

# It Can Get Better Right Now: Ending School-Based Homophobia



## “But ‘It Gets Better’...”

The very successful “It Gets Better” campaign has a very important message for all young lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people: others have shared similar experiences to you and gone on to bigger and better things. But understandably that could seem like a long time to wait.

It can be better **right now** for LGBT students. They don’t have time to wait.

## “But it’s better these days...”

With greater general levels of community acceptance and visibility of all things LGBT than ever before, it can seem easier and better for young people today. However, the research evidence is beyond debate: about two-thirds of same-sex attracted and gender questioning students face abuse and harassment. This level has not changed significantly since 1998 (Writing Themselves In series).

## “But so much is happening: the marriage equality debate, gay people on TV, anti-homophobia campaigns...”

There’s never been a greater level of discussion of all things non-heterosexual in Australian society. There’s also never been more (public) negative opinions and haters, often in the name of “balanced” reporting. It’s clear that it’s time for the ‘good’ LGBT talk to translate to evidence-based action where it matters: in everyday school classrooms.



## Beyond ‘That’s So Gay’: we have a long way to go

Beyond ‘That’s So Gay’ was a 38-week national challenging homophobia tour of **regional, rural and remote** Australia. For 266-days, Daniel Witthaus drove to almost every nook and cranny of this country to get a modern-day snapshot of what life is like for LGBT people.



After 100s and 100s of cuppa conversations it’s clear: school-based homophobia **is not going away**. Modern day Australian schools do have more examples of openly LGBT students and teachers than ever before. But apart from some rare examples in inner-city centres, most LGBT young people who came out did so **in spite of their school environment** and not because of it. Despite dazzling exceptions, the overwhelming majority of LGBT students do not feel safe and supported to “come out” at school. Yes, that includes Melbourne and Sydney too.

The overwhelming majority of teachers and schools reported that they did not have any gay students; at best, support teachers said they would “deal with it” if a student came out, not before. In many ways the focus on LGBT students coming out distracts schools from what is most important: making schools safe and supportive for all students, especially those LGBT students who can’t or won’t come out.

Unfortunately only the “occasional teacher” is doing something about homophobic language and behaviour in everyday Australian schools. The majority of homophobic language and behaviour in school environments **is not challenged or interrupted** by teachers. Most teachers indicate that they would like to do more, but said they lacked the right tools and the confidence to use them.

Interestingly, transgender young people and those who support them identified that although transphobia is alive and well across the country, it is homophobia that **most impacts** on their everyday lives.

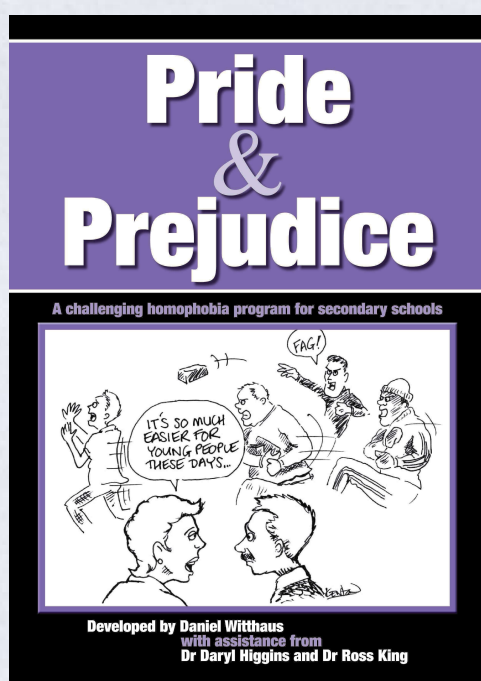
**For more information and strategies:**  
[www.thatssogay.com.au/findings](http://www.thatssogay.com.au/findings)



### What they're not telling you: 10 years of success

There is something that schools can do **right now**. Launched at VicHealth, the original funding body, in 2002, the Pride & Prejudice educational package has found its way into over 1000 Australian schools.

Formally evaluated by Deakin University (2001, 2006, 2010), Pride & Prejudice significantly improves attitudes to gay men and lesbians AND, more importantly, **reduces homo-aggressive behaviours** (i.e. the ones that research evidence tells us makes the biggest difference between an LGBT young person surviving or thriving). No other project or program has been able to replicate these formally evaluated results, particularly because teachers and health professionals took ownership and delivered Pride & Prejudice themselves. In 2006 this prompted Tasmania's education minister and Rodney Croome to call Pride & Prejudice **international best practice**. Not bad for a program piloted in a regional all-boys Catholic school (in the late 1990s no less).



### How it works

Now in its **third edition**, Pride & Prejudice is an easy-to-follow, interactive six-week program that gets students talking. The package includes a DVD, and step-by-step session outlines with handouts.

The essence of the program is to provide **real examples** of lesbian, gay and bisexual people. It provides a **safe and supportive** environment for students to talk about sexual diversity and homophobia with their peers.

This is more than a rainbow sticker, a poster or something "only for the gay kids". Pride & Prejudice is not just about supporting same-sex attracted young people. It recognises that there are **benefits for ALL students** when homophobic attitudes and behaviours are challenged, particularly when homophobia is closely tied to general bullying.

### Not (quite) ready for Pride & Prejudice?

Everyday schools still report that they "don't know where to start" or that their school "isn't ready yet". For those schools there is a helpful stepping-stone, based on over a decade of Pride & Prejudice work in schools. Beyond 'That's So Gay': Challenging homophobia in Australia schools provides **everything a teacher, health professional or homophobic-curious individual would need to effectively challenge and interrupt homophobia** and affirm sexual diversity. It is practical, entertaining and easy-to-follow. It encourages schools to assess their **school community readiness** and helps them develop a blueprint for ending school-based homophobia.



### What you can do: Approach your local school or library

Following the Beyond 'That's So Gay' tour, a small number of individuals decided to **take action** in their local schools and libraries across the country. They reported that they had success in approaching their local schools and libraries to see if they knew of Pride & Prejudice and Beyond 'That's So Gay'. In most cases the schools and libraries were pleasantly surprised and then ordered one or both. In one example, a man from regional NSW bought both and donated them to his former school.





### A simple request

1. Please contact your former and/or local school to ask if they can order a copy of:

**Beyond 'That's So Gay': Challenging homophobia in Australia schools**

**Pride & Prejudice: Challenging Homophobia Program for Everyday Classrooms**

2. Please contact your local library (community, school or university) to ask if they can order a copy of either resource, or both.

3. Please contact your educator and health professional friends to ask the same.

4. Consider donating copies to a school, a library or someone you know that does not have the budget. One young man from rural South Australia reported buying 5 copies of Beyond 'That's So Gay' for his teacher and health professional friends for Christmas.

5. Let us know how you go.

E-mail [daniel@thatssogay.com.au](mailto:daniel@thatssogay.com.au) and share your progress.

### 10-Year Anniversary Special

To celebrate of 10 years of change in schools, Hawker Brownlow Education is offering a Beyond 'That's So Gay' Pack (i.e. Pride & Prejudice and Beyond 'That's So Gay' together, which saves you 15%).

Simply go to [www.thatssogay.com.au/pride-prejudice](http://www.thatssogay.com.au/pride-prejudice) and download the order form now.

### About the campaign

For over 15 years Daniel Witthaus has challenged homophobia in Australian schools. Recently he completed a 38-week national challenging homophobia tour of regional, rural and remote Australia, following the launch of his first book, Beyond 'That's So Gay'. In 2006, due to his work with the Pride & Prejudice educational package, Daniel joined the World Board of the Global Alliance for LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender) Education. His work has included locations such as Indonesia, Sri Lanka, the Netherlands, Germany and Poland. Daniel also sits on the editorial board for the international Journal of LGBT Youth.

Daniel hopes that the national conversation about school-based homophobia moves beyond awareness-raising and that more everyday educators find out about the great work that is happening in everyday schools.

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