



# ABC:

Promoting an Anti-Bias  
Approach to Education  
in Northern Ireland

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## FOREWORD

In commending this resource, I must begin by paying tribute to all those, named in the booklet, who have created what I believe to be an invaluable resource. Congratulations for co-working and delivering such an excellent product. I have absolutely no doubt that it will meet the needs of the education community for many years to come.

When I arrived in NICIE, back in February 1995, one of the first engagements with policy which I encountered was the working group involved in developing the original *Anti Bias Curriculum*. It was quite simply a resource manual, developed by a group of passionate academics, parents and practitioners and aimed primarily at teachers in pre-schools. Even then, the response was phenomenal to what was, by today's standards, a fairly basic, short summary of existing good practice in working with small children.

It was first published in 1998 and reprinted with minor changes in 2002 and has been a huge success in both editions. Northern Ireland has changed considerably since 1998. We now have significant numbers of children who do not fit into the traditional definition of either of the two majority cultures. The number of school age children who have English as a second language has doubled over the past few years and, if peace holds, we expect this growth to continue. Schools are becoming more diverse in their intake and the way in which education practitioners work with children and young people must reflect best practice and engage with the pupils in their worlds too. This resource offers support to teachers and governors to allow such good practice to be developed and maintained.

Producing *ABC: Promoting an Anti-Bias Approach to Education in Northern Ireland* has involved a major re-working of the original editions to reflect the new context in which we are challenged to work as professionals and to ensure that the document is applicable to school environments both at early years, primary and secondary levels. We live in a world in which practice can too easily follow a route of either political correctness and legalism or liberalism and relativity. It is my view that this handbook maintains the correct balance between the two extremes. It pays due attention to the rules and regulations without losing sight of creativity and experience. So, well done and many happy hours of use to all who avail of this resource's suggestions and ideas.

**Michael Wardlow**



Chief Executive Officer  
NICIE

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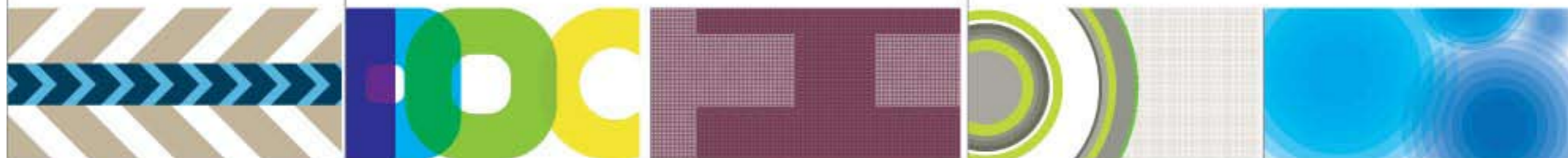
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## INTRODUCTION TO THE ANTI-BIAS APPROACH

ABC seems a natural place to start and learning your ABCs should be made easy with the support of enthusiastic, committed educators. Such thoughts influenced the choice of title for this handbook which is designed to promote the ABCs of an anti-bias approach to education in Northern Ireland. This resource is aimed at all those who have responsibility for children's development in schools and it is hoped that the layout is user-friendly and the content thought-provoking and challenging.

The focus of this manual is on the development of inclusion, respect, sharing and openness – essential aspects of the school's ethos and practice in the delivery of the 'formal' Northern Ireland Curriculum and also the more 'informal' and 'hidden' curricula that exist in our schools. This resource is aimed at all aspects of the holistic development of children and young people and the ABCs of this approach represent the fundamental elements of understanding, respecting, valuing difference and being inclusive. While the prefix 'anti' often communicates opposition, this handbook is, rather, premised on the fact that 'bias' is a normal part of life and an awareness of bias is crucial to ensuring inclusivity.

It is ideal for the anti-bias approach to start early in a child's education but it can be adopted at any stage by educators. This resource is designed to be useful to all individuals involved in the learning process, from early years through primary school to second level education.

Each chapter provides an opportunity for reflection on different aspects of diversity and inclusion. While Chapter One gives a detailed introduction to the anti-bias concept, application of it to issues of culture, religion and ethnicity is the focus of Chapter Two. Chapter Three is devoted to pertinent issues relating to gender and sexual orientation and Chapter Four places specific emphasis on the inclusion of children and young people with special educational needs. The final chapter is devoted to the important partnership between school and parents in reinforcing the anti-bias approach.

The ABCs of this approach represent the fundamental elements of understanding, respecting, valuing difference and being inclusive.

### 1.1 THE NORTHERN IRELAND CURRICULUM AND THE ANTI-BIAS APPROACH

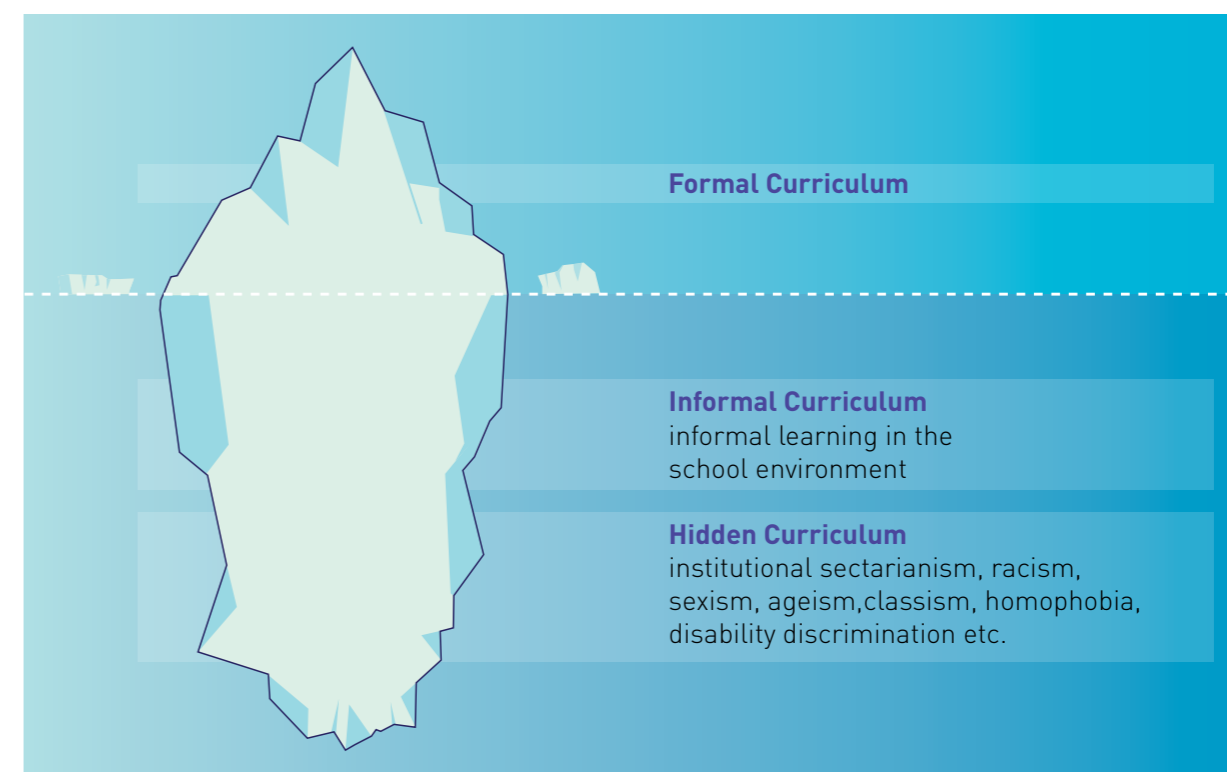
For too long, education specialists favoured the 'island of sanity / calm' approach, arguing that schools should be kept free from conflict and controversy, particularly in relation to teaching about culture, religion, ethnicity, social background, gender, sexual orientation and disability. At the time of writing, however, the Northern Ireland Curriculum<sup>1</sup> is introducing a focus on Personal Development and Mutual Understanding at the Foundation Stage and Key Stages 1 and 2 and Learning for Life and Work, at Key Stages 3 and 4 (with the strands of Personal Development, Local and Global Citizenship, Home Economics and Education for Employability). Such changes to the Northern Ireland Curriculum are designed to enable students to gain a greater sense of the relevance of what they are learning. It also encourages the building of Thinking Skills and Personal Capabilities and ensures that ongoing Assessment for Learning is integrated into classroom practice.

As a consequence, teachers are becoming more 'facilitative' of a learning process where both they and their students share learning intentions and success criteria. Schools are now engaged in preparing young people for life in a world where they can address conflict and controversy rather than avoiding them. Educators can help children and young people develop a mature understanding and attitude about social background, culture, religion, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation and disability. Also, teachers can promote a sensitive awareness about differences and similarities and how to handle them in a constructive way.

#### What is the anti-bias approach?

The anti-bias approach relates to the whole set of school experiences from which children can learn. Such experiences may be provided for children deliberately as part of the 'formal curriculum' (with the various areas of learning contained in the NI Curriculum) or incidentally as part of the 'informal curriculum' (such as learning appropriate ways of attracting the teacher's attention). However, they may also arise more or less unconsciously as part of the 'hidden curriculum' (which may include biases held by teachers and unconsciously transmitted to pupils). Like an iceberg, the hidden elements are often more threatening and people frequently respond through denial or avoidance.

The anti-bias approach relates to the whole set of school experiences from which children can learn.



1. [www.nicurriculum.org.uk](http://www.nicurriculum.org.uk)

*Part one: Introduction to the anti-bias approach*

The anti-bias approach involves that part of the formal, informal and hidden curricula relating to the concept of equality. It is founded on the idea that all children are entitled to learning experiences based on genuine equality of opportunity, equality of access, and equality of outcome. This does NOT mean that everyone is, or could possibly be, the same. What it does mean is that both difference (especially that based on social background, culture, gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, religion or disability) and similarity are real. However, if bias leads to stereotyped attitudes, prejudiced behaviour and unequal treatment within the school context, some aspects of the curricula (formal, informal or hidden) need to be reviewed.

### The purpose and focus of the anti-bias approach is to challenge negative attitudes, values and practices held in our society...

#### Why is the anti-bias approach important?

Children arrive in school with a range of well established attitudes and beliefs, some of which may be negative and biased. From the very earliest age, children are subject to environmental and social conditioning which may reinforce prejudice and a conventional wisdom about what is 'normal', 'good' or 'positive'. Such conditioning relates particularly to behaviour, intellectual ability, physical ability, culture, class, religion, gender, sexual orientation, age and ethnicity.

The findings of an important survey<sup>2</sup> showed that Catholic and Protestant children demonstrated preference for particular cultural events and symbols and tended to identify with a particular community. This research also demonstrated an awareness of sectarian statements from the age of three. This implies that conditioning can reinforce social inequalities already embedded in our society and permeating language, images, attitudes and structures.

The purpose and focus of the anti-bias approach is, therefore, to recognise and realise the positive potential of schools to challenge negative attitudes, values and practices, held in our society, rather than viewing education solely as a mechanism for consolidating and passing on accepted wisdom.

#### What does the anti-bias approach mean in practice?

To achieve the goals of the anti-bias approach, positive action is required to ensure that every child acquires and projects a positive and confident self-identity and is enabled to understand and reduce bias and prejudice. The rest of this handbook provides detail of the anti-bias approach in practice and highlights the potential implications for the following:

- POLICIES AND PRACTICES which define how the class (and whole school) is organized and run
- EXPERIENCES AND ACTIVITIES provided for or created by the children
- LANGUAGE used between children themselves, and used between adults and children
- THE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT of the classroom, the school, and of its immediate surroundings

The anti-bias approach may involve challenging some previously unquestioned practices and behaviours among children and staff. It may, therefore, meet with resistance from some teachers, parents, governors, support staff and administrators. On the other hand, although the anti-bias approach is demanding it is also rewarding, and if it is applied to whole-school development it can make a major contribution to preparation for adult life, particularly in the context of living in the Northern Ireland of *A Shared Future*.<sup>3</sup>

#### What is needed to make the anti-bias approach work in schools?

The following represents the most favourable circumstances for school staff who wish to engage in successful anti-bias work:

- A willingness to develop a positive self-identity and a positive view of one's own culture
- An open-mindedness and awareness of one's own bias, behaviour, motivation and limitation
- An understanding of the issues of gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, culture, religion, class, physical and learning ability, and how these interact and affect everyone
- A readiness to incorporate an anti-bias approach into all aspects of work in the classroom and throughout the school

2. Paul Connolly, Alan Smith and Berni Kelly, *Too Young To Notice* (Belfast: Community Relations Council), 2002.

3. *A SHARED FUTURE –Policy and Strategic Framework for Good Relations in Northern Ireland* (Belfast: OFMDFM), 2005.

*Part one: introduction to the anti-bias approach*

- The ability to know when and how to intervene in discriminatory activity and to seek training for any perceived gaps in that knowledge
- Time devoted to develop good practice and reflect on progress
- A willingness to make a start here and now!

## 1.2 MAKING A START

Before embarking on any changes within the school, the existing situation should be carefully assessed. This can be done in a variety of ways but one possibility is to examine practices, within the school and classroom, under the following headings.

#### Documents

A great deal of paperwork and electronic data is produced in and by schools. All documents, by inclusion or omission, transmit significant impressions of how equality and anti-bias is approached and established in the Northern Ireland Curriculum and evident in the management and organisation of the school. It is vital that all written materials convey positive messages about the importance of anti-bias work in the school and in each classroom. Careful consideration should be given to the following:

- The prospectus and the school development plan
- Curriculum documents, schemes of work, policies and timetables
- Letters, circulars, notices and reports to parents
- Websites

#### Practices

All schools have routine practices which are sometimes so familiar that they are barely thought about or discussed. Some of these practices may have inappropriate implications. It may, therefore, be enlightening to give consideration to some of the school's long established practices. Examples of questions to enable reflection on gender issues are listed below:

- Are boys/young men always chosen to carry chairs and equipment around the school?
- Are girls/young women chosen to clear away and tidy up more than boys/young men?
- Do girls and boys line up or queue separately?
- Do both boys and girls have equal opportunities to play all ball games, including football?
- Do boys occupy the larger space in the middle of the playground for football?

Similarly, in relation to students with disabilities:

- What provision is made for those who cannot participate in the same way as their friends?
- Are children and young people with additional needs given extra work to do when games and P.E. are taught?
- How often are P.E. lessons adapted to include children or young people with disabilities?

#### Displays

The impact of displays, notices and other visual materials around the school should also be considered:

- Do images reflect the reality of the cultural heritage of children, staff and the wider community? Is there reference to events such as Chinese New Year or Diwali as well as Christmas?
- Is there gender balance in the images displayed around the school?
- Within the classroom, is the breadth and range of family and cultural backgrounds and interests reflected by the use of photographs, writing and drawing?
- Do images reflect the individuality of each child?
- Will any negative messages, such as graffiti, be dealt with? The school should be proactive in discouraging negative graffiti and prepared to remove any graffiti as it occurs.

Before embarking on any changes within the school, the existing situation should be carefully assessed.

*Part one: Introduction to the anti-bias approach***Resources**

All resources, whether human or material, convey ideas, beliefs and values, either explicitly or implicitly. The balance and focus of such messages needs to be considered carefully in the light of the anti-bias approach.

**Books**

Books are amongst the most important resources used in schools. Consequently, school and classroom libraries are critical areas to review, ensuring that the books available to children and teachers reflect the ideas and ideals of the anti-bias approach. For example, it's important that books demonstrate that people of diverse culture, race, gender, sexual orientation and those with disabilities, can live and work with equal competence (see section on 'Stereotyping' on page 14).

**Equipment**

Both males and females should have equal access to all school equipment.

**Visitors**

A rather less obvious example is that when choosing a visitor to present or demonstrate a skill or occupation, they should be chosen specifically because they reflect a non-stereotypical image.

**1.3 RELATIONSHIPS AND INTERACTION**

The various relationships and interactions within schools are central to the anti-bias approach. However, such interactions are often difficult to analyse objectively, since they are so personal and individual. The following examples of questions may help you to reflect on these complex issues or form the beginnings of an agenda for discussion with colleagues.

The various relationships and interactions within schools are central to the anti-bias approach.

**Views and attitudes**

What views and attitudes do you bring to school that influence your work with children / young people?  
What views and attitudes do the children / young people display and how do you react to these?

**Praise**

How many children / young people or adults did you praise today?  
How was the praise given?  
What were you actually praising in the children / young people?  
Why were some children / young people not praised?  
Why was some work praised above other work?

**Play**

How does the type and content of children's play determine the language they use?  
How do you create opportunities for boys and girls to play collaboratively?  
What pieces of equipment are favourites with the girls / with the boys?  
Do you find that boys and girls behave differently when playing? What do you think causes this? How do you know?  
What actions, games or language do you consider inappropriate?  
How can play which reflects cultural and role diversity be encouraged?

**Interactions**

What are your expectations of appropriate interactions between children / young people and adults (bearing in mind that children / young people may be as susceptible to what isn't said or done, as they are to the explicit?)  
Is your interaction with children / young people evenly distributed across all and similar for all?  
Is positive child-to-child or young person-to-young person interaction encouraged and reinforced?

*Part one: Introduction to the anti-bias approach***Bias**

The Northern Ireland Curriculum encourages teachers to become more facilitative of the learning process and provides real opportunities for developing understanding of stereotypes, prejudice and bias, particularly through the Personal Development and Mutual Understanding Strand.

In which subjects / classes are the children / young people going to be encouraged to think / talk about and understand stereotypes, prejudice and bias?

Are they becoming familiar with terms such as sectarianism; racism; ageism; sexism; classism, homophobia and discrimination against those with a disability?

At what age / Key Stage are the children / young people going to be made aware of the consequences of stereotypes, prejudice and bias in relationships?

An honest and careful whole-school analysis of the documents, procedures, resources and interactions within the school, their strengths and weaknesses, opportunities and problems, can provide a firm foundation for the planning and implementation of new or amended policies and practices.

Have positive interventions / policies been decided upon, at whole-school level, to stop biased behaviour and language?

When are the children / young people, or their parents, made aware of these school policies?  
Are the interventions the same for all the children / young people?  
When does the school consider it inappropriate to intervene?

Many of these issues will be considered in detail in subsequent chapters but, prior to that, specific attention must be paid to language and its effects and implications.

**1.4 LANGUAGE**

Language is fundamental to our existence as social beings. It is the most powerful means of interacting with other people and can be used for the most creative and also the most destructive purposes. Language is also central to the anti-bias approach.

So much depends on awareness of the effects of language and on the design and implementation of strategies to maximise the positive use of language.

There are two important issues to consider initially:

- The use of words which are, as far as possible, inclusive.
- The use of language which avoids stereotyping.

Both have implications within and beyond the formal curriculum.

**Neutral language**

The English language is full of words and terms which can, justifiably, be regarded as offensive by individuals and by groups. In most cases it is easy to find alternatives. It is also just as important to check the use of emphasis, tone of voice and body language.

In the case of gender related words, terms such as policeman, chairman, or fireman can simply be replaced by police officer, chairperson, or fire fighter.

Disparaging words used to describe people with disabilities, such as cripple, handicapped, or wheelchair-bound, can easily be substituted by a person who has 'Downs syndrome', or someone who has a 'learning disability' or is a 'wheelchair-user'. Moreover, there should be awareness that a phrase which begins 'a person with' or 'a person who has' is less derogatory than one which includes 'suffers from' a particular condition.

The Northern Ireland Curriculum encourages teachers to become more facilitative of the learning process and provides opportunities for developing understanding of stereotypes, prejudice and bias, particularly through the Personal Development and Mutual Understanding Strand.

*Part one: Introduction to the anti-bias approach*

Slightly more complex (and perhaps more contentious) is language which relates to aspects of culture, especially in Northern Ireland. Some terms are clearly offensive (Black Prod, Fenian, Taig), but others may be more subtly biased. Similarly, there are familiar difficulties with Derry / Londonderry, Catholic / Roman Catholic and with British / Irish / Northern Irish.

**Stereotyping**

Stereotypes arise not from the use of particularly derogatory language but occur when certain characteristics are attributed to individuals belonging to particular groups or categories. An example can be found in the description of girls / young women as pretty and boys / young men as tough (but not vice versa). While there is nothing intrinsically objectionable about the words 'pretty' or 'tough' they become questionable when exclusively applied to children of one gender.

Biased or stereotypical gender statements or judgments such as 'girls / women can't do that'; 'boys / men don't...'; 'boys / guys are better at...'; 'boys will be boys', need to be contested. Box 1 lists some of the familiar gender stereotypes.

**Box 1****Male Stereotypes**

Active  
Strong  
Rough  
Rational  
Messy  
Independent  
Innovator  
Decisive  
Logical  
Can only concentrate on one thing at a time

**Female Stereotypes**

Passive  
Weak  
Gentle  
Emotional  
Neat, tidy  
Dependent  
Conformer  
Indecisive  
Creative  
Good at multi-tasking

Similarly, stereotypes are often used to characterise individuals from particular ethnic or sexual-orientation groups and to label those who have disabilities. Stereotypes such as 'disabled people can't...'; 'more black youths get involved in gangs'; 'gay men are more interested in their appearance than straight men', must be consistently challenged.

**Language in use**

Words are powerful because they communicate values. Therefore, the derogatory use of words to disparage minority groups or individuals (because of their gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, religion, social background or disability) must be challenged within any school environment. A clear policy should be developed around the derogatory use of words and the unacceptable use of such words must be communicated.

Therefore, a school needs to agree a common anti-bias language, including a set of preferred, unbiased and non-stereotypical terms. This list can, of course, be extended and developed by consultation, as circumstances require. For example, teachers should be encouraged to make a distinction between the general use of the word 'gay' and the use of the word specifically to hurt or demean. Care should be taken not to give the message that there is something wrong with being gay. The key message is always one of respect for difference.

Stereotypes arise not from the use of particularly derogatory language but occur when certain characteristics are attributed to individuals belonging to particular groups or categories...

*Part one: Introduction to the anti-bias approach*

A strategy is also required for encouraging the positive use of appropriate language, so that children (as well as teachers, parents, and ancillary staff) receive an induction in its use and understand the reasons for using appropriate language. In essence, an anti-bias language needs to be agreed within the school, especially in relation to the language traditionally used by the different communities in Northern Ireland and the gender-specific and sometimes discriminatory language used in our society. By listening carefully to the interaction of staff and children/young people, assessment can be made of the extent to which this agreed anti-bias language is consistently in use. Language can then be planned and used deliberately as a tool to expand and challenge children / young people's experience.

**Example: the language of books**

Books form a staple resource in schools and are, therefore, a large and influential part of every child's experiences. All books imply and reflect values and in some the implicit messages may be offensive. For this reason, careful consideration is needed in order that, as far as possible, books reflect diversity, positive role modelling and an unbiased approach. The following questions may be useful when considering specific texts:

- What do the illustrations imply? For example, are roles defined in terms of gender, culture, ability or race?
- How typical are the scenes portrayed e.g. poor housing in India?
- What happens in the text and who is involved? How typical are the relationships presented?
- Who are the active characters and the supporting players and are they stereotyped?
- Are subservient / leadership and passive caring roles shown?
- Is the diversity of family types represented?
- What behaviours are represented? Do they reflect particular cultural or gender myths or stereotypes?
- What social messages are conveyed? Are there particular points of view approved?
- What values are implicit in the text's use of language?
- How are children / young people likely to relate to the story, imagery and overt and covert messages?

Books form a staple resource in schools and are, therefore, a large and influential part of every child's experiences.

Through the consideration of such questions a judgment can be made of how the book can be used to best advantage whilst guarding against any biases within it.

**SUMMARY: KEY PRINCIPLES**

What are the key principles to remember about the anti-bias approach?

- **Start early:** very young children already have prejudices and biased attitudes.
- The anti-bias approach is a whole school matter and, so, continuity, consistency and progression should underpin anti-bias work as much as work in implementing other aspects of the Northern Ireland Curriculum.
- Scrutinise school documents to ensure that they reflect the importance of the anti-bias approach by monitoring, reviewing and evaluating practice and policies. All resource materials must be reviewed (particularly books, equipment and displays).
- Analyse your own work in the classroom and around the school by talking with colleagues and observing each other.
- Agree and implement a common anti-bias language and negotiate and agree clear policy guidelines for dealing with discriminatory behaviour and comments.





# CULTURE, RELIGION AND ETHNICITY

## 2.1 EDUCATION ABOUT CULTURE, RELIGION AND ETHNICITY

The anti-bias approach attempts to encourage children and young people to understand the shared values of society and appreciate and value the diversity of lifestyles and ethnic, cultural, religious and linguistic backgrounds. It also helps them to make sense of the complexities of life in Northern Ireland and encourages objectivity in their responses to those situations which may confront them as they mature.

Inter-cultural education is needed to support pupils from various cultural backgrounds and broaden the education offered to all pupils, so that it reflects the diverse cultural, religious and ethnic pluralism of society. An anti-bias approach recognises the fact that sectarian and racist attitudes are learnt at a very early age. It acknowledges that if children are allowed to develop negative racist and sectarian attitudes, they will have been prevented from achieving their full emotional, psychological and intellectual potential.

The Northern Ireland Curriculum, with its focus on Personal Development and Mutual Understanding, from the Foundation and Key Stages 1 and 2, through the strands of Personal Development, Local and Global Citizenship and Education for Employability at Key Stages 3 and 4, puts the imperative on teachers incorporating anti-bias issues into classroom practice.

While the statutory core syllabus in religious education (in all schools from September 2007) was drawn up by the four main Christian churches, and is based on an explicitly Christian premise, teachers also need to be more open to other world faiths and explore respect for difference in R.E. Religious education should, therefore, be seen as something positive and inclusive. For too long, in Northern Ireland, we have learnt what to avoid talking about. Teachers need to 'unlearn' this in order to share religious education in an inclusive way.

Schools should be engaged in preparing young people for life in a world where they can address conflict and controversy rather than avoiding them. As educators, we can help children and young people develop a mature understanding and attitude about culture, religion and ethnicity and a sensitive awareness about differences and similarities and how to handle them in a constructive way.

**Schools should be engaged in preparing young people for life in a world where they can address conflict and controversy rather than avoiding them.**

The teacher's attitude and willingness to be flexible, and to exploit situations which arise within the class, is crucial to the success of an anti-bias approach. Success will also rely heavily on the teacher designing programmes which challenge the negative and biased elements of culture in Northern Ireland. This can be achieved by integrating children and young people's cultures into everyday classroom life and ensuring that such explorations are not isolated into a 'special event' category.

Identifying, distributing and incorporating resources which reflect the value of different cultures, and ethnic and religious groups, is all important to the intercultural aspect of an anti-bias approach. Teachers must recognise that while children may adopt their parents culture, they will also have culture common to their own generation, e.g. music, language, heroes, fashion and foods. This may be as important to them as their family culture.

The aims of education about culture, religion and ethnicity are:

- To provide students with a variety of stimuli from the various cultures within Northern Ireland and particularly those which exist within the school.
- To introduce children to similarities as well as differences between cultures and emphasise that all cultures are given fair and equal status within the school.
- To encourage children to be positive and secure about their own culture.
- To promote positive acceptance of ethnic, religious and cultural difference.

## 2.2 BRITISHNESS, IRISHNESS AND OTHER

Cultural identity in Northern Ireland has been constructed by a range of specific characteristics, traditions, activities and heritage. This involves language, history, sport, religion, and perceived Irishness or Britishness. A number of people in Northern Ireland, however, are from more than one heritage or background, influencing both how they think of themselves and how others think of them<sup>4</sup>.

Identity is also constructed by messages received from sources such as the media. All messages represent a value system and teachers need to ask whether this value system reinforces prejudice, and, if so, how they can meet this important challenge.

A pluralist view of Northern Ireland is the key concept which underpins exploration of culture as part of anti-bias work. Valuing difference and awareness raising about that difference are essential dimensions of working on cultural bias, both in the context of Northern Ireland and within the school system. In addition to the acceptance and celebration of cultural diversity, recognition of common culture is also an important goal for anti-bias education.

Anti-bias work on culture challenges personal, communal and institutional attitudes, actions, beliefs and structures which create and sustain sectarianism. Sectarianism arises as a distorted expression of positive human needs, especially for belonging, identity and free expression of difference. It is expressed in destructive patterns of relating, from the hardening of boundaries between groups to physically and verbally intimidating or attacking others.

As sectarianism and racism are systems which affect everyone, it would be an ideal starting point for staff to consider their own feelings and ideas about these matters. Personal development is part of professional development in this area. It is also important to share these understandings within a whole-school context.

4. Katy Radford "Think of Me, Think of You" (Belfast: Save the Children), 2004.

*Part Two: Culture, Religion and Ethnicity*

Ultimately, the aim should be for individuals within the school community to neither conceal nor flaunt their own cultural identities. It is important to realise that what may seem natural and non-sectarian to one person may be perceived as offensive to another. Sectarianism and racism thrive in denial and avoidance. No one should feel they have to compromise their beliefs but there may be times when the open exercise or expression of those beliefs may have to be tempered. An acceptable outcome can be achieved by the adults, within the school, openly discussing relevant topics.

**Assemblies and public occasions**

Assemblies and public occasions can provide an excellent opportunity for celebrating diversity, common cultures and our multiple heritages, on an equitable basis. In addition, there is a need to ensure balance by including various traditions in relation to elements such as drama, music, dance and food.

It is also important to clarify that the regular school assembly is not the same as, or a substitute for, religious education.

**Texts**

There is nothing wrong with choosing a text for class work which implicitly or explicitly is either Irish, British or represents another culture within the school. The important thing is to realise this and to ensure balance in other text choices.

**Visitors**

Visitors invited to the school should be carefully chosen to ensure equitable representation.

**Symbols and emblems**

Symbols and emblems can be a very contentious issue which, therefore, deserves due consideration by the school. It is important that the school develops a clear policy on symbols and emblems and communicates that policy to all staff, pupils and parents.

The outcome of a consultation on the issue may be that specific opportunities are created for children / young people to bring in, explore and learn about symbols and emblems which are important to them and gain an appreciation and understanding of those symbols and emblems which are important to others. These opportunities may take place within the classroom; as part of a special assembly; or as part of community relations / good relations work with other schools.

A symbols and emblems policy may be helpful in supporting pupils to discuss and value cultural symbols appropriately, rather than displaying them on a day-to-day basis in school. Additionally, pupils should be encouraged to develop a sense of pride in the symbols and emblems which relate specifically to the school (such as the school badge, crest or school flag). Teachers and parents should discuss what is acceptable, with regard to symbols and emblems, with understanding and sensitivity.

Sectarianism  
and racism  
thrive in denial  
and avoidance.

*Part Two: Culture, Religion and Ethnicity***Flags**

Flags may be presented appropriately in the context of curriculum work in The World Around Us at Key Stages 1 & 2 and geography, history and sport at Key Stages 3 & 4. To eliminate them from such contexts would be to avoid the subject, thereby playing into the hands of sectarianism and doing a disservice to children / young people.

**Curriculum connections**

Classroom work on issues related to culture and identity in Northern Ireland has been particularly appropriate in certain areas of the Northern Ireland Curriculum, notably history, sport, music, literature, and religious education and is now also appropriate within Citizenship and Personal Development and Mutual Understanding.

**History**

Local place names, customs, family and first-names, and the origins of all of these, offer a wealth of opportunity to begin exploring local history. Family and personal stories also present rich data. Towns and town lands are particularly interesting: their names may be of Irish derivation, or from other languages, or from references to persons or events of importance to that locality. For example, Larne, Strangford, Coalisland, Banbridge and Londonderry are of English and other derivation; Belfast, Ballymena and Derry are of Irish derivation; while Cookstown, Brookeborough, Brownlow and Craigavon are named after people.

There is also a distinct town and country divide as seen in, for example, street rhymes and games. Study of rhymes and games offers much fun to young children. Folk tales are a rich source of tradition and many colourful folk tales are Ulster based and pre-date division.

Children could be asked to collect a range of rhymes, short stories and games which represent traditions in Northern Ireland, making the origins as clear as possible. Here begins a mutually beneficial exploration of difference and commonality. Similarly, local storytellers could be asked to come into school to tell stories and to talk about the history and tradition of storytelling.

**Sport**

Sport typifies many of the divisions in Northern Irish society. The nature of the games played, and who plays them, represents a cultural gulf in many communities. This can be a distraction from the importance of the range of sport and physical exercise which enhances leisure time, sport skills and personal fitness.

Sport is also a fundamental gender issue in Northern Ireland and there is a need to value those sports which are traditionally perceived to be more suitable for girls and place them on a par with those which more boys have tended to play. Schools could also consider bringing together teams so that they comprise both girls and boys and think about adopting games not usually played in the school.

Similarly, greater emphasis on, and support for, individual sporting achievement is needed. In small schools it is virtually impossible to practice all sports but there are ways to accommodate diversity. Team Skills might be practiced in sports like hockey, gaelic football, camogie and cricket while also concentrating on sports commonly played by everyone, such as athletics, gymnastics, soccer and basketball.

Children could be asked to collect a range of rhymes, short stories and games which represent traditions in Northern Ireland...



*Part Two: Culture, Religion and Ethnicity*

Ulster has had great success in recent years in both rugby and gaelic football, and discussion of games, with reference to players known to the children, is one way of promoting pride and achievement. At the very least, any project or display on sport should illustrate diversity and similarity, e.g. ball games, stick games, contact and non-contact games.

Children have a natural desire to identify with teams and to talk about them. Obvious potential sources of conflict, such as Celtic versus Rangers, should be discussed rather than ignored, if issues naturally arise. In addition, the virtual monopoly which men have on the sporting media should be addressed.

**Religion**

In a school which is committed to making specific faith provision for its pupils, events and activities should, as much as possible, be inclusive rather than exclusive. In relation to the RE curriculum, children should only learn apart that which it would be unreasonable to ask them to learn together. At the same time, every effort should be made to accommodate the preparation of children of particular faiths in their faith practices if this is their desire and that of their parents. This, in itself, should not be seen as divisive. For example, if Catholic children are to be prepared for the sacraments this will, of necessity, be carried out to some degree apart from the other children. The others should, however, be made aware of what is being done lest any sense of "them and us" should arise. Children who do not take part in, for example, sacramental teaching programmes, should be included in other ways as much as possible (for example, by attending the First Communion or Confirmation service). The integrated education sector (together with representatives from the Scripture Union and two Education & Library Boards) have developed an alternative 'Delving Deeper Religious Education Pack'<sup>6</sup>, for children from a Protestant faith background to follow at this time.

A broadly-based and shared religious education curriculum is necessary – one that examines all religious faiths, not just Christianity. One of the aims of the school should be to welcome children of other faiths, and of none, in a manner appropriate to their age and ability. Children should be introduced to the ideas, beliefs and practices of the major world religions and humanist philosophies, including those that may not be represented in the classroom or the school as a whole. As 'spiritual awareness' is a Northern Ireland Curriculum objective at Key Stages 1 and 2 and an important element at Key Stage 3, young children need to begin the process of exploring religion as early as possible. After all, they live in a society in which it is a major issue in both local and global affairs.

Significant events in faith communities, (in addition to the Christian faith) such as Ramadan, can be introduced naturally because they affect fellow pupils. If a student is absent from school in order to attend to a religious observance, it might be good to offer them the possibility

of speaking to the rest of the class about it, with support and guidance from the teacher and /or parents. It is important to talk about events that happen in the wider community from an early age so that the students have an accurate understanding of them. These might include the Diwali celebrations, Hanukkah, Rīdván, or Vaisakhi<sup>7</sup>.

**A broadly-based and shared religious education curriculum is necessary-one that examines all religious faiths, not just Christianity.**

6. *Delving Deeper... into the Christian faith from a Protestant perspective* (Belfast: NICIE), 2005.

7. [www.creni.org/contents/resources/stepping\\_out/contents](http://www.creni.org/contents/resources/stepping_out/contents).

*Part Two: Culture, Religion and Ethnicity*

Classroom displays will recognise and respect all religious faith traditions. Some of the religious faiths which are particularly significant, in addition to the Christian faith, are Judaism, Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, Sikhism and Bahá'í<sup>8</sup>. Teachers need to know the different and common practices in each of these faiths.

The possible place of prayer in the classroom (and also in assembly) is an activity which needs to be talked about carefully with parents and other staff. There is no simple way to deal with this, but in order to give proper consideration to children and young people from various religious faith backgrounds, and from families that are not religious, accommodation needs to be sought. It is important for children to be aware of any common prayers and a school prayer or prayers might be devised by the children themselves. Perhaps such a prayer could be inclusive so that all children could identify with it.

Visits to Christian Churches and other places of religious worship, such as the Mosque or Synagogue, are natural opportunities for children to experience diversity. These might be centred on specific celebrations and events, such as First Communion, Harvest Festival; Eid; Diwali or Vaisakhi or might be arranged as a distinct activity. Protestant children may go to Sunday school and this should be acknowledged and incorporated into awareness raising activities along with information from Catholic children about First Communion or other sacramental celebrations.

**It is important to talk about events that happen in the wider community, from an early age, so that the students have an accurate understanding of them.**

**2.3 CULTURAL AND ETHNIC IDENTITY**

Rather than minimising or ignoring differences, of whatever kind, it is essential that staff aim to foster a positive and appropriate response to such differences.

It is also important not to make assumptions based on stereotypes. Children notice and comment on all similarities and differences, so the same methods may be used whether dealing with appearance, language or culture. An equitable attitude to all children is fundamental, as is encouraging the children to treat each other with the same respect, whilst freely expressing difference.

8. James Nelson and Norman Richardson, *Local People, Global Faiths Book 1: Skihis, Jews and Hindus and 2: Muslims, Buddhists and Baha'is in Northern Ireland* (Newtownards: Colourprint), 2006.

*Part Two: Culture, Religion and Ethnicity*

You may find it useful to consider your own responses to cultural and ethnic difference by engaging in a discussion around some of the points recorded in Box 2.

**POINTS FOR DISCUSSION****Box 2**

**Discuss your immediate reactions to the following comments:**

I don't go to Church, I go to Chapel

I'm British, not Irish

I don't eat with my left hand

Dublin is the Capital of Ireland

I'm not supposed to shake hands with you, it's not allowed

**Resources**

A wide range of multi-cultural resources is a prerequisite. For example:

- Books chosen to reflect a broad range of cultures and ethnicity and featuring multiracial situations and main characters
- Jigsaws featuring scenes from the everyday life of people from a variety of cultures
- Booklets and posters showing people of many ethnic backgrounds (e.g. health education material) successfully integrated at work, at play, in school and in the community
- Costumes, from a wide variety of cultures
- Everyday clothes from a broad range of cultures
- Songs recorded in different languages, e.g. Irish, Chinese, Punjabi, Arabic, Greek, Polish, Portuguese
- Greetings (and possibly prayers) in different languages
- School signs and directions in different languages
- Books using different alphabets (Greek, Russian, Hebrew, Arabic) and magazines in different languages

**Classroom activities**

Role play activities can be structured (with appropriate resources) to reflect different cultures, not only of children in the class, but also a wide variety of other cultures. Similarly, taste, touch and smell activities can be devised to promote awareness of foods from different parts of the world, such as champ, colcannon, spices, olives, exotic fruits, curry powders etc.

Co-operative games can build a feeling of support and caring in a class. Teachers need to choose games which ensure no child is left out or is forced to compete against others or participate unequally. Games that draw participants together through laughter (and diminish competition) result in the children being relaxed and better able to work as a unit.

Children who come from a range of cultural, religious faith and ethnic backgrounds may need encouragement to introduce and share their particular experiences. This contribution is clearly valuable as part of the curriculum and not as something separate or different.

**Co-operative games can build a feeling of support and caring in a class. Teachers need to choose games which ensure no child is left out or is forced to compete against others or participate unequally.**

*Part Two: Culture, Religion and Ethnicity*

Creating a book reflecting the characteristics of "Our Class" or "Our School" is a worthwhile activity, promoting the idea that everyone is special. To begin with, everyone draws her/himself and then discusses what makes us who we are (size; colour; shape; where we live; what we do; what groups we belong to etc). It is important to show our multiple-identity, our belonging to a range of groups and not simply our categorisation as white or black, a girl or a boy. Following such discussion, children could record, in the class book, the physical characteristics of each person and devise graphs showing eye colour and its distribution, or hair colour or eye shape, or the incidence of freckles. There may be a range of skin colour and perhaps the different languages spoken by those in the group could also be represented.

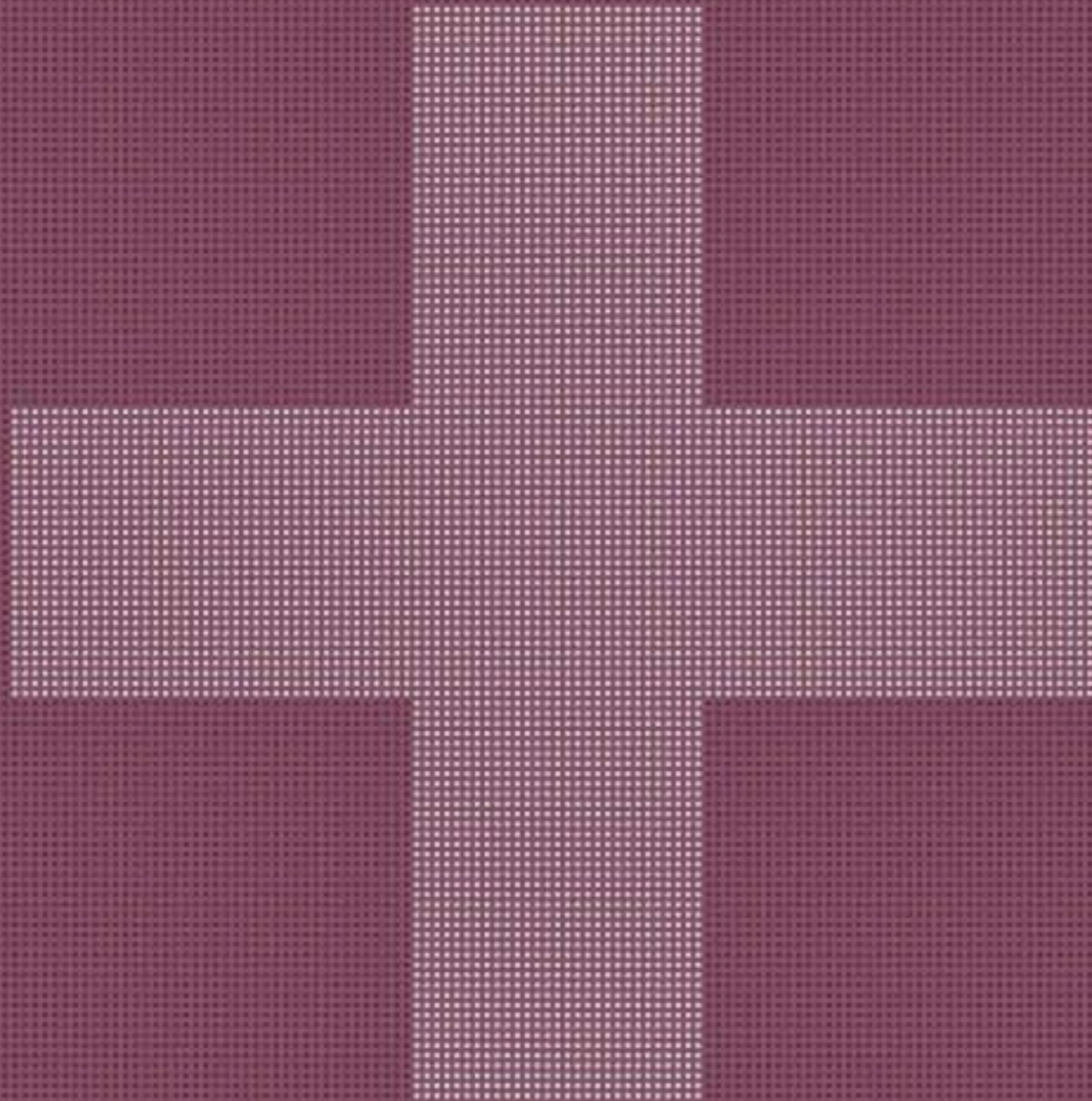
Finally, it is essential to consider the perceptions of a game or activity from the perspectives of children from different backgrounds. What is common practice, and acceptable in some groups, may not be equally so for all children and may even be threatening. An appreciation of where each child is 'at' and 'coming from' is a fundamental principle and requirement of anti-bias teaching, and especially so when cultural impact and heritage is the backdrop to so much of what children do, say and see.

**SUMMARY: KEY PRINCIPLES**

Sectarianism and racism prevent children from developing their full emotional, intellectual and psychological potential. Therefore, education about culture, religion and ethnicity necessitates that:

- Teachers should know about, have experience of and understand the shared and different values of society and their own bias. Teachers should not avoid an exploration of diversity simply because they feel they lack knowledge.
- Schools should reflect diversity and cultural, religious and ethnic pluralism. Religious education is a subject with great possibilities, not least in challenging ignorance with increased understanding.
- Cultural, religious and ethnic issues should be integrated into everyday life in the classroom. Sectarianism and racism thrive in environments of denial and avoidance. To avoid teaching a controversial subject is to give credibility to the argument that it is not possible to do so in an open, fair and unbiased manner.
- Teachers should talk openly about these issues, thus giving "permission" for children to feel comfortable about doing the same.





# GENDER AND SEXUAL ORIENTATION

## 3.1 WHY GENDER IS AN IMPORTANT ISSUE

Gender stereotyping originates in the assumptions, expectations, structures and processes of education which mirror sexist aspects of society. Sexism operates in very similar ways to racism and sectarianism. For this reason, the anti-bias approach is essential to ensure that children develop an identity which relates their gender to anatomy rather than to behaviour and spheres of activity.

Gender-stereotyping of children can have serious implications for subsequent educational achievement, and for the personal development of the individual child. It is damaging because it may lead to the assumption that a child's gender limits her or his sphere of activity and because it can blind a teacher to the individual talent and potential of a boy or girl. The stereotyped messages that are transmitted can contribute to restricting the child's aspirations. Examples of such processes include the under-achievement of girls in mathematics and the physical sciences and the under-achievement of boys in language and communication skills.

Early learning experiences can significantly affect a child's later achievement, ambitions and attitudes. This implies that teachers and other adults have a special opportunity and a corresponding responsibility to provide an environment which is equitable and unbiased and which will support girls and boys in all aspects of their development.

## 3.2 ORGANISATION AND INTERACTION

To translate ideals into reality, positive steps are needed. One of the difficulties is that routines and strategies, developed over years of professional practice, which work well in the sense of ensuring smooth school and classroom practice, nevertheless need close analysis as small changes might make a considerable difference in terms of gender equality. In principle, boys and girls should have equal access to the curriculum, and should be encouraged to participate and succeed in all activities. This should be made clear in the school policy documents and in the prospectus, or any other material, prepared for circulation to parents or the wider community.

### Resources

The materials used in the classroom, including equipment, textbooks, puzzles, construction materials, posters, etc. frequently carry messages relevant to gender. There is, therefore, potential for selecting materials which support positive images of equality. At the same time, it is not possible to throw away all existing materials, even if some present stereotyped images (e.g. only boys engaged in scientific pursuits or girls in caring roles). The most appropriate strategy, in this situation, may be to draw attention to the images and messages presented and to provide counter-examples related to the child's own experiences.

Choice and use of materials is an area where simple but regular monitoring can be very productive. Books and stories are needed which show mothers working in a range of occupations outside the home, cleaning the car or changing a fuse, and fathers caring for children or cooking. Equally, both the images presented and the classroom reality need to involve girls and boys in active and leading roles across a broad range of activities (academic, sporting and social).

The pictures and photographs displayed around the classroom, the favourite jigsaws, the colours used for labels and the symbols on coat pegs can all convey messages or provide the basis for discussion.

### Using children's literature

Children's first experience of gender roles within society, outside of their home, often come from the images portrayed by stories and rhymes and through a variety of media, such as books, DVDs and television. Teachers can carefully select these images and present them to the children to encourage respect for differences in gender, race, ability and for varied cultural norms.

Primarily, books and stories should be provided that show:

- Mothers working outside the home, repairing appliances, plumbing, cleaning the car, changing a fuse, etc.
- Fathers involved in domestic chores, caring for the children or cooking
- Girls taking leadership roles and engaged in a broad range of activities
- Boys caring, being helpful or needing help
- All kinds of work undertaken by men and women of differing ability
- Mixed gender groups of children doing things together and working co-operatively.

Stories and rhymes which advocate traditional gender, racial and cultural stereotypes can be adapted and used to promote positive images. For example, slight changes can be made to render stories or rhymes less biased or older children / young people could be encouraged to rewrite them. The gender of the characters can be altered, the story retold with the emphasis placed on how stereotypes can be addressed. For example, a familiar story like "The Three Billy Goats Gruff" could be dramatised with a girl in the dominant role of troll.

Children should also have the opportunity to create their own stories with the teacher suggesting a basic idea or scenario and children going on to imagine the detail in terms of roles, events and outcomes. Children can also be asked to create, narrate, and explain their own stories. The subsequent discussion could then identify negative or positive images around the presentation of women and men.

### Teacher actions and interventions

The interaction patterns and management strategies in use in the classroom provide a climate which can either support or limit the development of equality. For example, the way in which teachers and children interact is as important as the nature and content of the curriculum. It is, therefore, of great value if teachers can observe, review and consider their own behaviour, interaction and language with children. Teachers should also observe each other as it is important not to assume everybody shares the same attitudes.

The aim should be to give girls and boys equal and fair treatment in terms of the number and nature of interactions. It may be particularly important to encourage quieter children to give their opinion, experiences and ideas by the use of sympathetic questioning, but it also involves thinking about the tone of voice, body language and the length and style of questioning used in a range of situations. Similarly, when talking to children, boys and girls need to be supported equally, and in particular the nature, frequency and types of attention given to girls and boys needs to be considered.

Stories and rhymes which advocate traditional gender, racial and cultural stereotypes can be adapted and used to promote positive images.

Dividing children / young people into groups, for different purposes, is an important element of classroom management and gender balance is a real issue in these circumstances. In order that all children are given opportunities to participate fully in discussion activities, and practical work, single gender groups will be valuable on some occasions and mixed gender groups on other situations. The roles individuals take within the group also need to be examined to ensure that both girls and boys lead and speak on behalf of groups. This will ensure that all the children have experience of both leadership and supporting roles. There may well be situations in which particularly forceful children, of either sex, dominate groups and this will call for positive, unbiased strategies to give other group members space and time to contribute and role-take.

#### Classroom practice

One example of an issue which deserves consideration is that of classroom routines ie. the allocation of classroom jobs equally by gender and by job type. Also, a classroom practice which may need to be avoided is the grouping of children's names by gender in the class register and putting either boys or girls names first.

Indeed, groupings must be carefully thought out, noting that both mixed and single sex groupings should be used. There should also be planned times when boys and girls sit together and help each other and there should always be transparent and fair ways of composing groups. In mixed groups, all children should be given an equal chance and it should be ensured that girls and boys lead and speak for groups on an equitable basis.

#### Interaction

It should be the aim of all teachers to give girls and boys equal and fair treatment in terms of the nature and number of interactions. Quieter boys and girls should be encouraged to give their opinions and relate their experiences. Care should also be taken that the length and style of questioning does not anticipate different responses from girls and boys. Both genders should be encouraged to ask questions and should get a positive and unbiased response. An awareness of dominant children can also help teachers devise positive unbiased strategies to deal with them.

#### Intervention

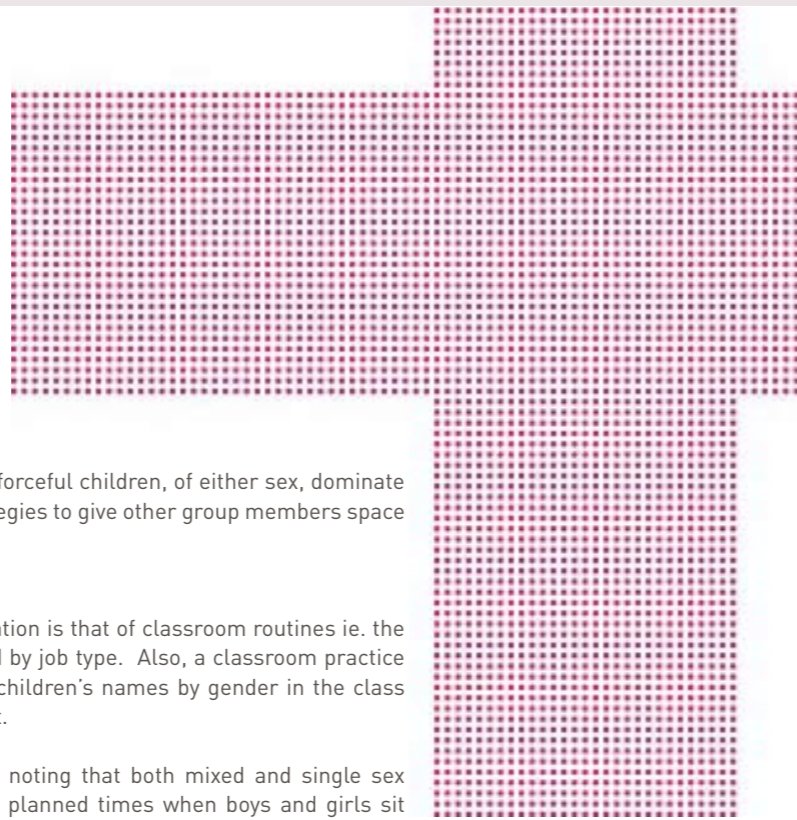
Girls and boys should not be allowed to ostracise other children, particularly if this is done because they are not conforming to children's own stereotypes.

#### Language

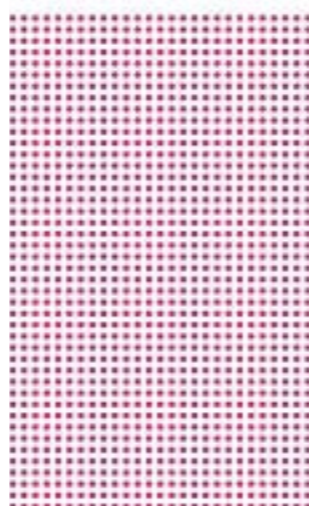
Name-calling and sexist remarks can occur in any classroom. The less obvious comments can be just as negative as the more blatant ones, especially when they are used in an aggressive and provocative manner. Clearly, sexist remarks should not be tolerated as they deny the individual's dignity and can seriously distress many children. For these reasons teachers should actively discourage children from using sexist name calling, such as words like 'sissy' and 'tomboy'.

The everyday language used by teachers can also contribute towards a stereotyped view. For example, remarks such as the following are frequently uttered:

- "Can I have two strong boys to help carry this table?"
- "Here's a picture the girls will like, it's a wedding."
- "The girls are behaving so nicely, they can come and choose first."
- "Now then, big boys don't cry."



In mixed groups, all children should be given an equal chance and it should be ensured that girls and boys lead and speak for groups on an equitable basis.



## POINTS FOR DISCUSSION

Some common role play situations are briefly described in Box 3.

#### Box 3

Consider your reactions to the following, either individually or with another member of staff.

A role play area is set up as a hospital. The only poster available is that of a male doctor with a female nurse. How do you overcome the stereotype from this limited supply of resources?

The teacher asks a quiet boy a question in a group situation. The child will not answer. How do you handle this? What is the most biased response you can think of? Would your response and approach be the same if the child were a girl?

A group of girls are tidying away art and craft materials and the teacher praises them: "My, you girls are doing a neat job there, well done". Is this a biased statement? If so, why? If not, why not?

## 3.3 GENDER AND THE CURRICULUM

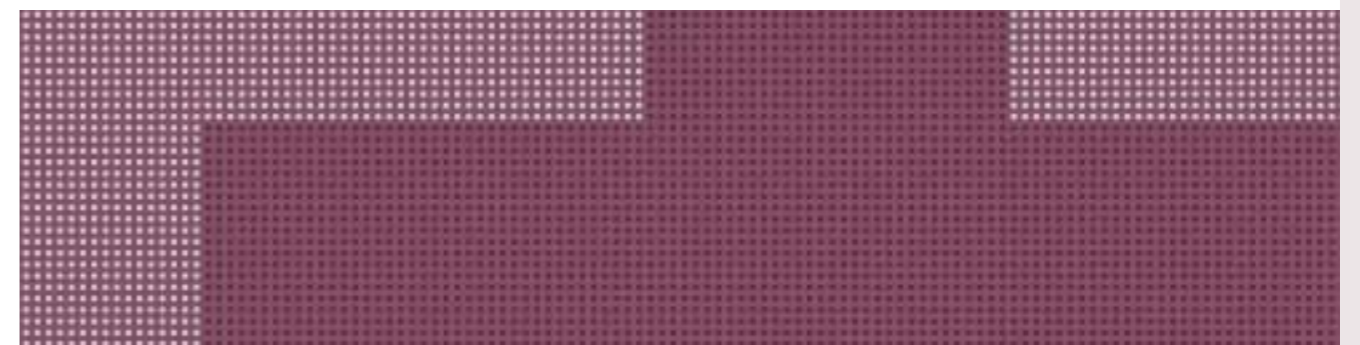
Classroom work on issues related to gender is appropriate in many areas of the curriculum. The following represents just a few examples that may be most appropriate for younger children, but can be readily adapted for work with older pupils too.

#### Art and Design

A variety of themes can be chosen and developed in order to meet the common interest of all children / young people and the requirements of the Northern Ireland Curriculum. For example, topics may include areas of study such as: myself; my body; flight; sea and sky; food; water etc. A variety of media and materials for craft work can be used to stimulate participation ie. paints, shells, scissors, glue, wool, feathers, waste packaging, papers and cardboards, clay, texturing media, wood, etc. Both girls and boys can make, fix, build, mend, paint, saw, cut out, or hammer.

Opportunities for conversation and discussion can be provided to help develop a theme directly from the children's interests. Care should also be taken to avoid stereotyped language, in the presentation of art and design activities, for example, "the boys could use this to make rockets" or "the wood at the work bench would make great aeroplanes for the boys". Rather, a question such as "what could we make with these?" seems a better choice.

Indeed, creative activity is not always about making something, rather, children need to be encouraged to explore and experiment through creative work, without the necessity for an end product.





**Cooking/home economics**

The food children regularly eat at home should be cooked and foods eaten in every child's family must be included. While new foods should be introduced, it is always important to include healthy balanced options and have plenty of alternatives to fatty and unhealthy foods. Non-stereotyped images, showing both sexes often/always involved in cooking, can be introduced through story, rhyme and songs. A variety of play situations can be created where preparing and eating food is featured, for example, a café; the canteen of a police station, factory, school, hospital, fire station or space station; a shop selling real food, etc.

**Festivals and holidays**

Finding out what festivals or holidays each child celebrates may enable a range of foods, from various traditions and customs, to be prepared and tasted. This may include any of the following:

<b>Shrove Tuesday</b>	pancakes
<b>Christmas</b>	sweet treats, edible tree decorations
<b>Hanukkah</b>	latkes (potato pancakes)
<b>Chinese New Year</b>	won ton soup
<b>Easter</b>	shredded wheat bird nests
<b>Eid</b>	Eid Pudding
<b>Diwali</b>	bajjis and pakoras

Since a variety of foods from other traditions and cultures may be introduced (such as Chinese, Jewish, Italian, Greek, African, Mexican, and Indian) appropriate cooking pots and utensils, such as the use of a wok if making Chinese stir fry, can be used to stimulate participation by all children. Regular food tasting and smelling activities, centred on a variety of traditions, may provide an added interest in cooking for children of both sexes.

**Preparation and Hygiene**

All children should be involved in helping with the preparation and serving of food for break or lunch. This may include cleaning tables, setting places, and preparation of snack foods (slicing fruit, serving, clearing tables, washing and drying dishes). Healthy eating and good food hygiene will be encouraged through cooking activities which help children to discriminate between healthy and unhealthy foods. Children will also always be encouraged to wash hands before and after touching/handling foods and after using the toilet.

**3.4 WHY SEXUAL ORIENTATION IS AN IMPORTANT ISSUE**

Teachers need to be aware that gender and sexual-orientation are two completely separate concepts. It is important for teachers to realise that if children express themselves outside of the stereotypical norms for their gender, this does not give an indication of their future sexual orientation. Moreover, teachers should not have expectations of student gender roles based on traditional notions and heterosexual assumptions.

Teachers also need to be cognisant of the diversity of family forms that pupils may be coming from, including one-parent families, same-sex parents, multiple heritage families, etc. They need to be aware of using heterosexist language and making statements such as: 'Are Mummy and Daddy at home?', 'When you get married...' (to a girl) or 'Is she your girlfriend?' (to a boy). Teachers, of course, will refer to traditional family forms but should also recognise and acknowledge diverse family forms so that all children see their reality reflected in school and feel affirmed in their own background.

It is important for teachers to realise that if children express themselves outside of the stereotypical norms for their gender, this does not give an indication of their future sexual orientation.

**Homophobia and homophobic bullying**

Homophobia is a fear or dislike of someone perceived to be lesbian, gay or bisexual and can involve behaviour ranging from passive resentment to active victimisation. Such attitudes may be aimed at anyone perceived to be homosexual or those who don't conform to stereotypical standards of feminine or masculine behaviour. Responding to homophobia, and helping challenge it, will also help address concerns regarding gender-based bullying and stereotypical images of masculinity and femininity.

Homophobic bullying can be present in an environment that fails to challenge and respond to homophobia. It may involve rumour spreading, social isolation, text bullying or more obvious forms of bullying. It doesn't only affect young people who identify as lesbian, gay or bisexual (LGB) but can affect any young person whose life choices, needs or interests don't conform to accepted gender norms as well as adult members of the school community who are LGB.

Research undertaken by the Department of Education and carried out by Youthnet<sup>9</sup> focused on the experiences of young people in the youth and education sectors. The findings of this research were startling; 35% of LGB young people surveyed said they had been subjected to physical abuse while 65% had experienced verbal abuse. A shocking 29% of those surveyed had attempted suicide and 44% said they had been bullied at school because of their sexual orientation. Finally, 33% believed they had achieved lower results because of experiences related to their sexual orientation.

The problems LGB individuals face at school were also highlighted by the Equalities Review<sup>10</sup> in its interim report. It identified the educational achievement of LGB teenagers who had suffered homophobic bullying as one of the 'persistent and disturbing challenges for the task of reducing inequality and increasing fairness' and one of the top priorities for the review, suggested by respondents, was 'action in schools both to educate pupils about discrimination and to combat the impact of policies and practices that are seen as having a harmful effect on minority groups'.

Homophobic bullying can be present in an environment that fails to challenge and respond to homophobia.

It is a widely held belief that schools, both at primary and secondary level, should be proactively addressing the homophobic harassment of both pupils and staff. There are numerous sources of information and advice on tackling such issues, details of which can be found in the ABC Resources List at the end of this handbook.

**What are the benefits to the school of tackling homophobic bullying?**

Being proactive and tackling bullying effectively through peer counselling and listening; promotion of social, emotional and behavioural skills; co-operative learning; and the consistent application of rules and sanctions, will contribute to the wider benefits of improved behaviour, attendance and educational attainment.

It will also promote a culture and ethos that are positive for the health and well-being of the whole school community. While bullying causes anxiety, misery and negates the capacity to learn, pupils who are content and secure are more likely to thrive academically and continue to do so into adult life.

The steps required to address homophobia and homophobic bullying will also help schools to meet their curricular requirements.

9. Youthnet, *Research into the needs of young people who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual and / or transgender*, Youthnet 2003.

10. The Equalities Review: *Interim Report for Consultation*, March 2006 [available at [www.theequalitiesreview.org.uk](http://www.theequalitiesreview.org.uk)].

### 3.5 SEXUAL ORIENTATION AND THE CURRICULUM

Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) is included, on a statutory basis, within the Northern Ireland Curriculum and should be provided through the Personal Development Strand. In primary schools, at Key Stage 2, Health, Growth & Change (theme 4) involves preparation of students for the physical and emotional changes at puberty. As young people progress through school they should be given opportunities to become more aware of their own sexuality. The statements of minimum requirement, at key stage 3, include conditions for healthy relationships, types of relationships, and gender issues in relationships.

Advice in a DENI circular on Relationships and Sexuality Education<sup>11</sup> is that every school should have a policy setting out how the school will address relationships and sexuality education. This policy should be the subject of consultation with parents and should be endorsed by the school's Board of Governors. All teachers, whether or not they are directly involved in teaching the programme, should be aware of its details and implications.

In relation to sexual orientation, an anti-bias approach would recommend that the policy should seek to:

- address the myths, prejudices and stereotypes that may exist in relation to lesbian, gay and bisexual sexual orientation
- support the understanding that the questioning of one's sexual identity as a normal part of adolescence
- support the understanding that RSE is about the sexuality, relationships and the sexual health of all young people.

#### POINTS FOR DISCUSSION IN BOX 4

##### Box 4

Every school has a culture that creates a climate.

How might your school respond to a member of staff or young person 'coming-out'?

Homophobia can be addressed and dealt with in the following ways:

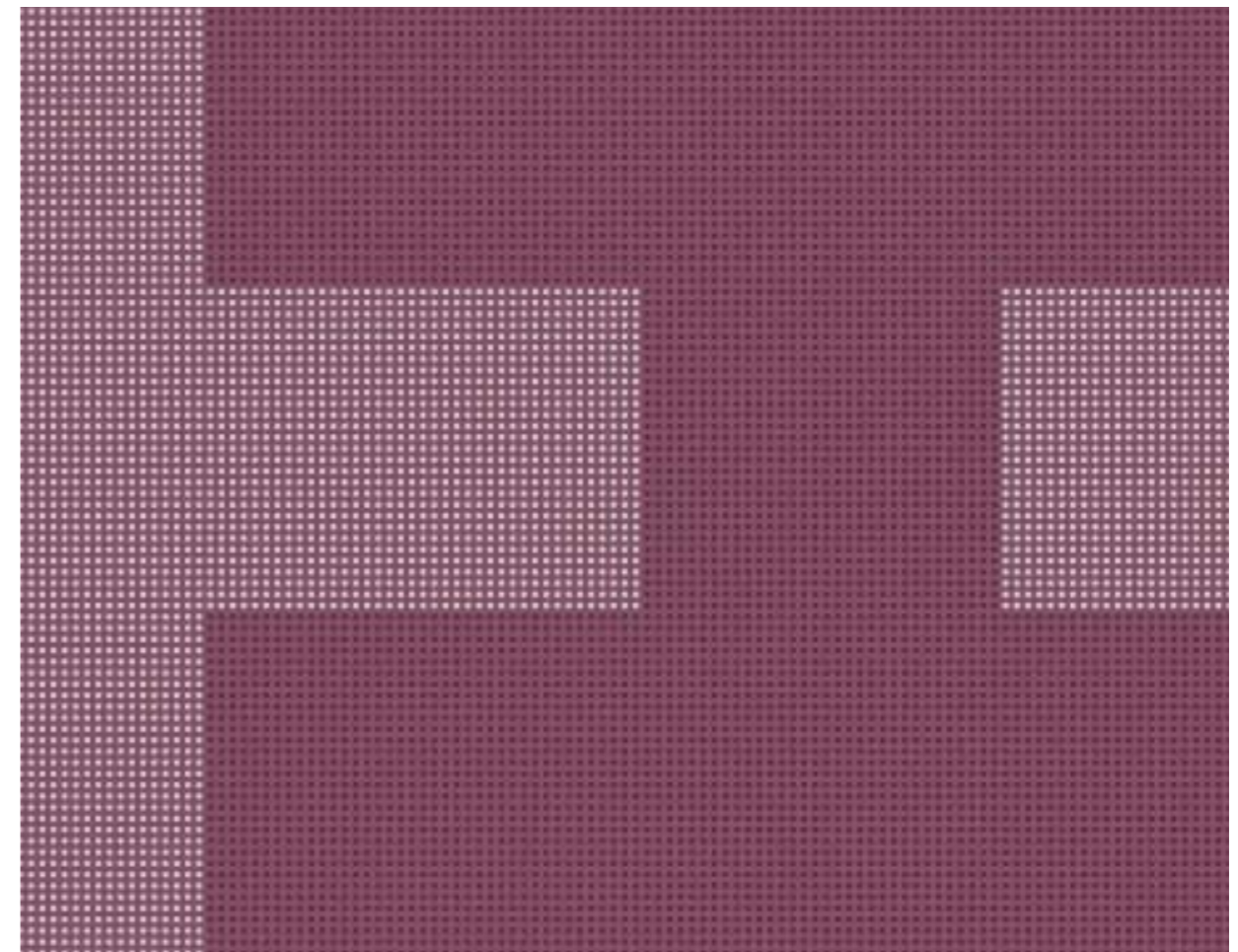
- By making sure, as a teacher, that you are well informed
- Having a RSE policy outlining routines and strategies for the school and the classroom
- The use of appropriate resources within the learning environment and the curriculum
- A review of what is considered 'natural' behaviour. Teachers shouldn't be afraid to examine their own beliefs
- Establishing a school based support group
- Creating a safe space for open discussions
- Respecting confidentiality
- Providing positive images of LGB people and acknowledging the sexuality of famous and successful LGB people
- Letting people label themselves - speak for yourself
- Using neutral language e.g. 'are you seeing anyone?'
- Having a day of awareness in the school and inviting a speaker
- Being absolutely clear that no matter what ethos the school might hold, being lesbian, gay or bi-sexual will not incur the disrespect of others.

11. Relationships and Sexuality Education, Circular Number 2001/15 (2001).

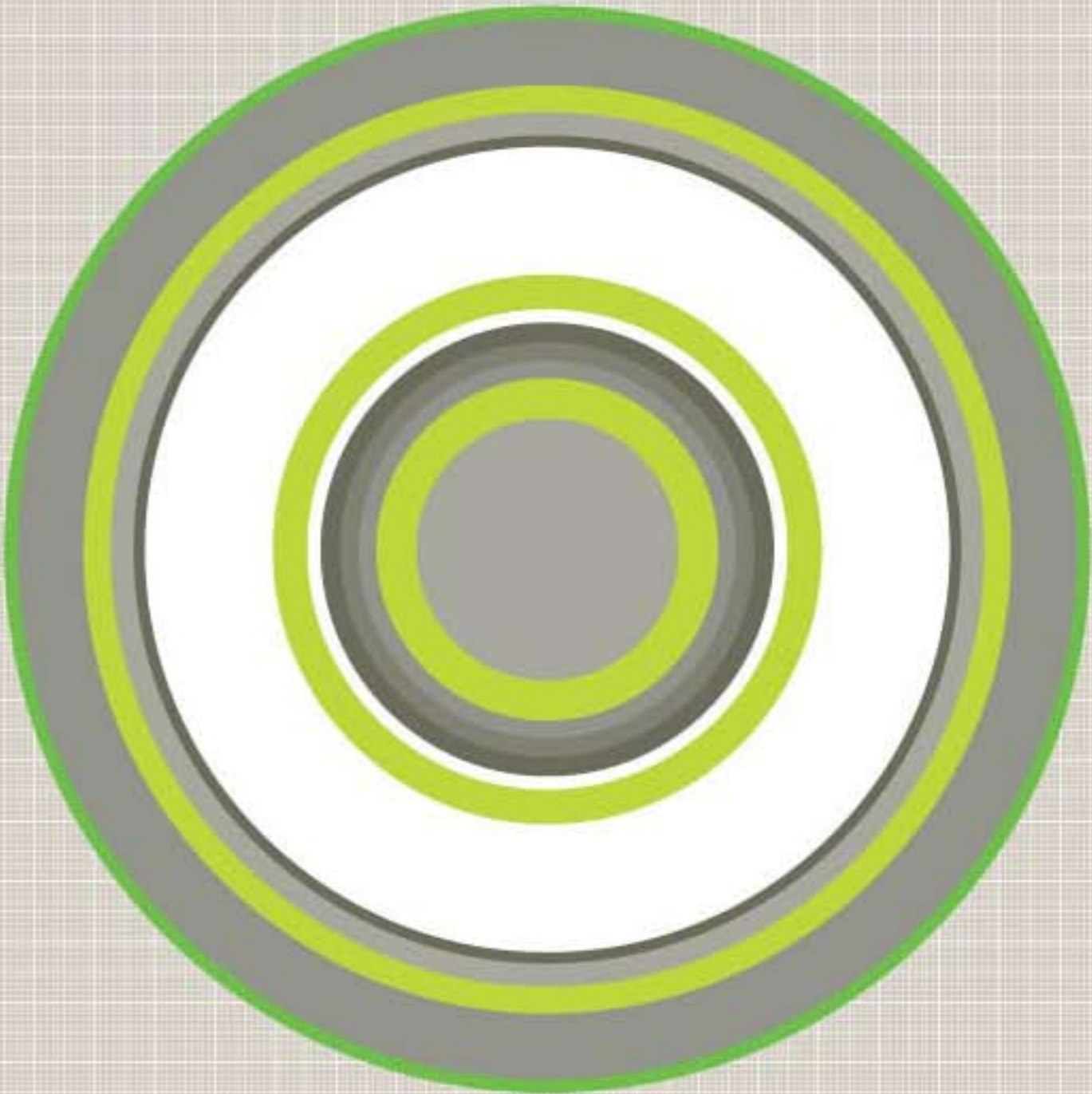
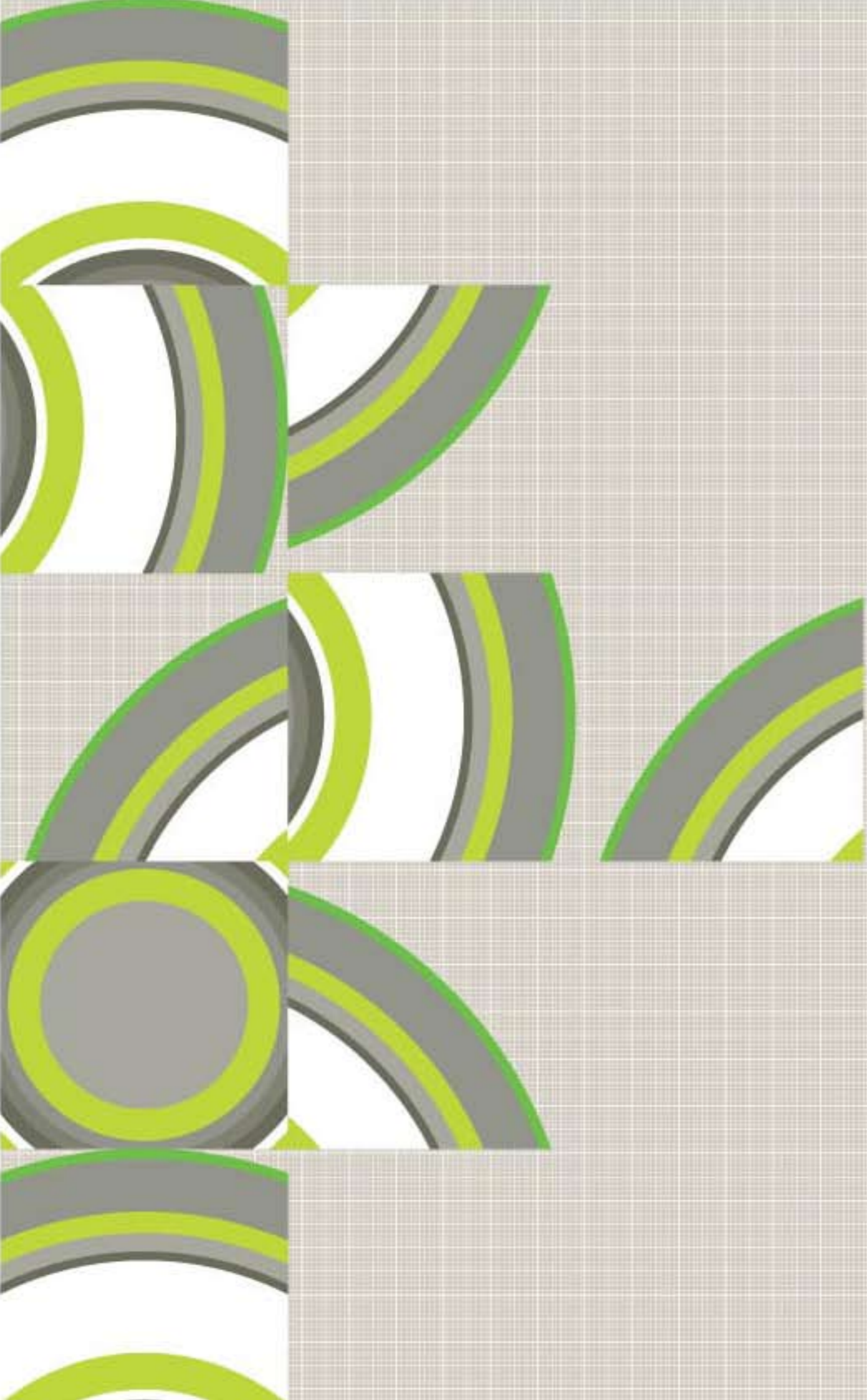
### SUMMARY: KEY PRINCIPLES

Gender bias and homophobia:

- Are negative and damaging
- Pervade all aspects of life
- Affect both girls and boys but in different ways
- Are underpinned by invalid (often covert) assumptions
- Restrict choice and affect educational achievement
- Need to be challenged by all staff and students
- Are legislated against.



11. Relationships and Sexuality Education, Circular Number 2001/15 (2001).



# CHILDREN / YOUNG PEOPLE WITH ADDITIONAL NEEDS

## 4.1 CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS IN SCHOOL

Many children will have additional support needs during their education. Children with special educational needs (SEN) have learning difficulties, or disabilities, that make it harder for them to learn than most children of the same age. Special educational needs could mean that a child has:

- Learning difficulties – in acquiring basic skills in school
- Emotional and behavioural difficulties – making friends, relating to adults or behaving in school
- A specific learning difficulty – reading, writing, number work or understanding information
- Sensory or physical needs – such as hearing or visual impairment, which might affect them in school
- Communication problems – in expressing themselves or understanding what others are saying
- Medical or health conditions – which may slow down a child's progress and/or involves treatment that affects his or her education.

### Legal Framework

The Special Educational Needs and Disability (Northern Ireland) Order<sup>12</sup> (SENDO) increased the rights of children with special educational needs to attend mainstream schools and introduced disability discrimination laws for the whole education system in Northern Ireland, for the first time.

SENDO includes benefits for children and young people with additional needs at school, as noted below:

- Increased rights to attend mainstream schools
- New services, including a mediation service for parents and for schools. This service provides information and advice, helps to avoid and resolve disputes and has increased rights of appeal, for parents, to the SEN and Disability Tribunal
- New duties on Education and Library Boards to comply with SEN tribunal orders, within set time limits.

For children and young people with additional needs at school:

- Protection against discrimination in education
- New duties on schools to make reasonable adjustments (relating to the physical, social environment and curriculum) where appropriate for pupils with disabilities
- New duties on Education & Library Boards and schools to plan to continually improve the accessibility of the school building, curriculum and information provided to pupils with disabilities and to make these plans available for inspection.

12. SENDO (2005) available at [http://www.deni.gov.uk/index/7-special\\_educational\\_needs\\_pg](http://www.deni.gov.uk/index/7-special_educational_needs_pg)

Further information on the SEN aspects of the law is available from the Department of Education.

### Support for children / young people with additional needs

Early intervention is important to ensure that children who have difficulties in learning receive the help they need, as soon as possible. Barriers to learning should be removed by embedding inclusive practice in every school.

Expectations and achievement can be raised by developing teacher skills and strategies for meeting the needs of children with SEN and sharpening the focus on their progress.

The purpose of education is to develop the personality, talents and mental and physical abilities of the child or young person, to help them achieve their fullest potential. Education authorities have a duty to seek and take account of the views of the child young person and their parents. It is also the duty of education authorities to make adequate and efficient provision for additional support required by a child or young person.

Fostering anti-bias attitudes towards disability and enabling children with disabilities to achieve, however, requires much more than merely bringing together differently-abled children in one classroom. Each child, whatever their abilities or disabilities, needs to enjoy a classroom environment where they feel both valued and secure. Children with disabilities need to see themselves reflected in the world around them, in pictures, in equipment, in books and in role models. They not only need acceptance for who they are, but an environment which fosters their independence.

Providing maximum freedom, opportunity and space to learn, gain confidence and pride in their own identity, to develop, choose, and to achieve their potential, are essential goals of the anti-bias approach for children with disabilities.

The education process also needs to inform children (who are not disabled as well as those with special educational needs) to explore their feelings and understanding about disability and inclusion. Children need encouragement to work and play together, share activities and the opportunity should be there for them to challenge myths and stereotypes. All children need to gain information, ask questions and express their feelings about each other. This will enable them to begin to resist, re-evaluate and challenge stereotyping and break down barriers, in order to support their peers who have disabilities.

## 4.2 POLICY AND PLANNING

### Attitudes

Teachers themselves need to assess their own experience and become aware of their own deep-rooted and unconscious attitudes to disability and inclusion. Most people have been conditioned to avoid disability unless it affects them at a personal level.

There is often a tendency to treat those with disabilities as if they are:

- Invisible
- Incapable of doing/thinking anything
- The disability itself, rather than a person who has a disability and is restricted by the social and / or physical obstacles around them.

*Part Four: Children / young people with additional needs*

Coping with children who have additional support needs involves, first and foremost, crucial decisions concerning values and attitudes rather than 'how' questions related to the curriculum and teaching methods. Teachers need to behave equitably and ensure that children with additional needs are:

- Visible
- Treated as whole persons
- Not seen as problems
- Treated as people with the same range of rights as those without disabilities
- Consulted regarding their everyday needs in the classroom
- Valued and respected for their views.

When attitudes, values and school ethos are consistent with meeting a wide range of individual needs, the necessary curriculum and organisational reforms are easier to implement.

**Planning for the classroom and the school**

The aim should be to create an inclusive classroom environment where all children can succeed. This involves teaching all children how to resist and challenge stereotyping, name-calling and barrier-building directed against people with special educational needs. Meeting children's additional needs requires policies that concentrate on the following elements:

- Curriculum development plan
- Classroom work
- The learning environment
- Support for learning (if required)
- Flexible and creative teaching.

**Curriculum development plan**

The Special Educational Needs Code of Practice<sup>13</sup> gives guidance on identifying, assessing and providing help for children with special educational needs. The code describes how help in schools and early education settings should be made through a step-by-step or 'graduated approach'. The school should have a SEN policy and the emphasis should be on making a broad curriculum accessible to all pupils. As curriculum development plans are put into practice their appropriateness to pupils with special educational needs should be checked, in order to ensure that:

- All staff know which pupils have special educational needs, the nature of their needs and how best to meet them
- Maximum access and progress for pupils with additional needs are possible
- Adequate resources, support and training are available to staff
- A designated member of staff (SENCO) is responsible for co-ordinating a special needs policy and greater inclusion
- The effects of the curriculum on pupils with special educational needs can be monitored and evaluated
- Curriculum development plans are regularly revised and adjusted to reflect the requirements of pupils with special educational needs.

*Part Four: Children / young people with additional needs***Classroom work**

As encouraged by the Northern Ireland Curriculum, teachers will be concerned with adapting learning and teaching to reflect new understanding of the learning process, focusing on children's needs and developing skills for lifelong learning. The Northern Ireland curriculum offers teachers more flexibility by offering 'statements of minimum requirement' rather than prescribing detailed programmes of study. 'Assessment for learning' is also a classroom methodology designed to include all children in the negotiation of learning intentions and success criteria.

The following questions for reflection may help teachers to plan:

- Can the selected tasks and activities enable children with a wide range of ability, (including gifted children?) to experience success?
- Can activities be matched to pupils individual requirements?
- Can activities be broken down into a series of small and achievable steps for pupils who have marked learning difficulties?
- Will the activities stretch pupils with physical, sensory or other impairment who are high attainers?
- Can a range of communication methods be used with pupils with language difficulties?
- Will the purpose of the activities and the means of achieving them be understood by pupils with learning difficulties?

**The learning environment**

The learning environment should arouse interest and whet curiosity. Most of all, it should help those who need extra stimulus and encouragement to overcome their learning difficulties. A positive environment is happy, stable and caring, with the provision of resources, books, equipment and displays which reflect and value children/young people with disabilities alongside those without disabilities. It's important to check the prospectus, books, letters to parents, games, jigsaw puzzles and toys to ensure balance in the images they present.

A major concern, when admitting a child with physical disabilities, must be the suitability of the premises and equipment in relation to the disability. For example, are the entrance and exit easily accessible? Are ramps necessary and are extra handrails needed?

Staff provision should also be carefully considered. Extra help may be needed to successfully integrate a child with disabilities. For example, the expertise of a 'signing' teacher or parent may be needed for effective communication with a hearing impaired child.

Many children need specialised equipment to enable them to become more independent and move around the classroom more freely. School staff may need to maintain close contact with special needs advisory and support services, psychological services, speech therapists, etc.



### 4.3 ACTION AND INTERACTION

Curriculum development plans, classroom work and environments need to be closely aligned with the teaching needs and individual curriculum plans for pupils with special educational needs, so that maximum access to the curriculum is ensured. Pupils with additional needs are likely to have more requirements than other pupils in terms of:

- Positive attitudes from staff who are determined to ensure their fullest participation in the curriculum
- A non-patronising environment which encourages independence
- Teachers who encourage them to become active learners, helping to plan, build and evaluate their own learning programmes, wherever possible
- A climate of warmth and support in which self-confidence and self-esteem can grow and in which all pupils feel valued and able to risk making mistakes, as they learn, without fear of criticism
- Home/school partnerships which enable families to support the teaching programmes for the child with special educational needs.

Some common situations are described in the box below.

#### POINTS FOR DISCUSSION

##### Box 6:

**Individually or with another member of staff you may wish to consider your reactions to the following:**

A group of differently abled children are producing work for a display in the school entrance. How do you choose the work to be used for the display?

A child with physical disabilities plays happily with other children until they move to the climbing frame, where distress is shown due to considerable effort needed to 'join in'. How best do you deal with this situation?

You invite a visually impaired visitor (adult or child) into the classroom. How do you prepare your 'language' for this situation?

It is proposed that a child with a disability should enrol in your class. You know that dealing with the situation alone will diminish your effectiveness with the others in the class. What do you do about this?

The inclusion of children / young people with additional needs should be a positive experience for all concerned. Pupils with special educational needs will benefit from integrating with a larger group and with less sense of isolation from the outside world. They will also be encouraged to develop independence, competency and confidence. Children / young people without disabilities will be enabled to interact knowledgeably, comfortably and fairly with people who have various disabilities.

**Obstacles are created by society and not by disability; it is adults who are conditioned, do the conditioning and who reinforce separateness for those with disabilities.**

#### SUMMARY: KEY PRINCIPLES

- All children, regardless of ability or disability, are entitled to a positive learning environment and to feel valued and secure in school.
- Obstacles are created by society and not by disability; it is adults who are conditioned, do the conditioning and who reinforce separateness for those with disabilities.
- Children and adults should have training around appropriate ways of supporting children with additional needs.
- Children with additional needs require the same opportunities and goals as any other children and their progress towards them should reflect the individuality of their need.
- Children without disabilities will be able to interact more easily if they work, learn and play with those who have disabilities.



# PARENTS AND THE ANTI-BIAS APPROACH

## 5.1 PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT

Parental involvement is an essential and positive aspect of all school development and activity. Parents who have been consulted and had the opportunity to contribute to the school, and help shape policy and practice, will feel more involved in their child's education. Consequently, they are more likely to be committed to supporting the school in all its ventures.

A policy or code of practice is an important basis for effective home-school liaison and its endorsement and promotion by the Board of Governors is essential. Closer home-school liaison is not only beneficial for the school but also ensures parents are informed about the school provision for their child, how this provision is organised, and who's involved. Parents also need to know if it's working for their child or how they can help if their child is under-achieving. However, it is also essential for parents to understand that the Principal and staff of the school have professional expertise but benefit tremendously from active and consistent parental support and involvement.

It is important that the school sets a positive tone, pace and programme to identify and establish effective home-school co-operation and collaboration. Such action can clear up potential misunderstandings and conflict before relationships are damaged and before issues become problems. It is also necessary for all the partners in the education process to work out clear parameters and a framework for their working relationship.

A positive system cannot be imposed; it has to be negotiated if it is to be useful and workable. In addition to the general principles of parental involvement in schools, the introduction and development of an anti-bias approach necessitates direct parental involvement in preparation and support for the programme in the school, since the nature of the anti-bias approach means that children will begin to question what they hear and see outside the classroom, including at home.

Parents need to be informed about the purpose of the anti-bias approach and how it is intended to influence their child positively. They also need regular opportunities to discuss their concerns with staff, at the school, even before the programme is introduced. Involvement should be ongoing once the anti-bias approach to teaching and learning is in place, and is linked to the learning programme, themes, and general work taking place in the school. The nature of the anti-bias approach means it is not always possible to prepare parents for specific learning opportunities which occur in the classroom, on a day-to-day basis. However, it is essential to clarify with parents the depth and purpose of the anti-bias approach to learning.

## 5.2 NEGOTIATION WITH PARENTS

The first step involves identifying all the things that parents (and governors) need to know which professional staff have already discussed and agreed. All suggestions, ideas and information should be collated in a concise and straightforward pamphlet, using the following headings:

- Why the anti-bias approach is proposed
- What is proposed
- What this means for each child
- How parents can inform the school of their views about the anti-bias approach
- What teachers expect from the children
- How parents can support the anti-bias approach
- How the school intends evaluating the success of the anti-bias approach

Once given this information in writing, all parents should have the opportunity to comment on and influence decisions. Such opportunities should be encouraged in written form and by invitation to a meeting.

The second step requires consideration of the key issues which need to be discussed with parents. Obviously, the most salient is an explanation of the nature of the anti-bias approach: that it is about planned and incidental learning experiences designed to challenge bias and prejudice related to religion, culture, ethnicity, ability, age, gender and sexual orientation.

It should be the school's intention to keep parents constantly in touch with what's happening and developing. It's also important for parents to understand that the anti-bias approach is collaborative and will only be effective if all who work and play with the children provide consistent messages.

Parents are partners and it is only by drawing on their detailed knowledge of their children that teachers can ensure anti-bias work is carried out with sensitivity, giving value to the children's cultural heritage and seeing their home life as a rich context for children's development. Thus, parents need opportunities to inform staff about how they view the programme as it develops and continues. Parents can also offer practical support which is essential if the anti-bias approach is to work effectively. For example, parents can:

- Talk to their children about the programme and prompt interest and discussion
- Send in comments and information about how particular issues raised in school have been viewed by their children
- Attend briefings on anti-bias development
- Offer to be involved in particular topics e.g. when studying other cultures, festivals and special days, cookery activities etc.
- Suggest particular anti-bias issues which, from their experience, seem important for children to explore.



**POINTS FOR DISCUSSION**

Some common situations are briefly described in the box below.

**Box 7**

**Individually or with another member of staff you may wish to consider your reactions.**

A parent has made a specific request for their own religious beliefs and practices to have a higher profile in the classroom. How do you handle this?

A parent suggests changing the routine of the class as their child is apparently upset by aspects of it. How do you deal with this?

A parent comes in to help the class for the day. How do you prepare them for the anti-bias approach to learning, teaching and interacting? Does the gender of the parent influence how you prepare them?

A parent of a child with a physical disability spends the day in class and is not happy with the social and academic achievement of their child. How do you react in this situation?

**SUMMARY: KEY PRINCIPLES**

Parental involvement is essential in order to develop and maintain the anti-bias approach. From the teacher's point of view:

- A thought-out policy and code of practice are important support for parental involvement
- Negotiation is vital
- Parental involvement is a balanced combination of social and formal events
- Information exchange is a two-way process - parents need it but so do teachers
- Parents have skills which can enhance education provision at the school
- Parents need teachers to help them understand and fulfil their educational role.

From the parent's point of view, parental involvement:

- Is good for their child
- Is important throughout their child's school career
- Is crucial to helping under-achieving children
- Needs to be fully discussed and agreed between teachers and parents
- Supports the school's attempts to help children develop into aware, confident adults
- Is a key feature of a successful school.

## CONCLUSION: THE ANTI-BIAS APPROACH

The anti-bias approach is about understanding, respecting and valuing difference and being inclusive. This is a perfect approach to adopt in relation to the Northern Ireland Curriculum with its stated aim of developing the child / young person as an individual, a contributor to society and a contributor to the economy and the environment.

The anti-bias approach is aimed at all aspects of a child's development: at their intellectual, academic, physical, social, spiritual, emotional and health-related growth. In essence, it involves a holistic approach to education.

The anti-bias approach should ideally start early because it is from the age of three or four that children begin to translate experience into attitudes. The support of parents in advising, helping and reinforcing the anti-bias work of the school is, therefore, vital.

## Tips for Getting Started in your school

- Create an awareness of the anti-bias approach by sharing this resource with colleagues.
- Reflect on your current attitudes and practice – the 'points for discussion' boxes will help you engage in this process with your colleagues.
- Carry out an audit of your school environment by considering the messages which are being transmitted by the visual material displayed around the school.
- Audit the resources and books in your own classroom
- Engage in further ABC training by contacting NICIE on 028 90 236 200 for further information.

## ABBREVIATIONS

<b>DENI</b>	Department of Education for Northern Ireland
<b>IFI</b>	International Fund for Ireland
<b>LGB</b>	Lesbian, Gay and Bi-sexual
<b>LLW</b>	Learning for Life and Work
<b>NICIE</b>	Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education
<b>PDMU</b>	Personal Development and Mutual Understanding
<b>RSE</b>	Relationships and Sexuality Education
<b>SEN</b>	Special Educational Needs
<b>SEND O</b>	Special Educational Needs and Disability Co-ordinator
<b>SEND O</b>	Special Educational Needs and Disability Order

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