



Educating children and young people on Gender Equality

UK National Report

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1. Overview

This National Report comprises two sections: a national review of literature and example practices in regard to educating children and young people on Gender Equality in the United Kingdom; a summary of field research conducted by Discover Children's Story Centre to locally investigate the depth of understanding children and young people, adults and carers, and educators have of Gender Equality, and how adults, carers, and educators approach this topic with children and young people in the home and classroom.

Both reports serve the purpose of informing the next steps of the Educating children and young people on Gender Equality (EdGE) project funded by the European Union's Rights, Equality and Citizenship Programme (2014-2020). The scope of the research and reviews conducted were necessarily limited by the funding, project proposal and timeframe, and therefore a focus was chosen on considering current policy, education frameworks, and example practices of educating children and young people on this topic. It is therefore not intended to be an exhaustive summary of present literature and best practice.

The respective reports were written by Rebecca Goldsmith (Freelance Creative Practitioner and Arts Manager) then peer reviewed and later compiled in this format by Stephanie Bennett (Head of Learning, Discover Children's Story Centre).

2. Desk Research Report

2.1 Aim

This report is a review of current literature, policy and educational frameworks, and best practice to outline the current situation regarding the education of children and young people on gender equality.

2.2 Previous/ recent surveys and research on gender equality

Gender equality is a multi-faceted issue that intersects with many others, including race, poverty, identity, and educational opportunity. Cultural expectations and constructions of gender norms can lead to pressure to conform to prejudiced notions, which in turn may lead to gender-based violence (GBV) in a range of forms. Relevant from birth, these issues impact on the social, physical and psychological development of children and young people within and outside of an educational context (Culhane & Bazeley, 2019). In the UK, there is a growing focus on preventing harm by establishing gender equality from early childhood (HM Government, 2010), with attention given to inclusion of non-binary gender identities and celebrating difference (Rae, 2017). Challenging gender stereotypes and taking whole-school approaches to changing culture and practice are key areas of focus (AVA & Comic Relief, 2013), with storytelling and children's literature identified as being especially powerful media for change (Education Scotland, 2019). A range of surveys and research have been conducted to better understand the challenges inherent in these issues and to explore potential solutions. This report will present a brief overview of three recent examples.

In 2016, the UK House of Commons published a report on the nature, prevalence and impacts of sexual harassment and sexual violence in UK schools (Women and Equalities Committee, 2016). This showed that 5,500 sexual offences were recorded between 2015-2018, that 41% of girls and 14% of boys had experienced some form of sexual abuse from a partner, and that 71% of 16 to 18 year olds regularly heard sexual name-calling towards girls at school. Issues identified include the pressure to assert masculinity by objectifying and teasing girls, harassment being normalised and treated as a 'joke', new technologies facilitating sexual violence and harassment, and lack of sufficient training for school staff in how to respond to incidents. Impacts

of sexual harassment and violence were shown to include physical and emotional harm, reduced participation in educational and extra-curricular opportunities, pressure on teacher time, and negative constructs of social norms being carried through into adult life. It was noted that different groups of children and young people experience sexual harassment in different ways, with the example given that Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) girls are more likely to experience verbal abuse that is racialised. It was recommended that tackling these issues become an immediate priority in the provision of legislation, updating of policy, and amendment of guidance for schools. Other recommendations include taking a 'whole-school approach', providing more advice on how to record, monitor and respond to incidents, and making Personal, Social and Health Education (PSHE) and Sex and Relationships Education (SRE) statutory subjects. The report concludes that boys should not be demonised, but should be engaged in the process as part of the solution, and that in order to address 'lad culture' at university, the Government needs to enact change earlier – within schools.

A literature review of gender stereotyping in early childhood was conducted by The Fawcett Society in 2019, and supports this recommendation for early action (Culhane & Bazeley, 2019). Stereotyping is shown to begin at birth, and so intervention in pre-school ('early years') and primary school settings is recommended, as well as engaging parents and the wider community in a whole-school approach. The report notes requirement for capacity building for education practitioners, who feel ill-equipped to deal with issues that arise as a result of gender inequality. Teachers admit to being exhibiting implicit and explicit stereotyping due to unconscious bias, which can lead to discriminatory behaviour, and sexism is an area identified as a training need by 62% of teachers. The review states that challenging gender constructions at school can narrow the gender gap in achievement and address the UK's gender pay gap of 13.7% mean average. It argues that the UK populace underestimates the effects of gender stereotyping, in spite of evidence for serious impacts including toxic masculinity, violence against women and girls, inequality in career aspirations, and reduced wellbeing. Pressure to conform to culturally accepted gender stereotypes has been shown to result in 'peer policing' from a young age, which intersects with LGBT issues of widespread bullying and self-harm related to gender identity and sexual orientation. The development of racial and gender stereotypes are also noted to intersect, with potential to compound effects of bias and prejudice on opportunities and attainment. The review suggests gender is 'soft wired' and gender roles can be challenged through interventions in environment and play. The toys children play with are shown to be important in this context, especially when overcoming gendered representations in advertising and retail. Storytelling and children's literature are also shown to be key considerations, with

gender neutral and gender subversive narratives having power to challenge perceptions, influence attitudes, and improve self-esteem for boys as well as girls. The report argues practitioners should provide spaces and materials that are actively counter-stereotypical rather than gender neutral, to challenge wider cultural expectations. It signposts toolkits for guidance and recommends drawing from best practice around the world, in particular Nordic countries such as Sweden.

In an effort to scope out and address the current state of gender inequalities in schools, Education Scotland has published a literature review entitled 'Improving Gender Balance' (Education Scotland, 2019). This provides an overview of relevant theory and research, focusing on the evidence of sex differences in education, the influence of gender stereotypes and unconscious bias, and the implications for practice. Unconscious bias and gender stereotypes were seen to impact on classrooms for all ages, with implications for the construction of norms regarding gender appropriate behaviours over the longer term. Differing expectations were shown by teachers for boys and girls, which could negatively impact either gender. Findings indicate that implicit stereotypes are potent, but that gender should not impose any limitations on a young person's interests, capabilities or ambitions, since in this regard there are "no inherent differences" (Education Scotland, 2019, p.2). According to the literature, a range of gender imbalances may be addressed by identifying and challenging gender stereotypes in all classrooms, from early years through to secondary. Furthermore, the findings suggest that focusing on a single approach (such as one-off role models) does not have sustained impact on beliefs, attitudes or behaviours, and that lasting change requires comprehensive gender balanced messaging to be delivered through multiple approaches. The review calls for a raising of awareness of implicit and explicit stereotypes for teachers as well as students, recommends that play experiences in early childhood are broad and diverse, and suggests that exposure to gender atypical characters and behaviours in stories can be especially effective in breaking down stereotypes, particularly for girls. Further recommendations include creating learning environments that are as unbiased as possible, consistent use of gender-fair language, and enacting sustained whole-school approaches in order to address gender imbalance.

2.3 Curricula, action plans and educational policies on gender equality

Since the late 1990s, authority over education in the UK has been increasingly devolved to each constituent country and schools are able to attain a level of autonomy over the curricula they teach. Because of this, approaches to gender equality and issues of violence vary and the overall structure of curricula in UK schools is complex. In general, issues relating to gender equality and gender-based violence are addressed in areas of the curriculum dealing with sex and relationships, personal and health-based learning, community and citizenship programmes, and religious education. The level to which these subjects are compulsory varies between countries and schools. In England, state-funded schools ('maintained') must abide by the national curriculum guidelines laid out by the Department for Education (DfE), but schools that are independently funded (including faith schools, private schools, and Academies) are able to build their own curriculum. In Scotland, the Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) offers guidance for achieving broad and balanced learning from nursery to secondary school (ages 3 to 18), but schools have autonomy over the curriculum they create. The new Curriculum for Wales (led by the Welsh Assembly Government) will be in action by 2022, and places a commitment to 'excellence, equity and wellbeing' as being one of its 'four enabling objectives'. The Northern Ireland Curriculum (led by the Department of Education or DE) places emphasis on 'personal capabilities' as a key area of learning. Although approaches to gender equality vary in UK education, they are underpinned by legislation designed to address discrimination. This includes the Equality Act (2010) adopted in England, Scotland and Wales, and alternative legislation built around similar principles of equality in Northern Ireland such as the Sex Discrimination (NI) Order (1976), the Northern Ireland Act (1998), and the Equality Act (Sexual Orientation) Regulations (NI, 2006). Laws related to specific types of violence are also relevant, and the rights and responsibilities laid out in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC, 1989) provide a bedrock for commonality in approaches to education across the UK.

A number of action plans have been developed in the UK, to tackle violence and improve gender equality. The HM Government's 'A Call to End Violence against Women and Girls' (HM Government, 2010) laid out a long-term commitment to addressing issues of violence by taking a preventative approach. Since then, corresponding action plans have been presented and updated, in which the Government outlined ambitions to empower women and girls, to increase aspirations, and to challenge "unacceptable attitudes and behaviour" (HM Government, 2014, p.13). Early intervention and the effective involvement of schools are identified as being crucial.

The 'Ending Violence against Women and Girls Strategy 2016 – 2020' (HM Government, 2016) and its refreshed version (HM Government, 2019) set out four strategic pillars to tackle GBV and and improve gender equality; prevention, provision of services, partnership working, and pursuing perpetrators. In 2014, the Department for International Development (DFID) partnered with the VAWG Helpdesk to create a two-part action plan entitled 'Addressing Violence against Women and Girls in Education Programming' (Fancy & Fraser, 2014). This aims for two key impacts; that knowledge and skills are gained in safe and gender-responsive education environments, and that formal and informal education systems support "the development of more gender-equitable societies where VAWG is not tolerated" (Fancy & Fraser, 2014, p. 4). In 2006, the Scottish Executive produced a comprehensive toolkit for education staff covering gender equality (Scottish Executive, 2006), and the Scottish Government has since developed a framework for 'Achieving Excellence and Equity' (Scottish Government, 2019). The Welsh Assembly Government (2010) has delivered a 'Sexual Health and Wellbeing Action Plan for Wales', and laid out their commitment to protecting the rights and wellbeing of children and young people in their 'Framework for Partnership' (National Assembly for Wales, 2000) and 'Rights for Action' (Welsh Assembly Government, 2004). The Education Authority for Northern Ireland have included issues relating to gender equality and prevention of violence within their 'Action Plan for Primary, Post-Primary and Secondary Schools April 2019-March 2021' (Education Authority, 2019) and their 'Entitlement Framework' (Department of Education, 2009).

These legislations and action plans have prompted a wide range of educational policies, which impact upon school curricula in the UK. Policies relating to gender equality and gender-based violence in schools take into account the inter-related nature of issues including safeguarding, bullying, poverty, and equal rights. 'The Equality Act 2010 and Schools' (Department for Education, 2014) offers guidance regarding how to embed this legislation into policies and curricula, with specific approaches to dealing with protected characteristics, including sex/gender. Schools are advised to ensure they do not favour one gender over another, with particular reference given to choice of subjects. The Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) is highlighted, which requires schools to pay due regard to eliminating discrimination, advancing equality, and fostering good relations between all people, whether or not they share one or more protected characteristics. Schools are urged to be diligent, considering equality implications when developing policies and making decisions, keeping these under review, and implementing the requirements of the PSED in a rigorous way. Furthermore, schools are required to publish information about how they are complying with this Duty. Consideration is also given to measures that address homophobic bullying, and it is suggested that sexual orientation and

marriage should be included within a school's approach to sex and relationship education. Schools are encouraged to engage with those affected by their approach to gender equality issues, including pupils, parents, staff, and the local community. Encouraging girls to explore career options that are non-stereotyped is suggested as an example of a potential equality objective, and issues of harassment also appear within the context of protected characteristics. Overall, the guidance for policy aims to help schools abide by the legislation, promote gender equality, and protect children and young people from harm.

Safeguarding is the prime focus behind the 'Keeping Children Safe in Education (KSIE)' policy (DfE, 2019). This prepares education professionals with how to protect the welfare of children and young people, how to identify and respond to abuse and neglect, and how to deal with issues of 'child on child' sexual violence and sexual harassment. The policy draws from and complements other guidance, including 'Working Together to Safeguard Children' (HM Government, 2018), the Children Acts (1989; 2004) and the Children and Social Work Act (2017). The KCSIE is continually updated to include current issues, such as challenges to safeguarding presented by access to new technologies. Further guidance on safeguarding against gender-related issues is detailed in the DfE's (2018) publication on 'Sexual violence and sexual harassment between children in schools and colleges'. This provides information to support governing bodies, proprietors, headteachers, principals, senior leadership teams and designated safeguarding leads. It includes definitions of sexual violence and sexual harassment between children, an overview of a school's legal responsibilities, guidance for enacting a whole-school approach to safeguarding and child protection, and advice on responding to reports of sexual violence or harassment. Bullying is an area that encapsulates many issues relating to gender-based violence, and advice relating to this includes the DfE's (2017) 'Preventing and Tackling Bullying'. This covers overarching advice relating to legislation and safeguarding, as well as giving specific reference to developing issues in areas such as cyber-bullying. Intervention strategies are outlined, with attention given to tackling underlying issues. Links are provided to further information on cyber-bullying and online safety, LGBT issues, and sexual bullying. Together, guidance such as that outlined here enables schools to develop their own detailed policies on how to approach the promotion of gender equality and prevention of gender-based violence.

2.4 Good practices and initiatives in promoting gender equality

2.4.1 Example 1: Gender Action

Title:	Gender Action
Aim:	To promote and support a whole-school approach to challenging stereotypes.
Methodology / Approach:	An organisation offering a framework for whole-school approach to challenging gender stereotypes, with: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Guidance on creating gender-neutral environments for learning and play • An award programme with tiered progression levels for gender equality in policy and practice • An online library of resources, reports and guidance to inspire and inform practice and projects
Tools:	Toolkits featured in the Resource Library include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Gender Respect Project: A hands-on guide for gender equality in primary schools • The Gender Friendly Nursery: Support pack for early years establishments • Tips on gender stereotypes: Guidance for parents on critical thinking and resilience • Outside the Box: A resource to help practitioners tackle sexism and sexual harassment
Activities:	Activities featured in the Resource Library include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Colour-in posters on diversity, refugees, women in science, gender, climate change, tolerance, the scientific method, autism, consent, and equality. • Classroom activities to raise awareness of stereotypical thinking

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lesson plans for PSHE, with teacher notes, worksheets and presentation slides
Website:	www.genderaction.co.uk

2.4.2 Example 2: Prevention Platform

Title:	Prevention Platform
Aim:	To help education practitioners prevent VAWG
Methodology/ Approach:	The Prevention Platform is an online hub run by AVA (Against Violence & Abuse). It was developed with support from UK charity Comic Relief, who funded a report into 'what works' in prevention education (Comic Relief & AVA, 2013). It provides resources to help education practitioners develop and deliver a comprehensive programme to stop Violence Against Women and Girls.
Tools:	<p>An online hub providing:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A 'Safe Space' with links to support services for those affected by VAWG • Interactive Network Map of UK organisations and private practitioners • Fact sheets on the most common forms of VAWG • Guidance on the core components of a comprehensive education programme • Advice on working in specific settings such as Pupil Referral Units (PRU) and youth groups • Multimedia resources for raising awareness and understanding
Activities:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Safeguarding e-learning module for staff working with children and young people aged 11 to 18 • Activities based around themes of 'Education', 'Prevent' and 'Understand' • Using film as a teaching aid
Website:	www.preventionplatform.co.uk

2.4.3 Example 3: #BehindEveryGreatCity

Title:	#BehindEveryGreatCity
Aim:	To promote gender equality by championing the contributions of women to cities including London
Methodology/ Approach:	An initiative led by the Mayor of London in 2018, showcasing achievements of women, making positive representations more visible, and establishing initiatives to promote change. The campaign marked 100 years since women achieved the right to vote in the UK, and included a year-long programme of events to engage schools and the wider community.
Tools:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 'Women of Courage' walking trail to encourage visits to sites that celebrate the achievements of women (in partnership with the London Curriculum) • 'Our Time' toolkit, helping future leaders tackle gender inequality in the workplace • 'Road to Equality' online platform celebrating female pioneers in activism and change
Activities:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Activity Sheets: 'Women of Courage' trail activities • Competition: 'The Women We See' advertising challenge for inclusive campaigns • Public Art: A year-long programme of public art by women artists and establishment of a statue of suffragist leader, Millicent Fawcett, in Parliament Square • Social Media Campaign: #HiddenCredits project recognising women for their contribution to the city • Video Campaign: 'Now and Next' video conversations to inspire future female leaders • Radio Content: 'NEXXT Step' project with live shows from Women in Music and BBC 1Extra • Sporting Events: 'Summer of Sport' events showcasing women in athletics • Strategic Plan: 'Our Time: Supporting Future Leaders' scheme to address workplace inequality

Website:	https://www.london.gov.uk/about-us/mayor-london/behindeverygreatcity
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2.4.4 Example 4: Voices Unheard

Title:	Voices Unheard: LGBT Domestic Abuse and Gender-based Violence Resource
Aim:	To provide a resource for those delivering educational work with a focus on domestic abuse and gender-based violence as they relate to LGBT issues.
Methodology/ Approach:	PDF resource created in partnership between three organisations in Scotland; LGBT Youth Scotland, The LGBT Domestic Abuse Project, and Voices Unheard.
Tools:	<p>Resource includes explanations of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relevant terminology and definitions, including GBV and domestic abuse • Functions of GBV (why it is used) • How LGBT issues relate to gender norms • Forms that domestic abuse may take • Key research findings on LGBT and domestic abuse/GBV <p>Other tools include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tips for LGBT inclusion in educational resources • Lesson plans for exploring LGBT issues in relation to domestic violence and GBV • Glossary of terms • Examples of LGBT inclusion in educational projects and programmes • Links to additional resources online
Activities:	<p>The resource provides activities to deliver in-person with groups of young people, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Gender Box: Exploring gender labels and cultural stereotypes • Transgender and The Gender Binary: Exploring notions of gender as a non-binary construct • LGBT Language: Exploring LGBT terminology and homophobic language • Healthy (LGBT) Relationships: Exploring mutual respect • What is (LGBT) Domestic Abuse?: Improving understanding of abuse and its impacts

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • LGBT Bystander Scenarios: Developing skills and confidence to enact positive change
Website:	https://www.lgbtyouth.org.uk/media/1473/voices-unheard.pdf

3. Field Research Report

3.1 Executive Summary

This study, conducted by Discover Children's Story Centre (London, UK), investigated the education of UK children and young people in gender equality (GE) under guidance from the Ed.G.E Project Consortium. A mixed-method approach consisting of focus groups, interviews and surveys was taken to examine the knowledge and perceptions of children, parents/carers, and teachers. Total participant numbers were 6 children, 25 parents/carers and 27 teachers. The study found that children, parents and teachers require greater opportunities for learning in the subject, and that prevailing stereotypes and preconceptions at home, school and in wider society present significant challenges to overcome. Potential areas of training recommended for teachers and parents focused on developing GE knowledge base, and practical guidance for approaching the subject with children and young people. Teachers are willing to approach GE, however there are context limitations such as a lack of of statutory or priority status in the curriculum, lack of supporting materials, and reliance on the knowledge and motivation of individuals to teach the subject. It was stated that children's preconceived notions can be difficult to overcome, especially as they get older. Adults also require support to overcome their own unconscious bias and preconceptions in order to lead by example and educate effectively. There is a need for a greater quantity of books and other materials that educate on gender equality with diversity of representation. Consistent messaging between home and school may support effective learning of GE, as well as engagement from cultural and community organisations. Parents and teachers recommend open debate and discussion with parameters and guidance as an effective approach to GE, as well as exposure to positive real-life examples and role models. Collaborative approaches may be combined with direct instruction and independent learning to optimise engagement with the subject. Open discussion and debate was shown to be the most effective way to approach GE with children and young people, alongside creative activities including reading, storytelling, role play and engaging with films and other cultural media. Games and digital technologies were also highlighted as effective tools.

3.2 Methodology

A mixed-method study was conducted by Discover Children's Story Centre in London (UK) to examine knowledge and perceptions of gender equality in three target groups; school-aged children, parents/carers, and teachers. The research formed part of the wider EU study led by the Ed.G.E Project Consortium, and followed guidance provided by the Ed.G.E Project Coordinator, Kentro Merimnas Oikogeneias Kai Paidiou (KMOP), and the Center for the Advancement of Research and Development in Educational Technology (CARDET) the lead for this particular Work Package. The study assessed knowledge gaps of school age children and young people in relation to their understanding of gender norms, gender equality, and gender-based discrimination and violence, as well as the perceptions, capacities and limitations of teachers and parents/guardians in order to identify the most appropriate culture-based techniques and practices for educating children and young people about gender equality.

Data collection took place between March and May 2020 based on the Ed.G.E Standardised Focus Group Discussion Model. In-person data collection was initially conducted in the context of focus groups (FGs), but was later revised due to the Covid-19 pandemic to include one-to-one telephone interviews and online surveys. Data gathering with child participants was limited by the constraints of social distancing and the considerations of safeguarding. Standardised questions were set centrally to maintain consistency in research across all partners, and were adapted with approval from the Ed.G.E Project Coordinator to ensure relevance to UK participants and the mode of data collection.

The research aimed to address the following questions;

1. Which are the main educational gaps/needs in terms of challenging social norms, gender stereotypes and roles reported by the target groups/ countries?
2. Which creative art/ cultural best practices may support enhancing the education and awareness of girls and boys so that they can challenge social norms, gender stereotypes and roles that contribute to perpetuating GBV and promote respect for others, as well as protect themselves from victimisation?
3. How can the competences of teachers, (children, youth) museum professionals and other professionals and volunteers, who come into contact with girls and boys, on

implementing creative art/cultural education approaches that promote gender equality and prevent GBV, be strengthened?

4. What are the good practices in enhancing the awareness of parents on the role they can play in educating their children about gender equality and respect for others through participation in common art/cultural activities?
5. Which are the most efficient tools for “educators” working with children and young people on gender equality promotion and GBV prevention in formal and non-formal settings?
6. How can the role of schools and museums in promoting gender equality among children and young people and preventing GBV can be advanced?

The following participants were recruited to take part in focus groups conducted at Discover; 6 children aged 8 to 11 (FG1), 4 primary school teachers (T-FG1), and 5 educators (T-FG2) selected from Discover’s ‘Story-builders’ (trained storytelling facilitators employed in the education team). The focus groups were led by the Head of Learning for the Discover Education Team, and followed the Ed.G.E Standardised Focus Group Discussion Model with approved amendments. In addition to these focus groups, Discover’s Head of Learning conducted 5 one-to-one telephone interviews with parents (P1-P5), and a one-to-one telephone interview with a ‘Story-builder’ (T10). Facilitators took notes during focus groups and interviews, and audio recordings were transcribed for further examination by an external researcher. Two online surveys were circulated – one for parents/guardians and one for teachers – through email and social media. A total of 20 responses were received from parents/guardians (P6-P25) and 17 from teachers (T11-T27). Data was analysed in accordance with guidance from the Ed.G.E Work Package Leader.

3.3 Results

3.3.1 Participants’ Views and Knowledge on GE

i) Children’s views and knowledge on GE

It is acknowledged that participant numbers in this group were limited due to the impacts of Covid-19.

The focus group study conducted with participants aged 8 to 11 demonstrated that gender equality may not be recognised by children as a term, but that the concept may be understood in relation to equal treatment, opportunities and fairness.

The children who took part in the study showed strong belief in notions of fairness for all, purporting that everyone is human and should be treated the same regardless of gender. They suggested that a sense of equality and fairness can be attained by giving all children chance to speak in class, however they raised concerns that teachers can give differential treatment based on the child's gender. Some participants felt that girls are given preferential treatment, greater responsibility for class tasks, and more frequent rewards, leading to gender division and resentment.

It was argued that girls may “play the victim card” (C-FG1) - using emotional manipulation and dishonesty to get what they want. This indicates that teachers may be susceptible to bias, that children are sensitive towards their peers' capacity for control, and that children may develop negative attitudes towards a particular gender from a young age if they perceive that children identifying as that gender are engaging in behaviours that illicit unfair rewards or reinforcement.

The children demonstrated they are aware of a range of mechanisms in place to raise concerns or discuss issues, from student Ambassadors, Pupil Star Leaders and School Council, to teachers, headteachers and parents. They suggested they may be motivated to have a meeting or gather a group together if they have concerns they would like to raise, or alternatively they may approach the subject in private. The children expressed a sense of separation from wider society that they consider to be an adult domain, and there was some concern that their issues may be ignored or overlooked.

“A child might say something and get ignored but if an adult complains they get listened to” (C-FG1)

Gender equality was acknowledged to be embedded across the curriculum and addressed alongside issues of fairness, citizenship, current affairs, personal responsibility and wellbeing. The children were able to identify and name particular areas of the school programme and curriculum that approach GE, including Circle Time, clubs, assemblies and meetings.

“There are clubs in my school, and one of them is called Empowerment Club, and we talk about how men and women can save the world by being equal” (C-FG1)

Children showed awareness of some GE issues – those they felt affected them personally and those they consider to have been a problem historically (“in Victorian times, women were not allowed to vote”, C-FG1). There was also an understanding that GE issues have culture-specific impacts (“in Asian countries, boys were allowed to go to school...and women had to just stay home”, C-FG1). Children expressed belief that career stereotypes can now be challenged, and that greater equality of opportunities exist today.

“We can still have...the same careers. Like, men can be gymnasts and girls can play football” (C-FG1)

ii) Parents'/carers' views and knowledge on GE

Parents/carers responding to the survey were able to define GE in terms of equality of opportunities and treatment regardless of gender. Equal pay and freedom of choice were prevalent issues raised within this definition, and respondents also gave reference to equal rights, respect, fairness, self-expression, and freedom from discrimination, prejudice or persecution. Respondents also noted that GE co-exists and inter-relates with other issues including race and sexuality, and advocated for the value of embracing and celebrating difference.

“Gender equality means that all genders are inherently valuable, and deserving of the same, respectful treatment” (P6)

100% of parents/carers who participated in the survey and interviews and said they feel GE is an important subject to discuss in the home, with more than half of survey respondents (55%) considering it to be ‘very important’.

100% of parent/carer participants in the survey and interviews stated that they do discuss the subject at home, with 65% of survey respondents discussing this ‘often’ (25%) or ‘always’ (40%). One interview participant said they had “never had a sit down conversation about it” (P1), but

that the subject is discussed in general conversation. Another described this as a “hot topic” (P2).

Survey and interview participants noted the following as key reasons for discussing GE at home:

- Promoting equality
- Tackling current inequality, stereotypes and preconceptions
- Equality of career aspirations, opportunities and pay
- Supporting freedom of choice and self-expression
- Educating future generations
- Sharing of parental responsibilities and domestic duties
- To gain appreciation of the issues
- Preventing discrimination and abuse

Parents report having received no specific training on GE, except where this has come up in their personal studies such as university courses. Potential areas identified for training and support include;

- **How to approach the subject with children**
 - Explaining why gender divides currently exist
 - Navigating issues around sexuality
 - Managing children’s emotional responses to issues of inequality
 - Avoiding creation of anxiety about the future
 - Acknowledging and challenging gender inequality in society, media, and cultural materials
 - Managing negative responses to non-conformity
- **How to ensure parenting is in line with current thinking and avoids reinforcing learned bias**
 - Language use, including appropriate terminology and pronunciation

- Helping children to use correct terminology to ensure positive integration in society
- Avoiding perpetuation of gender stereotypes
- Understanding and awareness of what is being taught in school
- Modelling equality in parental roles and responsibilities
- Approaching LGBTQ+ issues

Parents/carers suggested they require access to books and other cultural materials that support GE messaging, as well as reading materials for children that are age-appropriate and interesting. Other areas of note include the need for equality of representation in the media, restrictions on gendered marketing of toys, reinforcement of ideas at school, greater class equality, and access to 'hard facts' and examples.

"I need to educate myself, and at the moment I don't feel like there is a central place to find or seek that information" (P1)

A lack of male role models in primary school teaching was noted to exist, and respondents also expressed a need for addressing "institutional patriarchy and sexism" (P20), for bringing parents together to tackle the issues, and for "keeping the conversation going, rather than feeling we have ever done enough" (P18).

Whilst one respondent said they feel that approaching GE "is the job of the parents" (P9), 85% of parents who responded to the survey felt that schools should play a role. Other organisations noted as having potential to support include libraries, community centres, public authorities, shops, TV and media, as well as arts organisations and practitioners.

"My children need to hear about gender equality from multiple people that they respect. By giving them different opportunities and settings to consider this issue, I hope that they will gain a better appreciation for it" (P6)

iii) Teachers' views and knowledge on GE

Teachers were able to define GE in terms of equal opportunities and treatment regardless of gender. They also drew attention to specific areas including rights, fairness, identity, achievement and the existence of an “entire spectrum” (T24) of genders.

All teachers surveyed believe it is important to teach GE at school, with the majority considering the subject to be ‘very important’ (84.2%). Establishing an ethos of GE within the learning environment is noted to support the wellbeing of children, helping them to feel “safe, valued and able to learn” (T24). By sending “clear and consistent messages about inclusion” (T26), teachers can help to optimise achievement without barriers or limitation.

“Teachers have enormous influence and responsibility to empower all young people to reach their potential regardless of gender” (T13)

Teaching GE in schools ensures children are exposed to a range of viewpoints, which can challenge stereotypes, preconceptions and current GE gaps that exist in wider society. Participants identified the rationale that because GE “may not be taught or displayed in a child’s home setting” (T15), “teachers have to step in” (T-FG1).

78.9% of teachers surveyed said they explicitly teach or discuss GE, but only 26.3% had ever been involved in GE-focused projects. 68.4% would welcome such a project.

The majority of teachers who were surveyed (73.7%) report that they have not received relevant training to teach GE, but that some training had been offered as a buy-in from the Local Authority or delivered within the context of other curriculum areas such as SRE (Sex and Relationships Education). Whilst 60% of teachers surveyed said they would like to participate in GE training, 40% expressed uncertainty (‘I don’t know’).

Participants in the teacher focus groups and interview also suggested they have received no direct training in GE, but that it has come up in other areas including;

- Corporate role-plays based on diversity and gender-based issues
- Training session with a transgender facilitator
- Making a safe space to ask questions without feeling ignorant or embarrassed

- FGM training within safeguarding of at-risk children

The following were identified as potential areas of training for teachers;

- **Increasing knowledge of GE issues**
 - Understanding and using relevant language and terminology
 - Understanding LGBTQ+ issues
 - Discussion of real-world scenarios
- **Empowering teachers to advocate for GE**
 - Guidance on ethos and importance of subject
 - Overcoming teachers' own unconscious bias, preconceptions and behaviours
 - Standardised guidance for teaching GE that avoid personal opinion and making lessons "too political" (T10)
 - Building teacher confidence
- **Approaching the subject with children and YP**
 - Tackling issues in a conversational way
 - Challenging children's unconscious bias and behaviours
 - Approaching sensitive topics
 - Dealing with difficult issues that come up in GE conversations
 - Tackling GE with cultures that have traditional and strongly defined gender roles
 - Linking to other subjects and areas of the curriculum
 - Practical activities for use in the classroom

Teachers also identified the following needs for effective teaching of GE;

- Making the subject statutory

- Educating and motivating teaching staff
- Having a clear vision for the school with common ethos, rules and boundaries
- Clear policies and guidelines on subject content and delivery
- Support with policy writing
- Bringing teachers together to discuss good practice and challenges encountered
- Teaching children from a young age
- A trusted bank of resources, including books and stories about diversity

“One of the valuable things [is] just giving teachers time to talk...I think in a conversation like this there will be role-playing and scenarios that you could draw from” (T10)

3.3.2 Good practices in GE

i) Methodologies

The majority of parents/carers (92%) explicitly advocated for open discussion as the best way to approach the subject of GE with children. Within this, they recommended the following as effective strategies;

- Highlight real world issues and examples
- Give honest answers
- Promote equal career opportunities and aspirations
- Acknowledge and challenge stereotypes and preconceptions
- Take issues seriously and address them explicitly as they arise
- Share real-world examples and experiences
- Adapt approach to be age-appropriate and relevant
- Encourage children to question their own views

Rather than 'acting like a teacher' and sitting children down to talk about the subject, parents/carers recommended letting children come to them with their questions, and embedding discussions within other conversations and activities. These may include;

- Discussing everyday life and school
- Discussing relevant topics such as sport, history and careers
- Discussing and distributing household tasks
- Playing games

“We do address it explicitly, but it’s more...interwoven in our daily lives. It comes up regularly” (P5)

Parents/carers suggested they aim to embed equality within their own behaviour and parenting practices, including modelling GE in parental interactions and behaviours and 'leading by example'. They strive to explain and support freedom of choice and self-expression, and refrain from negative approaches such as 'forcing the issue', expressing negative attitudes towards any gender ('man-hating'), or restricting freedom of choice by preventing preferences that conform to gender stereotypes. It was noted that it is easier to approach the subject with younger children, before their ideas become more fixed:

“It’s only as they get older they form their own opinions, and those opinions are so influenced by parents and by friends and outside influences” (P1)

Teacher participants were in agreement with parents/carers, recommending discussion and debate most often and most highly (“Debating and having an open question to answer... really works”, T27). They suggested that creating opportunities within lessons can be complemented by addressing issues when they arise in conversation. Providing some structured questions alongside opportunity for open discussion was also noted to facilitate successful and informative engagement.

Collaborative learning was inherent in many activities recommended, and was also mentioned explicitly. Independent learning was noted to be effective when directed towards research, information gathering and challenging own assumptions. Enquiry-based learning may also be

welcomed, for example by providing a teacher or other informed facilitator as a point of contact for children's questions.

"I feel collaborative work would be ideal. Opportunities to research and gather information to form a discussion with opposing views would deepen pupils' ideas and challenge stereotypes" (T11)

Recommendation was given for learning to be underpinned by direct instruction relating to terminology and issues, and that a combination of approaches be used for most effective teaching, including "some knowledge and vocabulary input from the teacher, collaborative learning, and some independent activities" (T27). It was suggested that activities should draw from and include children's own ideas when reaching conclusions, to maximise engagement and impact.

"I don't want to be too top down with the message, I want it to be more conversational" (T10)

Teachers argued that GE should be embedded within general teaching practice, and should also be taught explicitly. It was suggested that approaching the issue from a young age would be most effective, since "it can be a challenge to overcome deep ingrained beliefs" (T18) and "if children understand the importance of gender equality from a young age, they will follow this through to adulthood" (T12). LGBTQ+ issues should be included and "demystified" (T) for teachers as well as children, to enable better understanding of gender identity and equality.

"Gender diversity is an important topic that we've not quite got right yet" (T10)

Whilst GE is not a statutory element of the curriculum, teachers report approaching some areas of the subject within curriculum areas such as SRE (Sex and Relationships Education) and PSHE (Personal, Social and Health Education), and non-curriculum areas such as P4C (Philosophy for Children). There are also opportunities for cross-curricular links with subjects such as history, drama, English and science.

"As part of our WW2 topic I was able to use this as a platform to look at the changing role of women in the workplace post 1945" (T27)

Discover's facilitators noted that when story-building with children, providing parameters as well as giving choice may lead to the richest engagement with the subject matter and the greatest opportunity to counteract gender stereotypes.

It was recommended that teachers should seek to acknowledge and avoid their own inherent biases, and refrain from segregating groups based on gender. They should strive to lead by example and provide strong gender representations to observe, internalise, and inform future attitudes and behaviour. This extends to design of classroom displays, exhibitions and resources, where gender-neutral or counter-stereotypical representations may exert quiet impacts.

“We've been mindful in the actual design of the exhibition and the play space not to have images of characters as looking in a particular way or having a particular gender...making it open” (T-FG2)

ii) Tools

Children stated they would find games to be the most enjoyable way to talk about the subject of GE. They would also value real people as an information source at an assembly, such as role models, senior teachers or other speakers.

“I'd go through a game because maybe they will be talking about something emotional, but if you're playing it through a game it can be cheering you up” (C-FG1)

Parent/carers noted the following as the main tools and materials they find effective for approaching the subject of GE;

- Books and literature
- Stories
- Films
- TV shows
- Digital technologies

- Teachers as an information source

Mention was also made of toys, games, and digital media, as well as the value of real-life role models and characters in a range of media that promote and represent gender in a balanced and/or counter-stereotypical way. It was noted that the choice of tools and materials should reflect the interests of the child, for example “providing books on gender equality if they enjoy reading” (P6).

Similarly, teachers noted the following as the most effective tools learning about GE in an education setting;

- Books and literature
- Real-life role models
- Films and videos
- Stimuli for discussion and debate

Teachers also noted use of toys, songs and equipment for accessing digital activities, as well as resource packs such as those that accompany books.

“Stories are a good way to talk about these subjects” (T-FG1)

iii) Activities

Children suggested the most effective activities for learning about GE would be playing games. They would also talk about the subject in Circle Time or at a club, and would listen to a guest speaker, Ambassador or senior teacher during an assembly.

The key activities that parents/carers reported as effective for exploring GE are;

- Discussion
- Reading
- Watching films

- Playing games
- Storytelling
- Watching TV
- Other creative activities (such as writing, drawing and music)

Parents also noted the use of role play, incorporating GE into domestic duties such as housework and cooking, analysing news and media, researching issues online, and approaching the subject within sport and other kinds of play.

Teachers cited the following activities as being most effective;

- Discussion and debate
- Storytelling
- Role play
- Assemblies and presentations
- Circle Time

The use of objects, images, and real-life case studies may be used facilitate discussion and creative response.

Other activities that are used to explore GE include reading, drawing, research, general play, educational visits. Particular moments in the calendar also present opportunities for GE-related activity, such as International Women's Day and Careers Day.

3.4 Challenges and Limitations

8/20 parents/carers who responded to the survey said that they did not perceive any issues in approaching GE with their children. However, other participants outlined challenges.

A key challenge noted was counteracting prevailing inequality in society, particularly in relation to segregation in sport, clubs, activities, retail, careers and media. The ability to attain and sustain a child's attention was a prevalent concern, as was a perceived lack of awareness on

the part of children about inequality in the wider world and difficulty in understanding the concepts.

“They don't understand how the world got to this place, and why inequality was allowed to be built into our societal infrastructure” (P18)

Parents'/carers' knowledge and confidence in dealing with the subject may present a challenge, with the need to manage children's emotional responses that arise and navigate the influence of friends, media and wider society. Gendered bullying by siblings and peers was also cited as an issue, and the parental need to support children through societal challenges presented by non-conformity.

“[My child] doesn't quite understand why you can't have a mixed football team, and that kind of thing. And it's difficult for me to talk about that with any kind of knowledge” (P1)

Parents/carers acknowledge that their own preconceptions and gaps in knowledge may impact on their parenting and their level of confidence in tackling issues, and that lack of open-mindedness in their own upbringing may mean they are not fully equipped to parent GE themselves (“it can restrict your thinking and your choices that you make for your children”, P4). They suggest it is important to ensure alignment between positive parental attitudes and messaging being taught at school, and caution against positively discriminating in favour of any gender or criticising behaviours that conform to stereotypes, as this may result in resentment towards another gender or negatively impact on freedom of choice, self-expression, self-confidence and academic attainment.

“It doesn't rule you out from wearing it, just don't pink-ify everything” (P2)

Teachers noted a number of challenges in approaching GE. These included;

- Preconceived views from home, family and media
- Time pressures of other curriculum priorities
- Lack of supporting materials

They also noted resistance from both parents/carers and teachers to tackling the subject, the need to respect different cultural attitudes of families, lack of confidence in teaching GE issues, negative language and stereotypes embedded in culture, potential to impose own world view, and protests from external groups and organisations.

“Some people think schools aren’t the place to talk about these things” (T-FG1)

Teachers argued that because GE is not an explicit or statutory area of the curriculum, this impacts on the amount of time that can be committed in class and the level of teacher training. Teaching of GE is therefore reliant on each teacher’s own knowledge and level of motivation.

“The key barrier is that it...requires the teacher to not only have an interest, but a specific subject knowledge of the issues” (T27)

Other challenges noted include the formation of ingrained ideas as children get older, resistance of young men to GE education, and the potential for an over-emphasis on the subject to “be counter-productive and create stigma/taboo” (T14)

3.5 Conclusions

i) Lessons learned

This study found that gender equality is understood by children, parents/carers and teachers alongside other related concepts such as fairness, rights and equal opportunities. Adults were able to specifically define gender equality, and though children had more difficulty with the term they were able to demonstrate understanding of the concepts with prompting.

Many parents/carers feel comfortable approaching the subject of GE with their children, but others acknowledge challenges with attaining and maintaining children’s attention and offsetting the messaging of media, retail and wider society.

Parents/carers do not always have sufficient knowledge base to tackle the issues, and require additional support in the form of books and other cultural materials that inform and effectively represent GE, as well as consistent messaging between home and school.

The majority of parents/carers feel that schools should offer support in this area, and also identify other organisations in the wider community – such as libraries and community centres – that could offer valuable reinforcement.

Teachers appreciate the benefits and necessity of delivering GE education in schools, and feel that children do not always get the information they need on the subject at home.

Teachers are willing to approach GE, however there are context limitations. Lack of statutory status or explicit emphasis in the curriculum means teachers can find it difficult to prioritise the subject, and current delivery relies on an inconsistent level of knowledge, interest, and motivation of each teacher. There is a lack of supporting material or lifelong learning opportunities available. Children's preconceived notions can be difficult to overcome, especially as they get older, and teachers also require support to overcome their own unconscious bias and preconceptions.

Teachers recommend open debate and discussion with parameters and guidance as an effective approach to GE. Collaborative approaches may be combined with direct instruction and independent learning to optimise engagement with the subject.

Parents/carers and teachers expressed a need to learn more about current thinking and terminology related to GE, in particular the emerging concepts and practices related to LGBTQ+ issues and gender as non-binary.

The most effective activities for approaching GE with children and young people identified by parents/carers and teachers were open discussion and debate, reading, storytelling, role play and engaging with films and other cultural media. Games and digital technologies were also highlighted as effective tools, with endorsement from parents/carers, teachers and children.

It was noted that freedom of choice and self-expression should be prioritised, and that promotion of GE should not lead to differential treatment, positive discrimination, or criticism of behaviours that conform to established stereotypes.

ii) Recommendations

Drawing from the results of this study, the following recommendations are made to support the education of children and young people in gender equality.

- Provide learning opportunities for parents/carers and teachers
- Help parents/carers to embed GE issues within conversations at home
- Invest in GE expertise in educational policy and practice
- Introduce GE as statutory in the UK educational system
- Introduce GE education from early years
- Increase access to books and other resources that offer positive GE messaging and diversity of representation
- Provide trusted resource lists and supporting materials to educate parents and teachers
- Promote consistency of GE messaging between home and school
- Address issues of inequality and lack of GE representation in wider society
- Employ a whole-school approach to tackling GE issues, engaging parents and the wider community
- Avoid approaching the subject in a way that stigmatises, ostracises or prevents freedom of choice and self-expression
- Prioritise open discussion and debate in a safe setting
- Acknowledge and integrate LGBTQ+ issues
- Focus on inclusion and equality for all

A key recommendation for educating children and young people on gender equality is that collaborative learning should be prioritised, and complemented with direct instruction and independent research. Opportunities for open discussion and debate should be made available, with a point of contact for questions and real-life role models and/or examples. Creative activities should be employed for effective learning, including reading, storytelling, role play and engagement with cultural media that supports and represents GE. Games and digital technologies may also be effective tools. Freedom of choice and self-expression should be

prioritised, without differential treatment, positive discrimination, or criticism of behaviours that conform to established stereotypes.

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