

14th July 2017

Dear Mr and Mrs Rowe,

Thank you for your letter dated 7th of June and for your patience in awaiting a reply. After discussion with the Federation Governors and the Diocese, we are now able to answer the questions you have raised in your letter. Our answers will be set out in line with the questions you have asked.

1. The school does not require any formal medical/psychological assessment and reporting when a pupil seeks to be treated as transgendered or is exploring their gender.
2. In terms of a long term plan in relation to addressing the issues on an ongoing basis, the school is working in close partnership with the families involved, the Gires – Gender Identity Research and Education Society and the Tavistock and Portman NHS Foundation Trust. The school has sought advice and support from these professionals at every stage of the process and will continue to do so.

The school has ensured that adequate training has been undertaken by key personnel with regard to approaching a change in gender identity. This has been cascaded appropriately and sensitive discussions have been had with school staff to help children understand the nature of transitioning and the exploration of gender identity.

3. The school is legally bound to respect the wishes of the pupil and parents involved. Under the Equality Act, 2010 schools must have due regard to the need to:
 - Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the act
 - Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not
 - Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not
4. The school takes all forms of bullying incredibly seriously and would act accordingly regardless of a child's gender or exploration of gender. To date, the school have not received any allegations of bullying against the children in question.

The school is aware that anyone who expresses a wish to change their gender identity may be interpreted as different from wider cultural or social norms of being male or female and may experience transphobic bullying. We are aware that both pupils and the wider community may react negatively to ambiguous expressions of gender. Here we refer to examples of transphobic behaviour:

- Inability to believe a transgender person is actually a "real" female or male
- Assuming that transgender people are mentally ill, deranged or confused
- Feelings of discomfort and inability to trust or connect with someone based on their transgender status
- Excluding transgender people from events and discussions
- The refusal to acknowledge a transgendered person's true gender e.g. by failing to use their adopted name or using gender inappropriate pronouns.
- Consciously or purposely putting down or harassing a transgender person verbally or physically

School has in place an inclusion and equalities policy to help tackle these issues and, again, we refer to the Equality Act and a Human Rights approach when supporting our children with managing these attitudes and behaviours.

Where a child's transgendered identity is known to the wider school community, we as a school are developing a robust language, using the Equality Act and a Human Rights approach, to counteract any prejudice expressed or concerns raised. Additionally, when a parent or carer raises a concern about the feelings of their child when spending time in the company of a transgender identified pupil, support work is aimed at answering the question: 'How can we make your child feel better?' rather than compromising the rights of the transgender child.

5. The board of governors fully support the school's approach in seeking professional advice from the agencies named above and through consultation with the children's parents. The close contact with these agencies will ensure that we act appropriately at any given stage as children move through the school.
6. The school takes the responsibility for the welfare and needs of all pupils seriously. Pupils are respected as equals. They are taught the Federation Christian Values through their PSHE/SMSC (Personal, Social, Health, Economic/Spiritual, Moral, Social and Cultural) work and these values permeate through all that we do at school. The children are taught about acceptance, difference and tolerance, with the aim for them all to play and work together.

"Schools should ensure that their Christian ethos statement emphasises an inclusivity that welcomes all, and reveres and respects all members of the diverse community as individuals who are known and loved by God." ¹

Our mission statement, across the Federation, specifies that the 'purpose of the Federation of the Church schools' is to educate children in an atmosphere of Christian love.

The school takes your concerns very seriously and we have drawn from English law as well as guidance from the Diocese and others to best answer your questions. As a Federation we are legally bound by the Equality Act 2010 which provides protection from discrimination because of gender reassignment in schools. This means that it is unlawful for schools to treat pupils differently or less favourably because of their gender reassignment, and that schools will have to factor in gender reassignment when considering their obligations under the new Equality Duty. Gender reassignment is defined in the Equality Act as applying to anyone who is undergoing, has undergone, or is proposing to undergo, a process (or part of a process) of reassigning their sex by changing physiological or other attributes. This definition means that in order to be protected under the act, a pupil will not necessarily have to be undertaking a medical procedure to change their sex. Pupils who are undergoing a social transition, for example, going by a preferred name or pronoun are protected by the Equality Act².

Enforcing children who are exploring their gender identity into a gender conformity with regard to both uniform and physical appearance which does not fit their identified gender is both mentally damaging for the child but also falls under a form of discrimination whereby a 'protected characteristic' and therefore the individual's identity is threatened within an institution which should provide a supportive and safe environment in which a young person can thrive and learn.

Guidance on approaching the issue of transgender and questioning children within schools is widely available. The following is from East Sussex County Council: Schools should ensure they 'Avoid seeing the child or young person as a problem and instead see them as an opportunity to enrich the school community and to challenge

gender stereotypes and norms on a wider scale' and to 'Consider gender as a spectrum and take a non-binary approach to gender. Gender is often an important part of our identity and developing a positive sense of gender identity is part of growing up. However, gender identity is often complex and there is a spectrum of gender which is wider than just male and female'³. The measures and attitudes outlined in this document is being held up as best practice in many parts of the country and is working as a framework for schools when working with young people exploring their gender.

The Church of England has produced guidance for schools to follow, it wants schools to celebrate and support diversity and challenge discrimination and negative attitudes towards any of its pupils. The church's inclusion policy for schools states that:

".....we believe that all should feel welcomed, valued and nurtured as part of our community. This inclusion is essential as preparation for our children so they can make a positive contribution to life in the multi-cultural, multi-faceted world in which we live. Hospitality, inclusion and reverence for all are part of the core values which underpins all our work and practice and is central to our Christian ethos. School aims to provide an environment where all feel valued and free from discrimination, reflecting the world in all its rich diversity. We are committed to promoting the understanding of the principles and practices of equality - treating all those associated with our school as individuals, according to their needs, with an awareness of our diverse society and appreciating the value of difference. We actively promote an anti-bullying stance which includes making explicit the unacceptability of racist, disablist and homophobic remarks. In fact we actively seek to combat all forms of negative discrimination." 3

As a school community both within the Church of England and part of a wider community, we strive to stand against all forms of discrimination. We cannot both legally, and/or morally, discriminate due to being or becoming a transgendered young person, as with disability, race, nationality, ethnic or national origin, religion, belief or lack of religion/belief, sex, sexual orientation. These are called 'protected characteristics'. Adults and children are legally protected from discrimination in education under the Equality Act 2010.

We understand that, as a family, the issues raised in your letter have caused you real concerns and questions to ask. We hope that we have been able to answer the questions honestly and fully. We remain committed to supporting your family, valuing your input into the school and providing [REDACTED] with an enriching education. We would be more than happy to meet with you to discuss how best to support him with the questions he is asking now and to continue to support him as he carries on with his educational journey. Please be aware that the end of the school year is this Friday 21st July 2017 and the office will be closed for the holidays after this date.

We hope this letter answers the questions you have and the concerns you have raised.

Yours sincerely,

References

- 1 & 3 Valuing All God's Children, Guidance for Church of England Schools on Challenging Homophobic Bullying, CHURCH OF ENGLAND ARCHBISHOPS' COUNCIL EDUCATION DIVISION, May 2014.
- ¹ Equality Act 2010: Advice for Schools
- ¹ Trans* Inclusion Schools Toolkit, Supporting transgender and gender questioning children and young people in East Sussex schools and colleges, Children's Services, East Sussex County Council, October 2014
- SIAMS (Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools) 2012
- ¹ Trans* Inclusion Schools Toolkit, Supporting transgender and gender questioning children and young people in East Sussex schools and colleges, Children's Services, East Sussex County Council, October 2014
- Valuing All God's Children, Guidance for Church of England Schools on Challenging Homophobic Bullying, CHURCH OF ENGLAND ARCHBISHOPS' COUNCIL EDUCATION DIVISION, May 2014, p.4
- Equality Act 2010: Advice for Schools

cc : Jeff Williams, Director of Education, The Diocese of Portsmouth & The Diocese of Winchester

cc: Kim James, School Improvement Manager, Isle of Wight