

Statement on Trans and Non-binary inclusive education

Zero Tolerance

September 2020

In response to the new guidance by the Department for Education in England on teaching gender and biological sex in the classroom, we are concerned by the vague and confusing language which focuses on what teachers shouldn't teach with regard to trans and non-binary identities, rather than clearly stating what they should teach.

We agree that no teacher or individual working with children and young people should make presumptions about a child's gender identity or sexual orientation based on their personality, interests, or clothing choices. Teachers and schools must also be a safe space for children to discuss their feelings and experiences of gender identity. The guidance states that teachers should always 'treat individual students with sympathy and support' but does not clearly articulate how they might do so.

The equality of trans and non-binary children is integral to the rights and needs of women and girls. Any attempt to remove the rights of trans and non-binary people from feminism undermines the movement as a whole. We can only tackle the harms of gender stereotypes on all children by creating safe spaces for children to discuss their different experiences of gender. It is our duty to provide teachers guidance on how to achieve this.

Our You Can Be campaign highlights that harmful gender stereotypes can be reinforced in various ways, including through curriculums that overwhelmingly focus on the achievements of (white) male artists, composers, scientists, inventors and historical figures; teachers who are more likely to praise boys for correct answers than girls; or play areas that are gender-prescribed. Reinforcing binary gender stereotypes will harm girls and boys, as well as non-binary and trans children who may feel pressured to conform in a way that they do not identify.

The inclusion of sexual orientation and gender identity as part of 'Relationships Education and Relationships and Sex Education' (RSE) is a welcome addition to teaching in England's secondary schools (as of September 2020), but there is no clear direction on how gender identity should be covered in the curriculum. Research indicates that the lack of support teachers have had in preparing for new areas of RSE risks undermining its impact for students who could benefit most from these changes, as well as for school environments as a whole.

In Scotland, ministers recently accepted all 33 of the LGBT Inclusive Education Working Group's recommendations for professional learning of teachers, practice and guidance, school inspections and anti-bullying. These recommendations, which are set to come into effect by March 2021 include updating guidance on the 'Conduct of Relationships, Sexual Health, and Parenthood Education in Schools (RSHP) (2014)' to include themes relating to LGBTI equality and inclusion, including:

- a. Understanding LGBTI terminology and identities;
- b. Representations of LGBTI people and their relationships in ways which seek to deliver understanding and equality;
- c. Recognising and understanding homophobia, biphobia, and transphobia within school and their impact on wider society;

- d. Tackling homophobia, biphobia, and transphobia within school and their impact on wider society;
- e. Understanding prejudice in relation to the LGBTI community and an awareness of the history of LGBTI equalities movements; and,
- f. An understanding of respect, privacy and consent.

We welcome this review of RSHP in Scotland and hope clarity on the above issues will provide safer and more inclusive education environments for all children. We call on the Department for Education to review its current guidelines for teachers and schools in England to ensure that they understand how to support all students in their experience of gender identity.