



# Making diversity visible

**David Church** discusses the importance of making LGBT+ diversity visible and how science can be the context

As the conversation across the country progresses towards diversity and decolonisation of the curriculum, it is important to consider the many ways of demonstrating recognition of diversity. At Harris Garrard Academy in south-east London we have gone to great lengths to increase the visibility of race and ethnicity in our curriculum, through initiatives such as our 'diverse readers' programme. However, we quickly recognised that there was a dearth of visibility of the LGBT+ community; at best, one of our year 4 classes is named after mathematician and wartime code-breaker Alan Turing, but his sexuality has never really been discussed with the class. It was as if we felt unable to discuss LGBT+ issues in primary schools – perhaps part of the legacy of Section 28 (see below). In contrast, the new 'Relationships and sex education' (RSE) guidance in England (DfE, 2019) promotes and encourages schools, both primary and secondary, to 'celebrate' LGBT+

diversity, to accept that families are different and that relationships are more than just heteronormative (see Box 1 for definitions).

### Taking action

In order to improve the visibility of LGBT+ diversity, we signed up to 'Diversity Week', organised by the LGBT+ youth charity 'Just Like Us' (see *Weblinks*). Throughout the week, children from reception (ages 4–5) to year 6 (ages 10–11) engaged in a range of lessons to provide a safe and secure environment where LGBT+ diversity is accepted. As part of this, some year groups had specific science lessons.

But, this was not an easy fix. As an academy, we have had to consider how we approach the topic of LGBT+ diversity, which can often provide polarised opinions. We know that the renewed approach to teaching children about LGBT+ diversity in schools is contested, and that parents across the country have

protested outside schools, suggesting that it is not the place of a school to educate about the LGBT+ community, particularly when religious tensions are considered.

As professionals, we often fear this pressure from parents, and the unwanted media attention this can bring. Regardless of our subjects, as primary school teachers and leaders we all want the best for our children. However, too often the ramifications of Section 28 are still with us today and can inhibit progress in educating our children about the LGBT+ community. While some of us may remember teaching under Section 28, many of us will have been educated while it was law and may have unconscious bias towards our approach to LGBT+ education, regardless of our personal beliefs and attitudes.

The Section 28 clause, which was an amendment to the Local Government Act 1988, was the Government's response to the demands from the LGB community for equality. At the

Key words: ■ LGBT+

### Who was Alan Turing?

Alan Turing was the creator of modern computing and arguably the most famous computer scientist of all time.



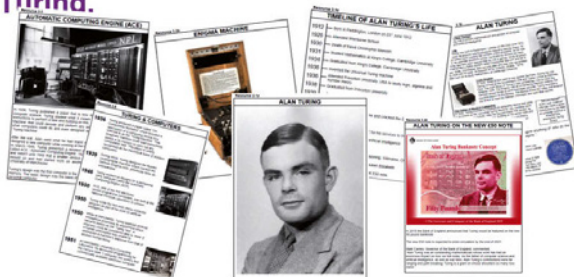
**Figures 1–3**  
Slides from the year 4 lesson on Alan Turing

children were more knowledgeable than some of the teachers, proving the point that schools are often a vacuum. We knew that, as a staff team, we were accepting of everyone and we knew we wanted to teach our children about a wide range of diversity, so we signed up for the Just Like Us 'Diversity Week' initiative.

Our science curriculum already covers a range of scientists and roles, considering how we can develop children's science capital, but Diversity Week gave us an opportunity to look beyond this. As part of the planned activities, children learned about LGBT+ scientists. Children in year 4 (ages 8–9) studied Alan Turing from the LGBT+ perspective. They were tasked with completing research to find out more about Alan Turing's life, which specifically mentioned his sexuality (Figures 1–3). For children in year 5, the focus moved to looking at how significant scientists, some contemporary, who represent the LGBT+ community, have built on previous scientific knowledge, and how they have contributed to current scientific learning. They found out about Nergis Mavalval, Sally Kristen Ride, Leonardo Da Vinci, Alan Turing, Alan L. Hart and Martin Wen-Yu Lo (Figures 4–5).

As a result of these lessons, children's awareness of LGBT+ diversity, particularly in science, has

### These are the secondary sources you will be using to research the life of Alan Turing.



prohibited local authorities, and therefore teachers, from 'promoting' and informing children about LGBT+ people and same-sex relationships. As a result, homophobia against children and teachers grew out of ignorance.

Fortunately, Section 28 was repealed in 2003 in England, and former Prime Minister David Cameron has since apologised for its introduction. Since then, charities such as Stonewall (see *Weblinks*) have worked tirelessly to help tackle homophobic bullying in the classroom and to ensure that schools are a secure and safe environment where children can focus on their education regardless of their identity (Bradlow *et al.*, 2017).

Furthermore, in today's society, there is an increase of positive LGBT+ representation across television and films – even television series such as *Star Trek: Discovery* have non-binary and trans characters. As a result, our children are exposed to positive LGBT+ diversity and inclusion within society, but our

schools are often a vacuum; hence the need to educate our children about acceptance of and respect for the LGBT+ community.

#### Diversity Week activities

So, as a school, we came together to discuss these issues and how we can ensure our children are educated about life in modern Britain. Interestingly, our

#### Resource 3.1c

### TIMELINE OF ALAN TURING'S LIFE

1912	Born in Paddington, London on 23 <sup>rd</sup> June 1912
1926	Attended Sherborne School
1930	Death of friend Christopher Morcom
1931	Studied Mathematics at King's College, Cambridge University
1934	Graduated from King's College, Cambridge University
1936	Invented the Universal Turing Machine
1936	Attended Princeton University, USA to study logic, algebra and number theory
1938	Graduated from Princeton University
1939	Start of World War II
1939	Worked at Bletchley Park
1939	Invented the Bombe machine and cracked the Enigma code.
1945	End of World War II
1945	Turing was awarded an OBE for his services to the country
1950	Invented the Turing Test for artificial intelligence
1952	Alan was arrested for being gay.
1954	Death (ruled suicide) by cyanide poisoning.
2013	Received a Royal pardon by Queen Elizabeth
2021	Turing's portrait to feature on UK £50 note.

time, the then Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher (cited in Day, 2019), said that '*Children who need to be taught to respect traditional moral values are being taught that they have an inalienable right to be gay. All of those children are being cheated of a sound start in life. Yes, cheated.*' In essence, Section 28 (which was vaguely worded)

### Box 1 Key Terminology

**LGBT:** lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans

**Heteronormativity:** Describes the way that people generally assume that others are heterosexual and think about the world from a heterosexual viewpoint or perspective. This means there is an expectation that being straight is 'normal'.

**Non-binary:** Used to describe people who feel their gender cannot be defined within the margins of gender binary. Instead, they understand their gender in a way that goes beyond simply identifying as either a man or woman.



**LGBT+ scientists**

Today we will be learning about LGBT+ people in science who have changed the world.

You will be creating your own set of 'Trump Cards' on notable and significant LGBT+ scientists from the past and present.

The cards you create will contain details and statistics relating to their life and work.

**TTYP: Why is it important to celebrate the successes of Scientists who are apart of the LGBT+ community?**



**Legacy and impact (score them between 0-10)**

Question to support:

- Do we still use their invention/discovery?
- What impact does their invention/discovery have on your life?
- Were you aware of their invention/discovery before the lesson?
- Do you think their invention/discovery is important to the world?



**Figures 4–5 Slides from year 5 lesson on LGBT+ scientists**

are available on the Just Like Us website. They show that there is more to be done to ensure that our children, regardless of whether they identify as LGBT+, are taught about acceptance of everybody. In fact, the Equalities Act 2010 identifies gender re-assignment and sexual orientation as protected characteristics, alongside race, age, pregnancy and others.

**Conclusion**

While I don't believe that we have yet truly embraced LGBT+ diversity, we have started the conversation and our school is more accepting of everybody; our children are aware of the LGBT flag, contemporary LGBT+ scientists, and that it is all right to have a different opinion or belief to their peers.

There is still much work to be done to diversify and decolonise the curriculum further. As the Chair of the ASE Primary Science Committee, I am proud of the increased work the ASE is doing around equality, diversity and inclusion, and of the books we now have in the bookshop: *Superhero scientists* (Allen and Sinclair, 2021) is an excellent example of this. It is important that we recognise that Section 28 no longer exists: we need to usualise the lived experiences of the LGBT+ community – they are part of the fabric of every school, from teachers and children to parents and wider families.

increased. It is now accepted, and talked about in school, that:

- LGBT+ people do exist;
- LGBT+ people contribute positively to society;
- you can be LGBT+ and a scientist.

**The need for more action**

Interestingly, Just Like Us has recently released a report highlighting the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the mental health and well-being of young people across the UK (see

*Weblinks*). This independent study of 2934 pupils aged 11–18 (1140 of whom were LGBT+), has found that LGBT+ young people are significantly more likely to struggle with mental health and are not getting enough positive messaging from school. In the survey, 68% of LGBT+ children reported having had suicidal thoughts (compared to 29% of non-LGBT+ children) and only 58% of LGBT+ children feel safe (Box 2). These statistics, along with the full report,

**Box 2 Statistics on LGBT+ young people and mental health**

**Feeling safe**

58% of LGBT+  
73% of non-LGBT+

**Positive messaging from school (all secondary pupils)**

48% – little to no messaging  
18% – zero positive messaging  
30% – once/twice in last year

**Suicidal thoughts**

68% of LGBT+  
74% lesbian, 77% trans, 73% bi, 66% gay  
89% of black LGBT+, 67% of white LGBT+  
29% of non-LGBT+

**Self-harm**

31% of LGBT+  
9% non-LGBT

(from Just Like Us *Growing up LGBT+*)

**References**

Allen, D. and Sinclair, A. (2021) *Superhero scientists*. Hatfield: Millgate House Education.  
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DfE (2019) *Relationships education, relationships and sex education (RSE) and health education (statutory guidance)*. London: Department for Education. [www.gov.uk/government/publications/relationships-education-relationships-and-sex-education-rse-and-health-education](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/relationships-education-relationships-and-sex-education-rse-and-health-education)

**Weblinks**

Just Like Us – School Diversity Week: [www.justlikeus.org/school-diversity-week](http://www.justlikeus.org/school-diversity-week)  
Just Like Us report: *Growing up LGBT+*: [www.justlikeus.org/single-post/growing-up-lgbt-just-like-us-research-report](http://www.justlikeus.org/single-post/growing-up-lgbt-just-like-us-research-report)  
Stonewall resources: [www.stonewall.org.uk/best-practice-toolkits-and-resources-0](http://www.stonewall.org.uk/best-practice-toolkits-and-resources-0)

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