

EQUALITY OF OPPORTUNITY - GENDER

1. What is Gender?

Gender is the expected social role which a person takes on as a result of cultural influences. It is learned through socialisation rather than the effect of biology.

2. The Need for a Gender Policy

The influences which affect the acquisition of gender role are many and varied and many of these are beyond the influences of the school. However it has been shown repeatedly that gender expectations do affect children's performance in school and ultimately their adult work opportunities.

Many of the influences which the school imparts may appear trivial on their own and are often the subject of trivial comments. However, taken as a whole, they can have a huge influence on children's expectations for themselves and for others. In devising a school gender policy and the action to ensure its implementation it is necessary that we avoid introducing any influences which encourage stereotypical gender differences into the life of the school.

3. Daily Organisation of the school.

The daily organisation of the school can unwittingly reinforce gender stereotypes and to counter this the following Action is to be taken: all staff, including non-teaching staff, should endeavour to avoid any organisational procedures which involve gender differentiation as this may appear to legitimise this in the eyes of the children. With this in mind: there should be no lining up of separate gender lines to move around the school or in assembly;

all school lists should be alphabetical with no separation by gender;
all space, facilities (except toilets) and equipment in the school should be available to both boys and girls;

in the allocation of prefect and monitor duties there should be no gender differentiation (except for access to toilets);

staff should be aware that their actions can reinforce gender expectations, e.

g. a male to "sort out the computer" or female to "mend a torn coat";

both male and female teachers to lead assemblies so that both provide role models as "authority figures".

4. Classroom Organisation and Interaction.

Within their own classrooms, teachers should be cognisant of the numerous ways in which they contribute to children's perceptions of gender role. They should be alert to these possibilities and be able to stand back and review their practice. In doing so they should consider the following courses of Action: note to be taken of seating arrangements and whether they should be adjusted to counter gender bias;

the allocation of children to groups for practical activities should be without gender bias;

ensuring that rotas for classroom duties to not show gender bias;

having the same behavioural expectations for both sexes, both in presentation of work and the manner in which they act;

ensure conscious avoidance of the proven tendency of teachers of either sex to ask boys to answer more than girls;

through keen observation and raised awareness to aurally monitor interaction between teacher and pupil, and pupil and pupil to for instances of gender bias and to intervene to point this out thereby raising the awareness of the children.

5. The Curriculum

The school has been aware for some time of the need to avoid any gender bias in the development of new curriculum guidelines and this practice will continue as new curriculum policies are laid down. The subject of compensatory activities, i. e. positive discrimination in certain areas counter to current gender stereotypes, was discussed by the staff and rejected as it was felt that such activities would only serve to emphasise gender differences.

5. 1 Language. The language that children use, read and write can be a major source of gender bias. Action to obviate this will be:

Teachers should be aware in their selection of materials of the role which language acquisition can play in reinforcing gender differences.

Most recently published material does attempt to avoid stereotypical portrayals of males and females, however older books and much fiction should be checked before use to ensure that they are suitable.

Bias found in books should be highlighted by guided discussion among the children.

5. 2 Mathematics. This is a traditionally "male" subject. Action to counter this will be:

teachers should endeavour whenever possible to show that girls' efforts are valued as highly as boys'; mathematically based careers should be regarded as equally suitable for girls as for boys.

5. 3 Science and Technology. Again a subject with traditional "male" connotations. Action to counter this will be:

teachers must ensure that boys are not allowed to dominate groups working on practical activities;

activities have an interest value independent of gender.

5. 4 Computers. Again boys tend to dominate. Action to obviate this will be: every effort must be made to ensure that girls have an equal amount of "hands-on" time;

girls' efforts are not dominated by boys;

software should be selected that does not have a gender bias in terms of content or interest value;

all teachers irrespective of gender should strive to attain equal competence at basic computer use so that role models seen by the children are not stereotyped.

5. 5 Topic Work. Action to obviate bias will be:

in teachers' selection of activities for topic work, cognisance should be paid to the possible opportunities for sharing males and females in non-typical roles.

5. 6 Creative activities. The school has abolished all differentiation between boys and girls in art craft and textiles and all activities are offered to all children. Action to obviate bias will be:

mixing of gender groups for art, craft and textile activities will continue;

the role drama can have in dispelling biased gender expectations cannot be over-emphasised, providing opportunities for both sexes to feel empathy with problems which another may encounter.

5. 7 Physical Education. This is an area in which segregation is common and traditional. After review, the staff decided on the following Action:

it is appropriate to continue the practice of teaching major team games to groups of mainly boys or girls

however, opportunity is provided for boys and girls to participate in soccer, netball, cricket and rounders etc. (several children avail themselves of this opportunity);

summer games should be mixed;

a review of these arrangements, summer and winter, should be made annually.

5. 8 Personal, Social (and Religious) Education. This area is presently under review, and gender issues which arise will be addressed during this review in the light of the policy of Equal Opportunity.

6. Home/School/Community Links.

Such links provide opportunities both for the school to show how and why it is addressing the gender issue and to heighten parental awareness of how gender affects their children's lives. With this in mind the school takes the following Action:

the school brochure should contain a statement of the school's policy on gender issues;

-|the wording of all correspondence to parents should be monitored to eliminate gender bias;

fathers as well as mothers should be encouraged to participate in activities both during and after school;

gender policy should be open for discussion at parents' meeting, through the vehicle of the P. T. A.

7. Race, Culture and Gender.

We have a minority in school from different cultural backgrounds where gender expectations are different. Whilst it is not suggested that different rules should apply to them, the school must take the following Action:

be sensitive to the different expectations that they and their parents may have;

this issue also may be raised for parents through a P. T. A. evening on Equal Opportunity.

8. Monitoring and the Future.

This policy document is not, and never could be, the final word on the subject.

We cannot be complacent and say that we have "done" gender. Part of this review is the need for monitoring. Attached to this statement are appendices showing how this monitoring can be done. This will involve the following Action:

there is recognition of the need for constant review;

to facilitate this a member of staff is designated as responsible for monitoring progress on gender equality of opportunity;

time during school based INSET will be made available for periodic review of progress on gender equality of opportunity.

programmes for raising awareness among the children will be devised and put into operation;

self-monitoring among the children will be encouraged by the programmes;

procedures for this self-monitoring will be established;

adjustments will be made as circumstances change.