

May 3, 2023

Sent via email

Dear Head Teacher,

As the HMC conference draws near please would you consider speaking up in keynote speeches 1 and 2 on Thursday 4th May. Instead of offering school leaders an understanding of the complexity and vulnerability of their trans-identified students, the keynote speeches appear to present a simplistic & glamorized perspective that makes no mention of the evidence provided by the NHS Cass Review.

The Bayswater Support Group represents over 600 families. We offer parents whose children have a transgender identity support and somewhere to talk. We are wary of medical solutions to gender dysphoria, when exploring gender roles is part of normal child development. A significant number of our members have children in the private sector at HMC schools.

Parental confidence in schools' ability to support their children in line with the Cass Review findings and NHSE guidance is already low. It is difficult to see any common ground between The 'Trans in the City' representative and the current cohort of teenagers presenting with gender confusion, notably vast numbers of girls. In fact Dr Cass and other medical experts have repeatedly described the new teen presentation of gender distress as a novel cohort for which there is no long term research on outcomes.

Setting children off on a transgender pathway in school can lead to lifelong medicalisation and has clear links to serious mental health issues. We urge schools to view this through a safeguarding framework rather than as a cause for celebration.

The recent findings of Dr Hilary Cass highlight the need to look beyond a trans identity into what is actually happening beneath the surface in the life of a child. Our children have wide ranging and complex underlying issues such as autism, trauma and same sex attraction. Schools must consider an approach that protects vulnerable children from harm in their teenage years, rather than rushing to affirm an identity that may be transient, or at worst a mask for some very serious underlying concerns.

Please would you read the documents attached and be prepared to ask questions on behalf of these children in the discussions that follow these two keynote addresses.

Possible questions to ask the speakers:

1. The Cass Review states that "social transition is not a neutral act" and NHS England guidance recommends clinical advice before a child adopts a cross-sex identity. Given the potential medical consequences of a trans identity, what can HMC do to ensure schools are not facilitating irreversible mistakes of the kind already being reported by young detransitioners?
2. Recent data from Policy Exchange revealed that many schools are failing to obtain consent from parents before agreeing to a child's social transition (the adoption of a cross-sex identity through changing name and pronouns). The government has made it clear that this is not acceptable. What can HMC do to make sure schools understand the consequences of social transition and the need to involve parents in decision making?
3. The Cass Review highlights the fact that gender distress in children and young adults can arise for a variety of multifactorial reasons including a history of :abuse, trauma, bullying, internalised homophobia, and mental health issues. Dr Cass also emphasises that the retention of a trans identity into adulthood is only one of many possible outcomes for these children. What can the HMC do to provide school leaders with accurate, robust evidence on supporting children who announce a trans identity given the change in landscape of our understanding?

We thank you sincerely for taking the time to read this letter. Should you be interested further in our work for families or wish to contact us to find out more or if we could help your school, please do not hesitate to get in touch with us.

With our best wishes,

Fiona Peterson