

Today: A protest by Singaporeans against transphobia in the education system. <https://t.co/ZRy14e9nHZ>



They've issued a statement and are using the hashtag [#FixSchoolsNotStudents](https://t.co/lzqYSVFBUD) <https://t.co/lzqYSVFBUD>

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Students and supporters protest, calling on MOE to end anti-LGBT discrimination in and by schools

26 January 2021 – We are a group of students and supporters staging a peaceful demonstration at 5pm today outside the Ministry of Education (MOE) at Buona Vista (*you can read messages from individual protestors at the bottom of this press release*). We call on Minister Lawrence Wong to end discrimination against LGBTQ+ students by MOE schools, so as to uphold the fundamental right of all students to education within a safe and supportive school life.

Discrimination and harassment against LGBTQ+ students is a long standing issue in our schools which damages their wellbeing and denies access to safe and supportive education. Most of us demonstrating today have experienced this first hand.

Students themselves, [human rights and civil society groups](#), as well as [educators, counsellors and other professionals](#) working with young people, have raised concerns about discriminatory and intrusive practices by schools, which hurt both LGBTQ+ students, as well as heterosexual and cisgender students, by undermining privacy, bodily autonomy and well-being. These practices include (but are not limited to):

- Checking and controlling whether students' clothes, hair and bodies match gender norms imposed by schools, including through intrusive clothing checks (e.g. examining underclothes)
- Prohibiting and policing students' dating and intimate relationships, including punishing or shaming students for relationships
- School counselling which treats LGBTQ+ identities as problems to be done away with (e.g. conversion therapy) rather than affirming students' autonomy and identities
- Disrespecting students' confidentiality and outing them as LGBTQ+ to family members or other persons without their consent
- Physically excluding students from school based on whether they look like a gender the school imposes upon them. Home-Based Learning (HBL) could be offered, but not imposed, for all students whose circumstances might make HBL a preferred option for a period.
- Refusing to use gender pronouns requested by students
- Censoring mention and open discussion of LGBTQ+ experiences and identities, including by disciplining or policing educators
- Continuing to discuss LGBTQ+ identities mainly in the context of informing students during sex-ed that Section 377A deems homosexual conduct illegal and opposed to societal norms, and failing to provide LGBTQ-inclusive information on sexual and reproductive health and well-being.

MOE has a duty to protect the human rights of LGBTQ+ students in its care. Your recent statements on this matter have not acknowledged the harm your schools have done to trans students, nor committed to concrete actions to alleviate this harm. You have merely stated that your current practices are good enough when it is abundantly clear from the

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testimonies of trans students that they are not. MOE seems more invested in defending itself than in caring for the well-being of trans students.

The cost of MOE's failures in eradicating these harmful practices is the health, well-being, and sometimes, the lives of LGBTQ+ students. And that is too great a cost for us to bear.

In schools, children and young people learn how to treat others in society. Civic lessons instruct them to respect and be kind to others. Do the institutions practise these same values, in their treatment of students? Young people learn much more from what they see others do, rather than what they are told. Schools that practice transphobia reinforce a transphobic society. It is urgent that we put an end to discrimination in schools' policies and practices.

Today, we build on the work and care of the many groups and individuals who have spoken for LGBTQ+ rights over the years, even though each of us acts alone, and not in affiliation with any association. We believe that gathering in support of our beliefs is an important and legitimate form of expression in a democratic society, and we are putting our bodies on the line to stand in solidarity with all LGBT students, past and present.

We envision a society that cares deeply for the well-being of all children in Singapore, where no child has to struggle to survive, and has every opportunity to thrive in the life they have chosen for themselves.

We urge MOE to acknowledge and apologise for the harm done by schools to LGBTQ+ students through their schools' discriminatory practices, and to clearly and explicitly commit to end such discrimination in the education environment. This must include working closely with students themselves and LGBTQ+ groups to understand their concerns, and to draw on and implement their existing concrete ideas and expertise.

Messages from individual protestors:

"I have seen and heard of far too many generations of transgender students who have been subjected to the disciplinary violence of MOE-run schools - me included - with regards to the regulating of hairstyles, wearing of gendered uniforms, the lack of access to medical treatment, and the prevention of trans alumni returning, among other forms of discrimination. I want to see Transgender/Queer students at the table with MOE on educational policy, and for the Ministry to accede and assist to the needs of Transgender/Queer students."

Lune Loh (she/they), student activist

"As an LGBTQ+ student who has experienced discrimination in school, I feel uncomfortable having to recite the pledge every morning - "based on justice and equality" - knowing that this is not true, and that our national leaders who should be at the forefront of upholding

this national promise are severely lacking in doing so. I am here today in solidarity with fellow students who have faced transphobia by systems that are meant to protect them. I would love to say "we deserve better", but the fact is that we are fighting for the bare minimum."

Elijah Tay (they/them), founder of My Queer Story SG

Within minutes security officers have shown up saying that photos can't be taken and asking them to leave. 2 protesters have left but 3 remain. **#FixSchoolsNotStudents**

Photos from earlier. **#FixSchoolsNotStudents** <https://t.co/4fdpnVgZQi>







A whole bunch of people (I suspect plainclothes police officers?) have arrived -- it's all happened quite quickly!
<https://t.co/3iRnDhu2em>

The police are now taking down their particulars and issuing them an order telling the protesters to leave.
<https://t.co/8wkKzOX8sX>



The authorities are trying to get them to leave but the three protesters want to talk to each other first before they make any decisions. They're now in a huddle surrounded by officers. <https://t.co/8jzGEUx6Jc>



An officer is talking to them about "other avenues".

Response: "There have not been other successful avenues."

The protesters highlighted how statements and other actions have previously been taken on the issue of **#LGBT** discrimination and trans rights. <https://t.co/cX4Rs96b2g>

An officer: "You've had 20 minutes of exposure..."

Response: "You've been standing in front of us for most of it!"

The officer is saying they are being given a move on order, and if not, he will have them arrested.

The three protesters have been arrested. <https://t.co/5IQ73WibTX>

I took that photo in the first tweet of this thread right after the protesters first set up, and tweeted it soon after that, so this thread is pretty much a real-time of how things unfolded.

For those who need context: the only space in **#Singapore** where Singaporeans can gather to demonstrate without first obtaining a police permit is Hong Lim Park. However, the park is closed for such activities until further notice because of **#COVID19**.

UPDATE: Averyn, one of the two protesters who chose to leave early on (and therefore wasn't arrested), has been informed that she needs to present herself at the police station for questioning today. **#FixSchoolsNotStudents**

According to the government, permits have been granted thousands of times since 2009, but activists say it is very difficult to get a permit for what they want to do. Applications for solo protests have previously been rejected. <https://t.co/39b7wQfQGs> <https://t.co/lykVlFCTS>

Threading this: <https://t.co/w3sdulcaAu>

And also this. Read: <https://t.co/Tr8n0bSUwl> <https://t.co/vXxzShy5cA>

UPDATE: The three arrested protesters (2 are students, one isn't), are in lock-up in police headquarters at Cantonment Complex now. One more, who wasn't arrested, is going in to be questioned over her participation in **#FixSchoolsNotStudents**.

CLARIFICATION: This is according to supporters/friends of the protesters who say they have been told they can bail out the three later tonight. <https://t.co/1eK8hvaXa7>

UPDATE: I've heard that the last **#FixSchoolsNotStudents** protester -- one of the two who left earlier and therefore wasn't arrested -- has also been called in for questioning, although probably not tonight.

[Sorry if I haven't responded to your messages/DMs — had to get some other work done (and also have dinner), and now I need to do some writing! Will catch up.]

UPDATE: The three arrested protesters have been bailed out. The police have sent out a statement to the press. <https://t.co/DG4mVsEojk>



POLICE NEWS RELEASE

THREE ARRESTED FOR TAKING PART IN A PUBLIC ASSEMBLY WITHOUT A PERMIT

The Police have arrested three individuals, aged between 19 and 32, for allegedly taking part in a public assembly without a permit on 26 January 2021.

2 On 26 January 2021 at about 5.00pm, a group of five had allegedly staged a protest outside the Ministry of Education Headquarters along Buona Vista Drive with placards stating "#FIX SCHOOLS NOT STUDENTS", "WHY ARE WE NOT IN YOUR SEX ED", "HOW CAN WE GET A's WHEN YOUR CARE FOR US IS AN F", "trans students will NOT be erased" and "trans students deserve access to HEALTHCARE & SUPPORT".

3 The group did not have a Police permit to carry out the public assembly. Upon Police's arrival, only three individuals remained. The Police warned them to cease their activities as they were liable for offence under the Public Order Act. However, they ignored the Police's warning and continued with their activities. The group was then issued with a 'Move-on' direction under Section 36 of the Public Order Act and were told that they would be arrested if they failed to adhere to the direction. The three refused to comply despite the Police's repeated warnings, and were arrested under the Public Order Act at around 5.35pm. Five placards, two multi-coloured flags and a blue bag were seized in relation to the case. The three individuals have since been released on bail at about 10.00pm. Police investigations are ongoing.

4 The Police would like to remind the public that organising or participating in a public assembly without a Police permit is illegal and constitutes an offence under the Public Order Act.

Threading: <https://t.co/O4sqTZekOQ>