

Gender Equality & Supporting Trans or Non-binary Children

We want all children in all our schools to feel safe and happy. Learning can only take place when children feel able to be themselves. Developing a positive sense of gender identity is an important part of growing up for all children and young people. However, we still live in a world that paints girls and boys in a very particular way.

Unfortunately, we know that by the age of 8 girls will already assume gender specific jobs. They will tell you that there are certain jobs that girls can't do because they are not strong or clever enough to do, this is heart-breaking, especially as 8 year old girls generally out score 8 year old boys in every subject. So where are they getting these messages from?

This damage is not only reserved for girls either, boys learn very early on that they aren't allowed to express their feelings. By the age of 7 boys have 70% less words for their emotions than girls.

It is important for the healthy development of all children that we recognise the need to actively challenge gender stereotypes, sexism and gender identity. As part of the programme we will unpick gender stereotypes and the supposed rules that surround how boys and girls should behave, what toys they can play with or what expectations we may have for them. Not all boys fit in the same box, and neither do girls.

We advise you **not to** separate your classes into girls and boys for any part of the programme, including lessons around puberty. We believe it is important for both girls and boys to learn about each other's bodies, changes and experiences. By keeping children together in mixed groups, children will learn to talk openly without embarrassment in front of each other and we can foster better understanding, break down gender stereotypes and build positive relationships and respect for each other, regardless of gender. This ensures that any non-binary or transgender children are included without feeling vulnerable.

Even at this early age, the majority of primary schools will have a child who doesn't feel like they fit the binary stereotypes of their birth gender. This is an ideal opportunity to talk to the class about the issue and ensure that their classmates are supportive and understand.

"Some people may feel that actually they like to dress in clothes or behave in a way we would usually associate with the opposite gender..."

Some children may even feel that their body doesn't really fit how they feel; even though they were born with the body parts of a boy, that actually inside they feel like they are a girl, or vice versa. This can be really confusing for some children and for the grown-ups that support them, so it is important that we accept them for who they say they are."

Indeed, gender identity is complicated and multi-faceted and can be best understood as being a spectrum rather than necessarily needing to be a binary choice between male or female. It is essential that educational settings develop pupil and student understanding of the spectrum of gender identity and in addition provide support to children that are trans, gender questioning and non-binary. Trans is an umbrella term to describe people whose gender is not the same as, or does not fully reflect, the sex they were assigned at birth. There has been an increase in children and young people coming out as trans and non-binary and an increase in different ways that young people self-identify in terms of gender. Evidence shows that 40% of young people first thought they were trans aged 11 or under - meaning this is definitely something we need to acknowledge before children leave primary school.

Gender Identity is one of the nine protected characteristics under the [Equality Act](#). This means that all public bodies, including schools and nurseries have a legal requirement to ensure they support and protect trans children and this is something that all Ofsted inspections are required to uphold. There has been a lot of discussion in the media and wider about how best to support trans and gender questioning children and young people and if and how to raise awareness of gender identity across the whole community.

To be clear, there is no evidence that talking about gender identity confuses children and ‘makes them trans’, there has always been trans young people - but we now actively seek to support these children and help them to be themselves rather than force them into hiding their true selves. Regardless, effective trans inclusive practices have been shown to benefit all genders and sexual orientations. Creating safe, trans inclusive learning environments is crucial to reduce and prevent harm to trans and non-binary children and young people, but will also be of benefit to all genders as gender stereotyping, sexism, homophobia, biphobia and transphobia are challenged.

Trans children and their rights

There are many different ways to be trans and talking with the child or young person (and if appropriate their family members) to find out what they want and need should always be a guiding principle.

When children and young people’s understanding of their own gender differs from the expectations of those around them, this can be very challenging and young people and their families can experience high levels of distress. Some studies find trans young people to be at an increased risk of self-harm and suicide. Therefore, there is a moral imperative to ensure effective support.

Trans children have the right to:

- Choose to use whatever name, pronoun or title they want. They do not need any documentation to prove their status.
- Be taken seriously and do not have to have undergone any changes, medically or socially to have these rights under the Equality Act.
- To decide who knows they are trans, when they tell people and how to tell people.
- Have the right to use whichever toilet or changing room they feel most comfortable using.
- Have the right to wear the uniform they feel the most comfortable in, within the school uniform policy. This is an important reason why schools should not gender their uniform list.
- Have a right to privacy. This includes the right to keep private one’s gender identity at school. Information about a pupil’s transgender status, legal name, or sex assigned at birth may also constitute confidential information.

For some children and young people exploring gender identity is all a natural part of growing up and understanding themselves and may pass over time. For others this is the start of a long journey of transitioning. It is essential that all children feel safe and feel listened to by the people around them.

If a child or young person does ‘*change their mind*’ about their gender identity it is important they do not feel they are ‘*letting anyone down*’ or that they have caused a fuss for nothing. They should be supported to change names and pronouns again if they want to, change uniform, gendered groups and any other areas to ensure they remain comfortable in their gender identity and expression.

If you have a non-binary or gender questioning child and would like more help and support please contact:

- [The Proud Trust](#)
- [Mermaids](#).