Government guidance around gender-questioning children in schools

A Statement from Safer to Wait

On 19 December 2023, the Department for Education published guidance for teachers on how best to support pupils questioning their gender in schools. [1]

It recommends that parents should be included in discussions when a child presents as gender-questioning and wishes to socially transition.

Safer to Wait welcomes this guidance. Changing names and pronouns is not a minor or neutral act: indeed, it is an impactful intervention which could be seen to encourage transition.

"Gender identity can fluctuate over time, … be highly mutable and …may be a response to many psychosocial factors, (and therefore) identity may change". [2]

The government's recommendations are guidance only. However, it would be very unwise for teachers to ignore this guidance.

"The majority of children and young people presenting to GIDS (Gender Identity Development Service), have other complex mental health issues and/or neurodiversity. There is also an over representation of looked after children." [2]

These are very vulnerable children; their gender questioning could be reflecting significant emotional distress. All adults caring for them (parents, carers and professionals) must be included in the vital sharing of information concerning the child.

This is an urgent and serious safeguarding issue. As Dr Val Fraser, Former Ofsted Inspector and co-founder of Safer to Wait, notes:

"Adolescence is a time of doubt and confusion for many children. As adults, we need to coordinate our care and support of those in particular turmoil about their identity, and of course, that coordination should involve their parents."

[1] https://www.gov.uk/government/news/parent-first-approach-at-the-core-of-new-guidance-on-gender-questioning-children

[2] Cass Review: Independent Review of Gender Identity Services for Children and Young People for the NHS cass.review@nhs.net

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