



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.

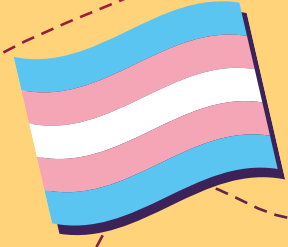


Schools need to recognize and address the **pressures and barriers** to teacher action. Clear **leadership** is essential, and can be driven by governors, head teachers and individual members of staff.

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.



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.



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.



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.



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



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

