Creating a welcoming school for gender non-conforming students: Introduction

Context:

Many schools encounter children and adolescents who are encouraged to identify as transgender. Schools have a duty of care for the safety and wellbeing of all of their students. It is important that in responding to the wishes and demands of one group, schools still ensure that they meet the needs of the rest of their students. This is a challenging demand as on occasions, specific demands made by those advocating for transgender students are in direct conflict with the rights and needs of other students.

In this and subsequent documents, you will find information and guidance identifying ways in which schools can manage these competing demands.

School Policies

All children have the right to be free from discrimination, bullying and harassment and to attend school feeling safe and able to learn in an atmosphere of mutual respect. Schools should ensure that any policies in relation to the needs of transgender children are in line with the school’s safeguarding policy and anti-bullying policies and that any specific arrangements to meet their needs do not unwittingly undermine the rights and needs of other individual or groups of children / young people.

Support & Training for Schools

Much of the current training and support available is from transgender activist organisations, which have as their main purpose, advancing the lifestyles and demands of gender non-conforming, transgender and non-binary individuals.

Schools should ensure that any training or support that is commissioned is not ‘evangelical’ in its form. Scientific facts used should be clearly evidenced. Staff must be encouraged to discuss and debate issues openly and with sensitivity. There should be no explicit or implicit silencing techniques. Any statistics presented about mental health and suicide must be clearly evidenced and used within the guidelines provided by the Samaritans.

Safeguarding

The welfare of the child is paramount. Schools are skilled and experienced in supporting and referring to partner agencies, children and young people at risk of significant harm. Some children and young people engage in self-harming behaviour and actively resist attempts by adults to support and divert them away from such behaviours. Gender non-conforming children and young people have the same right to be protected from actions that harm them including being protected from the influence of others (especially adults) who seek to influence them into self-harming behaviour.

Safeguarding risks and concerns must always be considered and evaluated in the same way as with all other children.

Aims

- To clarify the difference between 'sex' and 'gender' as a foundation for school policies
- To build a positive whole-school ethos which challenges gender stereotypes whilst respecting sex-based differences between boys and girls
- To create a culture of respect for ‘difference’ which allows children to reject the gender stereotypes for their sex without feeling they must also reject their bodies in order to be their ‘authentic selves’
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Transgender organisations use the term 'trans and gender non-conforming people' as if those two things are synonymous. If schools can widen the space in which young people feel comfortable in their non-conformity, fewer students will feel the need to 'transition' to the opposite sex and be set on the path of irreversible treatment, life-long dependence on synthetic hormones and possible surgery.

Children are confused by the conflation of the terms 'sex' and 'gender' which are used by transgender organisations as if they mean the same thing, or are inextricably linked. It is important to acknowledge the biological sex distinction between boys and girls but relax divisions based on gender, both in practical school policies and in general school life, PSHE classes etc.

- **Sex: Male/Female**  XX or XY chromosomes, biological sex and reproductive organs which cannot be changed (note: under 1% of children are born with a biological intersex condition, this is unrelated to transgender)


- **Gender: Masculine/Feminine**  Societal expectations of behaviour, aptitudes and appearance depending on sex, which change from culture to culture. Gender or sex-role stereotypes


Although 'sex' and 'gender' are conflated in transgender orthodoxy, the body and the brain are separated and sex is thought to reside in the brain, not the biological body. Positive mental health is characterised by mind-body integration. To believe that your 'authentic self' is split off from the body (in the form of a brain-based innate 'gender identity') results in a mind-body split which is recognised as an indication of mental ill-health. The body becomes the enemy. Mental health is characterised by the ability to accept reality. Encouraging children to feel comfortable in their own (sexed) bodies entails creating a culture of respect for the body and what it is capable of, respecting boundaries and differences and fostering bodily integrity. This is especially important in the teenage years when adolescents are developing sexually.

Note: There are now roughly an equal number of referrals of primary age boys and girls to gender clinics, although historically boys vastly outnumbered girls. This suggests that parents are beginning to see their little girls as 'trans' rather than 'tomboys.' The most likely outcome for these gender non-conforming primary age children is that they will either grow to accept and be happy as the sex they were born and / or become gay or lesbian as adults. Primary school teachers can play an important role in reassuring parents that 'cross-sex' preferences are normal in little children.

At secondary school age, teenage girls have overtaken and now vastly outnumber teenage boys (in referrals to gender clinics adolescent girls are the fastest growing group). This suggests that girls experience greater problems with adolescent changes than boys, which may be connected to discomfort with bodily functions like menstruation, sudden sexual attention, pressure to look 'hot' and the expectations on girls from a sexualised porn culture. Secondary school teachers need to pay special attention to 'humanising' girls who are waking up to the fact that women are routinely objectified and dehumanised throughout the media. A unisex uniform of trousers for all may help take some pressure off girls of this age. Teachers should also be aware of the risk of 'social contagion' from celebrity trans internet vloggers who glamorise medical transition. Teenage girls are the biggest users of social media platforms online.
Broadening gendered expectations and relaxing rules

- Offer a unisex school uniform of trousers or shorts for all or a choice of trousers or skirts for both girls and boys. Lift any hair-length restrictions which are for only boys. Explicitly apply jewellery and make-up restrictions to both girls and boys equally. Allow both girls and boys to wear hair slides.
- Get students to line up/sit in groups based on something other than their sex.
- Provide storybooks and factual books about real people who challenge gender stereotypes.
- Encourage both boys and girls to participate in non-stereotypical activities/sports/subject choices.
- At primary level, provide times when only typical 'boys' toys' or 'girls' toys' are put out to play with so that children are not always pressured to follow members of their own sex in their choices.
- Consciously try to acknowledge children for non-stereotypical attributes, eg praise a girl for being brave, compliment a boy on his gentleness; ask some "strong girls" to help move the table, ask some "caring boys" to look after a classroom pet.
- Invite in adults to speak who defy gendered expectations in their professions eg. a female firefighter, a male nurse.
- Notice and reinforce behaviours which go against stereotype, show approval to the confident girl who puts up her hand to speak and the thoughtful boy who sits and waits patiently for another child to finish speaking.
- Watch out for, and gently challenge children when they say things like "you can't do ballet, you're a boy" or "girls are no good at maths".
- Allow boys to take the female part and girls to take the male part in plays and performances.
- Be a role model.
- Reference people who defied gender stereotypes throughout the curriculum, eg. in History, Science and Art lessons find the female pioneers and role models who are usually brushed out of history.
- Teach gender and sex-role stereotyping directly, including media representation of men and women: equip young people to be critical media consumers.
- Make challenging gender stereotypes an integral part of your school ethos from nursery upwards, as the basis of boys' and girls' ability to see each other (and themselves) as human beings first.
- Have no tolerance of the words 'girl' or 'girly' used as insults or to imply weakness or lack of status.
- Point out examples of sexism in storybooks/fairytales etc.
- Teach children and adolescents the difference between the terms 'sex' and 'gender' and make sure you use the correct term when speaking about issues in PSHE classes, for example sexual orientation (heterosexual, homosexual, bi-sexual) is based on sex, not gender.
- Teach brain science and dispel the myth of 'pink brains' and 'blue brains'.
- Encourage questioning and critical thinking around cultural messages and societal expectations.
Respecting the sex distinction between boys and girls and encouraging bodily integrity

- Provide single-sex facilities to respect all pupils' rights to privacy, comfort, dignity and safety (including emotional and psychological safety)
- Make sports single-sex where males would have a physical advantage over females
- Teach children that the definition of the word 'boy' is 'young male' and the definition of 'girl' is 'young female' and that these words are not descriptors of personality
- Be aware of physical personal boundaries, and teach children to respect them; have a zero tolerance policy towards violation of personal boundaries, eg. unwanted touching, skirt lifting etc
- Recognise sexual harassment as a form of abuse which is based on sex, not gender, and tolerate no language which shames girls on the basis of their sex, eg. 'slut,' 'slag' etc or personal comments about a girl's body or body parts
- Recognise homophobic and lesbophobic bullying as abuse based on sex, not gender, and have zero tolerance for the use of the words "gay" or "lezzer" used as insults
- Teach 'consent' and the right to set personal boundaries as an important principle for everyone, not only in relation to sexual intercourse but in general as a component of respect and self-respect
- Teach the difference between girls' and boys' bodies and their functions; encourage children to understand and respect biological differences
- Encourage all children to respect their own bodies for what they can do, not how they look, and encourage physical activity for all children
- Teach bodily health and fitness, diet and sleep
- Name male and female body parts accurately and frankly without using euphemisms so children feel comfortable, unashamed and familiar with the language of sexed bodies
- Explain the differences between male and female developing bodies and their biological functions and the positive reasons for those changes so that they become demystified, and less secretive or shameful
- Encourage young children's curiosity about the human body and the miracle of how it works
- Acknowledge children's physical performance or fitness but don't make personal comments about the appearance of children's physical bodies
- When teaching children about sexual orientation, clarify that gay and lesbian people are same-sex attracted and not 'same gender' attracted, ie. a gay man is sexually attracted to males and a lesbian is sexually attracted to females.