

2021 update to Case Study of Non Binary/Transgender Staff Member

Back in 2018, we had the opportunity to experience first-hand a member of staff's transition from gender conformity to non-binary and this has enabled us to develop our practice in this area. We have learnt that it helps to work in a close partnership with the staff member about what, how and when, various stakeholders are told. Following an initial approach from the staff member, we held several meetings with the school leadership, an HR representative and the person concerned.

We agreed in this case, because the staff member was very open about their non-conformity to gender identity and had already made some changes to their personal appearance, that it was best if the staff were told in advance of the children and the parents. Interestingly, children had already commented on these changes to appearance and the staff member had simply replied that these were changes made out of personal choice. Children were accepting and generally positive towards this response.

The process of communicating the changes of name and dress that would follow after a holiday, were planned several months in advance. The headteacher wrote to all staff asking for their support for the staff member and outlining details of how and when parents and pupils would be told about the situation, The headteacher also enclosed a letter from the staff member who explained their personal journey and their intention to make further changes. In their letter, the staff member reiterated their willingness to answer any questions and discuss the situation in person with anyone who had queries. A copy of the headteacher's letter is attached below and can be used as a template.

A few weeks later at the agreed time before a holiday, a brief letter from the headteacher was sent to all parents explaining the staff member's forthcoming change of name and manner of dress. On the same day the children were told about the name and dress change that they would observe after the holiday.

This information was shared in an assembly along with other announcements such as name changes for those staff members, who are for instance, getting married over the summer. This choice of approach, providing only factual the information necessary was agreed by trustees, partially to ensure equality and an inclusive approach to this staff member's personal lifestyle choices and partially to minimise potential concerns from parents that the schools are influencing their children about personal identity choices.

Throughout the process we sought feedback from the staff member concerned and all other stakeholders, as well as liaising with Trustees, HR advisors and doing some reading and background research. We have learnt from the process, at least in part because this staff member has been so open about their situation. Looking at the literature available, this is not usually the case.

Three years later in 2021, this staff member remains non binary and is happy to be called Miss or Sir. As a valued member of our team, other staff are more interested in this person's skills and subject knowledge as a teacher and leader, than they are in their gender conformity or non-conformity. In fact, the matter is largely unremarked upon, except when a new class is taught by this teacher and children ask questions out of curiosity.

Initially, some parents expressed some negativity towards the teacher, but this was dealt with by the leadership, who reiterated this policy and our community principle of upholding every individual's right to protected characteristics. In fact, overall, having a staff member who is non binary has been helpful.

Gill Denham, Executive Headteacher, Marish Academy Trust, May 2021.