

A vibrant rainbow arches across a dark, textured background. The colors of the rainbow are clearly visible, transitioning from red on the left to violet on the right. The background has a subtle, grainy texture.

The Wheatley Park GSA

By WPS GSA members

What does GSA stand for?

GSA stands for Gay Straight Alliance, which means that we're supportive of everyone, regardless of sexuality or gender, and we accept allies into the group!

Our motto is Stronger Together, because we are stronger as a group. It's great to be able to walk into a room full of friendly and supportive people, and to be in a place where we feel safe and valid among people we know will accept us.

How the GSA was formed at Wheatley Park

“I was outed as gay to my entire school in Year 8, well before I was ready, and all I wanted was a safe place to go where I could meet other people like me.

When I realised that there wasn't one, I decided to make it my mission to create one, so that other young LGBT people would know that they weren't alone, because I think that's the hardest part of discovering your sexuality - the loneliness - and I wanted to make it as easy as I could for other young LGBT people struggling with this.

I talked to my form tutor and my head of year, and then the safeguarding team, and they agreed that if I could find enough people who'd be willing to come, and a teacher to help me run it, then I could set it up.

Luckily, I had lots of LGBT friends, and an awesome teacher, and we became the GSA.

We've been running for nearly two years now, and I couldn't be more proud of everyone.”

Barriers encountered

Sadly, the first group attracted lots of negative attention - where the group met was too obvious and there were many interruptions from other students who made abusive or derogatory comments - we settled on challenging homophobic behaviour by asking questions such as “why do you think that [x] is gay?”

Thankfully, we always made sure there was a teacher nearby, if not in the room to remove those students if they came in.

It took a long time to get approval for a gender neutral toilet - but continuing a dialogue with senior teachers is what helped us to get there in the end...

How we arranged the gender neutral toilet

Gender
Neutral
Toilet

Arranging the gender neutral toilet took a long time - getting senior teachers on board, arranging exactly where it would be, who would have the key, how staff would know who could use it, dealing with abuse from other students (both comments and trying to use it).

Once a suitable toilet had been agreed with the headteacher, a sign was put on the door to indicate that the toilet was gender neutral and only to be used by students with a pass card. A list of these students was shared with the teachers who had the key for these toilets - which were kept locked the rest of the time.

The venue we chose was a quiet part of the school.

How it runs

It is informal.

We meet at least once a week at lunchtime in a designated room, with designated supportive teachers present

Other teachers drop in or wear badges to show that they are supportive and can be approached

It's very inclusive - not only for pupils who identify as LGBT+ but also supportive friends

We don't advertise the room where the group meets, but there have been posters around the school showing that there is a group, which give a point of contact (a teacher to email) to find out more.

We...

Discuss how the week has gone and any issues that have arisen

Discuss approaches for response or course of action

Discuss LGBT+ issues in the news

Discuss how to support within the wider community

Watch relevant documentaries and programmes - with follow up discussion

Have 1-2-1 conversations - with each other or a teacher - to discuss specific issues

What works

Friendly and supportive of each other

It's not a big deal if students don't come every week

Having a safe space - knowing that there is a space you can go to be yourself

Having nominated / identified teachers that can be approached at any time

Having students that you feel you can talk to, if you can't talk to a teacher.

Having a space that is safe



What we have achieved as a group

We have been able to introduce a gender neutral bathroom for transgender pupils. This has helped greatly as we are now able to go to the bathroom and get changed for PE without being scared or uncomfortable.

We have also helped reduce homophobic and transphobic language by having an extended tutorial on LGBT+ people and issues and also targeting any discrimination when encountered.

A safe space has been introduced for anyone which has helped most members feel more confident and safe around the school. This has also enabled more students to have the confidence to come out and be who they are.

Some students have had their details changed to their preferred name and pronouns on the school data system.

What difference it makes to us

It gives us a place to talk

It gave us the courage to come out

It helps us to get to know other people

It's a place to hang out and talk to people who will be supportive and accepting

It's somewhere to be without fear of being judged

It's somewhere to be away from people who could be nasty

What difference it makes to us

It's a refuge from unsupportive friends and family

It's somewhere to find further support

It's a safe environment

It's fun

It's somewhere you don't have to worry about what you say, the way you act, who you are

"It's somewhere I can be myself"



Where next?

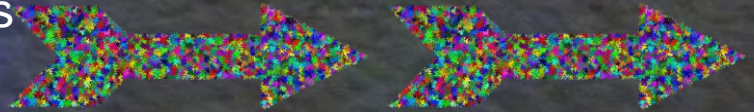
Developing a presence on the school website and school newsletter

Promoting the group to reach out to other students who would benefit from the group; to open up the safe space to a wider group of people, without receiving hate.

Setting up LGBT+ student ambassadors, to support other students and provide someone to talk to

Developing strategies to reduce harassment and abuse around school and the wider community

Further whole school PSHE about LGBT+ issues





Wheatley

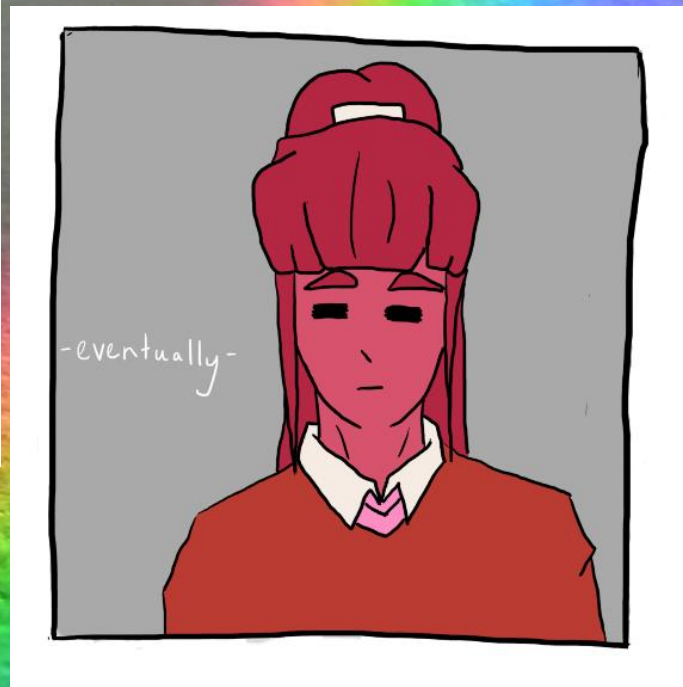
Park

GSA













We Can Be Happy

Thank
you for
listening!

