

EIS EQUALITY



The Educational
Institute of Scotland

CHALLENGING SEXISM

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CHALLENGING SEXISM POLICY

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**THIS DOCUMENT SHOULD BE READ IN CONJUNCTION WITH EIS
BULLYING AND HARASSMENT POLICY**

Introduction

The EIS believes that sexism and sexist stereotypes should be challenged to promote positive gender equality. This challenge should be made as an employee, where sexism occurs in the workplace, and as an educator, influencing beliefs, opinions and perceptions of young people within educational establishments and schools.

Legislation

Protection is provided by the Equality Act 2010. This legislation makes it unlawful to discriminate against anyone on grounds of protected characteristics, of which 'sex' (a man or a woman) is one. The amended Act also imposes general duties and specific duties on many public authorities to promote equality.

The Public Sector Equality Duty

Public bodies must have 'due regard' to the need to:

- eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation that is prohibited under the Act;
- advance equality of opportunity between people that share a relevant protected characteristic and those that don't share it; and
- foster good relations between people that share a relevant protected characteristic and those that don't share it.

What are the specific duties?

To help achieve the aims of the Public Sector Equality Duty, local authorities and other listed bodies are required to undertake specific duties. In Scotland, as part of the specific duties, a listed employer must publish a document or documents that include:

- A report on the progress it has made in mainstreaming the general duty into the exercising of its functions
- Information disaggregated by protected characteristics, such as sex, on recruitment and promotion, numbers of part-time and full-time staff, pay and remuneration, training and development, the return to work of women on maternity leave, grievances (including those about harassment), disciplines (including those about harassment) and dismissals, and other reasons for leaving
- Details of the progress that the employer has made in gathering and using the information to better meet the general duty

- A set of equality outcomes and the progress made to achieve these.
- An equal pay statement that includes information on occupational segregation
- Involve people who share a protected characteristic, and those that represent them, such as trade unions
- Equality Impact Assessments which should be carried out on an on-going basis, and published soon after.

This information must be published by 30 April 2013 and subsequently at intervals of not more than two years. The employer must publish this information on its website so that anyone can look at it.

Challenging Sexism as an Employee

Ensure you are aware of policies relating to sexism for your establishment.

Ask yourself about:

- How school-based recruitment of staff affects the gender balance within the establishment?
- Whether there is an appropriate gender balance of staff on all establishment decision-making committees?
- How the roles and status of different members of staff affect the gender ethos of your establishment?
- Raising the issue with management to make sure the recording of sexist incidents is monitored.

Be vigilant about all incidents of sexism.

- Make sure you know how to respond to sexist language or comments. Sometimes a few words are all it takes to convince someone they are wrong
- Make sure you know what procedures are in place to deal with sexist incidents
- Find out what training and relevant CPD opportunities are available to support teachers in promoting gender equality
- Find out what resources and material are helpful
- Be aware of the importance of images of society that challenge gender stereotyping
- Combat sexist myths as they arise
- Listen to those who have experienced sexism
- Question your own values and beliefs
- Familiarise yourself with EIS policies
- Seek help and additional information if you need it.

If you are involved in or witness a sexist incident

- Do not ignore the incident. Support colleagues and do not be influenced by possible scenarios which, more often than not, do not occur. The EIS will provide you with full support in the unlikely situation that you receive detrimental treatment by others through reporting the incident.
- Always seek advice from your EIS Rep.
- Keep a note of the dates, times and places and the effects on you, as soon as possible after the incident.
- Report the incident in accordance with workplace policy.

Challenging Sexism as an Educator

The EIS believes that all educators must go beyond compliance with the law and challenge sexism and sexist stereotypes and to promote positive gender equality. This is a complex and often misunderstood area of education.

Research literature has provided some clarity in examining gender inequality issues.

Patterns of gender difference in attainment have been identified. In Scotland, the percentage of pupils attaining age-related target levels is higher for girls than boys at most, if not all, stages and in most, if not all, subjects. Within this, statistical data does not offer a clearly and consistently differentiated picture: gender differences are more marked in some subject areas, at some stages and at some levels of attainment. It has been noted that differences are greater for later primary and early secondary but the gap steadily increases from Primary 3 onwards. Furthermore, the attainment gap for girls and boys is greater for literacy, and particularly for writing, than for mathematics.

The causes of in-school differences between girls and boys are broadly twofold:

- there are different styles of learning, which need different styles of teaching;
- girls and boys seem to relate differently to schooling and learning and girls find it easier to succeed in school settings.

Several strategies have been suggested to counter these differences in the classroom and across educational establishments;

Learning, teaching and assessment

- ‘Gender sensitive’ teaching should accommodate gender differences by providing tasks and activities to suit a range of learning styles and preferences whilst avoiding stereotyped assumptions about boys and girls

- Sound approaches to gender inequalities encompass well designed assessment processes with varied tasks which allow all pupils to demonstrate their learning
- Staff awareness is needed of the impact of teacher expectations and interactions on the behaviour and attitudes of boys and girls
- Teachers should be encouraged to monitor classroom dynamics such as gendered patterns of pupil/teacher interactions in order to increase teachers' awareness of, and responsiveness to, gender issues
- 'Gender sensitive' behaviour policies try to ensure consistency in the use of praise and reprimand whilst also recognising their differing impacts on boys and girls, for example, in their responses to public praise.

Classroom organisation

- There are criticisms of the practice of using girls to 'police' boys' behaviour in mixed gender classes
- Single gender groupings used flexibly can have a potential positive impact with benefits for both boys and girls
- There is a case for the use of single gender groups in sensitive subjects and for particular aspects of the curriculum, for example, in Health Education or in Personal and Social Education where sex education is a theme
- Preparation should include discussions about the rationale for single gender classes with all stakeholders
- Staff commitment to changes in organisational strategies is critical
- There is a possibility of increasing 'laddish' behaviour in some boy-only settings.

Whole school perspectives

A way forward may be provided by changed management processes involving a complex range of strategies including:

- the identification of issues and problems specific to the school by gathering a variety of data, including the views of stakeholders
- the use of strategies to raise staff awareness
- the development of specific teaching skills to address issues of gender inequality in the classroom
- the use of public events to raise interest
- the involvement of all stakeholders in discussion; and
- the use of monitoring to sustain and enhance progress.

Issues experienced in school continue into post-school destinations. Patterns of gender stereotyping post-school are still apparent for school leavers and these

patterns disadvantage girls in particular. Early leavers have particular needs in terms of advice and support, with girls experiencing poorer outcomes in spite of higher attainment. As a result of this, it may be obvious to state that a specific focus on gender-related issues is needed at option-choice times in schools.

In general, the evidence indicates that gender is socially and culturally formed. The construction of gender identities starts with early experiences in the family but continues throughout the span of schooling. In addition, children's identities are seen as multi-faceted, and as changing through processes of negotiation in different social and cultural contexts, including school.

Points for reflection

Consider:-

- your own perceptions of femininity, masculinity, relationships and sexuality
- how you can enlist the help of parents/carers in questioning stereotypes
- to what extent society still adheres to traditional male and female roles
- if you are doing everything you can to ensure your classroom or teaching space is welcoming to both sexes and that resources are free from gender bias
- what view you have of men who wish to work with young children
- the impact of not challenging stereotypes especially at the earliest age
- how your establishment's ethos takes account of female and male pupils, students and teachers
- how you might challenge traditional attitudes to career routes and work placements for boys and girls
- how your establishment's behaviour policy for students impacts on boys and girls
- to what extent your establishment includes gender issues in policy planning and development.

Consider how you would help learners to:-

- break down existing stereotypes
- realise that they don't have to conform to stereotypes
- understand that different cultures have different stereotypes
- appreciate that stereotypes put pressure on people to conform
- explore stereotypes as a cause of bullying
- understand that they have the power to change things
- take forward gender issues.

Adapted from 'Strategies to Address Gender Inequalities in Scottish Schools: A Review of the Literature' (May 2006), Dr Christine Forde, Jean Kane, Dr Rae Condie, Dr Alastair McPhee, Dr George Head, Quality in Education Centre, University of Glasgow/ University of Strathclyde



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