A scoping review of LGBTQIA+ inclusion in Queensland's North Coast Region secondary school policies

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LGBTIQA+ youth in Australia have reported negative experiences in secondary schooling contexts (Hill et al., 2021) despite governing bodies prioritising inclusion and wellbeing for all students (Department of Education, 2022). The objective of this study was to undertake a scoping review of research on LGBTQIA+ inclusive policies and their impact upon LGBTQIA+ youth, followed by a review of policies from secondary schools in the Queensland North Coast Region to evaluate if these policies align with research-based evidence, using the *Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-analysis Protocols Extension for Scoping Reviews* (PRISMA-ScR) protocol (Page et al., 2021). Findings show there is a large body of confirmatory research that provides actionable strategies for improving outcomes for LGBTQIA+ youth in Australian school-based contexts, yet this is not being enacted in secondary schools. These findings make evident the urgency by which inclusion policies and practices must be actioned in secondary schools.

Introduction and literature review

Terminology

For this research, the terminology to represent peoples with diverse sex and body characteristics, gender identity, sexual orientation and behaviour will be represented by the acronym LGBTIQA+ or, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transexual/ Transgender, Intersex, Queer/ Questioning, Asexual, with '+' to represent other identities not covered by the acronym. This terminology has been drawn from the most recent Child Family and Community glossaries at the time of writing (Australian Government, 2022). It should be noted that the Queensland Department of Education and other sources within this paper do not consistently use this acronym in their documents.

Rationale

In Australia, LGBTIQA+ youth have experienced considerable challenges due to erasure and discrimination on the basis of their sexuality and gender expression. Aside from the record of bullying, harassment and violence, these challenges also include institutional microaggressions such as: not providing adequately trained teaching and wellbeing support staff in working with LGBTIQA+ people; not using a person's chosen name and pronouns; the omission of diverse identities in the curriculum; non-confirming structures such as binary uniforms and toilets; and, a lack of LGBTIQA+ visibility through peer groups, spaces and celebration (Hill et al., 2021; Hillier et al., 2010; Jones & Hillier, 2013; McBride, 2021; Strauss et al., 2020). Research shows that there is a strong correlation between supportive school environments and higher levels of LGBTIQA+ youth mental health, wellbeing, and academic outcomes (Ceatha, 2021;

Day et al., 2020; Grant et al., 2021; Hillier et al., 2010), although this is still a relatively recent and developing area of inclusive educational practice that needs further research (Methlagl, 2022).

While there is media attention given to the experiences of LGBTQIA+ youth in a range of settings, such as higher education (ABET, 2023), sports (Bohane & James, 2023) and schools (Lee, 2022), there is very little media coverage of or research into the role school policy plays in creating an LGBTQIA+ inclusive environment. In Queensland, the current priority of the Department of Education is schools' continued precision of alignment with the Australian Curriculum and Reporting Authority (ACARA), its national curriculum documents, research and policy (Department of Education, 2022). Despite recommendations in research, there is a distinct dearth of LGBTIQA+ specific education (ACARA, 2016; ACARA, 2022) and anti-bullying policies at a national level across Australian schools, which is evidenced by the current reported experiences of LGBTIQA+ youth (Hill et al., 2021). It has not been reported, however, how many schools have LGBTIQA+ inclusive policies.

A scoping literature review (ScR) was used in this project to address the discrepancies between the priorities set by the Department of Education (2022) in the *School Improvement Strategy 2022-2026* and *Diversity Policy* that promotes LGBTIQA+ inclusion policies and practices, the research regarding LGBTIQA+ inclusion in schools and the recent reported experiences of LGBTIQA+ youth in secondary schooling settings (Hill et al., 2021). This objective was achieved by firstly, synthesising the body of research in Australia regarding recommendations pertaining to LGBTIQA+ inclusion policies and the current state policies regarding LGBTIQA+ inclusion in schools and secondly, substantiating the existence of LGBTIQA+ inclusion policies in secondary schools in Queensland's North Coast Region.

Objectives

The objective of this project was to substantiate the presence of LGBTIQA+ inclusion in Queensland state secondary school policy by answering the following research questions:

1. What is the research evidence regarding the impact of using LGBTIQA+ inclusive wording in Australian school-based policy documents?
2. To what extent are LGBTIQA+ students included in the *Student Code of Conduct* and other policy documents in secondary state schools in Queensland's North Coast Region?

These research questions and inclusion/exclusion criteria were developed using the *PICo* protocol (Lockwood et al, 2015), namely *population* (LGBTQIA+ youth in secondary settings), *interest* (inclusion in policy), *context* (Queensland's North Coast Region). The location constraint, North Coast Region, was based upon this being the researcher's local context, and needing to ensure a feasible scope and scale.

Methods

The protocol for the scoping review was developed using the *Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-analysis Protocols Extension for Scoping Reviews* (PRISMA-ScR) which was further informed by the explanation and elaborations of Tricco et al. (2018). To identify potential documents for the ScR, the databases *JSTOR, ProQuest* and *Scopus* were searched. The searches were conducted on the 14 September 2022.

Eligibility criteria

To be included in this ScR, research must have been peer-reviewed and concerned with the inclusion of LGBTIQA+ youth in Australian secondary educational settings. While the age range of secondary students is 12-18, research data included an age range of 11-25 (i.e. 'youth'). All documents used in this ScR had to be open access and be available in full text in English. The searches included journal and other kinds of articles published between 2009 and 2022.

The selected 14-year period represents a robust body of Australian research that has emerged related to the experiences of LGBTIQA+ people and their concerns (AHRC, 2015; Ceatha et al., 2021; Hill et al., 2021; Jones, 2012; Jones & Hillier, 2014). This development in contributions to the literature resulted from post law-reform periods under the Australian Labor Party (ALP), characterised by some of the most significant law reforms to protect the rights of LGBTIQA+ people in Australia which began with the removal of discrimination from 85 federal laws in 2009 (Winsor, 2022; Willett, 2013; Neilson, 2009).

Search

The search strategy for all databases was as follows:

> "LGBT" OR "Queer" OR "Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender" AND "secondary school" OR "high school" AND "Australia" AND "policy".

The advanced search function on each database was used to limit the search string to the following parameters: "remove duplicates"; "location: Australia", "peer-reviewed"; "specific date range: 14/09/2009 - 14/09/2022"; "source type: journal, book chapter, government publications and reports"; "open access"; "full text"; "language: English".

Selection of sources of evidence

The results pages from each database were read by a single researcher. The process for this was determined using Cohen's (1990's) method of *Preview, Question, Read and Summarise* (PQRS) (in Cronin et al., 2008) (see Appendix 2). Key words such as: "LGBTIQ"; "same sex attracted"; "gender diverse"; "transgender"; and "secondary school"; "high school"; "adolescents" and "youth" were considered in the assessment of titles and abstracts. Sources were rendered ineligible if related to contexts other than schooling environments,

due to the specific social elements and structures within schools. Duplicates and sources that could not be accessed were excluded. The sources were individually screened to identify the study type (quantitative, qualitative, mixed-method) and sources that were retained were empirical studies only as they needed to relate to the experiences of LGBTQIA+ youth and recommendations for their wellbeing at school. Sources were then read in full to determine suitability for the ScR.

Grey literature included for the ScR was drawn from several national surveys (Hill et al., 2021; Hillier et al., 2010; Smith et al., 2014); The Department of Education's (2021a) LGBTIQ+ *Diversity in Queensland Schools* policy documents; and research by Tiffany Jones, whose research has been drawn upon widely by other sources in the research literature and also in informing policy in Australia (Jones, 2012). The justification for the inclusion of this grey literature was that this research did not appear in any of the database searches and results of these sources demonstrate clear recommendations for school inclusion policies for Australian LGBTIQA+ youth. Also included as grey literature were school based policies from the North Coast Region's secondary state schools' public websites.

Data charting and appraisal

The data was charted by one researcher as an iterative process. Cohen's (1990) PQRS method was used to firstly chart the number of sources retrieved using the search string and parameters, then to chart the number of eligible articles remaining after review (Appendix 1: PQRS record of source selection). The process is further described using the PRISMA flow diagram (Figure 1). Quality assessment was performed and recorded using *CASP* (Critical Appraisal Skills Programs, 2022) for qualitative sources, *STROBE* (Strengthening the Reporting of Observational Studies in Epidemiology, 2022) for quantitative sources, *MMAT* (Hong et al., 2018) for mixed methods research and *AACODS* for grey literature (Tyndall, 2010) (Appendix 2). As the school policy documents were not empirical studies, the researcher developed a charting table which recorded themes drawn from policies located in each secondary school website (Appendix 2:Table 5). The format for this table was developed from Braun and Clarke's (2022) recommendation for thematic analysis.

Data that was extracted from the school-based documents included the school name; documents assessed; whether the school had a LGBTIQA+ extra-curricular support; whether the school had any stand-alone inclusion or diversity policy; whether the term "LGBTIQ" appeared in the school site search engine (using Department of Education's acronym to improve search hit likelihood); excerpts of text from the policy document related to support, protection and inclusion of students for thematic analysis; and, themes that were identified within the texts assessed. In all school sites, the *Student code of conduct* was accessed.

Data that was extracted from sources identified in the database searches and grey literature included the research question addressed in the study, the participants if applicable, limitations, research type and, the results and recommendation of the studies. The focus was to identify data items pertaining to LGBTIQA+ youth, their experiences in

secondary schooling regarding inclusion and discrimination and, the recommendations made based on the results of the study to improve school contexts for LGBTIQA+ students. From this data, themes were drawn based on actionable recommendations for schools.

In all cases of the data charting process, the method was iterative with the researcher reviewing and refining the approach to ensure that the data selected was not too broad and related specifically to the scope of this project.

Synthesis of results

The synthesis of results was completed by identifying themes that emerged across the studies that were included in the ScR and analysing the alignment between research themes, systemic policy requirements, and individual school policies.

Results

Selection of sources of evidence

The database searches resulted in N=13213 combined entries after automatic deduplication. After conducting PQRS on the research results, records were retrieved (n=94) and assessed for eligibility based on search criteria with (n=12) records retained. An additional (n=14) records were added as grey literature for synthesis (Table 1), with (n=5) of these being departmental policy documents.

North Coast Region secondary state school websites were accessed (N=36) with policies and documents relating to inclusion retained for thematic analysis (n=104) (see Appendix 3 for full list). The PRIMSA-ScR workflow results of the selection of sources are as outlined in Figure 1.

Synthesis of results

The synthesis of results was conducted in two ways, firstly the combined records from the databases and grey literature (n=26), not including the school-based policies, was synthesised to identify inclusionary themes: 'LGBTIQA+ specific inclusion policies' (n=18); 'LGBTIQA+ specific anti-bullying and harassment policies' (n=10); 'affirming school structures' (uniform and toilets) (n=8), 'inclusive curriculum' (general and sexual education) (n=12); 'LGBTIQA+ groups and spaces' (n=6); and 'staff professional development' (n=10). Almost half of the sources provided evidence to support a combination of the above themes, this was charted under 'whole school approach' (n=10).

Secondly, an audit of the state secondary schools of Queensland's North Coast Region (N=36) was conducted to substantiate existing inclusion policies (See Appendix 2 Table 5).
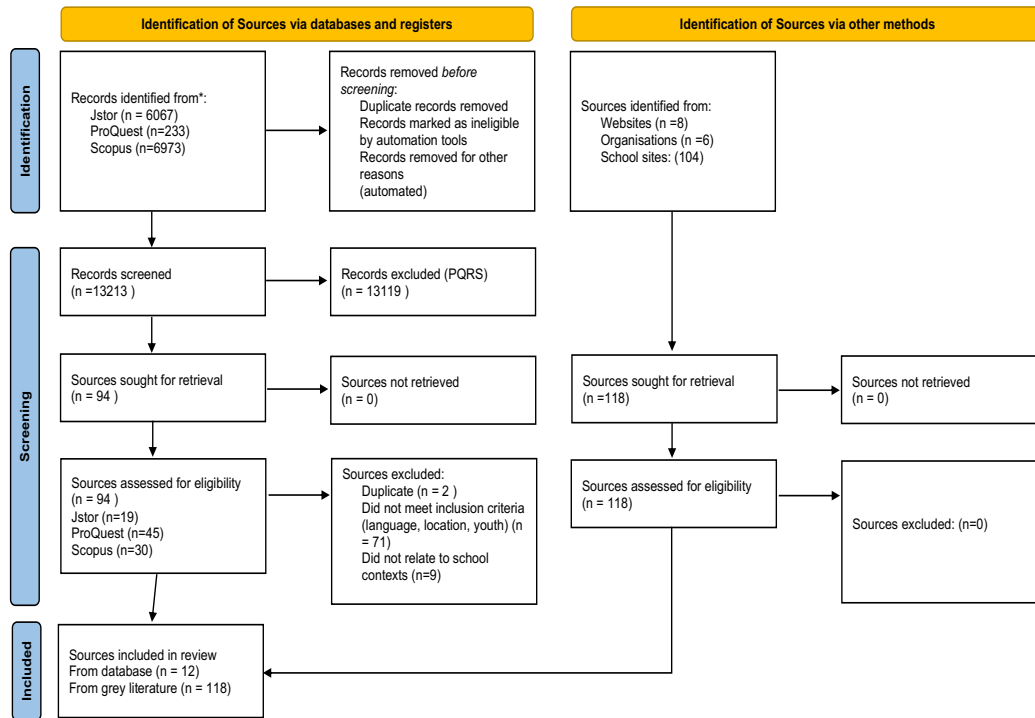
Figure 1: PRISMA-ScR flow diagram for new scoping reviews including searches of databases and other sources (use 'zoom in' function in web or PDF reader)

Key themes: Research literature

LGBTIQA+ specific inclusion policies

Of the literature found (n=26), the majority (n=18) of the sources recommended LGBTIQA+-specific inclusion policies as a supportive measure for LGBTIQA+ youth. The Department of Education has stated explicitly that LGBTIQ+ students must be supported through strategy, practice and policies (Department of Education, 2021b). However, while guidance is provided to principals regarding affirming structures for students with diverse gender identities and sex characteristics, there is very limited practical advice offered regarding supporting students with diverse sexual orientations (Department of Education, 2021a).

Results from *Writing themselves in 3* (Jones et al., 2010), and *From blues to rainbows* (Smith et al., 2014), two mixed methods surveys of Australian LGBT youth have been analysed by Jones and Hillier (2012, 2013, 2014; Jones et al., 2014). The findings from these sources confirmed the continuing challenges experienced by LGBTIQA+ youth in schooling contexts. One of the recommendations made by these articles referred to the benefits of LGBITQA+ specific inclusion policies that would promote inclusion, feelings of belongingness and provide affirmation for LGBTIQA+ youth, which was corroborated

by Hill et al. (2021). However, this survey also demonstrated that secondary schooling contexts are far less likely to have LGBTIQA+ specific inclusion policies and if they do exist, that students are not made aware of them.

The findings of Australian Human Rights Commission (AHRC) research regarding school contexts correlated with findings from other large scale national mixed method research (Hill et al., 2021; Hillier et al., 2010) regarding the challenges experienced by and risk factors for LGBITQA+ youth. It further demonstrated that these challenges and risks were related in part to a lack of visibility of LGBTIQA+ identities and perspectives within school policy, the curriculum and leadership. One of the recommendations from this report explicitly called for LGBTIQA+-specific inclusion policies at the federal, state and school levels.

LGBTIQA+ specific anti-bullying and harassment policies

The research recognises that in addition to inclusionary policy, LGBTQIA+ students should be afforded protection with specific anti-bullying and discrimination policies. While Ceatha et al. (2021) called for a shift beyond focusing on LGBTIQA+ specific anti-bullying and harassment policies, they still discussed the benefit of school policies that protect LGBTIQA+ youth specifically. Much of the research found in this scoping review (n=10) recommended that schools include LGBTIQA+-specific language within their anti-bullying and harassment policies. There are well documented negative impacts on the wellbeing and future outcomes of LGBTIQA+ youth due to experiences of bullying, harassment and discrimination, which was also found to most likely take place at school (AHRC, 2015; Hill et al., 2021; Hillier et al., 2010). Under the *Anti-discrimination Act 1991* (Queensland Government, 1991) and mandates from the Department of Education, schools are to have an anti-bullying and harassment policy and framework to protect all students. In Queensland, the schools use the broad-spectrum program *Bullying. No Way!* under recommendation from the Queensland Department of Education (2019). However, Jones et al., (2014) demonstrated that LGBTIQA+-specific, rather than broad or interpretative, policies have a highly significant relationship with a reduced likelihood of thinking about self-harm, actual self-harm, suicidal ideation and attempted suicide as well as an improved sense of safety, belonging and comfort with identity for LGBTIQA+ youth. Jones et al. (2014) further noted that Queensland students had the highest number of participants who felt unprotected and not included by school policies and that Queensland also made use of interpretative anti-bullying and inclusion policies that did not specifically name LGBTIQA+ students at this time.

Affirming school structures

Affirming school structures include non-binary uniforms, non-binary toilets, non-binary language by staff such as refraining from referring to students by their perceived sex characteristics (i.e. girls and boys) and using the student's chosen pronouns, and considerations made around sports, recreation and school camps. Research found in this scoping review recommending that schools adopt affirming structures (n=8) (Department of Education, 2021a; Francis et al., 2022; Hill et al., 2021; Jones et al., 2014; McBride,

2021; Smith et al., 2014; Strauss et al., 2020; Walsh & Townsin, 2018) also discussed how binary or heteronormative structures that do not consider diverse identities may be read by LGBTIQA+ students as institutional microaggressions, particularly by gender diverse and intersex students (McBride, 2021). This in turn impacts the students' sense of belonging, identity and wellbeing (Francis et al., 2022; Hill et al., 2021; Jones et al., 2014; Smith et al., 2014; Strauss et al., 2020; Walsh & Townsin, 2018). The Department of Education's *Diversity Policy* (2021a) has provided basic guidelines to principals to enact affirming structures for students with diverse gender or sex characteristics which demonstrates a more recent shift by the Queensland Department of Education to recognise and include LGBTIQA+ students in a structural sense.

Francis et al. (2022) found in a thematic analysis of cross-sectional interviews in Perth, Australia (n=34) that policymakers perceived barriers to making all toilets gender neutral at school. Some of these perceived barriers included: financial costs, lack of space, building code, compliance constraints, resistance from parents, resistance from students, privacy and confidentiality concerns, and cultural appropriateness. Regardless of these perceived barriers, the participants also recognised the positive impact that affirming structures would have for LGBTIQA+ students (Francis, 2022).

Inclusive curriculum

Searches of the ACARA website for the terms "LGBTIQ"; "LGBTQI"; or "LGBTIQA" did not yield any search results (n=0). However, the Queensland Department of Education (2021a; 2021b) has stated that schools must provide an inclusive curriculum that recognises diverse identities, including LGBTIQA+ identities. Furthermore, the research found in this scoping review (n=12) recommended that curriculum, including sex education, be inclusive of LGBTIQA+ perspectives and people (Ullman & Ferfolja (2015), through discourse analysis, found that the lack of visibility of LGBTIQA+ perspectives in the curriculum further reinforced fears from teachers that delivering curriculum that included LGBTIQA+ perspectives would lead to community backlash. Hill et al. (2021) demonstrated that Australian LGBTIQA+ youth are highly unlikely to be mentioned in the curriculum with one quarter of participants (27.3%; n = 1,041) reporting that LGBITQA+ people were never mentioned at all in a positive or inclusive way in their secondary school curriculum. Hill et al., (2021) also demonstrated that LGBTIQA+ youth want to see their identities and perspectives within the curriculum.

LGBTIQA+ groups and spaces

Research (n=6) has recommended that LGBTIQA+ groups such as Gay Straight Alliances, celebratory days or supportive LGBTIQA+ peer groups be enacted in schools to enhance belonging, promote visibility and increase likelihood of seeking support services or participation in activism (Ceatha et al., 2021; Jones & Hillier, 2013; Madireddy & Madireddy, 2022; McBride, 2021; Perales & Campbell, 2020; Vicars & Toledo, 2021). Perales and Campbell (2020) in a study of data collected in the *Longitudinal Study of Australian Children* aimed to test the hypothesis that social support and school belonging would act as an important mediator between LGBTIQA+ identity and mental health

outcomes. It was found that social support structures such as LGBTIQA+ groups and Gay Straight Alliances (GSA) which facilitate meaningful and supportive relationships between LGBTIQA+ students and their cis-gendered and heterosexual peers may mitigate the challenges and risks faced by LGBTIQA+ youth (Perale & Campbell, 2020).

Staff professional development

Research found in this scoping review (n=10) recommended that staff would benefit from professional development regarding inclusion of and differentiation for LGBTIQA+ students. Qualitative research by Grant et al. (2018, 2019) demonstrated that school staff not only would benefit from LGBTIQA+ professional development but may be willing to developing their professional capacity in this area. Thematic analysis conducted by Grant et al. (2018, 2019) on the interviews carried out in two separate studies of school staff faced a number of barriers to adopting a more inclusive approach, including a need for more professional development.

The Australian Human Rights Commission (AHRC, 2015) also reported concerns that LGBTIQA+ students were being affected by a lack of specialist support skills by support staff in schools, including the risk of inappropriate counselling from religious viewpoints which oppose LGBTQIA+ identities. (AHRC, 2015).

Whole school approach

The theme "whole school approach" was drawn from studies that recommended multi-tiered support and protection for LGBTIQA+ students, which called for a multiple combination of themes or used the phrase "whole school approach" (n=10). This theme was applied to the categorisation of schools in the second phase of analysis.

Synthesis of Queensland's North Coast Region secondary school policies

Regarding the state secondary schools of Queensland's North Coast Region (N=36), it was found that the minority of schools had any specific stand-alone inclusion policy (n=10). The thematic analysis of the selected school policy documents resulted in the following: 'binary uniform' (n=11); 'nonbinary uniform' (n=24); 'non-specific inclusion language' (n=33); 'sexual orientation' (n=16); 'LGBTIQA+ specific language' (n=10); 'gender diverse' (n=6); and 'affirming toilet facilities' (n=5) (Appendix 2 Table 5).

Four schools had the combination of all affirming themes ("non-binary uniform"; "sexual orientation"; "gender diverse"; "affirming toilet facilities"; and "LGBTIQA+ specific language") (n=4) within the school documents selected, which aligned with the research theme of 'whole school approach'. Five schools had a combination of LGBTIQA+ non-inclusion themes (binary uniform and non-specific inclusion language). Ten schools made no mention of LGBTIQA+ students but had a non-binary uniform (n=10) and 2 schools did not have their school uniform policy available.

Regarding the aims of this study, 10 schools of the 36 audited had a formal inclusion policy publicly accessible on their school website. Of these 10 schools, 4 had a formal inclusion policy that recognised all LGBTIQA+ people. Therefore 4 schools meet the criteria of substantiation of an existing LGBTIQA+ specific inclusion policy. However, it should be noted that where other schools without specific LGBTIQA+ inclusion policies made limited mention of LGBTIQA+ students in their *Student Code of Conduct,* the 4 schools with specific LGBTIQA+ policies did not reflect these policies within their *Student code of conduct* documents. As this is a high engagement document it is recommended that schools ensure that all inclusion policies are explicitly reflected within their *Student code of conduct.*

Discussion

Summary of evidence

In this scoping review, 26 sources of evidence were found. The research in this scoping review confirmed several inclusionary, supportive and protective practices for LGBTIQA+ youth in schooling contexts, with LGBTIQA+ specific inclusion policies the most recommended strategy. While the focus of this research was to substantiate LGBTIQA+ inclusion policies in Queensland's North Coast Region, it was important to also demonstrate the value of inclusion policies for LGBTIQA+ youth. Of the evidence concerning inclusion, support and protection, the research unanimously discussed the unique challenges and risks facing LGBTIQA+ youth, with schooling contexts acting a site of both potential strength and affirmation or hardship and exclusion. Overall, the scoping review demonstrated that the body of research from 2009-2022 regarding LGBTIQA+ specific inclusion policies in Australia was confirmatory, with LGBTIQA+ specific inclusion policies highly recommended as a significant step in improving wellbeing and outcomes for the LGBTIQA+ community.

Documents examined from Queensland's Department of Education and ACARA demonstrated a disconnect between policy and practice. The Queensland Department of Education recently amended their inclusion and diversity policies to become more explicit and specific to LGBTIQA+ students (Department of Education, 2021a; Department of Education, 2021b, Department of Education, 2022). It is stated within these documents that LGBTIQ+ students must be supported through strategy, support practices and inclusion policy. It is also the strategic improvement plan for each school to prioritise inclusion and wellbeing of students by aligning with policy and curriculum. The basis for these policies was drawn from *Sex and Discrimination Act 1984* and the *Antidiscrimination Act 1990.* It should be noted however, that while the *Inclusion Policy* (Department of Education, 2021b) broadly states inclusion for LGBTIQ students, the *Diversity Policy* (Department of Education, 2021a) provides actionable supports for gender diverse and intersex students but no guidance on how to include students who do not identify as heterosexual. Furthermore, no guidance is provided to principals or school policy writers on writing specific LGBTIQA+ antibullying and harassment policies.

ACARA makes no specific mention of LGBTIQA+ students. While the confirmatory research in the scoping review overwhelmingly recommends inclusive education and the Queensland Department of Education policy states that LGBTIQA+ students must be considered in the delivery of the curriculum, LGBTIQA+ people are invisible within the curriculum, including the ACARA diversity documents on both the original and updated sites (ACARA, 2016; ACARA, 2022).

The disconnect between policy at a state and federal level is evident within schools in the Queensland North Coast Region. While students are more likely to be provided with a non-binary uniform choice, they are not being made visible within existing school inclusion policies such as the *Student Code of Conduct* or in stand-alone LGBTIQA+ inclusion policies as directed by the Department of Education (2021a, 2021b, 2022). These findings demonstrate that in nearly all schools in Queensland's North Coast Region, LGBTIQA+ students are not being included, which as evidenced in the research, may have serious and negative impacts on the health, wellbeing and academic engagement of LGBTIQA+ youth.

Limitations

The research was conducted by a single researcher and without the use of thematic software that may have reduced semantic error or author bias. This limitation was negated where possible by the use of CASP, AACODS, MMAT and STROBE appraisal tables and the involvement of a second author in the writing phase. This scoping review identifies policy directions and goals but has not explored in detail how the gap between policy and practice in schools can be closed, including consideration of aspects such as school funding, professional development, community education, and parent support. These are all avenues for further research about the barriers and enablers of effective LGBTQIA+-inclusive policy implementation. As the findings of the review show, there remains a disparity and inconsistency in school policies on the inclusion of LGBTQIA+ students, and this is the most pressing and logical avenue for further research in both understanding how school polices have been developed and in identifying and implementing professional development and policy writing support to better ensure school policies that reflect the systemic requirements, and also best practice for ensuring the safety and wellbeing of LGBTQIA+ students in Queensland State Schools. Such a project could also be scaled up to be undertaken in other Education Queensland regions, and in non-state school settings.

Conclusions

The findings in this scoping review demonstrate that, despite the wide body of evidence spanning more than ten years confirming the specific challenges experienced by LGBTIQA+ youth and actionable methods to mitigate these, policies at a federal, state and school level are still not aligning with this evidence. State policies still require attention from policymakers to ensure that all members of the LGBTIQA+ youth community are being represented and supported in specific and actionable ways, as at the school level LGBTIQA+ inclusion policies are largely invisible.

Only four of the 36 state secondary schools in North Coast Region had a LGBTIQA+ specific inclusion policy that would be considered to be sufficiently supportive of all LGBTIQA+ students. Additionally, none of these 4 schools reflected their LGBTIQA+ inclusion policy within their *Student Code of Conduct*. The disturbingly low compliance with policy and legal frameworks regarding the protection and inclusion of LGBTIQA+ students warrants immediate action from state secondary schools as a high priority in aligning their school policies with that of the Departmental imperative and research evidence regarding the inclusion and wellbeing of all students, including LGBTIQA+ students.

The results of this study produce the following recommendations. The Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority must include LGBTIQA+ people and their perspectives specifically within their *Diversity* section and explicitly throughout the curriculum. School staff must be provided with professional development regarding creating a LGBTIQA+ positive school community and including LGBTIQA+ people in educational environments in a meaningful, cultural sense rather than on one-off celebratory days. The Department of Education must oversee an audit of all Queensland schools to ensure not only the compliance with instituting *Diversity* and *Inclusion* policies that specially include LGBTIQA+ students, but also ensure that other policies do not conflict with the objectives of inclusion for all students, such as including toilet and change room facilities, uniform and *School Code of Conduct*. Potential for further research lies in the replication of the policy analysis within other Queensland education regions to determine how inclusive policies are of LGBTQIA+ students as well as further study of how these policies are enacted in practical terms in schools within each region.

Acknowledgement

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Appendix 1: PQRS record of source selection

Table 1: Database source search terms

Date	Data-base	Search terms	Limits	No. article hits	No. artic. relevant	Notes
14 Sep 2022	JSTOR	"LGBT" OR "Queer" OR "Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender" AND "secondary school" OR "high school" AND "Australia" AND "policy"	14/09/2009 -14/09/2022 Peer reviewed; Full text Open access English language. Location: Australia; Remove duplicates; Type: Journal articles, book chapters, Govt publications, reports	6067 hits 19 articles selected based on title and abstract	0	Reviewed abstracts and removed articles irrelevant to the review, included only empirical studies
14 Sep 2022	Scopus	"LGBT" OR "Queer" OR "Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender" AND "secondary school" OR "high school" AND "Australia" AND "policy"	14/09/2009 -14/09/2022 Peer reviewed; Full text; Open access English language; Location: Australia Remove duplicates; Type: Journal articles, book chs, Govt publications, reports	233 hits 45 articles selected based on title and abstract	9	Reviewed abstracts and removed articles irrelevant to the review, included only empirical studies
14 Sep 2022	Pro-quest	"LGBT" OR "Queer" OR "Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender" AND "secondary school" OR "high school" AND "Australia" AND "policy"	14/09/2009 -14/09/2022 Peer reviewed; Full text; Open access English language Location: Australia; Remove duplicates; Type: Journal articles, book chs, Govt publications, reports	6973 hits 30 articles selected based on title and abstract	3	Reviewed abstracts and removed articles irrelevant to the review, included only empirical studies

Appendix 2: CASP, STROBE, MMAT and AACODS assessments

Table 1: CASP Qualitative studies asssessment (Critical Appraisal Skills Programs, 2022)
(use 'zoom in' function in web or PDF reader)

Key to columns			
1	Study	6	Data collected in a way that addresses the research question
2	Clear statement of the aims of the research	7	Relationship between researcher and [participant adequately/ explicitly considered
3	Appropriate use of qualitative methodologies	8	Ethical issues explicitly taken into consideration
4	Appropriate research design to address the aims of the research	9	Sufficiently rigorous data analysis
5	Recruitment strategy appropriate for the aims of the research	10	Research is of value as ...

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Gillett-Swan & Leent, 2019	Yes	Yes	Yes	n/a	Yes	n/a	Yes	Yes	... it provides an explanation of the inclusion of LGBTI people in school curriculums
Vicars & Toledo, 2021	Yes	Yes	Yes but required larger sample	Yes, with consent, review and ethics app-roval. Poss-ible conflict of interest.	Yes	No	Yes, achie-ved ethics appro-val	Yes	... the literature review before the study outlines the value of LGBTIQA+ Support groups and alliances in school
Francis et al., 2022	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	... the study demonstrates the compl-exity of issues facing the community regarding toilets and changerooms

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Grant et al., 2019	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	... the study demonstrates that staff approaches to inclusion is vital to its impact
McBride, 2021	Yes	Yes	Yes	n/a	Yes	n/a	Yes	Yes	... it performs a scoping review of empirical data related not only to transgender students, but LGBTIQA+ students as well, highlighting the need for a whole school approach to inclusion
Ceatha et al., 2021	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	... it demonstrates a shift in risk discourse regarding LGBTIQA+ towards inclusion and wellbeing
Johns et al., 2018	Yes	Yes	Yes	n/a	Yes	n/a	Yes	Cultural diffe-rence not ta-ken into con-sideration	... it identifies some supportive and protective factors for transgender and gender diverse youth
Madireddy & Madire-ddy, 2022	Yes	Yes	Yes	n/a	Yes	n/a	Yes	Yes	... it identifies actionable steps to improving outcomes for LGBTIQA+ students
Walsh & Townsin, 2018	Yes	Yes	Yes	n/a	Yes	n/a	Yes	Yes. A comp-arative anal-ysis of other conceptual models would enhan-ce discussion	... it discusses and provides a conceptual solution for the omission of SOGII issues in the national high school curriculum.

Table 2: STROBE Quantitative studies assessment (STROBE, 2022)
(Strengthening the Reporting of Observational Studies in Epidemiology)
(use 'zoom in' function in web or PDF reader)

Key to columns	2	Title/Abstract	6	Participants
	3	Introduction	7	Summary and outcome measures
	4	Methods	8	Bias /Generalisability
	5	Results	9	Overall quality based on authors independent review. Research is of value as it ...

Study	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Strauss et al, 2020	Associations between negative life experiences and the mental health of trans and gender div-erse young people in Australia: findings from Trans Pathways.	The study aims to characterise mental health issues affect-ing trans and gender diverse (TGD) Australian young people, and to investigate the potential relationships between negative life events and adverse mental health outcomes. The report is based on the outcome of the Trans Pathway survey (2016)	Cross sectional online survey questions . Logistic and linear regression models were used to test associati-ons betw-een mental health outcomes and negative life exper-iences.	TGD young people in Australia exper-ience: High levels of mental distress, including self-harm (80%); Suicidal thoughts (82%); Attempting suicide (48%). Depression and/or anxiety, 75% and 72%, resp. Peer rejection (89%), Precarious accommodation 22%, Bullying (74%), and discrim-ination (69%). Strongest associa-tions were found for precarious accom-modation and iss-ues within educat-ional settings. Link between negative experiences and poor mental health evident.	859 trans or gender diverse Australian participants aged 14-25 (anonym-ous)	Urgent need for targeted mental health intervent-ions and protective policies specific to LGBTIQA+ people	No conflict of interest. All procedures complied with the ethical standards of the relevant national and institutional committees on human exper-imentation and with the Helsinki Declaration of 1975, as revised in 2008.	... provides an explanation for the need for protective policies for LGBTIQA+ youth by demonstr-ating the negative health out-comes linked to experien-ces at school environments.

Perales & Campbell, 2020	Health disparities between sexual minority and different-sex-attracted adolescents: Quantifying the Intervening role of social support and school belonging	Authors demonstrate a large body of research that sexual orientation and health outcomes are linked, with people with diverse gender and sexual orientation experiencing significantly poorer outcomes. Authors hypothesise that improvements to social support will act as an intervening support measure for this group and mitigate some of the health issues experienced by this group.	Cross sectional analyses based on longitudinal data gathered from Longitudinal Study of Australian Children. One cohort, born between March 1999 and February 2000 were surveyed regarding their mood, sexual attraction and social support/ belonging.	Same sex attracted participants results demonstrated that they experienced poorer health-related quality of life and socio-emotional functioning, more depressive symptoms, and lower life satisfaction. Researchers demonstrated that improving these out-comes may be linked to improving social supports	Participant data was drawn from an Australian national probability sample of 14–15-year old youths (Longitudinal Study of Australian Children, n=3204)	Social support structures for LGBTIQA+ youth may mitigate the challenges and risks faced by this group.	No conflict noted	... supports a whole school/ community approach to inclusion

Table 3: MMAT (Mixed Methods Appraisal Tool) assessment (Hong et al., 2018)

Study	Category of study designs	Methodological quality criteria	Responses			
			Yes	No	Can't tell	Comments
Jones & Hillier, 2013	Screening questions (for all types)	S1. Are there clear research questions?	Y			
		S2. Do the collected data allow to address the research questions?	Y			
		Further appraisal may not be feasible or appropriate when the answer is 'No' or 'Can't tell' to one or both screening questions.				
	5. Mixed methods	5.1. Is there an adequate rationale for using a mixed methods design to address the research question?	Y			
		5.2. Are the different components of the study effectively integrated to answer the research question?	Y			
		5.3. Are the outputs of the integration of qualitative and quantitative components adequately interpreted?	Y			
		5.4. Are divergences and inconsistencies between quantitative and qualitative results adequately addressed?	Y			
		5.5. Do the different components of the study adhere to the quality criteria of each tradition of the methods involved?	Y			

Table 4: AACODS quality assessment (Tyndall, 2010)

Study	Authority	Accuracy	Coverage	Objectivity	Date	Significance
Hillier et al., 2010	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Hill et al., 2021	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

Smith et al., 2014	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
AHRC	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Jones et al, 2014	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes (author did use emotive language at times	Yes	Yes
Grant et al., 2018	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Jones & Hillier, 2014	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Jones & Hillier, 2012	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Ullman & Ferfolja, 2015	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Department of Education, 2021a	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Department of Education, 2021b	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Department of Education, 2022	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
ACARA, 2016	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
ACARA, 2022	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

Table 5: Samples from Synthesis Matrix Tool - North Coast Region schools (n=36)
(use 'zoom in' function in web or PDF reader)

State secondary school title	Policies identified*	LGBTQI+ group?	Inclusion policy	Site hits for LGBTIQ	Excerpts	Code
School A	*School A Student Handbook* *Uniform Policy* *Student Code of Conduct 2020-2023*	No	No	(n=0)	"Uniform…shirt…shorts… skirt" "The Beerwah High light blue blouse with crossover tie (girls) / light blue shirt (boys) with long tie (optional) is to be worn with the navy pleated skirt/formal shorts (with school initials)." School A "recognises that in some situations, students may require modifications to the requirements of the school dress code. "…recognising the rights of all students to: o express their opinions in an appropriate manner and at the appropriate time o work and learn in a safe environment regardless of their age, gender, cultural background, socioeconomic situation and impairment" "We believe that no one deserves to be mistreated and that everyone regardless of race, colour, religion, immigration status, nationality, size, gender, popularity, athletic capability, academic outcomes, physical ability, social ability, or intelligence has the right to feel safe, secure, and respected."	Non binary uniform Binary uniform Nonspecific inclusion
School B	*Student Code of Conduct 2022-2025* *Uniform shop price list 2022/2023*	No	No	(n=0)	"From the very beginning of the school's opening [School B] has focused on an Inclusive culture, founded on the belief that all students have diverse needs and that all students have the human right to engage in learning and to achieve positive learning outcomes for their future. Also key to our Inclusion model is that we as a College work together as a community and ensure through our values of Respect, Courage and Excellence that no student is disadvantaged and that all barriers to learning are addressed enabling positive learning outcomes for all of young people" "College striped boys shirt with logo" "College striped girls blouse" "Girls uniform" "Boys uniform" "Verbal bullying - Repeated or systematic name calling, insults, homophobic or racist remarks and verbal abuse."	Nonspecific inclusion Binary uniform Sexual orienatation
School C	*Diversity Policy* *[School C] Student Learning and Wellbeing Framework* *Student Code of Conduct 2020-2023*	Yes	Yes	(n=0)	"[School C] is committed to providing all students with a safe, supportive and welcoming environment where all students can learn free from discrimination based on gender, language, sexuality, culture, ethnicity, religion, health, disability or socioeconomic background" "Our aim is to ensure that all students regardless of their sex, gender identity or sexuality are provided with equal opportunities to learn and perform to their highest potential within our school." "Students may refer to themselves by a name of their choosing • As with all students, staff are encouraged to use a student's preferred name and gender when requested, including the use of appropriate pronouns." "Teachers are encouraged to avoid making generalisations or assumptions about gender, sexuality or gender identity." "[School C] provides unisex toilets for student use." "[School C] supports the right of each child to dress in accordance with their gender identity. A gender-neutral uniform option is also available." "Any bullying, harassment or discrimination based on gender, sexuality or gender identity will result in a prompt and appropriate response as per the Student Code of Conduct and Parent Code of Conduct." "[School C] recognises and celebrates diversity and individuality through signage and special events." "Students at [School C] are supported through the school LGBTQIA+ group that is facilitated by a staff member. This group runs every fortnight during first break. A space that is developed by students themselves to feel, safe, comfortable and confident to be themselves."	Sexual orientation Gender diverse LGBTIQA+ specific Affirming toilet facilities Nonbinary uniform Nonspecific inclusion *Student Code of Conduct did not reflect explicitness of

State secondary school title	Policies identified*	LGBTQI+ group?	Inclusion policy	Site hits for LGBTIQ	Excerpts	Code
					"An active LGBTQI+ group" "Celebrating diversity and providing an inclusive environment for students of all social, cultural, community and family backgrounds, and of all identities and abilities" "We believe that no one deserves to be mistreated and that everyone regardless of race, colour, religion, immigration status, nationality, size, gender, sexual orientation, disability, popularity, athletic ability, academic outcomes, social ability, or intelligence has the right to feel safe, secure, and respected."	Diversity policy or [School C] Student Learning and Wellbeing Framework
School D	Uniform Policy Supporting Gender Diverse Students Policy Student Code of Conduct 2020-2023	No	Yes****	(n=0)	"All parents would be aware that we are a uniform school and that the Junior School uniform (Years 7, 8 and 9) is different from the Senior School uniform (Years 10, 11 and 12). Seniors have a choice of different shirts while the juniors have a unisex shirt" "[School D] is committed to providing all students with access to high quality education. All members of our school community have the right to feel safe, be respected and free from discrimination based on gender, language, sexual orientation, culture, ethnicity, religion, health, disability or socioeconomic background. At [School D] we acknowledge our diversity and respect for all students and their choice to live authentically in their chosen gender identity" "Considerations about appropriate bathroom access will be negotiated with each individual student. At [School D] we work collaboratively to promote safety and comfort for all students. Some options that have been previously negotiated with students include the use of unisex bathroom facilities around the school." "We believe that no one deserves to be mistreated and that everyone regardless of race, colour, religion, immigration status, nationality, size, gender, popularity, athletic capability, academic outcomes, social ability, or intelligence has the right to feel safe, secure, and respected."	Sexual orientation Gender diverse Affirming toilet facilities Nonbinary uniform Nonspecific inclusion *Student Code of Conduct did not reflect explicitness of Diversity policy
School E	Year 6 into 7 parent information Antibullying and cyber bullying policy Student Code of Conduct Prospectus	No	No	(n=1)	"[School E] promotes inclusive education through a range of in class, external and student driven programs… Student led PRISM group for the LGBTIQ+ community" "Using negative words, repeatedly and intentionally to upset someone. Examples of verbal bullying includes name calling, insults, homophobic, sexist or racist remarks, and verbal abuse." "[School E] is proud to have a comprehensive Student Services Team in place to help the social, emotional and physical wellbeing of every student. In addition to the assistance provided by class teachers, we have a team of professionals whose dedicated roles are to help ensure our school is an inclusive, nurturing environment." "Guidance Counsellor In consultation with other staff members, provides support for LGBTIQ+ students." "All members of the school community actively participating in building a welcoming school culture that values diversity, and fosters positive, respectful relationships." "Uniform Skirt Charcoal pleated skirt with School emblem visible at hemline to reach the knee. Skirt not to be rolled at waist or re-hemmed Shorts Charcoal hipster knee-length dress short with School logo at hemline Charcoal knee-length walk short with school emblem at hem. May be worn with plain black belt – No large buckles Long Pants Students are permitted to wear long dress pants. The 'Iconic Soul Black Chino Pant' is an approved pant which can be purchased from Lowes. May be worn with a plain black belt – No large buckles Formal Blouse Striped over-blouse with piping and embroidered school emblem. Must have sufficient overlap of skirt to conceal midriff when arm is raised Formal Shirt Striped over-shirt with MSHS embroidered logo Junior Secondary Polo Shirt White polo shirt with green/gold panels across shoulders and under sleeves, green sleeves. Senior Secondary Polo Shirt"	LGBTIQA+ specific Non binary uniform Nonspecific inclusion Sexual orientation
School F	Student Dress Code Student Code of Conduct 2020-2023 Responsible Behaviour Plan for Students	No	No	(n=0)	"Casual uniform…formal uniform" "Inclusion All members of the school community actively participating in building a welcoming school culture that values diversity, and fosters positive, respectful relationships."	Non binary uniform Nonspecific inclusion
School G	Student Code of Conduct 2021-2024 Dress Code	No	No	(n=0)	"We will create a safe, supportive and inclusive environment for every student." "Formal Uniform Set One, Formal Uniform Set Two, Formal Uniform Set Three, Casual Uniform" "[School G] is proud to have a comprehensive Student Services Network in place to help the social, emotional and physical wellbeing of every student"	Non binary uniform Nonspecific inclusion
School H	Student services and support programs Student Code of Conduct 2021-2024 Student Dress Code	No	No	(n=0)	"QLife LGBTI peer support and referral 1800 184527" "Verbal Bullying - Repeated offensive comments that relate to race, religion, gender, sexuality or ability. This includes repeated behaviours such as: name calling, teasing and spreading rumours." "Uniform…Junior…Senior…Sports Uniform"	LGBTIQA+ specific Sexual orientation Non binary uniform
School I	Student Code of Conduct 2021-2024	No	No	(n=0)	"[School I] is committed to providing a safe, respectful and disciplined learning environment for all students, staff, parents and visitors" "We will create a safe supportive and inclusive environment for every student." "We will welcome and celebrate a diverse community with recognition of significant social, culture	Nonspecific inclusion Binary uniform

State secondary school title	Policies identified*	LGBTQI+ group?	Inclusion policy	Site hits for LGBTQIQ	Excerpts	Code
	Uniform Guide				and historical events." "Uniform…Boys…Girls"	
School J	*Student Code of Conduct 2021-2023* *Diversity Policy*	No	Yes	(n=0)	"Respect Others • Be positive, polite and inclusive. We will create a safe, supportive and inclusive environment for every student. We will promote every child's individuality and build a cohesive, inclusive classroom and school culture. Respect others… being positive, polite and inclusive with my language and behaviour." "In addition to the assistance provided by class teachers, we have a team of professionals whose dedicated roles are to help ensure our school is an inclusive, nurturing environment." "All members of the school community actively participating in building a welcoming school culture that values diversity, and fosters positive, respectful relationships." "We believe that no one deserves to be mistreated and that everyone regardless of race, colour, religion, immigration status, nationality, size, gender, popularity, athletic capability, academic outcomes, social ability, or intelligence has the right to feel safe, secure, and respected" "We know from research that students who are diverse in their sex, gender identity or sexuality are less likely to experience bullying and mental health issues, or disengage from school, when school staff are supportive and the school has a specific policy around supporting these students. This policy outlines the expectations of our school community in relation to diversity and helps us to respect and support all of our students." "The [School J] daily uniform is not gender specific • A student will not be forced to wear a Formal uniform which is gender specific" "Toilet and change room use…The school should discuss with the student, parent or carer and consider options based on available facilities" "As with all students, staff are encouraged to use a student's preferred name and gender when requested, including the use of appropriate pronouns."	Sexual orientation Gender diverse LGBTIQA+ specific Affirming toilet facilities Nonbinary uniform Nonspecific inclusion

Appendix 3: School policies

Note: All school policies were accessed during August and September 2022. Schools revise and update policy regularly (annually or more frequently). While every effort has been made to ensure that file names and links are accurate at time of publication, these may change over time.

The dates provided in the references indicate the publication date of the policies used in this review. In instances where the policy has been updated since the review was completed, the most current URL is provided and the date appears with an asterisk (*) to indicate a more current version of the policy is available.

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