
‘A Pillar for the local LGBTQ Community’: How Year 13 student Jo Buys is supporting the young, LGBTQ+ pupils of Helsby High School

This week we interviewed Jo B, Year 13 student leader of the LGBTQ+ club, here at Helsby High. There is a club for year 7-9 in the library every Tuesday lunch, and for years 10-13 every Wednesday lunch in A22.

We, and Jo, both agreed it is important to raise awareness of the LGBTQ+ community in school, because of the oppression they previously faced due to the Section 28 Act. This act prohibited the ‘promotion of homosexuality’ by local authorities. Introduced by the Conservative government and in effect from 1988 to 2003, this meant that teachers were not allowed to discuss or educate pupils on LGBTQ+ existence, because of the unjust laws in place. However, now that is a thing of the past, and we can rightly celebrate and support all those in the community.

The interview with Jo consisted of 6 questions, to provide an insight behind the club and its aims, with further opinions on significant advancements of LGBTQ+ treatment in schools.

Q: Why is the club run by students?

A: Jo responded that he felt *‘it is less intimidating to talk to another student rather than a teacher’* they went on to add that it *‘builds a larger community within the school’*. This is not to say that the teachers of Helsby High are not supportive, with media teacher Miss McGuirk supervising the club, but rather as Jo continues, *‘people in the lower years will get to meet others like them and have the space to grow up feeling some kind of “normal” rather than feel like an outcast’*. Miss McGuirk herself told us that the club is *‘very chill...lots of 80s music...biscuits and games!’*

Q: What are the aims of the club?

A: Jo told us that the aims of the club are to *‘build a community and safety net in school, having a space safe where young, queer people can go to not feel judged’*. Jo expressed that, in previous years the ability to feel *‘unapologetically yourself’* was *‘something that was lacking’*. They further explained their wish to be a *“pillar” for the local LGBTQ community, be the person young queer people can go to for anything’*. We agree,

as we are sure many others of you will, that this is important because it allows freedom to express yourself in a safe environment that provides support – this is a highly valuable thing that Jo and the club enable for those beginning to explore their identity. Jo also adds he wants *‘students to feel comfortable enough to report anything that goes on’* – something that we also want to reiterate, making sure all students know of the support nets in place within the school.



Pictured: 1 A picture of the Queeries Box in the LGBTQ Support Group - for any students to ask questions and air concerns privately

Q: What are your opinions on Helsby’s PHSCE lessons?

A: Jo expresses an interest in updating the information about the LGBTQ community, *‘especially on gender’*. They feel it could add to *‘ignorance’* surrounding the LGBTQ community. They felt that the curriculum could begin to include advice on *‘safe sex for same sex couples’*, feeling that the subject is *‘skimmed over’*. We also feel the importance to provide equal information regarding safe sex, for all couples, as it is imperative that all students feel prepared and not alienated – more talk around such topics will enable an even more inclusive environment than already exists. Jo also adds the wish to have *‘comprehensive information on the fluidity of gender and sexuality...that gender roles don’t exist’*.

Since writing this article Mr Callaghan (Dept Leader for PHSCE) has ensured that discussions surrounding all types of relationships are covered in lessons, including sexual relationships. This was always a feature of PHSCE lessons and teachers are now ensuring this element of the scheme is given the right amount of attention in lessons.

Q: Are there any local LGBTQ events you would like to recommend?

A: *‘There’s a charity based in Chester called PROUD’*. Jo added that one of the reps, Kelly, gave them *‘great advice on how to run the club’*. PROUD has a website, that we have linked here:

Pictured: 2 A screengrab from the Proud Trust Website, referenced below:



<https://www.theproudtrust.org/young-people/youth-groups/>. On the website you can search to find the nearest club near you, with ones in Chester and Ellesmere Port, as Jo said. The website is also full of informative articles on coming out, exploring identity, staying safe, and faith and religion. We agree with Jo, this is a charity with amazing initiative of supporting all the LGBTQ community. Jo went onto talk about the Stonewall foundation: <https://www.stonewall.org.uk>. To which they said their 'aim is like mine and want proper education on LGBTQ topics'. These are two great websites, full of up-to-date supportive knowledge, and we encourage anyone to check them out. Furthermore, Jo explained that during pride months there are parades in Chester and Liverpool, with Manchester Pride in August being one of the 'best experiences of my life'.

Q: Do you have any thoughts about the new uniforms, PE kits, or gendered PE lessons?

A: 'Helsby took a huge step in the right direction when switching from black uniform for boys and the bottle green uniforms for girls'. Jo went on to add that the new 'just black with green stripes on the blazer helps trans youth, especially those who deal with gender dysphoria. Indeed, it is incredibly encouraging

to see the way we as a school have been able to adapt and embrace the uniform change, which creates an inclusive



Pictured: 3 One of the many posters advertised around school for the support group. See if you can spot one in the corridors!

environment for all students. Jo furthered the advantages it has for trans students, 'It removes the target off their backs if they wanted to swap uniforms to help with gender dysphoria'. Regarding PE

lessons, Jo expressed that 'PE lessons should be separated entirely on ability rather than gender and ability'. Whilst girls and boys PE lessons do operate at the same time, it would be amazing to see the two groups be integrated with each other whilst having a game of football, for example, all in the hope of furthering the already established LGBTQ friendly environment that operates here. Jo finally commented that it would be nice if students had the 'ability to choose between wearing skorts or shorts' and that it would be great to see 'gender neutral PE kits, like the main school uniform'. I think we can all agree that these would be some really appreciated changes, that the school will be willing to take on board – as the happiness and security of the students is their main priority.

This is the end of the interview with Jo, but they rounded off by saying 'It'll be great to get this information out there'. We definitely agree with this, but before rounding off this article ourselves, we would firstly like to extend our thanks to Jo for giving us their time to do the interview and provide us with information that is vital to put out there. We would also like to say thank you on behalf of the whole school community, for the work Jo and others have put into the LGBTQ club – this ensures a safe, welcoming environment for any pupils who need it, the club is a much-welcomed asset to the Helsby High community.

We also wanted to add some links to other websites that could be of use for anyone reading the article. If you do relate to anything discussed in the article and feel like you need support, in-school, we have the LGBTQ safe space, as previously mentioned, running: for year 7-9 in the library every Tuesday lunch, and for years 10-13 every Wednesday lunch in A22. This provides student-lead support. Outside of the club, you can get into contact with any of the support teachers in your year, or if you prefer a trusted form tutor, teacher or adult at home. They are all more than happy to offer their support. Some websites for you: <https://www.theproudtrust.org/young-people/youth-groups/>. <https://www.stonewall.org.uk>. <https://lgbt.foundation> <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/advice-and-support-for-lgbt-people> <https://www.lgbthealth.org.uk>

Once again, many thanks to Jo for their time and knowledge, and to you, for reading the article. Hopefully it has helped, advised or informed you.

Remember, you are not alone, as demonstrated, here, today.

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