



# Supporting Trans Children in Schools



Findings and Recommendations from a 2020 Frontiers of Sociology article on LGBT inclusive education (open access).

## Thriving or Surviving? Raising our ambition for trans children in primary and secondary schools

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Trans pupils face stigma and **invalidation** at school, often alongside **discrimination** and harassment.

Affirmative language, respect and **trans-positivity** are critical.

Trans pupils experience **persistent stress**, navigating systems that delegitimise and exclude them. An anti-bullying approach underestimates the emotional and psychological impact on trans pupils of **cisnormativity\***.

Schools need to address the **cisnormative practices** that negatively impact on the wellbeing and mental health of trans pupils.

Schools respond to individual requests **reactively**, with trans pupils shouldering the burden of negotiating their own inclusion.

Schools need to move from individualized accommodation to **proactive and sustained adaptation**.

A **culture of silence** surrounds trans lives at school - minimal trans representation can be perceived as excessive. Trans pupils denied representation in school experience **shame** and **low self-esteem**, and are forced to educate their own peers.

Trans **representation and visibility** needs to become common and unremarkable, enabling trans pupils to grow up with a sense of belonging and self-worth.



**Cisnormativity\***: When systems, policies and people assume that everyone is (or should be) cis (not trans). Cisnormative schools place trans pupils at a disadvantage, requiring them to navigate systems designed to exclude them.



Trans pupils may experience **ignorance and hostility** from school staff, causing significant harm. Even one supportive and trusted teacher can make a profound positive impact on a trans pupil's experience of school. **Teacher trans-positivity** is significantly correlated with pupil wellbeing.



Schools need to recognize and address the **pressures and barriers** to teacher action. Clear **leadership** is essential, and can be driven by governors, head teachers and individual members of staff.

Schools **lack ambition** for trans pupils, aiming for the low bar of protection from harassment and abuse. Trans pupils need **equality of opportunity**, in schools where they can **excel and thrive**.



Trans pupils should be **affirmed and welcomed**, in schools where they are **represented, validated and respected** as equals.

Teacher **education and training** needs to move beyond basic education on transphobic bullying, to helping staff understand the ways in which cisnormativity privileges cisgender individuals and makes life harder for trans pupils.



Trans pupils need at least one adult who can **advocate** for them, help them understand their rights, and help them navigate cisnormative cultures. Teacher allies need to **understand and challenge** the systems and approaches that **delegitimise and marginalise** trans pupils.

Trans children have a right to an educational experience that is safe, **inclusive and affirming**.



Schools should **listen to** trans pupils and centre child rights. Schools also need to consider their **institutional responsibilities**, ensuring schools are fulfilling their **duty of care** to trans pupils.



**SUPPORT TRANS KIDS**

**Trans**: The term trans is used here to include people who are transgender, non-binary and/or gender diverse.