



SEXISM IN UK MIXED-SEX SECONDARY SCHOOLS

A 2017 study by the National Education Union and UK Feminista revealed some shocking findings about the extent and prevalence of sexism in UK schools.

SEXUAL HARRASSMENT

Sexual harassment is highly prevalent in schools. It is also gendered, overwhelmingly involving boys targeting girls.

- Over a third (37%) of female students at mixed-sex schools have personally experienced some form of sexual harassment at school.
- Almost a quarter (24%) of female students at mixed-sex schools have been subjected to unwanted physical touching of a sexual nature while at school.
- Almost one in three (32%) teachers in mixed-sex secondary schools witness sexual harassment in their school on at least a weekly basis. A further 36% say they witness it on a termly basis.

SEXIST STEREOTYPES AND BEHAVIOUR

Gender stereotyping is a typical feature of school culture, often reinforced through mundane, 'everyday' actions.

- A quarter of all secondary school teachers say they witness gender stereotyping and discrimination in their school on a daily basis, and a further quarter say they witness it on a weekly basis.
- Over a third (34%) of primary school teachers say they witness gender stereotyping in their school on at least a weekly basis. Over half (54%) say they witness it on at least a termly basis.
- 36% of female students in mixed-sex schools say they have personally been treated differently on account of their gender, compared to 15% of male students.

SEXIST LANGUAGE

The use of misogynist language is commonplace in schools.

- 66% of female students and 37% of male students in mixed-sex sixth forms have experienced or witnessed the use of sexist language in school.
- 64% of teachers in mixed-sex secondary schools hear sexist language in school on at least a weekly basis. Over a quarter of teachers (29%) report that sexist language is a daily occurrence.

RESPONDING TO SEXISM

Schools are currently ill-prepared and ill-equipped to tackle sexism.

- Less than a quarter (22%) of female students at mixed-sex schools think their school takes sexism seriously enough.
- 78% of secondary school students are unsure or not aware of the existence of any policies and practices in their school related to preventing sexism.
- Over half (64%) of secondary school teachers are unsure or not aware of the existence of any policies and practices in their school related to preventing sexism.
- Just one in five (20%) secondary school teachers has received training in recognising and tackling sexism as part of their Initial Teacher Education.
- Only 22% of secondary school teachers have received Continuing Professional Development training in recognising and tackling sexism.
- Barriers to tackling sexism identified by teachers include an overly heavy focus on academic subjects (identified by 69% of teachers), teacher workload being too high (identified by 68% of teachers), and the failure of school leadership to prioritise tackling sexism (identified by 62% of teachers).

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SCHOOLS

Adopt a 'whole school approach' to tackling sexism.

A 'whole school approach' means action to promote equality between girls and boys is supported by an over-arching framework involving all members of the school community. This enables a consistent approach and long-term change.

The three key components of a whole school approach are:

- An institutional framework: put in place a strategy, support it through school policy, and drive it with leadership.
- Building staff capacity: equip teachers and all staff with the skills, knowledge and resources to understand, identify and tackle sexism, including through the provision of training opportunities.
- Empowering students: enable students to discuss and learn about sexism, to report incidents, and to take action for equality.

Take a zero-tolerance approach to sexual harassment.

- Sexual harassment should be specifically and explicitly addressed through school policy, including clear procedural guidelines which are consistently enforced.
- All staff should know what the school's policies and procedures are regarding incidents of sexual harassment.
- All students should be aware of the school's zero-tolerance approach to sexual harassment and be supported to report incidents.