# Gay books 'censored' by UK school libraries



A recent report has revealed that over half of the surveyed school librarians in the UK have been requested to remove books from their collections, with a significant focus on LGBTQ+ titles. The survey, conducted by Index on Censorship in collaboration with the School Library Association (SLA) and the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals, sheds light on a growing trend of censorship in educational institutions.

The survey recorded responses from 53 librarians, with 28 reporting they had been asked to remove particular books from their libraries. Notably, over 50% of these requests originated from parents. Among the titles frequently targeted for removal are *This Book Is Gay* by Juno Dawson, *Julián is a Mermaid* by Jessica Love, and *ABC Pride* by Louie Stowell, Elly Barnes, and Amy Phelps. These requests have resulted in numerous books being taken off the shelves in several schools.

Alison Tarrant, the chief executive of the SLA, voiced concerns regarding this trend. "Censorship is definitely something that concerns many of our members," she noted. Tarrant indicated that the nature of censorship varies, ranging from direct requests by teachers to remove certain books to more subtle forms of suppression, such as keeping specific titles out of sight despite their presence in the library.

The trend appears to reflect patterns seen in the United States, where book censorship reached unprecedented levels last year. Tarrant remarked that some instances of censorship in the UK could be influenced by external groups or individuals from the US rather than the immediate school community.

To address these challenges, the SLA recommends that school libraries implement comprehensive collection development policies. These policies should outline the criteria for responding to complaints, the types of books to be stocked, and the overarching objectives of the school library. However, Tarrant pointed out that such policies are sometimes undervalued by school leaders, resulting in a lack of preparedness when disputes arise. Furthermore, school library staff may lack adequate training and support from senior leadership, exacerbating the difficulties they face.

Librarians find themselves under substantial pressure to navigate these contentious issues correctly. The emotional toll can be significant, as they must balance differing opinions on book content and censorship, often feeling isolated in the process.

Tarrant emphasised the unique role of the school library, which must cater to a diverse student body and a wide range of subjects. Consequently, content that may not be suitable for younger students will inevitably be present alongside materials essential for older pupils. She also stressed the importance of providing students with accurate and appropriate resources. "If a pupil is wanting to know more about sex or sexuality, I would much rather they went to their school library and explored the resources there than they went to the internet and explored what’s there," Tarrant stated.

The visibility of LGBTQ+ books in school libraries is particularly crucial, according to Tarrant. The absence of these books can subtly perpetuate exclusion and otherness among students seeking such literature. A representative from the LGBTQ+ rights charity Stonewall echoed these sentiments, highlighting the psychological impact on students who benefit from seeing themselves represented in educational resources. "Preventing LGBTQ+ young people from seeing themselves represented in inclusive resources and books at school can often make them feel ashamed and feel the need to hide who they are," the representative noted.