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Thriving or Surviving? Raising our ambition for trans children in primary and secondary schools

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Trans pupils face stigma and invalidation at school, often alongside discrimination and harassment.

Schools lack ambition for trans pupils, aiming for the low bar of protection from harassment and abuse. Trans pupils need equality of opportunity, in schools where they can excel and thrive.

Affirmative language, respect and trans-positivity are critical.

Schools need to address the cisnormative practices that negatively impact on the wellbeing and mental health of trans pupils.

A culture of silence surrounds trans lives at school - minimal trans representation can be perceived as excessive. Trans pupils denied representation in school experience shame and low self-esteem, and are forced to educate their own peers.

Teacher education and training needs to move beyond basic education on transphobic bullying, to helping staff understand the ways in which cisnormativity privileges cisgender individuals and makes life harder for trans pupils.

A cisnormative* school places trans pupils at a disadvantage, requiring them to navigate systems designed to exclude them.

Trans representation and visibility needs to become common and unremarkable, enabling trans pupils to grow up with a sense of belonging and self-worth.

Teacher trans-positivity is significantly correlated with pupil wellbeing.

Cisnormativity*: When systems, policies and people assume that everyone is (or should be) cis (not trans). Cisnormative schools place trans pupils at a disadvantage, requiring them to navigate systems designed to exclude them.

Trans: The term trans is used here to include people who are transgender, non-binary and/or gender diverse.