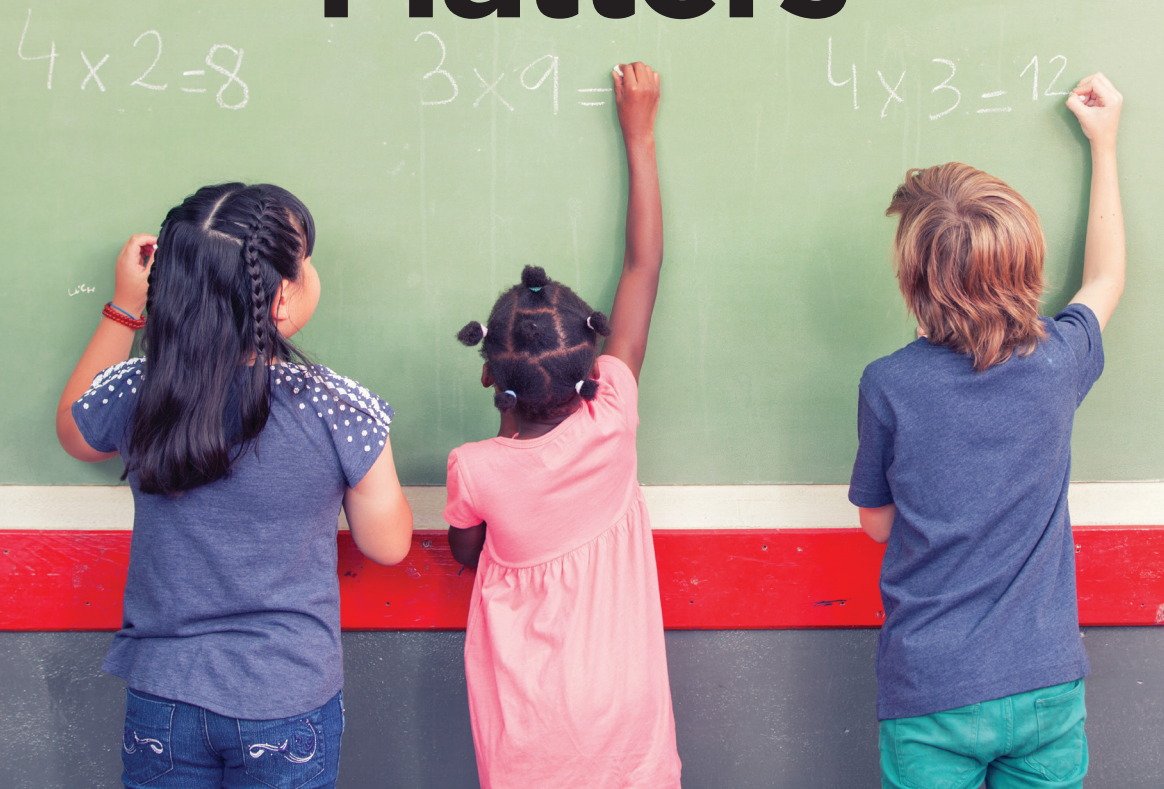


Inclusion Matters



**A parents' and carers' guide to assessing
a school's commitment to inclusion**

With thanks to:



DIVA



and Helen Semple

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Introduction

This guide is aimed at parents and carers considering the educational options available to their child, aged 3-18 years old, in either the state or independent sectors in England. While the section “Education, Diversity and the Law” is specific to England, we hope the rest of the guide will prove of use to parents and carers considering schools in other parts of the UK and beyond.

It was created with the LGBT+ parent, carer and/or child in mind, but it may also be useful to any non-LGBT+ parent or carer who seeks an inclusive and diverse educational environment for their child.

In many instances, schools that have made conscious strides to be more inclusive on LGBT+ issues are also more inclusive of other diverse characteristics, so we hope this guide proves a useful resource for a wide range of parents and carers.

What this Guide Is. The aim of this guide is to offer an informative resource for parents and carers on ways in which they might consider the diversity agenda as they explore and investigate educational options. Following some background on a school's statutory obligations on the topic of diversity, the guide will explain how schools are assessed and how case law supports the voice of parents and carers in the diversity dialogue.

Each follow-on section provides helpful questions which are intended to be a tool to stimulate discussion between parents, carers and educators while providing parents and carers with one practical manner in which to assess a school's commitment to LGBT+ diversity. The key points covered in this guide are set out in a helpful cumulative checklist in the back.

What this Guide Isn't. This guide is not a substitute for your own careful inspection of a school, its policies, staff attitudes, culture and practices. It is not intended to provide any type of recommendation or advice (legal or otherwise), but simply to consolidate certain public information to help parents and carers gain a better understanding of how they can consider diversity in a school context.

Who we are



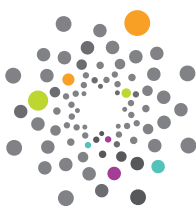
P3:Proud.Professional.Parents. (P3) was created to support ambitious professionals who happen to be LGBT+ and are either parents or hoping to become parents, and for professional parents of LGBT+ children.

Following tremendous interest from a wide range of employers, including those in the public sector, P3 has expanded its remit to support all working parents with an interest in LGBT+ inclusion, whether LGBT+ or allies, across the UK.

P3 seeks to bridge the gap between employers' LGBT+ networks and their families' networks, providing inclusive and informative support and creating opportunities for LGBT+ parents, prospective parents and allies to connect and share their experiences.

P3 supports its members at all stages of the family journey: considering family alternatives, discussions with employers/leave, returning to work, and on-going social engagement with other LGBT families.

As the only network of its kind in the UK, P3 is proud of its ever increasing work at role-modelling LGBT and non-traditional families in society.



Diversity Role Models (DRM) work nationally with primary and secondary schools. It takes a whole school approach to Embracing Diversity & Ending Bullying.

As well as providing training to governors, teachers, parents and carers, its student workshops span all age groups and educate young people about difference, challenging stereotypes and addressing the misuse of language.

For Primary age children, DRM focuses on the diversity of different family groups that exist and introduce them to the idea that people can be in

same sex families amongst a myriad of other combinations.

For older students, DRM provides a safe place for young people to explore the damage that discrimination and bullying causes, as well as providing positive and diverse LGBT+ role models who speak directly to young people about their experiences.

DRM also supports schools to set up Inclusion and Equality groups and to provide inclusive curriculums.

"We started working with DRM as there was a problem with homophobic language in the playground. Two years into the relationship, we have had no incidents since, which we believe is due to DRM involvement with the school"

Head teacher



Helen Semple has worked within Senior Leadership for 10 years in some of the UK's leading Independent Schools, including work on compliance, strategy and well-being. She has been instrumental in bringing about an awareness of Diversity and Inclusion and challenging schools to be more inclusive within their daily routine. She also works as a freelance

Educational Consultant, advising parents and carers on finding the right school for their child.

The Changing Face of Education

Today's children are fortunate to encounter a more diverse environment than ever before and recent estimates show that around 20,000 dependent children are being raised in same-sex couple families in the UK.¹

However, given that children and young people spend a large proportion of their formative years in school, it is important to many parents and carers that their children's school contributes to them being positive about who they are and embracing the diversity of the world around them.

There is obviously a huge disparity in attitude, knowledge and available resources around the subject of LGBT+ people's experience as students, staff or families in schools. However, increasingly, school leadership teams and governing bodies are aware of the need to become more inclusive, both to support existing pupils and to attract a more diverse range of prospective pupils and their parents or carers.

Many schools are also becoming better at utilising external role models to promote LGBT+ diversity, recognising that whilst they might not have an 'out' LGBT+ student or child of LGBT+ parents at their institution who is willing to be a vocal role model, they can call on a number of organisations who can provide a suitable advocate.

"Even twenty years ago, I believe schools were very different environments. For example, I was not aware of peers who were LGB, and the idea of a Trans person had never entered my mind. However, as a teacher and school leader I have regularly worked with LGBT+ students and families, and also had the privilege of supporting a young Trans male successfully navigate both his transition and his Sixth Form studies. It is key that school leaders embrace all forms of diversity and create an environment in which everyone can thrive and feel they belong."

Helen Semple, Educational Consultant

1 "Common law marriage' and cohabitation" House of Commons Library, briefing paper number 03372 (dated 9 March 2017) p.6

Schools which are keen to deal with any bullying issues the moment they arise, cannot wait until a pupil comes out as LGBT+ before they seek to demystify sexual orientation/gender identity and promote acceptance and understanding. Although many schools already teach PSHE including Relationship and Sex Education, the new 2017 legislation proposes to make these both statutory in State schools in the future (already compulsory within the Independent Sector). This, if delivered confidently and inclusively, can only be a positive move forward for young people, further providing safe spaces for discussion and exploration with experienced professionals.

Just as, over the past decade or two, we have witnessed a shift in schools' confidence in dealing with race-related bullying and adopting a zero-tolerance approach to racism, many schools are now beginning to adopt a similar approach to LGBT+ incidents, with a number of them actively promoting LGBT+ inclusion through their delivery of the curriculum, within their events, with the charities they support and within the ethos of the school as a whole. There is still much work to do, but there would appear to be small positive changes ahead.

What do we mean by Diversity and Inclusion?

The term **Diversity** can apply to a range of characteristics such as sexual orientation, ethnicity, gender & gender identity, religious belief, socio-economic background, physical or mental ability and age, and refers to the differences that can occur within each characteristic.

Inclusion is the practice of including people regardless of the diversity of their characteristics (including, for example, special educational needs, in a mainstream school setting). On a more ideological level, inclusion represents a drive towards full acceptance of diversity and using education to eliminate intolerances and prejudices.

Education, Diversity and the Law

Who is regulating education?

The **DfE** is the Department for Education and is a department of the UK government. It is responsible for issues affecting young people in England, including child protection, equality and education.

Ofsted is the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills. Ofsted inspects and regulates services in England that care for children and young people, and services providing education and skills for learners of all ages. Ofsted is impartial and independent of government and reports to Parliament via the DfE.

Ofsted inspections typically last one to two days, at the end of which an education provider will be awarded a grade of 'outstanding', 'good', 'requires improvement' or 'inadequate'. Schools rated 'outstanding' are generally exempt from further routine inspection, whereas schools judged 'good' and nurseries are assessed around once every three years. Schools identified as 'requires improvement' are inspected again after around two years, with more stringent action being taken for providers who are deemed 'inadequate'.

ISI is the Independent Schools Inspectorate and is responsible for the inspection of most independent schools. ISI is independent of government and reports to Parliament via the DfE. ISI reports to Ofsted in respect of any independent schools running the Early Years Foundation Stage. While ISI focusses on independent schools, the DfE may request Ofsted to inspect an independent school. ISI currently conducts two types of inspection: regulatory compliance inspections, which reports on a school's compliance with the Independent School Standards Regulations, and educational quality inspections, which reports on pupils' achievement and personal development at a school. Schools under the remit of ISI are usually inspected once every three to six years. Grading goes from 'excellent' through to 'good', 'sound' and finally 'unsatisfactory'.

The **SIS** is the School Inspection Service, which is another independent body which conducts inspections of a number of independent schools which do not fall under the remit of ISI.

Comparing grading standards in reports issued by the different inspection bodies is difficult because they apply different frameworks and have different criteria for judging school quality beyond that of the regulations, which are intended to be suited to the different types of schools inspected.

Statutory requirements surrounding Diversity

The Equality Act 2010 provides a consolidated source of discrimination law, covering all types of discrimination that is unlawful. It is unlawful for a school to discriminate against a pupil or prospective pupil by treating them less favourably because of their disability, gender, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation, gender reassignment, pregnancy or maternity.²

Schools may have a single equality policy or separate policies for different strands of diversity. What is clear is that, under the Equality Act, maintained schools and academies³ have two duties to meet: (i) a general duty, being the Public Sector Equality Duty (**PSED**), and (ii) a specific one, being

2 DfE, The Equality Act 2010 and Schools, May 2014.

3 Academies are publicly funded independent schools which get money direct from the government and not the local council. Some academies have sponsors such as business, universities, faith groups or voluntary groups.

the duty to publish information which shows compliance with PSED and publish at least one equality objective. Independent schools and non-maintained schools do not have this, but good practice would be to be able to identify where there is potential for advantage and how they are maximising inclusion.

The PSED requires schools to have due regard to the need to eliminate unlawful discrimination, to advance equality of opportunity and to foster good relations for pupils, staff and others using school facilities. The intention is for schools to develop an ethos and culture of dignity and fairness, where pupils are free to develop, understand that differences are respected and to become good citizens respecting human rights.

Ofsted inspectors therefore focus on how a school meets diverse needs, and advances equality through its focus on, among other things, how schools⁴:

- ensure pupils are free from bullying in all its manifestations including all types of prejudice-based bullying;
- deal with unacceptable behaviour and disruptions to learning; and
- build cohesive school communities where all pupils can thrive.

Within the ISI Regulatory Requirements, inspectors will assess a school for its spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils ([SMSC](#)). In particular schools need to ensure the following principles are actively promoted:

- encourage respect for other people, paying particular regard to the protected characteristics set out in the 2010 Equality Act;
- further tolerance and harmony between different cultural traditions; and
- encourage pupils to accept responsibility for their behaviour and show how they can contribute positively to society.

4 Ofsted, Inspecting Equalities: Briefings for Section 5 Inspection, April 2014.

Parents and carers have a voice

Parents and carers should feel empowered to question a school about how it satisfies its duties under the PSED. This is because case law pre-dating the Equality Act 2010, (but still in application today) established the **Brown Principles**, which give a broad indication of what organisations need to do in respect of the aims set out in general equality duties. Schools should follow six principles in evidencing that they have shown “due regard” to their equality duties, and the view of parents and carers have a prominent role to play. The six principles, as they relate to schools, are⁵:

- **Awareness.** All staff should know and understand what the law requires;
- **Timeliness.** The implications for equalities of new policies and practices should be considered before they are introduced;
- **Rigour.** There should be rigorous and open-minded analysis of statistical evidence, and careful attention to the views of staff, and the views of pupils and their parents and carers;
- **Non-delegation.** Compliance with the PSED cannot be delegated;
- **Continuous.** Due regard for equalities should be happening all the time; and
- **Record-keeping.** It is good practice to keep documentary records, for example in the minutes of staff meetings and governor meetings.

5 Ibid.

What to look for

Knowing what a school should do, and ascertaining whether they embed inclusion are two very different things. On the following pages, we have set out some of the factors that parents and carers might want to consider at different stages of the process in finding a suitably inclusive school for their child. Where a parent or carer is not in a position to choose a school, we hope the questions may help stimulate a discussion with a school so that it can work at achieving a more inclusive ethos.

Of course, not all of these questions will be relevant to a particular school, and there may be other ways to discover the same information, but these ideas should provide a starting point of things to look out for.

Remember, schools have a statutory obligation to support diversity and case law supports the need to take parents and carers' views into account. We trust this guide will help you feel armed to initiate the necessary dialogues.

Information from third-parties

There are many ways to obtain information about a school before approaching it.

Inspection Reports. The ISI, SIS and Ofsted each produce inspection reports which are publicly available. Whilst the school report (usually available from the school's website in addition to that of the relevant inspectorate) should be reviewed in detail and will paint an impression of the school, it is important to remember that it will usually have been compiled as a result of an inspection team having spent just a few days at most in the school. It is always worth making a note of anything (either positive or negative) that stands out in the report, and asking staff to elaborate further on those topics when you visit the school.

Internet searches. As elementary as it sounds, it is always a good idea to type the prospective school's name into an internet search engine to get an idea as to what people are saying about the school and of recent news articles. It is also useful to search for the school's name and "LGBT" or "diversity", for example, to see if there are any hits and whether these are positive or negative. It can also be useful to search the school's name in online parents and carers' forums to see what others are saying.

While the internet has many advantages, especially in the early stages of thinking about various options, information posted to the internet should not be taken as authoritative and only used as a starting consideration for further research.

Word of mouth. If you know people in the vicinity of the school, it is also helpful to ask their opinion. However, do bear in mind that schools can change quite dramatically with a new head or senior leadership team, so if their experience was not recent, it may not be particularly relevant.

A school's website

A school's website has the potential to provide a wealth of information about what life is like there. Some schools will have a comprehensive website which fully encompasses the culture of the school. It might include a school calendar, full suite of policies, information about schemes of work for each subject and year group, and a section on diversity and inclusion, showcasing recent initiatives, among other things. The website may, however, be simpler. However, this doesn't necessarily mean that these things aren't happening and conversely, just because a school knows what it *should* be doing and saying, there is no guarantee that this is what is occurring in practice.

A few questions to ask yourself are:

1. Does there appear to be a diverse representation of ethnic backgrounds, religions and/or disabilities?
2. Is there any suggestion of gender stereotyping (e.g. girls doing ballet, boys playing football)?
3. What events does the school celebrate?
4. What extra-curricular activities are on offer?
5. Is the school's equality objective (see PSED above) clearly identified?

School policies

As mentioned, you should be able to view a school's policies on its website. It may be that they are also available at open days, although some might need to be requested from the school itself. Important policies to look out for from a diversity perspective are the Diversity and Inclusion policy (sometimes called the Equal Opportunities policy) and the anti-bullying policy.

These may have other names, or may be part of other policies. Whilst these policies may contain a 'mission statement' on the value of diversity and inclusion, they should also include practical steps that staff can implement to address specific issues. Each policy should have the feeling of being a 'living' document which is referred to regularly by staff and is clearly based on reality as opposed to theory.

Questions to consider include:

1. Are words such as 'tolerance' used? If so, this should be queried as it suggests a lack of understanding around diversity which may be indicative of a wider cultural issue at the school.
2. Are the policies up to date?
 - a. on what date was each last reviewed?
 - b. is the named point of contact still at the school?
 - c. do they mention the now-obsolete Disability Discrimination Act 1995, Sex Discrimination Act 1975 and the Race Relations Act 1976 instead of the (current) Equality Act 2010?
 - d. do they refer to other protected characteristics (under the Equality Act 2010 duty or to reflect their widest community) such as gender identity and sexual orientation, for example and not just disability, gender and race?

3. Are the policies displayed around the school so all staff and pupils are aware of them?
4. Does the admissions policy (or any other policy) make heteronormative assumptions about home arrangements (for example referring to 'Mother' and 'Father')?

It is very useful to read a school's policies in advance of a visit, in order to know what practices the school is aiming to adhere to. If you have the opportunity, it is also helpful to ask several staff members about the policies and their implementation as this can reveal how embedded (or not) they are in the fabric of the school.

School visits and open days

There is no substitute for visiting a school to experience its culture and ethos.

Open days/evenings are very informative and usually portray the school in the best light possible, showcasing the best-performing students' work and selecting the most personable pupils to lead tours around the school. Despite the polished performances you may encounter, an open day is, however, a very useful visit as the senior leadership team and any diversity and inclusion leads are likely to be on hand, whereas they may be teaching or otherwise occupied with pupils on a normal school day.

If at all possible, though, a visit to the school during an average day can be invaluable in determining whether it might be the right environment for your child. Many schools are happy to show parents or carers around at other times by appointment, but others may be reluctant, citing child protection restrictions or disruption to teaching.

If you aren't able to visit the school on a normal day, it is sometimes worth walking past the school as pupils are being dismissed and listening out for any bullying or discriminatory language and asking yourself if the students are generally respectful of each other.

Questions to consider when visiting a school include:

1. What is on the display boards? What do they say about the school's views of diversity?
2. Are staff/students wearing rainbow lanyards/pins? If so, ask them why.
3. What books are in the library? Do they support different types of families/cultures/religions?
4. What diversity events and initiatives does the school support?
5. Which charities does the school support and why?

6. What school trips are on offer?
7. What diversity and inclusion training are leadership, teachers and peer leaders (such as prefects, student council) given?
8. How is the personal, social and health education (PSHE) programme delivered?
9. How does the school monitor diversity and inclusion?
10. Is diversity and inclusion discussed at senior leadership/ governors' meetings?
11. How are parents' evenings managed for working parents or carers?
12. How is mothers'/fathers' day managed for same-sex parents and carers?
13. How can parents and carers get involved in the life of the school and how active is the parent body?
14. Is there a student council? If so, what is its remit and how are student council members trained in inclusive leadership?
15. How does the school ensure cultural integration among parents and carers?
16. Is there an external speaker programme? If so, who has visited?
17. If there is a parent and carer group what events/activities do they run? Are they gender specific?

What if you can't choose the school?

Many parents and carers are not in the fortunate position of being able to choose their child's school from a range of possibilities. A great many areas in England (and other parts of the UK) are served by only one reasonable option for both junior and senior schools, and factors such as distance and financial resource may further limit the choice.

Furthermore, it may be that a child is particularly talented in, or enthusiastic about, a certain academic subject, sport, or creative endeavour which would be best nurtured through attendance at a specific school. Where this is the case, that child's parent or carer may decide that this is the best school for that particular child, regardless of its inclusion practices, meaning that they will be stuck with their choice.

Indeed, there are many reasons why the diversity agenda might not be top of a parent's or carer's wish list when selecting a school and if this is the case, it is worth thinking about how a parent or carer can engage with the school to ensure the best chance of an inclusive environment for their child.

It may also be that a child is already attending a school and you have only recently realised that the school has some work to do on the diversity front, for whatever reason.

One of the first steps to take is to assess where you think the school is currently with diversity and inclusion. This guide might help with this, as may any other information you might have, possibly as a result of your child already attending the school.

The next step is to establish how best to approach the issue with the school. If you haven't done this already, it is worth checking the school's policies around the issue (for example, if your child is being bullied for LGBT+ related issues, check both the anti-bullying policy and any diversity/inclusion policy). This will help to establish the action you can expect from the school.

If a specific incident has arisen, your child's class teacher or form tutor may be best placed to deal with it. In larger schools there may be a dedicated pastoral or inclusion leader who might be an appropriate contact.

On a more general level, becoming involved with the management of a school, perhaps by joining the governing body as a parent governor or signing up for the parent/teacher association can be a very effective way of shaping the culture and future policy of a school.

You also might consider offering to visit the school as a positive role model and to talk to pupils. Alternatively, you could recommend that the school seeks out an LGBT+ role model from an external organisation to visit and promote inclusion.



Checklist For Parents and Carers

General

- ☐ What does the inspection report say about the school's approach to diversity and inclusion?
- ☐ What comes up in an internet search engine for the school's name and 'diversity' or 'LGBT'?
- ☐ Do you know anyone who has experience of the school? Are any parents or carers discussing the school online?
- ☐ Does the school's website/prospectus suggest a diverse community?
- ☐ What extra-curricular activities and events are offered?
- ☐ What is the school's Equality Objective (maintained school) or Inclusion ambition?
- ☐ Are the school's policies comprehensive, up-to-date and written using inclusive language?
- ☐ Are staff familiar with the policies and how to implement them?
- ☐ Does messaging around the school promote inclusion and embrace diversity?

Nursery



What books are in the library? Do they show a variety of different families? (for example, ethnically diverse, same-sex and single parent)



What are the themes of the wall displays?









How is mothers'/fathers' day managed for same-sex parents and carers?



Primary

- ☐ Are teachers able to talk confidently and comfortably about diversity and how they embed inclusion?
- ☐ How does the school approach use of language during “Family Week”?
- ☐ What books are in the library? Do they show a variety of different families? (for example, ethnically diverse, same-sex and single parent)
- ☐ What are the themes of the wall displays and children’s work?
- ☐ How is mothers’/fathers’ day managed for same-sex parents and carers?
- ☐ How are parents’ evenings managed for working parents and carers?
- ☐ Is there a student council? If so, what is its remit and how are student council members trained in inclusive leadership?
- ☐ How is bullying dealt with?

Secondary

-  Are teachers able to talk confidently and comfortably about diversity and how they encourage young people to develop their sense of self?
-  How are parents' evenings managed for working parents and carers?
-  Is there a student council? If so, what is its remit and how are student council members trained in inclusive leadership?
-  Is there an external speaker programme? If so, who has visited?
-  How does the school mark various diversity celebrations (black history month, LGBT history month, IDAHOT)?
-  How is bullying dealt with?

Feedback

We would love to hear your feedback on this guide and on diversity and inclusion more generally. If you would like to recommend any resources for future editions of this guide, please contact us using the below details.

P3

TUVIA BOROK

Co-Founder & Co-Chair

tuvia@thep3network.com

ELIZABETH HARTNEY

Co-Chair

elizabeth@thep3network.com

Diversity Role Models

CLAIRE HARVEY

Chief Executive

claire@diversityrolemodels.org

WILL FLETCHER

Head of Operations

will@diversityrolemodels.org

Lead Education Adviser

HELEN SEMPLE

Semps77@gmail.com

Further support

If you feel that we may be able to help you further please contact any of the above or visit our websites for further information, including upcoming events and further resources.

thep3network.com | diversityrolemodels.org

