

Scottish Government submission of 27 October 2023

PE2043/A: Change the way gender theory is presented in schools

Thank you for your e-mail of 22 September 2023 on behalf of the Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee regarding Petition PE2043, seeking to change the way gender theory is presented in schools. I am replying as I am responsible for LGBT inclusive education policy in the Scottish curriculum. I apologise for the delay in responding.

Research tells us Scotland's transgender young people have poorer experiences at school than other pupils. They experience significantly more bullying, are likely to have poorer mental health and wellbeing, and do not achieve similar educational outcomes as their peers. A report¹ published by LGBT Youth Scotland in 2022 of more than 1,200 LGBT young people in Scotland showed that:

- 57% of transgender students report experiencing transphobic bullying at school;
- The percentage of participants aware of transphobic bullying in their school has steadily increased over the last decade, going from just 26% in 2012 to 69% in 2022;
- 52% of transgender young people rated their school experience as bad;
- Only 26% of transgender pupils felt confident reporting bullying to staff;
- 19% of transgender participants left school early as a result of homophobia, biphobia or transphobia; and,
- 70% felt homophobia, biphobia or transphobia had a negative impact on their educational experience, 36% negative impact on their educational attainment.

This is one of the reasons why the Scottish Government believes our education system must support everyone to reach their full potential. It is vital the curriculum is as diverse as the young people who learn in our schools.

LGBT inclusive education is a core part of relationships, sexual health and parenthood (RSHP) learning, within the health and wellbeing area of the curriculum. The Scottish Government's approach to LGBT inclusive

¹ <https://www.lgbtyouth.org.uk/media/2712/life-in-scotland-for-lgbt-young-people-2022-e-use.pdf>

education has been informed by the recommendations of the LGBTI Inclusive Education Working Group, which were published in November 2018. The Scottish Government accepted those recommendations in full. It was recommended that LGBT inclusive education should be embedded across the curriculum, not just LGBT specific lessons, to improve the learning environment for all children and young people. These recommendations also included a commitment to update the RSHP teaching guidance to cover themes relating to LGBT equality and inclusion.

RSHP education is not new and has been in place since 2010, the same year Curriculum for Excellence was implemented. Learning experiences and outcomes for RSHP education are freely available on the [Education Scotland website](#). RSHP education focuses on equipping children and young people with the knowledge, skills and values to make informed and positive choices about forming relationships. This aspect of the curriculum is intended to enable children and young people to build positive relationships as they grow older. Teachers are empowered to use a range of resources to deliver age and stage appropriate education in a way that enables children and young people to make informed decisions about their lives. A summary of RSHP education teaching resources is available on Education Scotland's [National Improvement Hub](#).

One of these resources, [rshp.scot](#), contains a lesson on '[Being transgender](#)' at second level (P5 to P7) as part of progressive learning about equality and being fair. This is the only time transgender issues and identities are the primary focus of learning in this resource. Learning in this short activity is framed in a way that asks what young people think transgender means and aims to challenge the stereotypes and prejudices that can lead to transphobic bullying. As outlined in this lesson plan, this content helps teachers deliver experiences and outcomes on areas such as managing changing relationships, understanding diversity, and identifying bullying behaviours and these align with the Health and Wellbeing curricular area within Curriculum for Excellence. The rshp.scot resource was developed during the 2018-19 academic year by a partnership of health boards and local authorities, with advice from Education Scotland and the Scottish Government. The content of this resource was informed by over 1,000 primary and secondary teachers and piloted in 38 schools across the country.

The Scottish Government does not take a prescriptive approach to the curriculum in Scotland. It is therefore up to individual schools and education authorities what approaches they use and external

partnerships they build to help them deliver relevant and engaging classes. Our empowered education system promotes pupil and parental engagement as effective approaches in delivering lesson content that meets the needs of all learners, and complements the flexibility of teachers to use their professional judgement in meeting the educational needs of the pupils in their classroom. LGBT inclusive education needs to start early so all children and young people begin to learn and understand tolerance, respect, and equality. This will support our children and young people to build healthy relationships and prevent prejudice occurring in any form. Educational settings have a lot to contribute, but it is vital we all help instil the values of respect and tolerance in our children and young people.

The information presented within LGBT inclusive education should be presented in an objective, balanced and sensitive manner within a framework of sound values and an awareness of the laws around discrimination. This will help ensure children and young people grow up to be responsible citizens within a diverse society. By receiving accurate, factual information in an age and stage appropriate manner, children and young people can form their own opinions, within their beliefs, in an open, supportive and respectful environment. Pupils are encouraged to discuss and understand their differences, and to understand how to hold contrasting beliefs in a respectful manner.

By learning about a diverse range of people and experiences, children and young people will be better equipped to succeed in diverse workplaces after they leave school. Additionally, one of the core founding documents for Scotland's Curriculum – [Building the Curriculum 3](#) – makes it clear that values of inclusivity lie at its heart. The document states the curriculum must be inclusive, must be a stimulus for personal achievement and must, through broadening of experience, be an encouragement towards informed and responsible citizenship.

Improvement, Attainment and Wellbeing Division