

**Getting started**

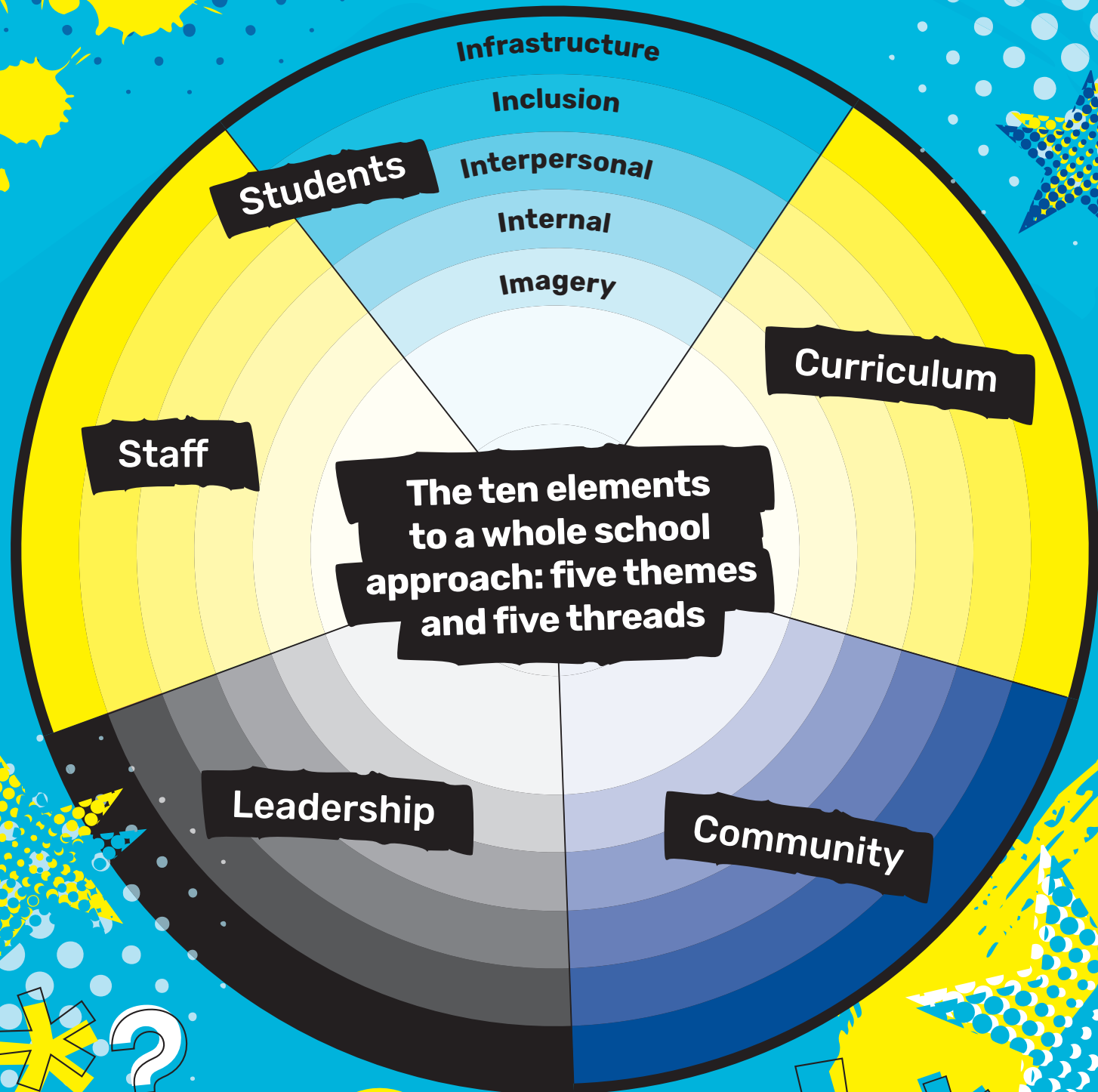
**A whole school approach  
to preventing sexism  
and sexual harassment**



**It's Not OK:**

**A toolkit for preventing sexism and  
sexual harassment in schools**

## A whole school approach to preventing sexism and sexual harassment



The ten elements to a whole school approach: five themes and five threads

Staff

Students

Curriculum

Leadership

Community

Infrastructure

Inclusion

Interpersonal

Internal

Imagery

Scan here for more information

[neu.org.uk/end-sexism-sexual-harassment](http://neu.org.uk/end-sexism-sexual-harassment)



# Why do we need a whole school approach?



“Children who are victims of sexual violence and sexual harassment wherever it happens, may find the experience stressful and distressing. This will, in all likelihood, adversely affect their educational attainment ...”<sup>1</sup>

## Keeping Children Safe in Education

This toolkit was created as a response to a motion brought to annual conference by NEU members. The work began when we researched sexual harassment in schools for our research report *It's Just Everywhere* in 2017.<sup>2</sup>

Sexual harassment, we found, was rife in schools. The research identified that over a third (37 per cent) of girl students at mixed-sex schools have personally experienced some form of sexual harassment at school and almost a quarter (24 per cent) of female students at mixed-sex schools have been subjected to unwanted physical touching of a sexual nature while at school.

## We have two posters you can download about this research.

Since our report, there has been a step change in the conversation about sexual harassment. The #MeToo movement, a growing global social movement against sexual assault, sexual harassment and rape culture, publicly called out perpetrators of sexual assault – particularly those in power – and said, “No more”.

Sexism and sexual harassment disproportionately affect women and girls. Violence and discrimination against women and girls have also become a headline issue with Laura Bates highlighting ‘Everyday Sexism’; public marches against the sexist behaviour of politicians; the deaths of Sarah Everard, Sabina Nessa, Nicole Smallman and Bibaa Henry; and public campaigns on street harassment. Black Lives Matter and the case of Child Q have highlighted the racialised and widespread nature of sexism for Black women and girls, and we know that sexual harassment is experienced differently by LGBT+ and disabled students and staff.

There is now enough evidence available in the UK to show that sexual harassment is prevalent in all schools – no member of school staff needs to prove that change is needed. DfE and Ofsted are clear: schools should presume sexual harassment is happening and that change is needed, and act accordingly.

The union is committed to providing advice to our members to influence the policies in their school or college, both relating to issues which affect members but also how teaching can respond to the social issues which impact on young people and their access to, and experiences of, education. The union has focused on sexual harassment because it is a consequence of gender inequality and challenging it can unlock positive conversations in education about sexism and gender equity.

As a starting point, you should assess where your school is currently with responding to and preventing sexual harassment.

<sup>1</sup> [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/64f0a68ea78c5f000dc6f3b2/Keeping\\_children\\_safe\\_in\\_education\\_2023.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/64f0a68ea78c5f000dc6f3b2/Keeping_children_safe_in_education_2023.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> <https://neu.org.uk/advice/its-just-everywhere-sexism-schools>

## What is a whole school approach?

It's now well understood that sexism and sexual harassment are prevalent in schools. Evidence from reports and studies shows that for meaningful change to happen, a whole school approach to preventing sexism and sexual harassment is required.

This approach needs to address the behaviours of individuals and shift school culture. That leads us to a question, 'what does a whole school approach to preventing sexism and sexual harassment look like, and how do we make it happen?'

This document outlines how to plan a whole school approach and breaks it down into five key elements:	Within these, five essential threads should be considered:
<b>Leadership</b>	<b>Infrastructure</b>
<b>Staff</b>	<b>Inclusion</b>
<b>Students</b>	<b>Interpersonal</b>
<b>Curriculum</b>	<b>Internal</b>
<b>Community</b>	<b>Imagery</b>

Changing culture takes time, it's a marathon not a sprint. Change takes years, not one term or school year, and the NEU toolkit allows you to pick out the most useful first steps you want to take for your school. It also allows you to plan for the longer term.

All schools are starting from a different point, and we advise collective discussion and reflection as a staff group to identify first or next steps, given your context and community. This toolkit is designed for you and colleagues to select what's useful and to adapt the content, and for you to pick and choose the elements and tools you want to use.

## Five key themes

A whole school approach can take many different forms.

### Leadership

The commitment needs to be clear and visible. Change needs to be seen at the top. School leaders and governors commit to taking a whole school approach to preventing sexism and sexual harassment. They lead by example, by promoting the importance of this issue, linking all sections of the whole school approach, and they make space for staff to embed that change. Leaders also need to take responsibility for the infrastructure of their school. This should include safeguarding, behaviour and reporting policies and an inclusive approach to the issue. Acknowledging that sexism and sexual harassment happens in your school, is not a reflection on your school, but society as a whole. Ofsted require schools to report on how they are tackling sexism and sexual harassment. This toolkit provides leaders with the support to do this.

- **Do you have a Sexual Harassment policy?**
- **Are you reporting processes inclusive and offer support to staff and students?**
- **Are Staff trained on how to identify, report and support victims?**

### Staff

Staff are the ones who generate a school culture and they must be supported, not just with encouragement but with time, skills and capacity to reflect on behaviours, teaching and the curriculum. They also need policies in place guiding how staff treat each other, such as behaviour policies for staff and how to report harassment. Staff act as role models for students. They need to be enabled and supported to generate positive cultures through access to training, and have the time to reflect.

- **Could you set up an equalities committee?**
- **How can all staff be active bystanders and work together?**
- **Can you supporting students to have safe spaces to talk?**

## Curriculum

All aspects of the curriculum, from science and history, to art, drama and PE, should identify harmful gender stereotypes, represent women's achievements and contributions and address healthy relationships. Relationships and sex education should be designed in consultation with students and explicitly address consent, respectful relationships, gender stereotypes, violence against women and girls and the meaning of consent and sexual assault.

- **Are all PE specialisms accessible to girls and boys?**
- **Do your lessons include women role models?**
- **Are women role models visible in your classroom?**

## Students

Students' experiences and using their ideas for change forms a core element of the school's approach to preventing and responding to sexism and sexual harassment. Students are supported to organise in feminist/equality groups. Students can share their thinking in safe learning spaces and are encouraged to grow their understanding and change their behaviours because they realise gender stereotypes harm them and all their friends and peers.

- **Could you encourage students to set up a student group?**
- **How can student voices be heard?**
- **Can students deliver training to staff?**

## Community

Families and carers should receive clear messages from the school that sexism and sexual harassment are harmful and will be challenged. The school can explain why preventing sexism and sexual harassment is important and beneficial for all students and their success at school. Parents and carers should receive information and reminders about who to approach if they are worried about something that has happened to their child. As sexism and sexual harassment is ingrained in society, our school communities will also need educating and made aware of how they can support their children to live free from sexism and sexual harassment in their homes and schools.

- **Could you hold active bystander training? Look at our top tips**
- **How can you share the toolkit with parents?**
- **Can you share your work in a parent newsletter?**

## Five essential threads

Each element should have five essential threads running through it:

### Infrastructure

Whether it concerns school uniform policy, reporting sexual harassment or access to non-stereotypical careers advice, the building blocks that make up the daily business of a school need to be part of the change to prevent sexism and sexual harassment. This is what we refer to when we talk about infrastructure.

Taking a whole school approach to prevent and address sexual harassment must sit in the wider context of infrastructure around safeguarding, behaviour policy, staff policies and more. We have a checklist for the Infrastructure thread on our website. If you visit the NEU website, you can explore this area further, looking at behaviour policies, uniform policies, and case studies.

## Inclusive

Sexism and sexual harassment manifest in different ways for different groups of staff and young people, such as Black women, women of different ages and lesbian or trans staff. Some groups of staff face multiple barriers and negative experiences which can be described as “multiple discrimination”. This means it is harder for some staff to feel able to report or seek support, or confident that it will make a difference.

To make it easier to report, evidence shows that regularly, positively encouraging ‘reporting’ as a sign of a healthy workplace culture will benefit all staff. Do consider the wider demographics of your school and community when developing your anti-sexism and sexual harassment policies. However, schools should feel confident to project and model a set of values that may be different to a student’s experience outside the school (“our school values”). It is also important to actively counter negative or narrow stereotypes which students will be encountering online.”

For example:

- Sexism and homophobia are closely linked and reinforce each other so your whole school approach must include challenging sexism and challenging prejudice against LGBT+ people.
- Different groups of Black girls will experience different assumptions about their peers and their aspirations, so plans to challenge sexism need to involve their concerns and recommendations and your anti- racism work needs to consider the needs of girls in your setting.
- LGBT+ disabled pupils are more likely to experience homophobic, biphobic and transphobic bullying than non-disabled LGBT+ pupils (60 per cent compared to 43 per cent). - Stonewall<sup>3</sup>
- 40 per cent of young Gypsies and Travellers have experienced bullying, with a higher

percentage of girls (58 per cent) reporting to have experienced bullying than boys (26 per cent) - The Traveller Movement<sup>4</sup>

We have more case studies on intersectionality and inclusion on our website.

## Interpersonal

The language we use and how we behave towards each other as professionals, and how students behave with each other, form a core part of the culture of a school.

**“ We were in a presentation to staff and the Head was speaking. When he finished, he said ‘And now it’s time for the girls’ referring to a presentation from several young female staff members.”**

### Member, West Midlands

The language we use in our day-to-day interactions, our policies and school communication are key to demonstrating a commitment to preventing sexism and sexual harassment. Over time it is recommended that you review your curriculum resources to identify content that promotes sexism. (See the Curriculum section on our website).

Reviewing language should span formal documents, contracts, policies and letters. It is essential that staff act as role models for students and model behaviour that works to prevent sexism and sexual harassment modelling equality and mutual respect between men and women.

We have a checklist for the Interpersonal thread on our website.

<sup>3</sup> Stonewall (2022) An introduction to supporting LGBTQ+ children and young people: A guide for schools, colleges and settings [https://www.stonewall.org.uk/sites/default/files/final\\_-\\_an\\_intro\\_to\\_supporting\\_lgbt\\_young\\_people\\_-\\_april2022.pdf](https://www.stonewall.org.uk/sites/default/files/final_-_an_intro_to_supporting_lgbt_young_people_-_april2022.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> The Traveller Movement (2020) Barriers in education – young Travellers in London [https://wp-main.travellermovement.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/TTM-Barriers-in-education\\_web.pdf](https://wp-main.travellermovement.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/TTM-Barriers-in-education_web.pdf)

## Internal

How do we create time and safe spaces for staff and students to reflect on their own beliefs and behaviours?

The internal thread is about ensuring that everyone involved has time and space to reflect on how they can contribute to a community which promotes positive values. Whether a member of staff or a young person, we are all exposed to stereotypes about gender and culture that impact how we act and what we do. Built into this internal dialogue will be some form of gendered social norms and expectations about how genders behave and how we behave as gendered bodies.

Thinking about gender inequality and preventing sexism and sexual harassment can often lead to important reflections about what influences us and where we acquired our ideas about men, women and gender. Different teachers have had different levels of access to professional development about gender and education. A whole school approach needs to include spaces for professional reflection and joint planning, so we can reflect on our own personal motivations and personal experiences and commit to listening and learning from other colleagues.

## Imagery

Can staff, families and students see a clear message throughout the school that sexual harassment is not acceptable? The Imagery thread is all about how the school promotes and displays its ethos, in what it says, celebrates, showcases and displays.

No matter how good a school policy or lesson plan, if staff and students don't know about it, or aren't receiving messages about it, it will not have the desired impact. This means that at every level, from clear statements from the school that sexual harassment is unacceptable to diverse role models in science, what every part of the school body sees every day tells them about the values and beliefs of the school. Changes that you are making can be reflected there.

Schools will benefit from making explicit links to demonstrate that gender inequality is at the root of sexual harassment. There needs to be a clear message about preventing sexism and sexual harassment to say that such work is the responsibility of everyone in the school.

We have a checklist for the Imagery thread on our website.

# Getting started



## Think Big

Having read through this document, the thought of tackling this problem alone and wondering where to begin might seem overwhelming. With lots of ideas running around or maybe you have come to a roadblock on where to start, either way it is essential to talk to your colleagues and engage them in taking their first steps with you.

Referring to the whole school approach diagram on pg 2, start an open discussion looking at each element and write down how your school currently prevents sexism and sexual harassment and where things could be improved. Don't worry at this early stage about keeping your goals small, think big...if you had a magic wand what would your long-term goal for each element look like?

## Break-it down

Looking at your long-term goals from the task above, discuss which one you would like to start with. Encourage colleagues to write a plan together and break this long-term goal down into manageable stages. You can work together and ask yourselves, 'where do we want to start?', 'what would we like to achieve?'

Have a read of your school's vision and ethos and where this work will link.

**Does your language feed into gender stereotypes?**

**'Can I have two strong boys to move this table?'**

**Are girls blamed for wearing short skirts into a male teacher's classroom?**

**Does the curriculum you teach include women role models?**

**Do you and your colleagues feel confident in reporting incidents of sexism or sexual harassment?**

**Is the infrastructure in place?**

## Case study: Demonstrating the relevance to your school

A social sciences teacher from Newcastle told us about how she gathered evidence. During her newly qualified teacher year she approached her senior leadership team to discuss how the school could tackle sexist behaviour in school. She found that there were no policies in place and the leadership team agreed to work on the subject. To get started she helped to organise some focus groups for students. From those sessions, the school learned that girls felt uncomfortable in their uniforms, experienced sexist 'banter' and students felt that teachers needed to be educated about sexism and how to deal with it.

They also heard from boys who said they do not know when, or how, to challenge sexist behavior. Some do not know where 'the line' is or how to safely intervene in an incident. Both boys and girls said they feel that PHSE and RSE does not give them what they need, that it is out of date and not fit for purpose.

This feedback provided useful information to indicate where different approaches were needed.



## Everyone brings something different

When holding discussions and planning ideas, these discussions should involve all staff, and we need to keep reinforcing the message that challenging sexism is good for everyone, it isn't just a 'women's issue'. We need male role models to support and lead their students by example.

There are also intersecting links between racism and sexism and sexism and homophobia. When we consider the statistics around sexism and sexual harassment, it is worth keeping in mind that not all staff or students will feel able to speak as easily about their experiences or ideas.

Solutions to tackle sexism and sexual harassment should recognise that sexism and sexual harassment look different for different students and staff. [\(you can read more about inclusion and intersectionality on our website\)](#)

## Be SMART – plan out a few small steps

Encourage colleagues to write a plan together. What would you like to achieve? consider how and why? what support might you need?

Keep the plan visible and re-evaluate it at regular meetings. Include discussion in staff meetings or consider setting up a gender equality committee. All plans will need the whole school to make long lasting change.

Working together to write your plan, consider how you will make each goal SMART:

**\*Specific**

**\*Measurable**

**\*Achievable**

**\*Realistic**

**\*Timely (short, medium, long-term)**

You may want to start by choosing the tasks that are easy to achieved. Each task achieved will build the building blocks to reach your long-term goal. Ensure the tasks are divided amongst the staff group, so everyone is involved.

Sometimes you will hit a roadblock and that is okay. Reassess the plans and think whether you need additional support to see this plan through.

(See Case study: How to lead a gender equality revolution in your school on p11)

## The Pledge

One achievable goal could be to ask your head teacher to make a public pledge to take a whole school approach to preventing sexism and sexual harassment. The NEU have produced a pledge poster which head teachers can sign and post a photo alongside their school representative on social media [#itsNotOk@neuwomen](#) [@NEUnion](#)

Making a visual statement brings the wider school community in to the school, to see the positive first steps the school is making to prevent sexism and sexual harassment in schools.

Remember, your school doesn't have to have evidence of sexism or sexual harassment happening. Statements from both Ofsted and DfE state that schools should presume sexual harassment is taking place and take steps to prevent it.

## How do you know your efforts are working?

It is extremely helpful to have a sense of where you are starting from and what progress has been made. Surveys and staff and student focus groups can all be used to measure progress.

Integrating these issues into school development and improvement can take time, but each step in the right direction and using a whole school approach to preventing sexism and sexual harassment in your school means that teaching and learning in the school can become an engine for good practice.

A whole school approach is not intended to be a 'quick fix'; cultural change takes time. Be proud of any and all steps you take towards preventing sexism and sexual harassment. You are changing the lives of your colleagues

and students, and you are part of a global movement, right now, in schools around the world saying that sexism and sexual harassment need to stop.

## I'm stuck! Call for help!

With the best laid plans, hiccups can happen along the way. If you come across barriers, don't get disheartened. It is important to check-in and evaluate how the plans are going. Do you need longer for the plans to be put in to place? Are the school not taking these issues seriously? Do you need help to come up with solutions to the issues?

If you come across barriers, sharing these with your branch/district will provide an opportunity to problem solve together.

You may want to arrange training on elements of the toolkit in your school, but you don't know where to start. Your branch/district can arrange training either in conjunction with your school or across your district.

[neu.org.uk/district-branch-finder](http://neu.org.uk/district-branch-finder)

## Hey Rep!!

Get to know your school rep. If there isn't one in your school, ask your branch/district about what becoming a rep involves. The rep role can be job shared if there are others interested in becoming active. Ask your branch is there is a vacancy for an equality or women's officer role.

" I did my NEU reps training this year and we were all asked, 'what are the key issues in your school?' I said 'sexism' but when the facilitator asked 'does anyone else have this experience?', no-one said they did. Yet when you talked to them, they were dealing with poor quality maternity rights, lack of menopause policy etc. it was embedded sexism but our colleagues didn't understand it as that"

**Member, North East England**

## Show Off!!

Report your positive stories to [neuwomen@neu.org.uk](mailto:neuwomen@neu.org.uk) so we can share your great work. Hearing about the stories on the ground will help inform the future development of this toolkit and subsequent training.

Visit your district and branch meetings and share your stories with fellow NEU members.

Keep a look out, your story could debut in Educate magazine!

## Wondering where to get started? Here are a few 'It's Not Ok' tools you can make a start with:

**Empower, educate and inspire:  
how to support students to make  
change happen**

**Sexual harassment: Ten top tips for your  
rights as a professional at work**

**It's not OK: Ten top tips on using a  
bystander intervention model**

**Working with boys and young men to  
prevent sexism and sexual harassment**

## Further resources:

AGENDA teachers' resource on  
relationships

Curriculum resources on gender  
stereotypes

## Case study: How to lead a gender equality revolution in your school

Like many women in the education profession, Laura Rutley has children and has to balance childcare and working. In order to receive her pay progression, she was required to submit a body of evidence, despite glowing appraisals.

No matter how hard she tried to balance her work and childcare responsibilities, there was never the time to assemble this unnecessary body of work. Laura reached out to colleagues to see if any of them had any suggestions and to her horror, she discovered that several of her women colleagues had also failed to achieve pay progression, solely due to the fact they could not find any time as working mothers, to assemble this body of work.

It won't come as a surprise to find that the gender pay gap in education is 18.8 per cent.

All of the above coupled with the impact of Covid 19 on women, meant that Laura felt she had to act.

**Specific** - Laura wrote a proposal to her head teacher to start a gender equality group.

**Measurable** - Students to be given a questionnaire about experiences/feelings each year, using the UK Feminista questionnaire on sexism

**Achievable** - Laura began to gather a group of supportive colleagues (men and women) who would like to be part of it. She was surprised and heartened to find so many of her colleagues were supportive and wanted to be involved - people of all genders and backgrounds. Laura reached out to staff in each faculty area and was soon able to assemble a group of around 20 staff, who met regularly to evaluate progress and discuss next steps.

**Realistic** - Laura started to research cultural change She also read the school's equality objectives. If a school is pursuing equality, they are pursuing change. Laura felt that it was important that equality was built into all systems, policies and procedures within the school and began to work closely with SLT. Her head teacher and many SLT members were incredibly supportive.

**Timely** - The campaign has a 5-year time frame, with short, medium and long-term goals.

Since this idea was first proposed, Laura has:

- streamlined the pay progression process
- led whole school staff training on sexism and sexual harassment,
- completed research and engaged male teachers in the campaign against sexism,
- created a gender equality staff group to work collectively on the campaign
- created a pupil group so pupil's voices are heard
- completed research on pupils' experiences of sexism, and conduct a yearly questionnaire to measure the impact of the campaign
- completed research on women's health and set up a women's health cafe
- led staff training on women's health, offered training in the SCITT on equality, diversity and inclusion,
- created school and staffroom displays to make the campaign visible
- worked closely with PE to de-gender the curriculum and designed bespoke workshops for boys on identity and relationships.



Scan here for more information

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