intervention during instances of homophobic language (r = -.34, p < 0.001). This was similarly apparent for students' sense that their teachers had high expectations for their academic success, where the strength of the correlation was nearly doubled between frequency and teacher intervention for homophobic language (r = -.16, vs. r = -.28; both p < 0.001).

Such results highlight the relationship between students' sense that their teachers are generally invested in the care of gender and sexuality diverse students and their sense that teachers are personally invested in their success and contributions to the classroom. Given the positive academic associations with perceived teacher care, including academic effort and motivation (Wentzel, 2009), these findings have critical implications for inclusive teaching practice.

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6   Barring three of 30 possible instances; see Appendix A.

Positivity and Inclusivity across Curriculum and School Policy

Research consistently highlights the importance of inclusive curriculum for sexuality and/or gender diverse young people in terms of perceived safety and increase sense of school connectedness (Bradlow et al., 2017; Toomey et al., 2012) and the positive impact such curriculum inclusions have been shown to have on the school community at large (Baams et al., 2017). Accordingly, as an additional indicator of school climate, students were asked about their teachers' approval and inclusion of gender and sexuality diversity within the curriculum.

Towards that end, students indicated how true it was that their teachers "talk about same-sex attraction (lesbian, gay, or bisexual people or topics) in a positive way". As shown in Figure 26, the majority of students indicated that it was at least "somewhat true" that their teachers had spoken about same-sex attraction in a positive way, with almost 40% of the sample indicating that this was "mostly" or "definitely" true.

In comparison, far fewer students reported that their teachers had spoken to them about gender diversity. In response to the prompt "My teachers talk about the different ways that people can express their gender" nearly half of the sample (45.3%) reported that this was "definitely false" (Figure 27), with another 34.7% reporting that this was either "mostly" or "somewhat" false. These findings point to institutional silences with regards to topics related to gender diversity and gender expression in schools, potentially due to a lack of awareness or knowledge about these topics more broadly.

An additional item asked students if they had ever "learned about LGBTQI people or discussed LGBTQI history or current events" within their classes at school, with 60% of the overall cohort responding in the negative. Students were grouped according to their school sector to allow for a more nuanced indication of which conversations and resources are being mobilised across which locations, with students from independent schools further separated into religious and non-religiously affiliated schools.

As shown in Figure 28, students attending government (public) schools were the most likely to report curriculum inclusions within the *F2BY* Cohort (*n* = 2,178), with 45.8% of this cohort reporting curricular inclusions, followed closely by students at independent, non-religiously affiliated schools (40.9% reporting "yes"). Conversely, students attending religiously-affiliated schools, either within the Catholic (57.6%) or independent sectors (53.5%) were the most likely to report that they had not learned about or discussed LGBTQI people or current events.

Comparisons with the 2015 data show that, overall, students who completed the *F2BY* survey were more likely to report gender and sexuality diversity curricular inclusions. Increases in "yes" responses were apparent across every school sector; however, these were most pronounced within the government sector, with almost twice as many affirmative responses since the previous iteration of the survey.

Figure 26: Positive Representations of Same-Sex Attraction by Teachers (*N* = 2,376)

Figure 27: Teachers' Discussion of Gender Expression (*N* = 2,376)
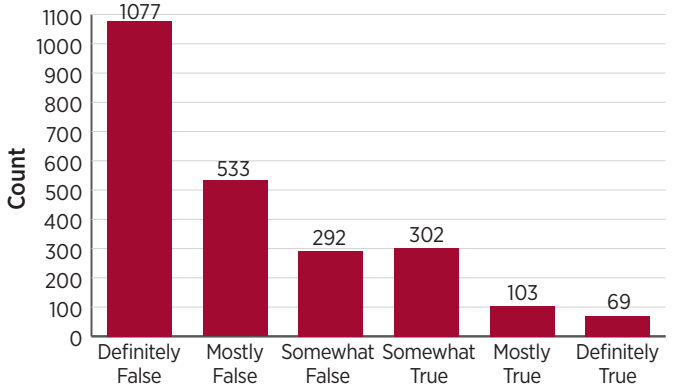
Figure 28: Comparative Presence of Reported LGBTQI Curricular Inclusions, by Sector

In your classes at school, have you ever **learned about LGBTQI people or discussed LGBTQI history or current events?**

F2BY? (2020); *n* = 2178

F2B? (2015); *n* = 658

● Government   ● Independent, non-religious   ● Independent, religious   ● Catholic
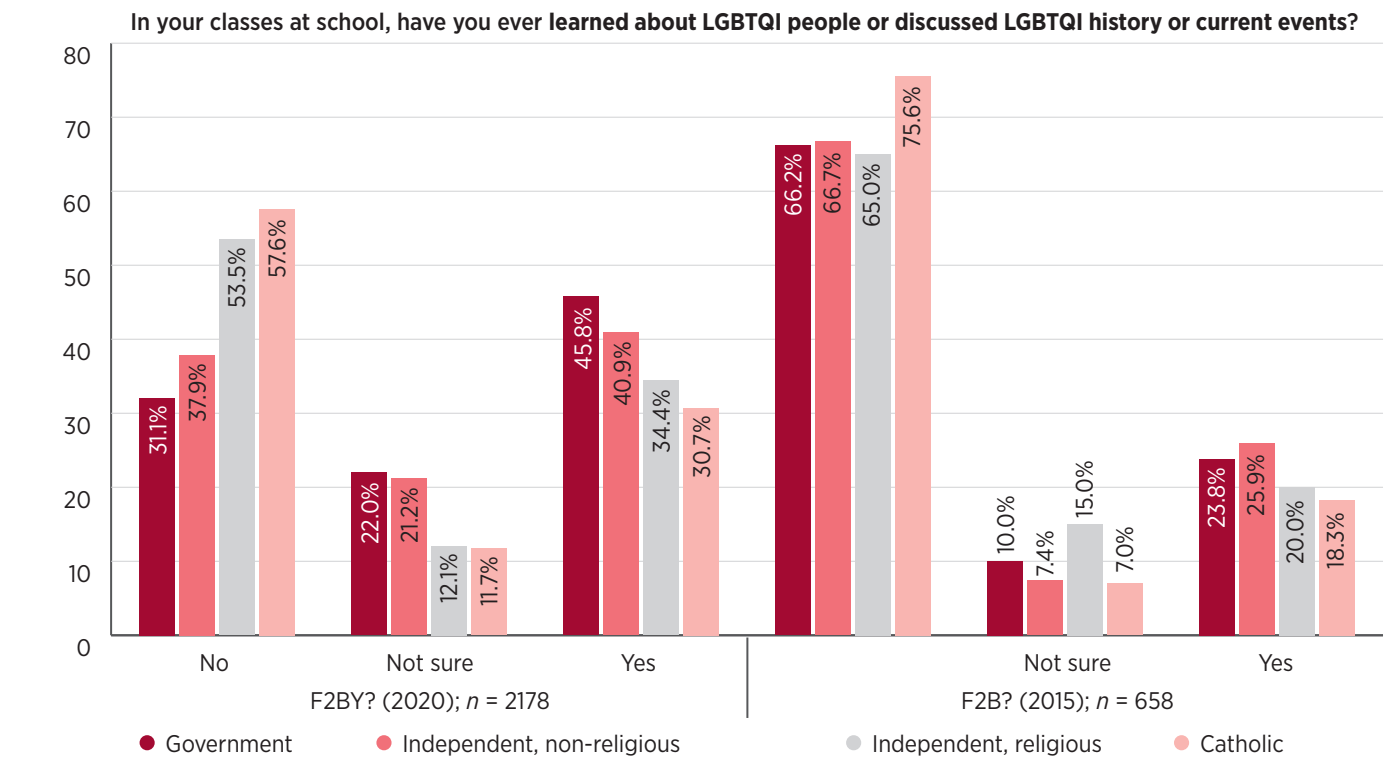
Note: Missing data excluded from both data sets (*F2BY n* = 198; *F2B? n* = 46).

Figure 29: Reported LGBTQI Curricular Inclusions in HPE Curriculum (*n* = 2,078)

	Definitely False	Mostly False	Somewhat False	Somewhat True	Mostly True	Definitely True
● Lesbian Sexuality	62.2%	11.1%	5.6%	9.4%	5.6%	6.1%
● Gay Male Sexuality	58.1%	10.5%	5.7%	11.3%	7.2%	7.3%
● Bisexuality	65.1%	10.5%	4.9%	9.0%	5.3%	5.1%
● Transgender	62.0%	12.4%	5.5%	9.2%	4.9%	5.9%
● Intersex	69.2%	12.3%	5.5%	5.6%	3.9%	3.5%
● Gender Identity	58.6%	10.6%	6.5%	9.1%	7.7%	7.5%
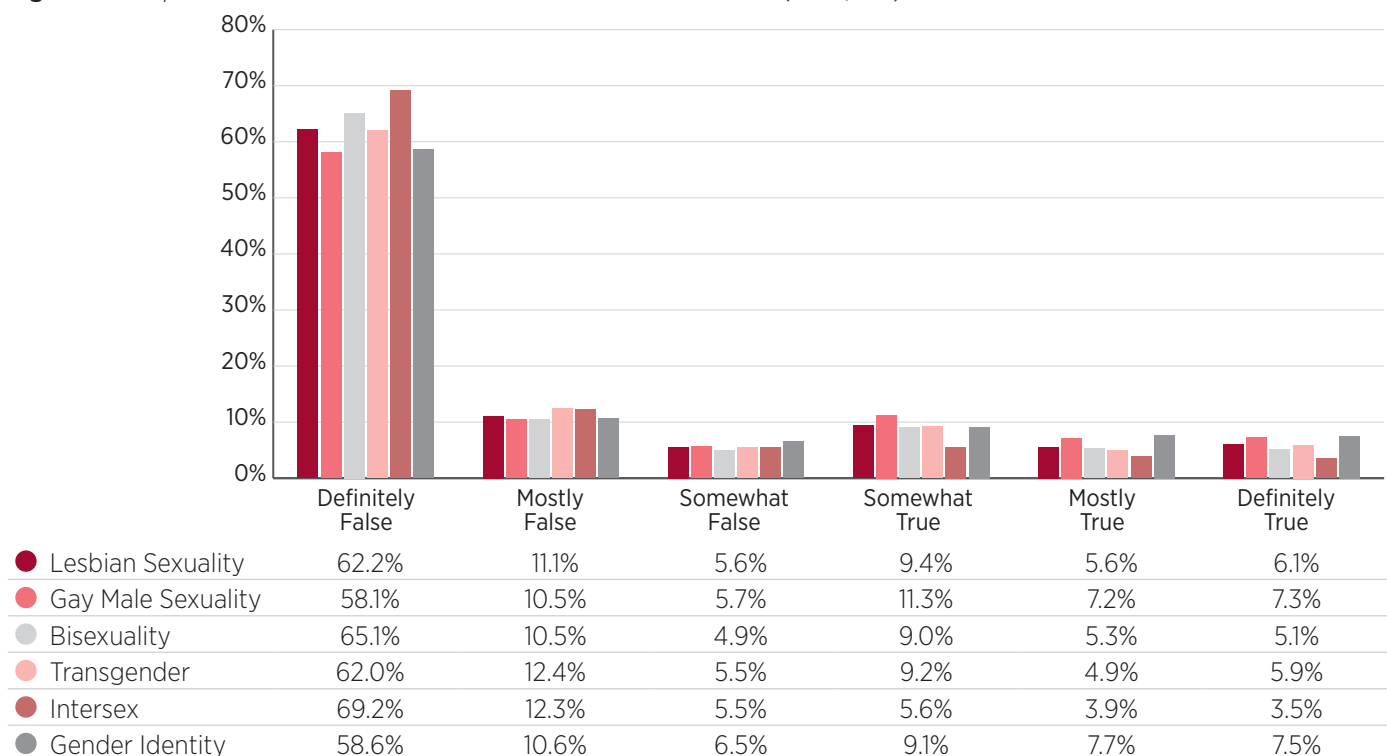
As the central curricular area where gender and sexuality diversity appears within the Australian national curriculum, a series of items asked students to comment on their recollections of inclusive curricular content within their Health and Physical Education (HPE) classes. The reported occurrence of six topic areas within HPE including: (1) lesbian sexuality; (2) gay (male) sexuality; (3) bisexuality; (4) what it means to be transgender; (5) what it means to have intersex physical sex characteristics; (6) the difference between assigned sex at birth and gender identity, was measured on a six-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 ("definitely false"; *I have definitely not learned about this in HPE*) to 6 ("definitely true"; *I have definitely learned about this in HPE*). For this series of items, the participant cohort was limited to students in years 9 and above (*n* = 2,078) to ensure potential exposure, given that gender and sexuality diverse-inclusive is present within the year 7/year 8 HPE curriculum descriptors. Figure 29 details responses across these six items, showing that while roughly one quarter of this cohort reported that it was at least "somewhat true" that they learned about gay (male) sexuality and gender identity, the majority of students selected "definitely false" across each of the six areas.

These six items were averaged to create a total HPE inclusion index for students in years 9 and above, ranging from 1 ["definitely false"] to 6 ["definitely true"]. Across the schooling sectors, students' reports of learning about gender and sexuality diverse identities or topics in their HPE classes was extremely low, with a sector wide mean score of 2.01 (*SD* = 1.29), sitting at response category "mostly false" (Figure 30). Students from Catholic schools (*n* = 498; *M* = 1.63, *SD* = 1.04) and religiously-affiliated independent schools (*n* = 403; *M* = 1.74, *SD* = 1.13) reported the lowest mean inclusions in HPE overall.

Figure 30: Reported Inclusivity of Gender and Sexuality Diversity in HPE (*n* = 2,078)
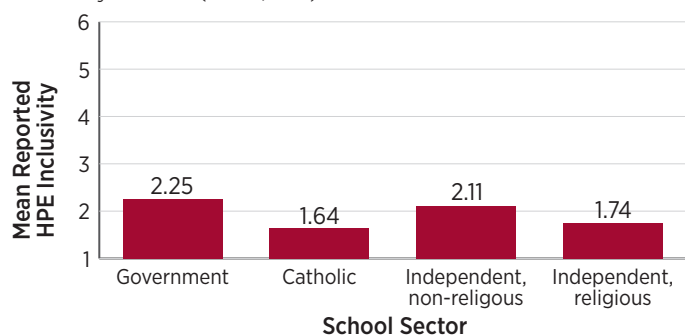
It is worth noting, however, that across all sectors, the response range reached the maximum score of 6, an indication that a (very) small percentage of students from across the sectors did have access to a gender and sexuality diverse-inclusive HPE curriculum. A recoding of the mean reported HPE inclusion scores into categories of "low" (1 & 2), "medium" (3 & 4) and "high" (5 & 6) revealed that 98 participants (4.7% of the year 9+ sample) attended schools with "high" reported HPE inclusion. The majority of these students attended government schools (*n* = 74; 6.4% of the eligible government school cohort).

In efforts to understand how formal curricular inclusivity of gender and sexuality diversity may be linked to student wellbeing more broadly, comparisons of group mean scores (ANOVAs) across each of the three categories ("low", "medium", "high") of HPE inclusivity were conducted for several of the school wellbeing outcomes measured via the *Attitudes to School Survey* (DET VIC, 2018) and the *PISA School Belonging and Inclusion* measures (ACER, 2018).[7] Results revealed statistically significantly more positive wellbeing outcomes for students indicating "medium" and/or "high" HPE inclusions of gender and sexuality diversity across each of the 12 subscales addressed in an earlier section of this report. Such students (*n* = 463, 22.3% of the year 9+ sample) reported an enhanced sense of teacher concern and high expectations, a stronger sense of school belonging, greater confidence in their school's ability to manage bullying, and an enhanced sense that their schools valued diversity (see Appendix B for related statistics). Of these school connection and wellbeing measures, perceptions related to student voice, diversity and management of bullying had the strongest statistical associations with students' reported HPE inclusion. These findings support links between a school environment that is more inclusive and less silent on topics related to gender and sexuality diversity and a gender and sexuality diverse student body who feel safer and valued at school, more connected to school and more cared for by their teachers.

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7   These instruments are discussed in greater detail in an earlier section of the report.

The survey contained two additional items investigating students' knowledge of the existence of school-based supports or sources of information on gender and sexuality diversity: "If you wanted information and support from your school about [*sexual orientation or LGBTQI issues/gender identity or gender expression*] would you know where to go?". Findings for these items are reported for the whole participant cohort. In contrast with the above findings on inclusions of gender and sexuality diversity within the HPE classroom, much larger numbers of the sample responded "yes" to these items: 40.6% of participants for information on sexual orientation and 36.5% of participants for gender identity. The largest cohort of participants who knew where to find information or support on sexual orientation and gender identity at school were attending independent, non-religious schools (51.5% and 48.5%, respectively), trailed closely by the government school student cohort (50.9% and 47.1%, respectively). Given the reported silences on related topics in HPE, it stands to reason that this these participants were able to access this information through some other means, via another teacher, curricular area or some other school-based support (e.g. within library resources, via the school counsellor or student wellbeing officer). Figures 31 and 32 detail responses to these items by school sector. Results are similar to those reported in the 2015 *F2B* survey (Ullman, 2015a), with the exception of the independent, non-religiously affiliated sector, where increases were notable.

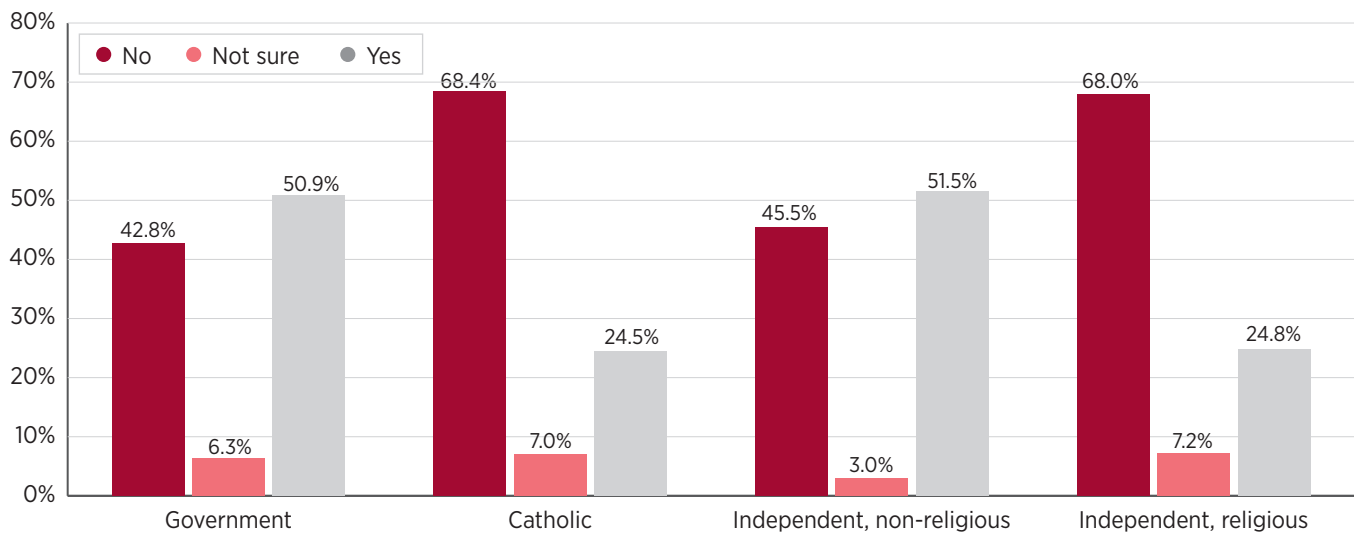**Figure 31:** Reported Availability of Information and Support, Sexual Orientation (*n* = 2,179)

Figure 32: Reported Availability of Information and Support, Gender Identity (*n* = 2,178)
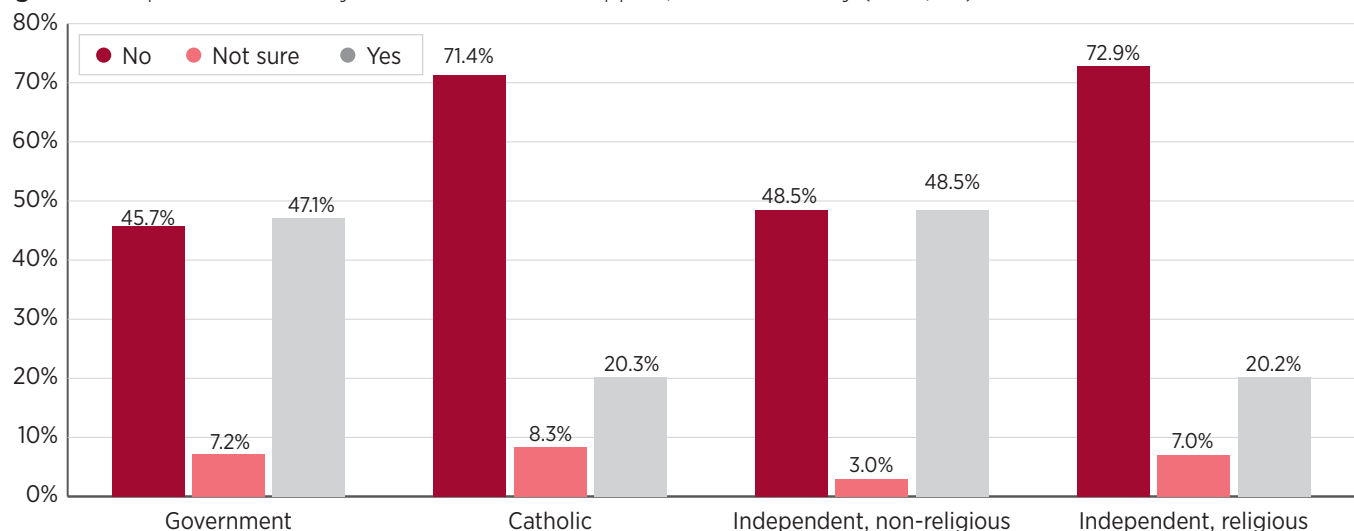
Figure 33: Reported Prevalence of LGBTQI Support Activities and Events (*n* = 2,179)
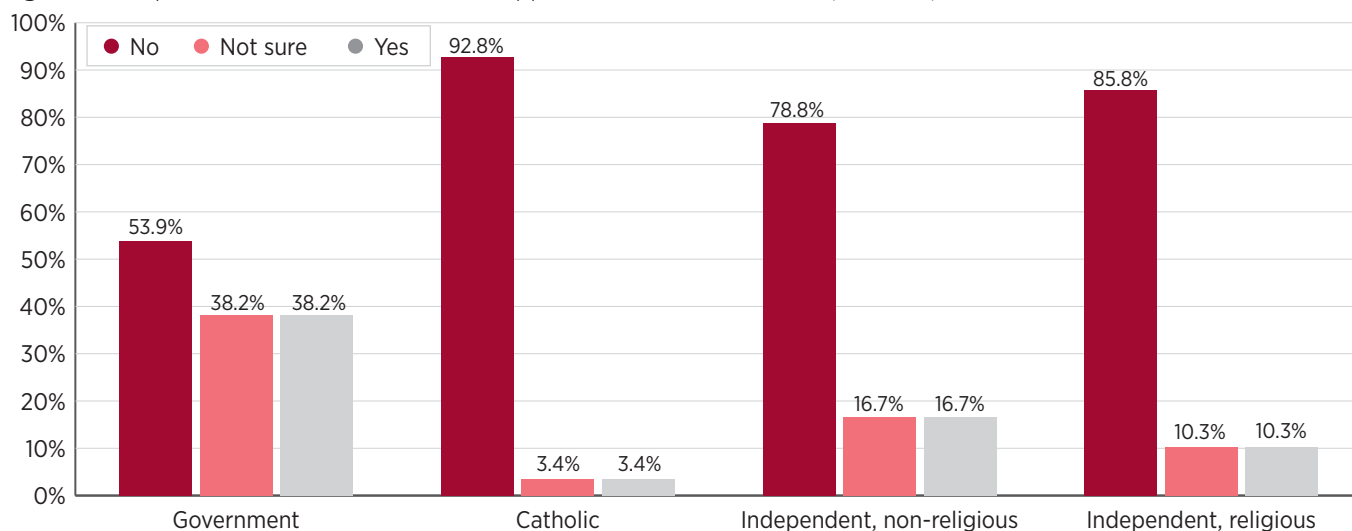
As an additional measure of visibility and inclusivity, students were asked whether their schools hosted "specific events or activities to support LGBTQI people" such as "Wear it Purple" or International Day Against Homophobia, Transphobia and Biphobia (IDAHOT Day). Such days of celebration, affirmation and remembrance can be included as part of a suite of 'diversity days' at schools and are often positioned as an element of a whole-school policy. As shown in Figure 33, such events were most commonly reported as occurring within the government school sector, with 38.2% of this cohort responding "yes" to this item. Students in Catholic schools were least likely to report such inclusions (3.4% reporting "yes").

As awareness of homophobic/transphobic marginalisation increases globally, schools are encouraged to take steps to actively include gender and sexuality diversity as named, protected personal characteristics against which harassment or bullying will not be tolerated. Large-scale international research has shown that gender and sexuality diverse students who are aware of inclusive policy are more likely to feel safe and less likely to report school-based victimisation related to their sexuality and/or gender diversity (Kull et al., 2015). While such inclusions are named at the federal institutional level (e.g. the *Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians* [MCEETYA, 2008]) and within the national Health and

Physical Education curriculum (ACARA, n.d.), the extent to which Australian secondary schools have named gender and sexuality diversity is, as yet, highly variable. Furthermore, Australian schools' proactive communication of these important policy inclusions remains unclear. Accordingly, two items asked students whether their schools had "a harassment policy that specifically includes sexual orientation" and "...gender expression". Figures 34 and 35 provide these results alongside 2015 percentages from the previous survey iteration.

As shown in Figure 34, much larger percentages of students overall reported that their schools had a harassment policy which was overtly inclusive of sexual orientation, nearly doubling since 2015. While this is clearly a positive shift, particularly for students attending government schools, where 45.8% of the cohort reported an inclusive policy, it is notable that sexuality diverse students attending religious schools reported being the least protected by school policy; nearly 58% of Catholic school students reported that their school did not have an inclusive harassment policy.

Figure 35 shows that far fewer percentages of students overall reported that their school had a harassment policy which specifically referenced gender expression, regardless of the sector, with significant percentages of students indicating that they were not sure. In every school sector, with the exception of government schools, majority

Figure 34: Reported Policy Inclusivity, Sexual Orientation, Multi-Year Comparison

	No	Not sure	Yes	No	Not sure	Yes
	F2BY? (2020); n = 2179			**F2B? (2015); n = 658**		
● Government	32.1%	22.0%	45.8%	30.4%	50.2%	19.4%
● Catholic	57.6%	11.7%	30.7%	53.5%	34.5%	12.0%
● Independent, non-religious	37.9%	21.2%	40.9%	37.0%	48.1%	14.8%
● Independent, religious	53.5%	12.1%	34.4%	55.0%	30.0%	15.0%
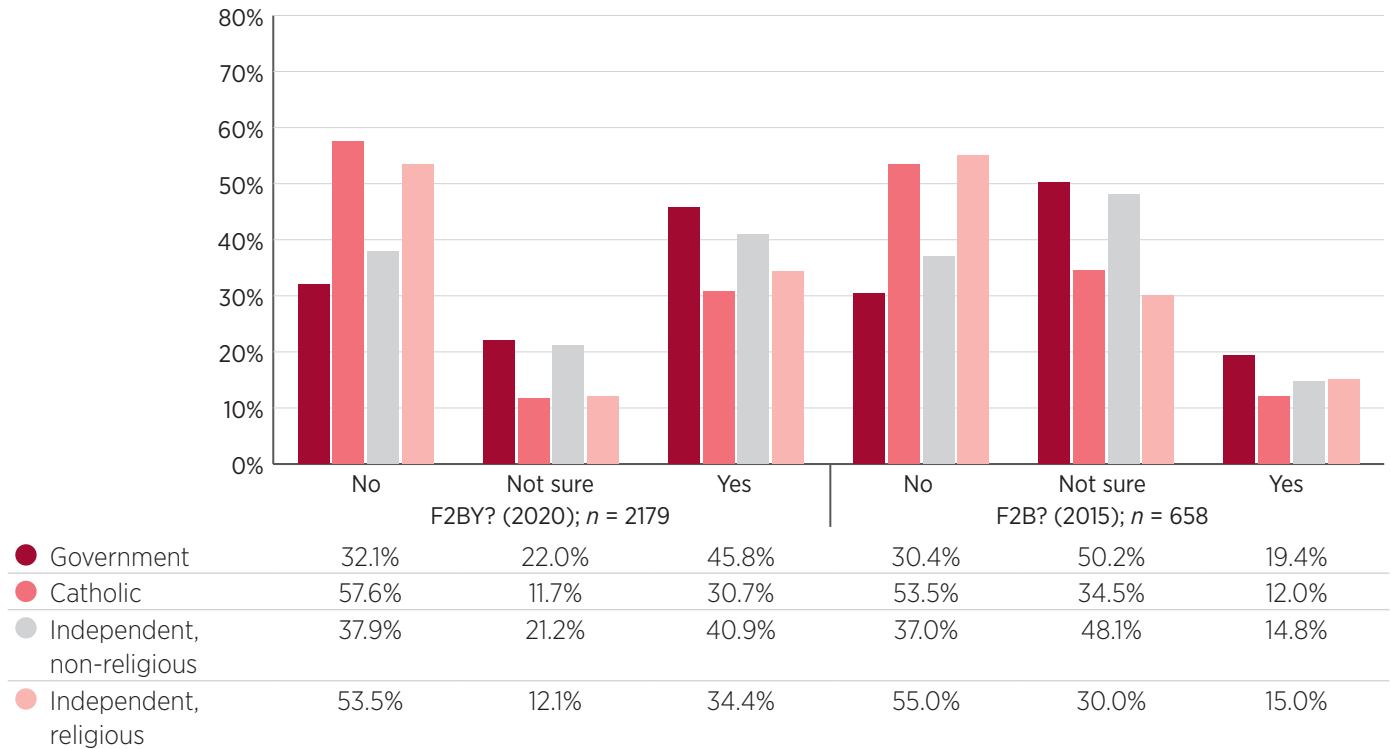
numbers of students reported their school did not have an inclusive harassment policy. Comparisons with the 2015 survey show that, while numbers of students responding in the affirmative increased, these remained low, with only 1 in 6 government school students and 1 in 16 Catholic school students reporting a harassment policy which was inclusive of gender expression.

When compared to students who reported that their schools did not have a harassment policy which was inclusive of sexual orientation, students who reported an inclusive policy were statistically significantly more likely to report

teacher intervention across all forms of verbal and physical harassment[8]. Furthermore, these students were roughly 1.5 times as likely to indicate that their teachers were openly positive about same-sex attraction[9] and gender diversity[10]. These findings highlight an evident relationship between school-wide awareness with regards to gender and sexuality diversity, evidenced here via inclusive school policy directives which have been actively communicated to students, and a teaching staff that is more positive and vocal about gender and sexuality diversity and related topics.

8   Students who reported an LBG-inclusive harassment policy were significantly more likely to report teachers' intervention in instances of 1. *verbal homophobia* [$M = 3.55$/$SD = 1.06$, for students with non-inclusive policy ($n = 745$), compared with $M = 2.82$/$SD = 1.13$, for students reporting an LGB-inclusive policy ($n = 316$)]; [$t(1059) = 10.10$, $p < .001$)]; 2. *verbal transphobia* [$M = 3.85$/$SD = 1.04$, for students with non-inclusive policy ($n = 492$), compared with $M = 2.99$/$SD = 1.20$, for students reporting an LGB-inclusive policy ($n = 207$)]; [$t(697) = 9.52$, $p < .001$)]; and 3. *physical harassment related to sexuality/gender diversity* [$M = 3.41$/$SD = 1.22$, for students with non-inclusive policy ($n = 201$), compared with $M = 2.71$/$SD = 1.21$, for students reporting an LGB-inclusive policy ($n = 52$)]; [$t(251) = 3.68$, $p < .001$)]. Frequency of teacher intervention was measured on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 ("always") to 5 ("never"), with **higher numbers indicating less frequent intervention**.

9   Students who reported an LBG-inclusive harassment policy were significantly more likely to report that their teachers spoke about same-sex attraction in a positive way. [$M = 3.15$/$SD = 1.56$, for students with non-inclusive policy ($n = 922$), compared with $M = 4.62$/$SD = 1.31$, for students reporting an LGB-inclusive policy ($n = 403$)]; [$t(1323) = -16.63$, $p < .001$)]. Positivity/support was measured on a 6-point Likert scale ranging from 1 ("definitely false") to 6 ("definitely true"), with **higher numbers pointing to a more inclusive environment**.

10   Students who reported an LBG-inclusive harassment policy were significantly more likely to report that teachers talk about different ways people express their gender. [$M = 1.71$/$SD = 1.07$, for students with non-inclusive policy ($n = 922$), compared with $M = 2.89$/$SD = 1.66$, for students reporting an LGB-inclusive policy ($n = 403$)]; [$t(1323) = -15.43$, $p < .001$)]. Positivity/support was measured on a 6-point Likert scale ranging from 1 ("definitely false") to 6 ("definitely true"), with **higher numbers pointing to a more inclusive environment**.

Figure 35: Reported Policy Inclusivity, Gender Expression, Multi-Year Comparison

	No	Not sure	Yes	No	Not sure	Yes
	F2BY? (2020); *n* = 2179			F2B? (2015); *n* = 658		
● Government	36.3%	47.2%	16.5%	37.7%	53.7%	8.6%
● Catholic	65.2%	28.4%	6.4%	64.1%	32.4%	3.5%
● Independent, non-religious	50.0%	39.4%	10.6%	40.7%	51.9%	7.4%
● Independent, religious	58.7%	34.4%	7.0%	70.0%	25.0%	5.0%
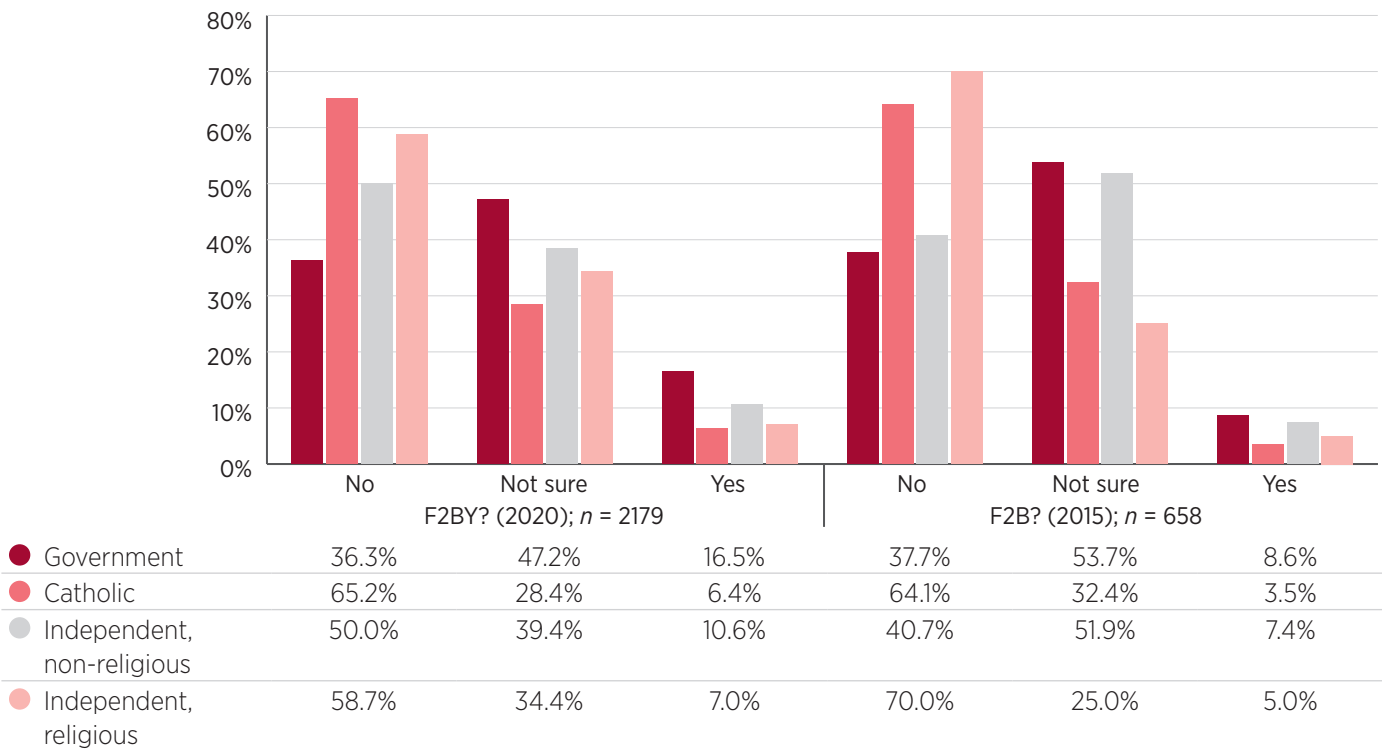
To assess how inclusive policy documentation might be associated with students' sense of school connection and wellbeing, mean scores for each of the *ATSS* (DET VIC, 2018) and *PISA* (ACER, 2018) measures were compared for the cohort of students reporting school harassment policies which were inclusive of sexual orientation and those reporting that they definitively were not inclusive. Students who were "not sure" were excluded from this analysis. It is noteworthy that students indicating that their school *did have* such a policy (*n* = 403), had statistically significantly better outcomes across every subscale measured (see Appendix C for associated statistics). The largest mean score differences between these two cohorts could be seen across students' sense of connectedness, their sense of teachers' concern for their wellbeing and their belief that their schools can effectively keep students safe as measured by the *ATSS*, each with more than a half point difference (measured on a 5-point scale). Effect sizes associated with these analyses approached a 'large' effect for several of these comparisons (Cohen, 1988).

Of critical importance, for the cohort reporting a harassment policy which was specifically inclusive of sexual orientation, mean scores for the seven of the eight *ATSS* measures were *higher* than averages reported across the state of Victoria (Figure 36). These findings indicate that policy visibility carries tangible impact for gender and sexuality diverse students and is linked to enhanced levels of school wellbeing, connection to school staff and identification with the schooling environment.

Figure 36: *ATSS* Measures Compared for Students with/out Inclusive Policy
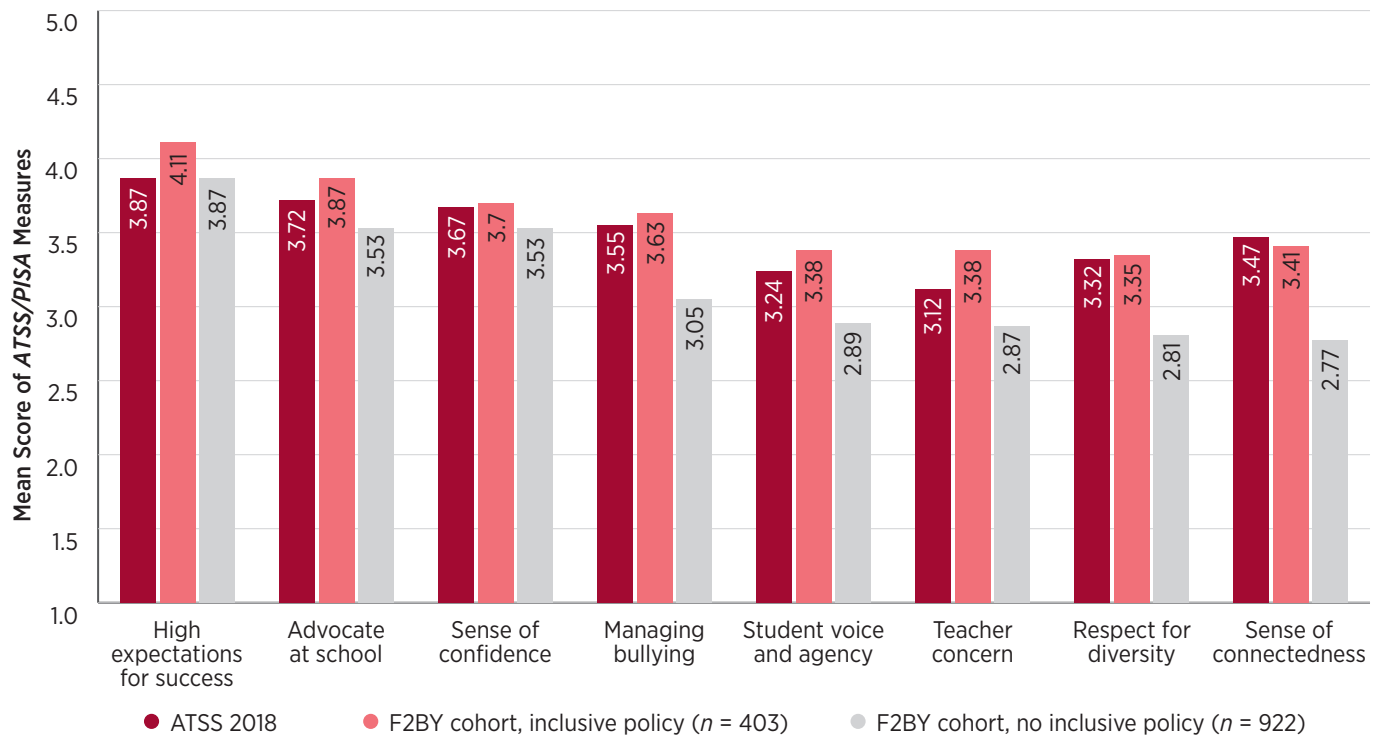
Associations with Teacher Positivity and Inclusivity

To investigate relationships between reported teacher positivity and inclusivity regarding topics related to gender and sexuality diversity and students' school wellbeing outcomes, bivariate correlations were conducted with the *ATSS* and *PISA* measures. Reported teacher positivity with respect to same-sex attraction and gender expression was statistically significantly correlated with each of these 10 subscales (see Appendix D for full statistics), with the strongest associations apparent between teacher positivity and sense of their school's respect for diversity (r = 0.44, p < .001 for sexuality diversity and r = 0.38, p < .001, for gender diversity) and their sense that they have personal voice and agency at their school (r = 0.40, p < .001 for

sexuality diversity and r = 0.35, p < .001, for gender diversity). Furthermore, it is notable that the two measures indicative of students' sense that there is a school-based adult in their 'corner' – teacher concern and advocate at school – also evidenced a moderate, positive correlation with reported positivity towards same-sex attraction (r = 0.38, p < .001 and r = 0.38, p < .001, respectively). These and the other results reported in Appendix D highlight important associations between students' sense of their teachers' positivity towards gender and sexuality diverse identities and their own sense of connection and care within their school environments.

Academic Outcomes

School climate has been linked to academic outcomes for gender and sexuality diverse young people across an array of international (Birkett et al.,2009; Kosciw et al., 2018; Murdock & Bolsh, 2005) and Australian research (Robinson et al., 2014; Smith et al., 2014; Ullman, 2015b). In the current study, participants' academic outcomes were measured via three key areas: self-concept, university plans and self-reports of truancy.

Academic Self-Concept

By way of exploring participants' self-assessments of their academic ability, the general academic self-concept scale from the *Academic Self-Description Questionnaire II* (Marsh, 1990) was included. Students' academic self-concept has been shown to have a reciprocal relationship with their actual academic achievement (Valentine et al., 2014) and has been linked to reported school climate for gender and sexuality diverse secondary students (Ullman, 2015b). This well-established, validated 8-item academic self-concept scale (reliability, a = 0.93), measured on a scale from 1 ("definitely false") to 8 ("definitely true"), was used in the current project as a proxy measure for students' academic outcomes, which cannot be reasonably standardised for comparison across schooling environments. Items in this scale referenced students' perceptions about their academic performance (e.g. "I have always done well in most school subjects") and the level of importance they attach to their own academic success (e.g. "It is important for me to do well in most school subjects").

As can be seen in Figure 37, participants' scores were at their lowest in year 8 (*M* = 5.51, *SD* = 1.58; *n* = 226), with an improved reported academic self-concept by the later years of secondary school, with a mean score of 5.94 in year 12 (*SD* = 1.29; *n* = 391), hovering just below "mostly true" (6) on the 8-point scale.

Figure 37: Mean Academic Self-Concept Scale Scores by Year of School (*n* = 2,274)

Note: Higher scores indicate a more favourable outcome. Scale score range (1-8) truncated here for improved visualisation. Participants no longer in secondary school at the time of survey completion (*n* = 102) were removed for ease of comparison.

Associations with Academic Self-Concept

Closer examination of participants' average (mean) academic self-concept scores in light of other school climate variables shows differences related to participants' reports of their teachers' behaviours and sentiments as related to care for and inclusion of sexuality diverse identities. For students who reported that they had heard homophobic language being used at school in the presence of a teacher (*n* = 1,807)[11], the minority number of students who reported that their teachers "always" positively intervened (*n* = 115) evidenced the highest academic self-concept outcomes, sitting between "mostly true" and "true" on the 8-point scale. Conversely, those who reported that their teachers "never" intervened (*n* = 260) evidenced the lowest academic self-concept outcomes. Figure 38 shows the steady decline in students' reported academic self-concept as associated with declining reported teacher intervention.

This relationship was replicated when mapping their academic self-concept against students' sense that their teachers spoke positively about same-sex attraction and/or same-sex attracted people. As shown in Figure 39, students who reported it was "definitely true" that their teachers were positive about these topics reported the highest academic self-concept. As the mean of the reported academic self-concept declined, so too did the level of reported teacher positivity, with the lowest reported academic self-concept amongst students who stated it was "definitely false" that their teachers were positive.

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11 While verbal homophobia was rampant at participants' schools, as highlighted in a previous section, a number of participants (*n* = 346) clarified that their peers did not use this language in front of adults at school.

Figure 38: Mean Academic Self-Concept Scale Scores by Reported Teacher Intervention, Verbal Homophobia (*n* = 1,807)
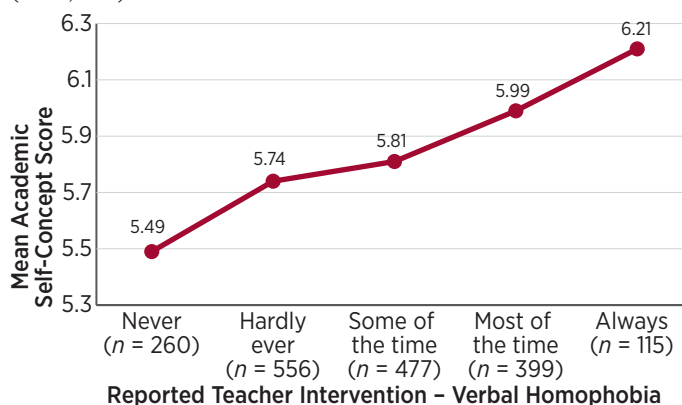
Note: Higher scores indicate a more favourable outcome. Scale score range (1-8) truncated here for improved visualisation.

Figure 39: Mean Academic Self-Concept Scale Scores by Reported Teacher Positivity about Same-Sex Attraction (*N* = 2,376)

Note: Higher scores indicate a more favourable outcome. Scale score range (1-8) truncated here for improved visualisation.

In order to explore relationships across participants' school wellbeing outcomes and their academic self-concept, a series of bivariate correlations were conducted. Such investigations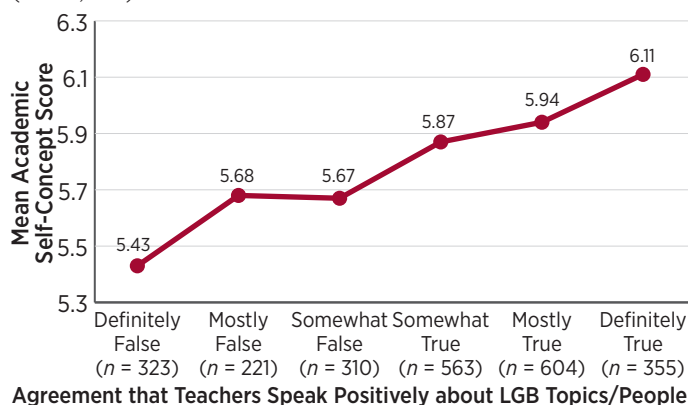 allow for an examination of the strength of association between key variable pairs and the associated level of statistical significance of that association. In terms of school wellbeing outcomes, students' reported academic self-concept was statistically significantly correlated with each of the school wellbeing subscales as measured by the *ATSS* (DET VIC, 2018) and the *PISA* (ACER, 2018; see Appendix E for the full set of correlations referred to in this section). Notably, a strong relationship was apparent between students' academic self-concept and their sense that their teachers were personally invested in their academic achievement ("high expectations for success"; *r* = 0.41, *p* < .001). Likewise, where students felt a stronger sense of school connection, as measured by the *ATSS*, and school belonging, as measured using the *PISA* subscale, they reported a higher academic self-concept (*r* = 0.41 and *r* = 0.37, respectively; both *p* < .001). Taken together with previously reported findings, results point to a complex relationship amongst reported school climate, school wellbeing and academic outcomes for gender and sexuality diverse students.

University Plans

A stand-alone item asked participants about the likelihood of attending university, originally measured on a 7-point scale from 1 – "very unlikely" to 7 – "very likely", with the mean participant score hovering between "somewhat likely" and "likely" to attend university (*M* = 5.63, *SD* = 1.79; *n* = 2,168). Despite the high overall mean, a small percentage of participants indicated a low likelihood of university attendance (12% of the sample). To better explore relationships between students' reported university plans and measures of their school wellbeing, scores were collapsed into broader categories of "unlikely" (1–3, *n* = 279), "neutral" (4; *n* = 181) and "likely" (5–7; *n* = 1,708). Comparisons of group mean scores (ANOVAs) were conducted for the three categories of perceived likelihood of university attendance across each of the eight school wellbeing subscales of the *ATSS* (DET VIC, 2018) and the two *PISA* measures (ACER, 2018). Mean scores across the three groups were statistically significantly different for every subscale measured, with the largest group differences between those participants who reported they were "unlikely" and those who reported they were "likely" to go to university (see Appendix F for the full statistical results). In real terms, gender and sexuality diverse students reporting enhanced school wellbeing outcomes – who felt included and less isolated at school, felt more cared for and invested in by their teachers – were significantly more likely to indicate that they would go on to complete university study.

Truancy

An additional stand-alone item asked participants how many times over the preceding three months they had "wagged or skipped a class without having an official reason (such as being sick or having an appointment)". Of the 2,167 students who responded to this item, 55% had not truanted in the three months preceding survey completion (n = 1,200), 23% had missed school only once or twice (n = 492) and 22% had missed school three or more times (n = 475), with a subset of these (6.3%; n = 136) reporting missing school more than ten times in three months. Reported frequency of missing classes was statistically significantly associated with each of the school wellbeing outcomes assessed through the *ATSS* (DET VIC, 2018) and *PISA* (ACER, 2018) measures. In terms of school wellbeing, students who reported higher levels of reported school connectedness were less likely to report missing classes (r = 0.24, p < .001), as were students with higher levels of reported school confidence (r = 0.23, p < .001) (see Appendix E). Figure 40 visually depicts the relationship between students' reported truancy and their sense of school connectedness.

A follow-up open-ended item asked students why they might "have skipped school or classes on those days", with 930 participants providing a response. Of these, many detailed what might be considered innocuous, or typical, reasons for having missed school, including avoidance of academic deadlines or requiring more time to complete assessment tasks (n = 225; 24% of open-ended responses); socialising with friends (n = 56; 6% of open-ended responses); or other miscellaneous responses related to family commitments, having 'slept in' or otherwise feeling tired and not up to attending school that day (n = 106; 11% of open-ended responses).

Figure 40: Mean School Connectedness Scores by Reported Truancy (n = 2,167)
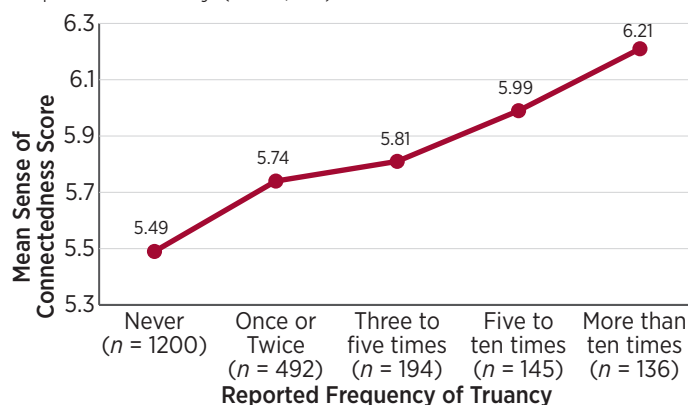
Note: Higher scores indicate a more favourable outcome. Scale score range (1-5) truncated here for improved visualisation. Missing data (n = 209) not shown here.

Other sub-groups of responses were more concerning. Almost 40% of responses (n = 364) described mental health issues, with depression and anxiety featuring heavily. Students here spoke about the various ways that the schooling environment exacerbated their mental health challenges. In particular, concerns related to loneliness or isolation, personal safety and generalised anxiety featured prominently.

> » *Anxiety and that I never do anything fun, the whole system is unfair, and all I do is read in the library because I have no friends.*
>
> » *Having issues with friends or having particularly high anxiety for no reason. Also missed a sporting event because I felt unsafe and I would have been bullied if I attended.*
>
> » *Feeling depressed/very down and knowing if I go to that certain classes I will have to face certain consequences, like classmates that I really do not want to be friends with will tease me or make jokes about me out loud in class.*
>
> » *I went through a two-week phase where I couldn't face the idea of going to school, and would break down at night time when talking to my mum as it was so overwhelming. I ended up moving schools.*

An additional group of responses specifically referenced conflicts and safety concerns, both related to their peers (*n* = 189; 20% of open-ended responses) and their teachers (*n* = 77; 8% of open-ended responses). These accounts spoke about bullying, harassment or arguments which may have been related to gender and sexuality diversity but did not specifically name this as the impetus for their withdraw from class/school.

> » *Class was getting too rough with students.*
>
> » *Scared of bullying and confrontation.*
>
> » *I felt scared to go to class as people were horrible to me, and it scared me that they might get physical.*
>
> » *Because I didn't feel I was needed in the classroom due to feeling like an outsider.*
>
> » *The teacher made me feel uncomfortable.*
>
> » *Scared of teacher.*

While across the responses referencing mental health and conflicts, many students alluded to issues likely related to school climate concerns for gender and sexuality diverse students, a comparatively small number of responses articulated specific reference to gender and sexuality diversity (*n* = 40; 4% of open-ended items).

> » *Recently I left school for a day because we did an activity where we had to write a card to someone. One boy wrote a card that said "you're gay, you have no friends, kill yourself" on the back it said "don't show this to teachers or you might want to watch your back".*
>
> » *I have felt uncomfortable with being in a class with students who constantly mock sexuality, gender and mental health. I've had several panic attacks at school and I went to the sick office about it once. She told me to relax...*

> » *I have depression, anxiety, and PTSD. This causes me to have a lot of difficulty to go out and do well. My school is very homophobic and as I am a gay female with short hair, verbal harassment is quite common. Some days this gets to me. I have no motivation to do anything. I have suicidal tendencies and going to school makes it worse. School is a hell hole for me and other LGBT+ people who attend. With my declining mental state, it becomes harder and harder every day.*
>
> » *Once I skipped classes because highly transphobic boys are in that class (Maths) and they frequently tease me about being genderfluid/non-binary, one time upsetting me to the point I shouted at them to defend myself (they were telling me I'm a girl and therefore should stop wearing the boys' uniform and were calling me "it"). Other times I skipped were because I felt I would get beaten or threatened for my identity.*
>
> » *I didn't want to go to chapel because they are against my sexuality.*

Conclusions

Findings from the *Free2Be...Yet?* second national survey of Australian high school students who identify as gender and sexuality diverse offer important information about what school is like for this group of young people. Looking across the broad trends in the data, it appears that the majority of young people attend schools in which language which marginalises gender and sexuality diversity is commonplace and teachers and other school-based adults do not respond to this language with consistency. Young people described schools where, although individual teachers may be positive about same-sex attraction, the formal health and physical education curriculum is silent about gender and sexuality. Silences were more prevalent around the topic of gender diversity, within both the curriculum and local school policy, and teachers were viewed as less likely to intervene during instances of transphobic language at school. While, compared to participating students in the 2015 *Free2Be?* research, this cohort was more likely to report school policies which were specifically inclusive of sexual orientation, such policies were less commonly reported in religiously-affiliated schools; likewise, students from the religious school sector were far less likely to have access to information and support about gender and sexuality diversity.

Where possible, national and international baseline trend data was used to get a better sense of how gender and sexuality diverse students are faring as compared to their peers. Compared to published averages for 15-year-old students worldwide using the *Programme for International Student Assessment* (PISA) data (ACER, 2018), 15-year-old gender and sexuality diverse students from across Australia reported very low school-based belonging and high rates of school-based isolation, with scores notably far worse than even the lowest performing countries. Mainstream trend data from high school students across the state of Victoria offered a secondary point of comparison, with gender and sexuality diverse students reporting lower average scores across nearly every subscale of the *Attitudes to School Survey* (VIC DET, 2018), used to measure school wellbeing. A closer examination revealed that, as with the mainstream population of Victorian students, participants in years 8 and 9 reported the worst school wellbeing outcomes as compared to their older peers; however, gender and sexuality diverse students' scores evidenced larger downward deviations in their scores within these years of schooling than their mainstream peers.

Results from this work are consistent with other research from the field which concludes that curricular and policy inclusions have an influence on the school wellbeing and academic outcomes of gender and sexuality diverse students. While participating gender and sexuality diverse students, on average, reported poorer outcomes on the *Attitudes to School Survey* (VIC DET, 2018), students in schools where inclusive policies had been communicated to the student body reported outcomes which were higher than Victorian state averages. Compared to students whose school-based policies were not inclusive, students in schools with inclusive policies reported significantly higher school wellbeing, with notable effect sizes related to general school belonging and students' sense that their teachers were personally invested in them.

... it appears that the majority of young people attend schools in which language which marginalises gender and sexuality diversity is commonplace ...

Where teachers were reported to be positive about sexuality diversity and to regularly intervene during instances of homophobic and transphobic harassment, students had significantly better school wellbeing outcomes. In particular, where teachers were viewed as positive about same-sex attraction and diverse gender expression, students felt less isolated, more personally valued within the school community and confident that they had a school-based adult who was invested in their academic and social wellbeing. Likewise, students in schools where their health and physical education curriculum was overtly inclusive of gender and sexuality diversity fared significantly better on every measure of school wellbeing, with students' faith in their teachers' ability to manage bullying and sense that they had a 'voice' in their school standing out with the largest overall effect sizes.

Students' reported school wellbeing was significantly associated with their academic self-concept and reported truancy; where students felt more connected to their teachers and peers, they were more confident in their academic capabilities and more likely to attend school regularly. Further, where students had higher school wellbeing scores, they were significantly more likely to aspire to tertiary study. Taken as a whole, these findings point to the connections between gender and sexuality diverse students' sense that they are visible, valued and protected members of their school community and their sense that they are capable students who should continue through to university study.

While the cross-sectional nature of this research makes the identification of true causal relationships impossible, these results nevertheless compel recommendations, specifically with regards to those elements of school climate directly under educators' and Departmental stakeholders' jurisdiction. These recommendations mirror those reported at the conclusion of the 2015 *Free2Be?* report – an indication that, while awareness of gender and sexuality diversity may have increased in the years between data collection periods, this has not necessarily been reflected in school curriculum, policy and broader schooling discourse.

Where teachers were reported to be positive about sexuality diversity and to regularly intervene during instances of homophobic and transphobic harassment, students had significantly better school wellbeing outcomes.

Recommendations for School Leadership Personnel

- **Make a formal commitment to support the safety and wellbeing of gender and sexuality diverse students** and communicate that commitment to teaching and other school staff, explicitly and regularly. Evidence that commitment via formal inclusions in publicly available school policies (e.g. student wellbeing; harassment/bullying) and communicate the rationale for, and implications of, those policies to teaching staff, students and their carers.

- **Design and implement a universal and consistent protocol** for addressing homophobic and transphobic language and physical harassment within the school community. Ensure that this protocol a) includes an educative, rather than a punitive, component and b) provides clear guidelines for the language to be used by teachers and other school staff during its implementation.

- **Acknowledge that positive visibility and normalisation of gender and sexuality diversity is central** to the reduction of associated bias-motivated (homophobic/transphobic) harassment and a prerequisite for a positive school climate for gender and sexuality diverse students. Accordingly, solicit, address, and work consistently to allay, teachers' concerns and fears about the parameters of relevant inclusions (e.g. which topics may be discussed, at which times and in what ways) and highlight the areas of the existing school curriculum in which there are clear provisions for inclusive material.

- **Source and promote professional development training for all school staff** with a focus on developing a whole-school approach to supporting and affirming gender and sexuality diverse students. Additional training will be needed for staff teaching health and physical education to promote inclusive practices, language and content across sexuality and relationships education.

- **Acknowledge that inclusive, relevant physical and sexual health information is a right of all young people** and provide inclusive sexuality and relationships education programs for all students.

- **Ensure that local school policy articulates provisions for transgender, non-binary, gender fluid and transitioning students**, covering uniform options; use of toilet/changing facilities; name and pronoun use; and assisted communication with the school community. Allow for the implementation of these to be student-led/informed and flexible.

- **Ensure the availability of single-occupant toilet and changing facilities for gender and sexuality diverse students** who may wish to use these. Importantly, acknowledge that students may wish to use the communal facilities commensurate with their gender identity and work to facilitate this where preferred.

- **Proactively let students know how they can report bias-motivated marginalisation**, by students or by school staff, and work to create a school climate in which gender and sexuality diverse students are encouraged to advocate for their needs.

- Since the field of gender and sexuality diversity is an ever-evolving space, with a growing glossary of terms, **acknowledge that gender and sexuality diverse young people have much to offer older generations**. Consider how interested young people might contribute to staff professional development on this topic.

- **Ensure that counsellors and other school staff members responsible for students' social and emotional wellbeing are trained** in inclusive practices and well-resourced to support gender and sexuality diverse students.

Recommendations for Teachers

- **Attend local professional development sessions on gender and sexuality diversity** across the primary and secondary years of schooling and share information and resources with colleagues.

- **Investigate student wellbeing policies for inclusive language and explicit mention of gender and sexuality diversity**. Where ambiguities, silences or oversights persist, communicate these to school leadership personnel.

- **Address homophobia and transphobia in the classroom, or in any other school location, consistently and with an aim to educate.** Encourage conversation on these topics and clearly outline the parameters of appropriate and inappropriate language to describe individuals and gender and sexuality diverse identities.

- Work to **establish a classroom climate where gender and sexuality diverse students feel safe** for curricular inclusions and to report marginalisation from peers or adults in the school.

- **Assess your curricular resources for inclusivity**; where heteronormativity persists in this documentation, alert school leadership personnel and advocate for inclusions.

- Communicate with the school librarian, school wellbeing personnel and school leadership to **ensure that students know where to go for additional information and support** related to gender and sexuality diversity.

Recommendations for State and Federal Departments of Education

- Ensure that published **student wellbeing resources** articulate the connections between (a) the visibility and affirmation of gender and sexuality diversity at school and (b) gender and sexuality diverse students' sense of school connection and academic capacity.

- Ensure that sector-wide policies, curriculum and syllabus documents provide both **unambiguous direction for educators to speak in an inclusive, affirming manner about gender and sexuality diversity** across all areas of the curriculum and guidance on the practicalities of this approach.

- Ensure that sector-wide policies outline explicit institutional responsibility for the **entitlement of gender and sexuality diverse students to receive safe, equitable educational experiences**, in which they are visible within the curriculum.

- Help **promote teachers' professional development in gender and sexuality diverse-inclusive pedagogies** for teachers at all levels of K-12 education.

About the Author

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Associate Professor Jacqueline Ullman is a Senior Researcher in the Centre for Educational Research at Western Sydney University and a member of the Sexualities and Genders Research network (SaGR). She has had a career-long focus on gender and sexuality diversity in schooling, with multiple related projects investigating the experiences of students, families, educators and school administrators, as they navigate curriculum, policy and community sentiment. A/P Ullman has published widely on these topics with articles in journals including: *Sex Education*, *Journal of Youth Studies*, *Teaching Education*, *Journal of School Psychology* and *Children and Youth Services Review*. She is the recipient of several major competitive grants, including two Australian Research Council Discovery Projects exploring parents' perspectives on gender and sexuality diversity -inclusive curriculum (with A/P Tania Ferfolja and Prof. Tara Goldstein) and sexism in the Australian academy (with Prof. Mindy Blaise and Dr. Emily Gray). A/P Ullman's 2020 co-authored book (with A/P Tania Ferfolja) *Gender and Sexuality Diversity in a Culture of Limitation: Student and Teacher Experiences in Schools* is published by Routledge.

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Statistical Analyses

Appendix A: Pearson's Product Moment Correlations between School Connection Measures and Reported Marginalisation

	Homophobic Language		Transphobic Language		Physical Harassment	
	Frequency $n = 2{,}196$	Freq. Intervention $n = 1{,}807$	Frequency $n = 1{,}677$	Freq. Intervention $n = 1{,}157$	Frequency $n = 674$	Freq. Intervention $n = 368$
ATSS Measures						
High expectations for success	-.16**	-.28**	-.19**	-.23**	-.17**	-.21**
Teacher concern	-.15**	-.34**	-.18**	-.32**	-.19**	-.30**
Advocate at school	-.15**	-.29**	-.22**	-.27**	-.25**	-.29**
Sense of connectedness	-.25**	-.32**	-.26**	-.31**	-.24**	-.31**
Student voice and agency	-.22**	-.34**	-.26**	-.33**	-.23**	-.36**
Respect for diversity	-.33**	-.37**	-.33**	-.35**	-.23**	-.40**
Sense of confidence	-.08**	-.15**	-.10**	-.10**	-.14**	-.18**
Managing bullying	-.27**	-.36**	-.29**	-.34**	-.24**	-.35**
PISA Measures						
School isolation	-.17**	-.21**	-.20**	-.21**	-.26**	-.19**
School belonging	-.19**	-.24**	-.22**	-.24**	-.27**	-.20**

Note: For all marginalising practices as shown in the columns above, higher scores indicate a more negative outcome (e.g. higher frequency of marginalising behaviours; lower reported teacher intervention during these behaviours). Thus, negative correlations indicate an inverse relationship.

** = $p \leq .01$

Correlation coefficients (r) can be interpreted where 0.1 = small; 0.3 = medium; 0.5 = large effect size. See https://imaging.mrc-cbu.cam.ac.uk/statswiki/FAQ/effectSize

Appendix B: Group Mean Comparisons on School Wellbeing for Students with Varying Levels of HPE Inclusivity

	High HPE Inclusion			Mid HPE Inclusion			Low HPE Inclusion			F (df)	η^2
	n	M	SE	n	M	SE	n	M	SE		
ATSS Measures											
High expectations for success	98	4.20	.02	365	4.10	.03	1,615	3.94	.02	16.98 [a]*** (2)	.01
Teacher concern	98	3.65	.09	365	3.33	.05	1,615	3.03	.02	35.15*** (2)	.03
Advocate at school	98	4.14	.07	365	3.87	.04	1,615	3.62	.02	32.63*** (2)	.03
Sense of connectedness	98	3.62	.10	365	3.37	.05	1,615	2.97	.03	37.53*** (2)	.03
Student voice and agency	98	3.65	.07	365	3.36	.04	1,615	3.02	.02	65.38[a]*** (2)	.05
Respect for diversity	98	3.64	.08	365	3.35	.04	1,615	2.96	.02	61.66*** (2)	.06
Sense of confidence	98	3.76	.08	365	3.74	.04	1,615	3.54	.02	11.46 [a]*** (2)	.01
Managing bullying	98	3.91	.08	365	3.60	.04	1,615	3.21	.02	64.11 [a]*** (2)	.05
PISA Measures											
School isolation	98	2.56	.08	365	2.60	.04	1,615	2.35	.02	16.44*** (2)	.02
School belonging	98	2.83	.06	365	2.73	.03	1,615	2.51	.02	25.12*** (2)	.02

Note: Only students in years 9 and up were included in this analysis, given the suggested stage for HPE inclusion in the Australian national curriculum (*n* = 2078).

*** = $p \leq .001$

[a]Welch's F statistic

Effect sizes for ANOVA comparisons of mean scores by group (η^2) can be interpreted where 0.01 = small; 0.06 = medium; 0.16 = large effect size.
See https://imaging.mrc-cbu.cam.ac.uk/statswiki/FAQ/effectSize

Appendix C: Group Mean Comparisons on School Wellbeing for Students with/without LGB-Inclusive Policy

	LGB-Inclusive Policy		*t*	*df*	Cohen's *d*
	YES (*n* = 403)	NO (*n* = 922)			
ATSS Measures					
High expectations for success	4.11 (.57)	3.87 (.65)	-6.815***	863.032	.40
Teacher concern	3.38 (.90)	2.87 (.90)	-9.467***	1323	.57
Advocate at school	3.87 (.74)	3.53 (.79)	-7.497***	1323	.45
Sense of connectedness	3.41 (1.03)	2.78 (1.02)	-10.371***	1323	.62
Student voice and agency	3.38 (.73)	2.89 (.76)	-10.894***	1323	.66
Respect for diversity	3.35 (.82)	2.81 (.81)	-11.241***	1323	.67
Sense of confidence	3.71 (.81)	3.53 (.89)	-3.573***	839.784	.21
Managing bullying	3.63 (.82)	3.05 (.88)	-11.273***	1323	.68
PISA Measures					
School isolation	2.52 (.83)	2.31 (.76)	-4.306***	703.694	.26
School belonging	2.70 (.65)	2.45 (.67)	-6.213***	783.498	.37

Note: For all measures of the ATSS and PISA, higher scores indicate more positive outcomes. Standard Deviations appear in parentheses below means.

*** = $p \leq .001$

Cohen's *d* measure of effect size for mean score comparisons of two groups can be interpreted where 0.2 = small; 0.5 = medium; 0.8 = large effect size. See https://imaging.mrc-cbu.cam.ac.uk/statswiki/FAQ/effectSize

Appendix D: Pearson's Product Moment Correlations between School Wellbeing and Reported Teacher Positivity

	Teacher Positivity Regarding...	
	Same-Sex Attraction (*N* = 2,376)	Diverse Gender Expression (*N* = 2,376)
ATSS Measures		
High expectations for success	.30**	.20**
Teacher concern	.38**	.31**
Advocate at school	.38**	.26**
Sense of connectedness	.39**	.32**
Student voice and agency	.40**	.35**
Respect for diversity	.44**	.38**
Sense of confidence	.19**	.13**
Managing bullying	.40**	.32**
PISA Measures		
School isolation	.26**	.21**
School belonging	.29**	.25**

Note: For all measures included here, higher scores indicate more positive outcomes (e.g. greater frequency of teacher positivity; stronger sense of connectedness).

** = $p ≤ .01$

Correlation coefficients (*r*) can be interpreted where 0.1 = small; 0.3 = medium; 0.5 = large effect size. See https://imaging.mrc-cbu.cam.ac.uk/statswiki/FAQ/effectSize

Appendix E: Pearson's Product Moment Correlations between School Wellbeing and Selected Academic Outcomes

	Academic Self-Concept (N = 2,376)	Reported Freq. Truancy (n = 2,167)
ATSS Measures		
High expectations for success	.41**	.21**
Teacher concern	.30**	.15**
Advocate at school	.33**	.16**
Sense of connectedness	.41**	.24**
Student voice and agency	.39**	.18**
Respect for diversity	.25**	.18**
Sense of confidence	.78**	.23**
Managing bullying	.27**	.20**
PISA Measures		
School isolation	.30**	.14**
School belonging	.37**	.17**

Note: For all measures included here, higher scores indicate either a more positive outcome (e.g. less truancy; higher self-concept; stronger sense of connectedness).

** = $p \leq .01$

Correlation coefficients (*r*) can be interpreted where 0.1 = small; 0.3 = medium; 0.5 = large effect size. See https://imaging.mrc-cbu.cam.ac.uk/statswiki/FAQ/effectSize

Appendix F: Group Mean Comparisons on School Wellbeing for Students with Varying University Plans

	Likely to attend			Neutral			Unlikely to attend			F (df)	η²
	n	M	SE	n	M	SE	n	M	SE		
ATSS Measures											
High expectations for success	1,708	4.04	.01	181	3.74	.05	279	3.78	.04	30.55 [a]*** (2)	.03
Teacher concern	1,708	3.13	.02	181	2.91	.07	279	2.98	.06	6.93 [a]*** (2)	.01
Advocate at school	1,708	3.72	.02	181	3.44	.06	279	3.52	.05	16.12 [a]*** (2)	.01
Sense of connectedness	1,708	3.17	.02	181	2.75	.08	279	2.60	.07	42.19 [a]*** (2)	.03
Student voice and agency	1,708	3.17	.02	181	2.86	.05	279	2.86	.05	29.58 [a]*** (2)	.04
Respect for diversity	1,708	3.11	.02	181	2.89	.06	279	2.84	.05	17.35*** (2)	.02
Sense of confidence	1,708	3.72	.02	181	3.05	.06	279	3.02	.06	113.77 [a]*** (2)	.12
Managing bullying	1,708	3.36	.02	181	3.14	.07	279	3.12	.06	12.29 [a]*** (2)	.01
PISA Measures											
School isolation	1,708	2.48	.02	181	2.15	.06	279	2.16	.05	31.92*** (2)	.03
School belonging	1,708	2.62	.01	181	2.36	.05	279	2.32	.04	31.32 [a]*** (2)	.03

Note: For all measures included here, higher scores indicate a more positive outcome.

*** = $p \leq .001$

[a]Welch's F statistic

Effect sizes for ANOVA comparisons of mean scores by group (η^2) can be interpreted where 0.01 = small; 0.06 = medium; 0.16 = large effect size.
See https://imaging.mrc-cbu.cam.ac.uk/statswiki/FAQ/effectSize

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