



Gender Bias

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What is Gender Bias?

Gender bias is the preferential treatment or unfair judgement of individuals based on their gender. In education, this can shape teacher expectations, classroom interactions, staff relationships, and curriculum content—especially in subjects like Relationships and Sex Education (RSE). Gender bias can disadvantage women and gender minorities while also reinforcing harmful stereotypes for all genders, sometimes leading to unintended negative consequences, such as internalised misogyny or feelings of inadequacy.

How Does Gender Bias Manifest in Education?

Expectations & Discipline: Boys may be expected to be more disruptive, leading to harsher discipline, while girls may be expected to be responsible, leading to additional emotional labour.

Subject Encouragement: Teachers may (consciously or unconsciously) encourage boys towards STEM subjects and girls towards caring professions, reinforcing traditional gender roles.

Leadership Opportunities: Boys may be encouraged into assertive leadership roles (e.g., sports captains), while girls are given organisational or supportive roles (e.g., note-taking, peer mentoring).

RSE & Gendered Accountability: If RSE lessons focus only on boys as perpetrators of harm and girls as victims, it can create a one-sided narrative that:

- Leads to feelings of shame and inadequacy in boys, potentially fostering resentment and defensiveness.
- Reinforces the idea that girls are responsible for managing relationships, boundaries, and safety.
- Risks fostering misogyny as some boys react to feelings of guilt by distancing themselves from discussions about gender equity.

Staff Interactions & Career Progression:

- Hiring & Promotions: Men may be more frequently promoted to leadership roles, even when women or gender minorities have similar qualifications.
- Pay Disparities: Gender minorities and women may be paid less for similar roles or be underrepresented in senior leadership.
- Workplace Culture: Certain professional networks or decision-making groups may be more accessible to one gender over others.
- Pastoral Responsibilities: Female staff may be more likely to be expected to handle emotional support or pastoral care, while male staff may be expected to focus on discipline.



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Recognising Gender Bias in Education

To address gender bias, it is important to be aware of its presence in school culture, classroom management, and professional development. Some key signs include:

Unequal Representation: Disproportionate numbers of men or women in leadership or specific subjects.

Biased Expectations: Students or staff being encouraged into roles or subjects based on gender rather than ability.

Pay & Promotion Gaps: Differences in career progression opportunities between genders.

Stereotyped Language: Gendered assumptions in communication, such as describing girls as "nurturing" and boys as "strong" or "leaders."

Imbalanced RSE Teaching: Over-emphasising boys as perpetrators in conversations about consent and relationships, rather than fostering a shared responsibility for respectful relationships.

Strategies to Combat Gender Bias in Education

Gender-Neutral Classroom Management: Set equal expectations for behaviour and participation for all students.

Fair Leadership & Subject Encouragement: Offer all students opportunities for leadership and ensure diverse representation in STEM, sports, and creative subjects.

Balanced RSE Teaching:

- Present consent and relationships as a shared responsibility, rather than assigning blame to one gender.

- Discuss healthy masculinity and emotional expression in ways that avoid guilt or defensiveness.

- Challenge harmful stereotypes that suggest girls should "manage" boys' behaviour.

Equitable Hiring & Promotion: Use structured hiring criteria and review pay scales to ensure fairness.

Training & Awareness: Provide gender bias training for teachers and staff to challenge unconscious biases.

Mentorship & Support: Encourage career development opportunities for underrepresented genders in leadership.



Reflective Questions

To better understand how gender bias may appear in your school, consider the following questions:

Recruitment & Staff Development:

How might gender influence perceptions of a candidate's suitability for a teaching or leadership role?

What steps can you take to ensure hiring and promotion decisions are based on skills, experience, and potential rather than gendered expectations?

Leadership & Career Progression:

Are certain leadership roles within the school—such as headteacher, pastoral lead, or sports coordinator—more commonly held by one gender?

How can you ensure all staff have equal access to leadership training, mentoring, and career progression opportunities?

Student Performance & Behaviour:

How might gender stereotypes influence the way students' abilities, behaviour, or leadership potential are perceived?

What steps can you take to ensure classroom interactions and discipline policies do not reinforce gendered expectations?

RSE & Gender in the Curriculum:

How does your RSE curriculum challenge rather than reinforce gender stereotypes about relationships, consent, and power dynamics?

In what ways can you ensure that discussions on topics like harassment and consent do not avoid labelling boys as potential perpetrators or girls as potential victims, while still addressing gendered patterns in harmful behaviours?

School Culture & Inclusion:

How does your school environment support students and staff of all identities?

What actions can you take to ensure policies, language, and role models reflect a commitment to gender equity?

