

Briefing: The Gender Affirmative model v the Watchful Waiting model in schools

The gender affirmative model at the Tavistock GIDS put children at risk through the emphasis on 'gender', resulting in diagnostic overshadowing where underlying mental health issues were not recognised, or ignored.¹ This process of gender affirmation should not be started in schools. Schools should not be places where the affirmation – social transition – medical transition pathway begins.

The Tavistock has subsequently published the results of a study on social transition. Results show that social transition has no mental health benefits.² Social transition does, however, carry the risk of persistence of gender dysphoria and increased likelihood of progress to blockers and hormones.

'Gender affirmation' or the 'gender affirmative approach' is a political activist model, an adult belief placed upon children. The gender affirmative model:

- is underpinned by the unprovable concept of 'gender identity' and holds that gender identity trumps sex, which it defines as a social construction, ie. not real,
- compels teachers to agree with a child's belief that they are the opposite sex as true,
- forecloses development, change and future options for the child,
- is incompatible with Dr Cass's interim report findings about the failings of the Tavistock clinic,
- covers up other issues, including mental health, trauma, undisclosed sexual abuse etc.

Gender affirmation of just one child teaches all children in the school that it is possible to change sex; that a girl is really a boy and vice versa, to serve a political agenda, ie. 'transwomen are women.'

- A gender affirmation school policy compels all children in the school to 'socially transition' a fellow pupil. This is not a child's job.
- Allowing one child to dictate other children's language is unworkable; a policy of 'preferred pronouns' is discriminatory towards neurodiverse, learning disabled or children with speech and language difficulties and those with protected beliefs.

The previously established 'watchful waiting' model is a non-political approach and is the only neutral approach towards children with gender-related distress. The watchful waiting model:

- is developmentally appropriate and makes no assumptions about the child's development and outcome,
- allows children to experiment, without judgment – neither celebration nor punishment – from adults,
- does not cement a child's identity which risks leading them on to medical intervention,
- does not hide or cover up other mental health issues the child may be experiencing,
- allows teachers to support children without taking part in an activist-led social experiment.

A school watchful waiting policy leaves mental health treatment to the professionals and does not put teachers at professional risk as gender affirmation does. The watchful waiting approach:

- does not compel teachers to lie to children or deceive them about another child's sex,
- enables a school to maintain normal standards of safeguarding,
- enables a school to have clear, fair policies to communicate to parents and children.

¹ <https://cass.independent-review.uk/publications/interim-report/>

² <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10508-023-02588-5>