# UK school librarians face rising pressure to remove LGBTQ+ themed books amid culture war tensions



Concerns are mounting in the United Kingdom over increasing pressures on school librarians to remove books that explore LGBTQ+ themes, reflecting a wider, culturally charged debate around educational content and censorship. This trend, which echoes similar developments in the United States, has been noted particularly since the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Guardian reports that the issue came into sharper focus in spring 2022 when a Catholic school in Croydon invited Simon James Green, a well-known gay children’s author, to speak. The event prompted an online campaign from the US-based anti-LGBT site Catholic Truth, urging supporters to contact the school and call for the talk’s cancellation. This pressure campaign led to a statement from the school's governing commission suggesting the event be called off, strikes by teachers, and national media attention.

Drawing on her experience as a librarian and academic in library and information studies at University College London (UCL), a researcher conducted interviews with ten school librarians across the UK to understand the extent and nature of censorship requests they face. The findings reveal that over half of 53 surveyed school librarians had been asked to remove particular books, with a significant portion of these requests originating from parents. The contested books often feature LGBTQ+ themes, including Alice Oseman’s Heartstopper graphic novels, which centre on a relationship between two boys; Tom Percival’s Billy’s Bravery, about a boy dressing as his favourite superhero Nature Girl; and Juno Dawson’s This Book Is Gay.

Some librarians reported receiving signed or anonymous letters from parents asking for specific books to be withdrawn. One also discovered leaflets produced by a right-wing religious American group similar to Catholic Truth left in their library. The increase in such requests is attributed partly to parents becoming more aware of their children's reading materials during home schooling in the pandemic, as well as the heightened political climate surrounding culture war issues in Britain. For example, drag queen story events aimed at children have attracted protests organised by far-right groups such as Turning Point UK and Patriotic Alternative.

The interviewed librarians highlighted the challenges they face, noting that despite their extensive training and dedication to curating age-appropriate, curriculum-relevant collections (including statutory LGBTQ+ content in relationships and sex education), they remain vulnerable within school hierarchies. Most librarians are women on relatively low salaries, with many school libraries suffering from funding constraints. Approximately 25% of schools in Wales lack a library altogether, while two-thirds of school libraries in Scotland operate without a dedicated budget.

The discussion also contrasts the relatively straightforward process of petitioning librarians to remove books with the more complex problem of addressing genuinely harmful material to which children are exposed, such as detrimental content on social media platforms that can fuel bullying, eating disorders, and misogyny. Experts caution that banning books risks pushing young people to seek information online from unvetted sources, underlining the crucial role librarians play in providing reliable and supportive educational resources.

The Guardian is reporting that the current climate underscores a growing cultural contest over school content and the responsibilities of educators and librarians in navigating these pressures.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## References

* <https://www.indexoncensorship.org/2024/08/banned-school-librarians-shushed-over-lgbt-books/> - This article supports the claim that over half of UK school librarians have been asked to remove books, many of which feature LGBTQ+ themes, following complaints often from parents.
* <https://www.attitude.co.uk/culture/heartstopper-lgbtq-school-library-book-bans-471757/> - Attitude Magazine reports on the disproportionate targeting of LGBTQ+ literature in UK school libraries, including titles like Alice Oseman's Heartstopper series.
* <https://www.euronews.com/culture/2024/08/20/new-study-reveals-more-uk-schools-are-removing-lgbtq-books-after-complaints-from-parents> - Euronews highlights a survey indicating that many UK schools are removing LGBTQ+ books due to parental complaints, echoing broader censorship trends.
* <https://www.thebookseller.com/news/school-libraries-censored-as-survey-reveals-28-librarians-asked-to-remove-books-from-shelves> - The Bookseller discusses a survey revealing that many UK school librarians face requests to remove books, often due to LGBTQ+ content, with some titles being permanently removed from shelves.
* <https://www.indexoncensorship.org/2024/08/banned-school-librarians-shushed-over-lgbt-books/> - This article mentions the U.S. context of book bans and their influence on UK trends, highlighting how similar issues are affecting librarians across both countries.