

School's LGBTQ+ initiatives have wide-ranging influence

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Sarah Sawyerr, assistant headteacher, Ricards Lodge High School, explains how their initiatives have included students running training sessions for educational and health care professionals, and primary pupils

Ricards Lodge is a school which celebrates difference. We are a girls' community school with a co-educational sixth form in Wimbledon, southwest London. We have a rich and diverse community of students and staff. Our students come largely from Merton, Wandsworth and Sutton local authorities with a variety of social and economic backgrounds. Pupil premium numbers including free school meals are about 30%. At the last count, students at our school spoke 81 different languages, with 43 % having English as an additional language.

The school is firmly committed to promoting, celebrating and valuing the diversity of all our staff and students, and we aim to create an open and welcoming environment. Taking seriously our commitment to equality of opportunity, we seek to challenge and address discrimination, inequality and stereotyping in all areas, including those associated with gender and sexuality. Our aim is to develop a culture of inclusion and diversity in which all those connected to our school

feel proud of their identity and are able to participate fully in school life. The school values of trust, equality, resilience and aspiration have been agreed by all members of our school community.

Ofsted approves

Our spiritual, moral, social and cultural agenda, developed over several years, has been highlighted as a real strength of the school. In our recent Ofsted report comments included; ‘The school’s focus on developing pupils’ awareness of SMSC issues is exceptional. When inspectors asked pupils to talk about their school, they often responded with the words ”opportunities” and ”inclusive”.’ SMSC is embedded in the personal development, behaviour and welfare section of our school strategic plan, monitored by the senior leadership team and reported to the governing body. SMSC also links closely to the personal and professional conduct of staff: at a recent CPD session for new staff and PGCE students, staff received training on non-binary terminology, including the use of non-gendered pronouns.

Ricards Lodge has an SMSC working group of students and staff. Its well-attended meeting drive the school’s SMSC principles. The SMSC lead is also part of the local authority equality working group. Three years ago, the school set up its own LGBTQ+ group, initially with a youth worker provided and paid for by the local authority. When the funding ceased, we set about running the group ourselves. The group meets fortnightly and offers a safe space for students to come and be themselves and discuss issues and concerns in an open forum. The Ofsted report also stated ‘The school’s work on inclusion and challenging stereotypes has established a culture where differences are celebrated. The school’s high-profile LGBTQ+ group (providing support for issues in relation to sexuality) is another example of ... outstanding work to promote equality.’

Students train professionals and primary pupils

Students have been asked to run a number of high profile training sessions for educational and health care professionals. In May 2017 the group led a conference for educational and health care professionals about issues in schools that affect students from the LGBTQ+ community. In November 2017 the group presented at a trans inclusion conference about advice and guidance on trans-inclusive policy and practice in schools. The group are currently creating schemes of work exploring LGBTQ+ relationships to support the teaching of sex and relationships education in the PSHE curriculum.

In addition, the group have run a number of workshops in local primary schools to address issues associated with homophobic language. Students organised a series of role plays and scenarios to encourage the younger pupils to reflect on their behaviour and consider how best to support young people from the LGBTQ+ community.

In a recent survey of the group, students responded to questions such as ‘why do you come to the group?’ with comments including: ‘The opportunities we get are good and the support and sense of trust and community,’ ‘People are accepting....it is a safe space.’

At Ricards Lodge we aim to ensure that our young people are comfortable when talking about sexuality and gender. Staff give visible signs that students have a safe space to talk openly in order that all young people can achieve their full potential regardless of which part of the rainbow alliance they represent.

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To support schools tackle homo, bi and transphobic bullying, SSAT are giving teachers, leaders and students in our member schools the opportunity to march in the Pride in London 2018 parade together, under the joint banner of SSAT, the Schools, Students and Teachers network. The allocation of 80 was fully booked in under two weeks. Find out more about the opportunity [here](#). If you're interested in Pride in London 2019 please email RMTeam@ssatuk.co.uk.

Read on the SSAT blog: [Tackling homo, bi and transphobic language can be difficult for many teachers... but it's essential that we do](#)



Sarah Sawyerr, Ricards Lodge High School

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