



Rt Hon Nick Gibb MP
Minister of State for School Standards

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Rt Hon Caroline Nokes MP
Chair, Women and Equalities Committee
House of Commons
London
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Dear Caroline

17 March 2020

Many congratulations on your election as Chair of the Women and Equalities Committee. I appeared before the Women and Equalities Committee on 23 October 2019 to give evidence to the inquiry into the Mental Health of Men and Boys. Subsequently I received a letter from your predecessor explaining that the publication of the report would be delayed and highlighting a number of issues. Many of these relate to broader Government policy, and I am aware that you have also written to Nadine Dorries MP and Victoria Atkins MP. I am responding on the issue of teaching about gender stereotyping, which falls within the Department for Education's responsibility. I am also taking this opportunity to respond to points that were raised at the hearing itself.

The letter raised concerns about gender stereotyping. The new requirement on every school to teach Relationships, Sex and Health Education (RSHE) from September 2020 represents a significant opportunity to ensure that we address the issue of gender stereotypes in the curriculum. The letter specifically asked that the Department should consider adapting the RSHE guidance to make it compulsory for schools to teach about gender stereotypes. I do not think that the guidance needs to be adapted as it already contains significant coverage of the issue.

The guidance requires primary school pupils to be taught what a stereotype is, and how stereotypes can be unfair, negative or destructive. Additionally, secondary school pupils must be taught how stereotypes, including gender stereotypes, can cause damage and encourage prejudice. The benefits of this teaching will be reinforced by the mandatory teaching requirements for the teaching of mental health and wellbeing within the health education component of RSHE in all primary and secondary schools.

The Department is developing a package of support for schools to help them teach the new curriculum and will look at what to provide to schools on gender stereotyping in that context. In particular the Department is working closely with a range of stakeholders, including the Government Equalities Office, to develop online training modules for teachers covering all of the requirements in the statutory guidance and face to face training for schools that need more help.

The Department is already providing some support on gender stereotyping through its funding for the Anne Frank 'Free to Be' debate programme, which encourages young people to think about the importance of tackling prejudice, discrimination and bullying. As part of this programme, participants explore gender expectations, and will often discuss where these expectations come from in the first place, as well as the pressures both boys and girls feel to fulfil them.

During the oral evidence session, the Committee asked what work the Department for Education is doing to encourage more boys to seek help if they have experienced or witnessed abuse. The RSHE curriculum will teach young people about positive and safe relationships. In primary schools, age-appropriate relationships education will involve teaching children about what healthy relationships are and providing them with the knowledge to recognise and report abuse, including emotional, physical and sexual abuse. In secondary schools, pupils will be taught about grooming, sexual exploitation and domestic abuse, including coercive and controlling behaviour. Pupils may need support to recognise when relationships, including family relationships, are unhealthy or abusive. An important part of relationships and sex education is communicating and recognising consent from others, and how and when consent can be withdrawn.

The Committee also asked how the Government will measure the impact of reforms to children and young people's mental health services on the mental health of young people, and specifically of boys. These reforms are significant. The NHS Long Term Plan made a commitment that by 2023/24 345,000 more children and young people aged 0-25 will receive mental health support via NHS-funded mental health services and school- or college-based Mental Health Support Teams. The evaluation of the reforms will consider whether the programme promotes equality of provision and outcomes for children and young people with protected characteristics. Mental Health Support Teams working in schools will also capture demographic information on children and young people who receive interventions. It will therefore be possible to look separately at outcomes of direct interventions for boys.

I hope that this response gives the Committee assurance of the Department for Education's commitment to supporting the mental health of men and boys.

I am copying this letter to Vicky Ford, who as the Children and Families Minister will take forward responsibility for Mental Health, online safety and bullying in schools.

With best wishes.

Yours sincerely
Nick

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