# School library book bans rise amid cultural debates over LGBTQ+ themes



In recent years, both in the United States and the United Kingdom, a notable increase in challenges to certain books within school libraries has emerged, particularly concerning titles featuring LGBTQ+ themes. This phenomenon has raised concerns among educators and librarians about censorship trends and their impact on students’ access to diverse literature.

In the US, the Trump administration was noted for instances of censorship, including a temporary closure of libraries at Pentagon schools serving military families, pending a review of materials related to what officials described as “gender ideology or discriminatory equity ideology topics.” This action reflected a broader resurgence of the book-banning movement within American right-wing groups.

Across the Atlantic, parallels have been observed within British schools. According to an article in The Guardian by a former librarian and current university lecturer specialising in library and information studies at University College London, the pattern of challenges to books intensified following the COVID-19 pandemic. In spring 2022, a controversy erupted at a Catholic school in Croydon after it invited Simon James Green, a well-known gay children’s author, to speak. The invitation prompted a campaign by the US-based anti-LGBT website Catholic Truth urging protests against the event. The school's governing body suggested the event be cancelled, leading to teacher strikes and extensive media coverage.

Prompted by these developments, the lecturer conducted interviews with ten UK school librarians to understand the scope and nature of book challenges. The findings revealed that a majority of challenges came from parents, predominantly targeting books addressing LGBTQ+ topics. Frequently challenged books included Alice Oseman’s Heartstopper series, which focuses on a romantic relationship between two schoolboys; Tom Percival’s Billy’s Bravery, telling the story of a boy dressing as his favourite superhero for World Book Day; and Juno Dawson’s This Book Is Gay. Librarians reported receiving both signed and anonymous letters requesting the removal of these books, with some even discovering leaflets from American right-wing religious groups similar to Catholic Truth left in school libraries.

The increase in book challenges since the pandemic is potentially attributed to factors such as parents’ heightened awareness of their children’s reading during home schooling and the intensification of cultural and political debates around gender and sexuality. The article also links protests against drag queen story events, organized by UK groups like Turning Point UK and Patriotic Alternative, to the growing climate of cultural contention. The extensive coverage in British media about “culture war” topics may have influenced some parents to petition for the removal of specific books from school libraries.

The article highlights the vital role school librarians play in curating appropriate and educationally relevant materials. Librarians undergo extensive training and carefully select books that complement the curriculum, including statutory relationships and sex education content that incorporates LGBTQ+ themes. However, many librarians experience professional vulnerability due to low salaries, gender disparity in the profession, and funding cuts leading to library closures in some schools, notably a quarter of Welsh schools lacking a library and many Scottish school libraries operating without any budget.

The author emphasises that addressing concerns about harmful material exposed to children demands attention beyond targeting books, particularly when such challenges concentrate on titles promoting inclusivity and understanding. The rise of social media as an influential yet unregulated source of information and its association with negative outcomes such as bullying and the promotion of harmful content underlines the significance of trusting trained librarians to guide young people’s engagement with literature. The article concludes by asserting librarians’ expertise and importance in navigating the complexities of information access in an increasingly digital and politically charged environment.

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

## References

* <https://www.ala.org/bbooks/frequentlychallengedbooks/top10> - This URL supports the claim about the increase in challenges to books featuring LGBTQ+ themes in the US, highlighting titles like 'All Boys Aren't Blue' and 'Gender Queer' as frequently challenged for their LGBTQ+ content.
* <https://news.harvard.edu/gazette/story/2023/06/lgbtq-book-challenges-are-on-the-rise-heres-why> - This article explains why LGBTQ book challenges are rising, attributing it to political and social tensions as well as organized campaigns against LGBTQ content.
* <https://www.ala.org/news/2024/03/american-library-association-reports-record-number-unique-book-titles> - This report from the ALA highlights the surge in censorship efforts targeting books with LGBTQ+ themes and other diverse content, noting a significant increase in unique titles challenged in recent years.
* <https://abcnews.go.com/US/report-lgbtq-content-drove-book-banning-efforts-2023/story?id=108992375> - This article discusses how LGBTQ content drove book banning efforts in the US, mentioning 'Gender Queer' as a title frequently challenged for its content.
* <https://www.pen.org/report/beyond-the-shelves/> - PEN America's report details the high number of banned books, especially those featuring LGBTQ+ characters and people of color, corroborating the trend of targeting diverse literature.