

NUT annual conference 2009

CONFERENCE 2009

Ending SATs: good for children good for education

In a historic first, a motion at the NUT conference proposing a national boycott of SATs at Key Stages 1 and 2 will also be voted on by members of the National Association of Head Teachers at their annual conference in May.

"SATs skew the system, as teachers teach to the test," said NUT Executive member Max Hyde. "Children suffer, unnecessarily, a reduced experience of what education really means."

There were cries of "shame" when conference heard that Schools Secretary Ed Balls had described the proposed boycott as 'irresponsible'. "It is you who are irresponsible if you continue with these tests," said Sara Tomlinson (Lambeth). "Every survey that's been done by expert groups says they are damaging to children."

Hazel Danson (Executive) warned that SATs "damage education" and are "educationally barren". She said league tables were "tantamount to wholesale, government-funded cheating", because they encourage schools to target teaching at borderline pupils who can push up their overall score.

Year 6 teacher Sasha Elliott (Camden) said she was convinced her pupils make more progress in the two months after the SATs tests than in the nine months beforehand, when she is forced to teach a "Gradgrind curriculum" of English, maths and science. She was one of many speakers and delegates wearing T-shirts with the slogan: 'NUT – No Useless Tests'.

The motion proposed that SATs should be replaced by teacher assessment, and called for a ballot to be held 'if all other reasonable avenues have been exhausted'. It was passed unanimously, prompting cheers and chants of: "No more SATs". NAHT president Clarissa Williams joined delegates in a standing ovation.

The NUT's annual conference determines the union's policies and campaigning priorities for the coming year. Elyssa Campbell-Barr and Janey Hulme report on all the debates and decisions from this year's conference, held in Cardiff from 10 to 14 April.

Our aim: one union for all teachers

NUT conference 2009 was an uplifting event for me and, I think, for everyone who attended. Teachers coming together to decide the union's priorities for improving the education of our children is always inspirational.

It was also, of course, a time of sadness for the union and for all those of us who worked with Steve Sinnott, as we remembered his life and his unique contribution to improving the lives of children, teachers and the education service.

The power of education

Steve's death has focused attention on his life. He was at his very core a teacher. His trade unionism and his internationalism grew from his deep commitment to equality and justice; to education as the great liberator. Steve would, I know, have agreed with the recent statement from Nelson Mandela, a great supporter of the Global Campaign for Education, that, "Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world."

"Teachers coming together to decide the union's priorities for improving the education of our children is always inspirational."

Christine Blower



What the NUT stands for

NUT conference set our priorities for doing just that over the coming year. We want:

- a good local school for every child and for every community
- fair funding for post-16 education
- equality of access to high quality education and to all public services
- trust and confidence in public sector workers
- community solidarity
- the status of qualified teachers recognised and valued both in salaries and conditions
- work/life balance that sees workload and central imposition reduce and fun return to the classroom
- free, state comprehensive education for all
- and, of course, an end to SATs and league tables.

Not the atomisation of privatisation and outsourcing.

Not schools subject to the profit principle.

Not academies, or even trust schools.

To achieve these aims for the benefit of children and teachers, we need the maximum possible trade union solidarity. This is not about professional unity for the sake of it; this is professional unity because it's best for children, best for teachers and best for the education service.

We believe one union for all teachers would help us achieve all this.

Christine Blower

NUT acting general secretary

Post-16 education - the new battleground

Moving a priority motion on cuts in funding for post-16 education, Martin Allen (Ealing) talked about the shocking £200m shortfall in money allocated to secondary schools and colleges this year. "If you're doing a pre-U course at Eton or Harrow there will still be good jobs at the end of it and it's not going to affect you, but if you are working class doing a course in FE then it is going to affect you."

Seconding the motion Jane Bassett (Conference Business Committee) said: "It's an absolute disgrace that a Labour government has now turned round to the young people we've been teaching and said 'you don't count any longer, you're on the scrap heap and we're not going to fund your education'."

The motion called on the NUT's Executive to: campaign for a restoration

of post-16 funding; approach other unions to discuss joint campaigning; defend teachers affected by these cuts by collective action up to and including strike action; campaign for the biggest possible mobilisation of NUT members on Unite's march for jobs on 16 May in Birmingham; and initiate discussions with other unions for an autumn demonstration. In his right of reply Martin warned: "Post-16 is going to be the new battleground."

Cover story

"Every class deserves a qualified teacher all the time, even when their regular teacher is absent, insisted Helen Hill (Executive), debating a motion on **no cover**.

Referring to the contractual right to provide cover 'only rarely', which will apply to all teachers from this September, Kevin Courtney (Executive) said: "No cover' has been a long-standing demand of the NUT, and we may be nearly there [but] we cannot rely on the government to deliver this demand for us.

"Heads should now plan *never* to ask teachers to cover colleagues' classes. We should say that 'rarely cover' means emergencies only.

Kevin told conference that cutting teachers' non-contact time was not an acceptable way of providing cover, and said the union should fight for limits on the use of cover supervisors.

The motion proposed pools of qualified supply teachers, to be employed on national pay and conditions, with access to teachers' pension and professional development.

Against academies

Moving a motion entitled **anti-academies**, conference agreed that the NUT should continue to campaign against the creation of new academies and trust schools, while supporting members who work in these types of schools. The motion committed the union to joint campaigning locally and nationally with other teachers' organisations and the Anti-Academies Alliance, and to lobbying the government for 'a statutory provision for parental ballots over academies or trust schools'.

Dave Malbon (Havering) said academies were "an attempt to force middle class values on a working class area". He also condemned their "insidious anti-unionism".

"Academies are not in the best interests of pupils, or parents, or of working class communities," added Paul Vernell (South Gloucestershire), who congratulated recent successful campaigns against academies in Derby and Bolton.

A motion on **opposition to academy and trust school status** deplored the continued involvement of the private sector in schools and education services. The motion called on the union to campaign against the establishment of academies and trusts and the involvement of the private sector in the running of schools.

Kevin Courtney (Executive) told conference: "We all know that academies and trusts are a threat to comprehensive education, to democratic accountability, to parental rights and to union organisation. They are not just a secondary school issue but are spreading widely in trust form into primary schools. This is the most serious threat we've faced in decades."

Rob Bolstridge, (Leicestershire) spoke against the motion because he felt there was not enough in it about the threat of trust schools. "By the time we get to Liverpool [for the NUT's 2010 conference] they will be in their thousands - trust schools are the real danger."

Using his right of reply, Kevin stressed the union's opposition to trusts and said campaigning materials on trust schools are being prepared.

"Academies are not in the best interests of pupils, or parents, or of working class communities."

Paul Vernell



Conference kids

Children being cared for in the conference creche put on a show for their parents on Easter Monday.

“Our state education system is as intrinsically wonderful as the NHS, available to all, regardless of wealth or social status.”

Martin Reed

A new deal



“It’s going to take all our strength – teachers, parents, governors, all those interested in education and all those committed to equality of opportunity – to prevent the dismantling of our publicly funded education system,” Martin Reed told conference in his presidential address, talking about the possibility of a new Conservative government next year.

“We must not allow the systematic deregulation of education or the dismantling of our school system. We must create a broad alliance that reaches out to parents – an alliance that involves the wider trade union movement, pro-comprehensive pressure groups and, yes, our colleagues in the other teacher organisations.”

A true proponent of teacher unity, Martin stated that solidarity with other teachers’ organisations is essential to promote local authority families of schools and stop the drift towards privatisation of schools and services. “Once more we extend the hand of unity. But if we are to create the possibility of a single teachers’ organisation we must strive more than ever to recruit and build our membership,” he said.

Martin called on the TUC and colleagues in other teacher organisations to join a united campaign to boycott SATs.

“Because of our boycott, carried out with the NAHT, there will be no national curriculum testing forced on our schools – not in 2010 nor indeed in any year after that,” he declared, to wild applause.

“It’s not surprising that so many teachers leave the profession within the first three years of their work,” Martin told conference. He urged a new deal for teachers, one based on trust, with more professional development – including sabbaticals, smaller class sizes, and evaluation systems based on support, not punishment.

“Is it no longer possible to talk with pride about the achievements of our teachers, schools and children?” Martin asked, calling on the government and the media to “recognise the fact that, actually, our state education system is as intrinsically wonderful as the NHS, available to all, regardless of wealth or social status.”

He challenged politicians to have trust and confidence in teachers, adding: “The prize is there for this or any future government: to raise the status of the teaching profession and to get rid of tests, targets, tables, Ofsted inspections, performance management and all the other oppressive machinery of distrust built up over the last 20 years.”

Fair pay for teachers

A motion on **salary policy** reconfirmed the union’s commitment to seeking a pay increase of £3,000 or 10 per cent (whichever is greater) for all teachers. “We will not tolerate the recession being used as an excuse to cut our pay,” insisted Ian Murch (Bradford).

“Between 2004 and 2008, while the sun was shining on the Fred Goodwins of this world and while real pay was rising in most of the economy, we experienced a cut in the value of our pay of almost 6 per cent.”

Young teacher Becky Williams (Nottinghamshire) said she was “tired of working over 60 hours a week” and “depressed at the thought of my £25,000 student loan”. She told conference she was moving to a better-paid job abroad, adding: “It is no surprise that 50 per cent of teachers are leaving in their first five years.”

The motion also instructed the union’s Executive to seek a merger of the main and upper pay scales into a single scale, and to establish substantial fixed allowances for inner and outer London and the London fringe area.

“It is no surprise that 50 per cent of teachers are leaving in their first five years.”

Becky Williams



Money matters

Conference noted that the credit crunch, speculation and lack of regulation have triggered an **economic crisis** and global recession. The impact in England and Wales has been a crisis in the economy and in people’s lives, with thousands of home repossessions, increased unemployment and threats to pensions.

Jerry Glazier (Executive) told conference that banks and bankers bore a huge responsibility for

irresponsibly making billions of dollars of credit so easily available. To applause he said: “Recession is global by its politics and its consequences, but its effects will be very similar on ordinary people wherever they live.

“We can vent our spleen on those responsible and rightly expose their greed. Outrageous pension payoffs – annual pension payoffs more than 20 times a teacher’s annual salary – have

no place in a decent society.”

Conference instructed the Executive to call on the TUC and its affiliated unions to develop and promote a set of demands, to include protection of pay levels, housing, employment, jobs and public spending, together with the end of wasteful privatisation. The motion also called for a progressive tax system and the return of union rights.

Opposing Ofsted

Talking about the “catastrophic impact” and “detrimental effect on pupils” of Ofsted inspections, Baljeet Ghale (Executive) moved a motion on **Ofsted** that called for the campaign for the abolition of Ofsted to be reinvigorated. “We’ve agreed to get rid of SATs – now let’s get rid of Ofsted,” she said, to applause.

The motion called for the effects of Ofsted inspections on schools to continue to be monitored through the collection of information from NUT school representatives, and for the union’s Ofsted guidance for members to be updated. It also proposed the introduction of a bottom-up school self-evaluation model and demanded an end to the unfair and unjust practice of categorising schools.

Speaking on this point, Rob Illingworth (Central Nottinghamshire), told conference that after a ‘notice to improve’ his school was fortunate through improvements to miss becoming a ‘national challenge school’. Instead it had now been categorised a ‘gaining-ground’ school.

Getting organised

“A lack of working together has allowed successive governments to divide the profession and exploit the fact that teachers are spoken for by five, six, seven voices,” said Roger King (Executive), moving a motion on **organising and recruitment**.

The motion reconfirmed the NUT’s commitment to the aim of having a single union for all teachers, and included a range of measures to support and protect school reps and local officers.

It also highlighted the union’s 2009 recruitment campaign which, as seconder Ian Grayson (Executive) explained, allows newly qualified teachers to join the NUT for “£1 for the first four terms and half price membership for the year after that.”

A testing issue

Moving a second motion on **SATs**, Philipa Harvey, (Croydon) explained the difference between this and the priority motion (see page 25). “We need to build on the boycott and build a campaign. Teachers will be taking a lead on how they assess and teach our children.”

The motion instructed the Executive to work with other organisations and individuals opposed to SATs to build a broad-based campaign to abolish them. As well as the planned boycott of the tests at Key Stages 1 and 2 next year, the motion called for further work to build on the joint NUT/NAHT statement on the future of assessment and urged the government to recognise that the current testing system and its impact are fatally flawed.

Musical youth

Pupils from Bassaleg School in Newport were among those providing musical entertainment, as part on the NUT’s ongoing sponsorship of Music for Youth.

Fighting for your rights

A motion on **teachers’ rights** called for a return to a national contract for teachers, with key points including:

- a minimum of 20 per cent non-contact time (40 per cent for newly qualified teachers)
- a maximum working week of 35 hours, to include preparation and marking
- a mandatory limit on class sizes of 20 by 2020, in line with NUT policy
- permanent contracts for all teachers in permanent posts
- teachers not to be required to cover for absent colleagues, except in a genuine emergency
- more freedom for teachers to determine their own Inset training
- a limit on after-school meetings of no more than 60 minutes one evening a week.

“Since the imposition of the STRB [School Teachers’ Review Body] in

1991... the right to negotiate not only our pay but also our duties and working time has been removed from us,” explained Tony Tonks (Executive). “Since 1991 we’ve seen our pay go down and our workload increase... The average teacher still works over 50 hours a week.”

Ian Murch (Executive) said a return to a national contract and nationally bargained pay and conditions was particularly necessary, as this summer will see “the greatest ever exodus of schools from local authority control”. Thousands of teachers are already, or will soon be, employed by academies, trusts and federations with the freedom to break away from nationally agreed pay and conditions.

The motion instructed the Executive to consult members and seek to work with other teachers’ organisations in developing the proposed national contract.

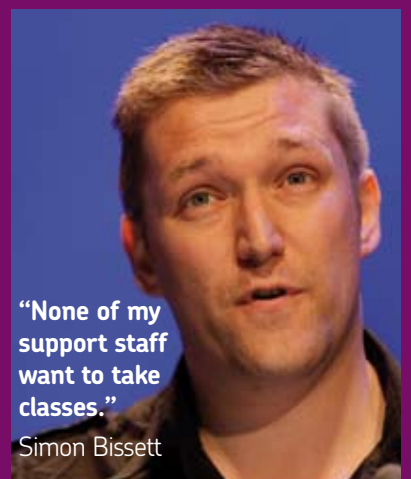
The right sort of support

“Our accord with Unison stated clearly ‘teachers teach and support staff support, but that accord, colleagues, is being abused in several ways,’ Brian Swinton (East Riding of Yorkshire) told conference as he moved a motion on **primary workforce classroom protocol**.

“None of my support staff want to take classes,” said headteacher Simon Bissett (North Yorkshire) seconding. He added that he believed there was no situation in which “either the children in my care or my own daughter should be taught by anyone other than a fully qualified teacher”.

Conference re-affirmed the union’s decision not to sign the Workforce Agreement and welcomed the Unison accord.

The Executive was instructed to work with other unions to draw up the proposed protocol and ensure that teachers and support staff receive appropriate training in their roles.



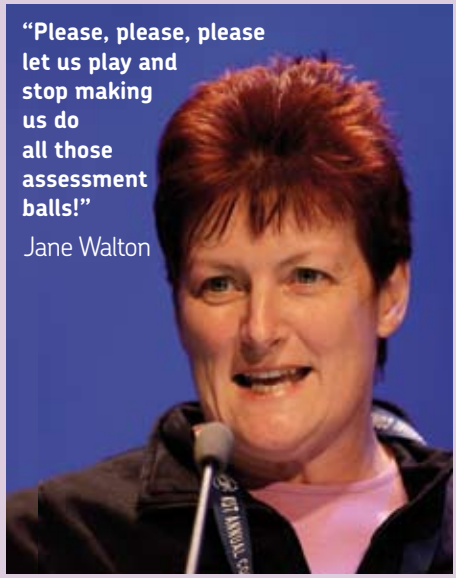
“None of my support staff want to take classes.”
Simon Bissett

Let us play

First-time delegate Jane Walton (Wakefield) received a standing ovation for her passionate and entertaining speech on **early years education**, in which she asserted that box-ticking had replaced play in nurseries. In a message to Schools Secretary Ed Balls, she said: "Perhaps we should set you a target... it would be 'leave education alone, Mr Balls. Please, please, please let us play and stop making us do all those assessment balls!'"

Hazel Danson (Executive) called the introduction of the Foundation Stage curriculum "a retrograde step" and expressed concern about "the imposition of a target-driven system on early years". Alex Kenny (Executive) warned that the government's move to increase free nursery provision meant an increase in contact time of 20 per cent for many early years teachers, with a corresponding rise in planning and preparation, but no additional remuneration.

The motion, instructing the NUT's Executive to develop guidance for members on the practical implications of the extension of free early years entitlement and calling for maximum adult-child ratios of 1:13 in nurseries and 1:27 in reception classes, was passed unanimously.



"Please, please, please let us play and stop making us do all those assessment balls!"

Jane Walton



"Fred Goodwin had a contract for his pension – so had we," said **Kevin Nolan**, as he told

conference about his involvement in a workers' sit-in at **Visteon's** Enfield?? car parts plant. The workers, whose factories were sold by Ford to Visteon in 2000, had been promised fair conditions and pension rights for life, but in April they were sacked with just six minutes' notice.

The sit-in forced the company to negotiate. "We must never let big companies treat people like this," said Kevin, a **Unite** union convenor.



"A child dies every three seconds because of global poverty," **Owain James** of the **Global**

Campaign for Education (GCE) told conference. Urging all NUT members to support the Millennium Development Goal of universal primary education, he explained that if an eight year old African girl completes primary school, her chance of catching HIV is halved, her future income more than doubles, and her own children are far less likely to die in infancy.

Owain also paid tribute to the NUT's late general secretary Steve Sinnott and the "enormous contribution" he made to the GCE.



Cuban teacher Lisette Rubio Mederos told conference about Cuba's

education system. After the 1959 revolution, 41 per cent of Cubans were illiterate and the country had just three universities. Now there are 45 universities and illiteracy has been virtually eradicated. Education and quality daycare are free and accessible to all, and there are just 13.6 pupils for every teacher. "UN and Unicef studies confirm that Cuba's education system is one of the best in the world," she said.

Beating the BNP

"The struggle to beat the BNP is one of the most important fights this union has ever undertaken," said Jason Hill (Stoke on Trent), moving an amendment to a motion on **anti-racism**. Jason told the shocking story of how the BNP in Stoke has gone from distributing racist leaflets outside a local high school seven years ago, to having an openly racist city councillor on the board of governors of the same school today. "If it's happening to us today, it could happen in some of your areas tomorrow," he warned.

"The BNP feed off the economic crisis. They exploit real grievances about job losses, about housing shortages, about school closures," said Patrick Murphy (Executive). "To fight the BNP effectively, we need to go well beyond the slogan 'don't vote BNP' and put forward real answers to the real grievances on which these people feed."

The motion reaffirmed the union's commitment to working with **Unite Against Fascism**, **Searchlight** and **Love Music Hate Racism** and to making use of the union's political fund to produce material opposing the BNP and other racist and fascist

Staying sane

"Stress is endemic in our profession, and it leads to a haemorrhage of teachers from our schools," said John Illingworth (Conference Business Committee), seconding a motion on the **Teacher Mental Health Working Party**. "Mental health conditions are now the single greatest cause of teacher absence," he told conference. "Every school *must* carry out stress risk assessments."

The motion reported on the working party's activities and achievements since its formation following a resolution passed at the 2007 NUT annual conference. It included seven recommendations to further its work:

- disseminate examples of good practice
- highlight that Ofsted remains a major source of stress for teachers, and ensure the inspection system encourages schools to look after the well-being of their staff
- support headteachers in their role in preventing mental ill-health among their staff, and in dealing with the pressures they themselves face
- press government and employers to recognise the true extent of stress in the teaching profession
- integrate teacher mental health into the wider work of the union
- make teacher mental health a standing item at every meeting of the NUT's Health and Safety Working Group and in the Executive's annual report
- press for teacher mental health to be a standing item at local authority and school safety committees.

GUEST SPEAKERS

CONFERENCE IN BRIEF **Black and proud**

A motion entitled **workload, pay and class sizes – a comprehensive strategy** aimed to build on the decision of the 2008 annual conference to develop 'a comprehensive strategy to protect the living standards and conditions of teachers'.

The motion instructed the union to draw up a comprehensive claim linking the union's objectives on salaries, working conditions and class sizes, for submission to the government, Welsh Assembly and School Teachers' Review Body.

Moving a motion on **democracy in education** Steve Johnston (Leeds) told conference that democracy was under serious threat in Leeds following his local high school's proposal to become an academy.

In spite of several public consultation meetings where the majority voted against the change in status, and a petition signed by 1,288 parents against the proposals, the council voted to proceed. "It's an absolute disgrace and an affront to democracy," said Steve.

The motion called for a campaign for all schools to belong to an accountable, reinvigorated local authority (LA), all school staff to be employed by LAs, and LAs to set common admissions procedures for all schools.

Describing public sector reform as "carnage", Paula Champion (Cambridgeshire), moved a motion on **defending public services**. It proposed that the NUT work with other unions to develop a high profile campaign providing positive alternatives to the government's reform agenda.

Paula told conference of an enquiry that showed between 400 and 1,200 patients had died needlessly in Staffordshire hospitals in three years. "Ward closures, staff shortages, patients left for hours without food or water and sometimes given the wrong medication – a Victorian picture in our 21st century hospitals."

A motion entitled **stop the spread of war** called on the union to work closely with partners in organisations such as the Palestine Solidarity Campaign, CND and the Stop the War Coalition on educational materials, peace protests, and campaigns to get troops out of Iraq and Afghanistan and end the Israeli denial of Palestinian rights.

Moving a motion on **casework for members**, Dennis Charman (Hammersmith and Fulham) told conference it was about "how we grow and re-grow our ability to support our members and build our union at local and national level and support our lay officers as they seek to support our members whilst we challenge those narrow minded orthodoxies trying to dominate education."

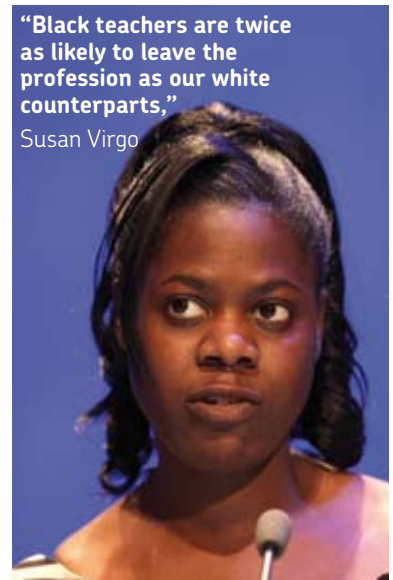
"Black teachers are twice as likely to leave the profession as our white counterparts," Susan Virgo (Birmingham) told conference, moving a motion on the union's **black members' structure**. She said black teachers needed representation within the formal structures of the union to address the particular issues they face, including "isolation, bullying and lack of promotion and support".

The motion instructed the NUT's Executive to establish and develop a self-organising Black Members' Section at both regional and national level, and to establish a black members' network.

Responding to criticism that such a section would be divisive, Molly Perrineau (Lambeth) said: "Not to separate, to unite, to pull together – that's what this motion is all about."

"Black teachers are twice as likely to leave the profession as our white counterparts,"

Susan Virgo



End child poverty

Infant teacher Phil Burnham (Southend) told conference that, as the recession deepened, he had noticed "more and more children who are coming into school distressed, tired, hungry, in dirty clothes". Seconding a motion on **eradicating poverty**, he said children "will never reach their full potential until they are supported financially as well as educationally".

The motion congratulated the union for its work towards eradicating child poverty nationally and globally, and called on the Executive to press the government to erode the gap between rich and poor and keep the promise of ending child poverty.

An amendment from Birmingham NUT called for a wide ranging union campaign on the issue of child poverty and reiterated the union's demand for maximum class sizes of 20 by 2020. "If they can afford to bail out the banks, they can afford to cut our class sizes," said Roy Wilkes.

LGBT rights

"I'm proud to be a member of a union that doesn't simply pay lip-service to equality, but holds it at the heart of all its work," said Dave Brinson (LGBT Conference), moving a motion on **fighting for LGBT rights**.

"Homophobic bullying is endemic in our schools. Comments like 'that's so gay' feed into an already negative language culture," said Annette Price (Amersham and Buckinghamshire). "How would you like it if your identity was used as an insult?"

She explained that, statistically, one child in every class will be lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender and told the harrowing stories of two LGBT teenagers, one who committed suicide and the other who was beaten and died of his injuries. "None of us are safe until all of us are safe," she said.

The motion warned of the 'poisonous ideas and propaganda' of the BNP regarding homosexuality. It instructed the union's Executive to campaign for schools to have recruitment, behaviour and harassment and bullying policies that support LGBT staff and pupils.

"Homophobic bullying is endemic in our schools."

Annette Price

