



# WE Party Conference

15 – 18 October 2020

**Title:** Ending sexism in schools: Curriculum, culture and environment

**Proposed by:** WE Barnet Branch and WE Lambeth Branch

**Proposer:** Debbie Brazil

**Supporter:** Julia Valentine

**Type of motion:** Policy Motion

**Motion text:**

1 Conference 2020:

2 Believes that all children and students should receive a gender-balanced education in all settings,  
3 where women's voices and experiences are an equal part of the curriculum and embedded within  
4 the institution's culture;

5 Notes that under our equal education objective, WE call for all schools to undertake a gender audit  
6 of their curriculum; and

7 Recognises that schools require resources and accountability to deliver gender equal curricula.

8 The Women's Equality Party calls upon the UK Government to:

- 9
- 10 • Amend the Equality Act 2010 to:
    - 11 – Include the content of the curriculum and exam syllabuses
    - 12 – Require schools, and exam boards to have a named Equality lead.
  - 13 • Produce statutory guidance to:
    - 14 – Require schools to undertake a gender audit, develop a whole school/organisation strategy  
15 and implementation plan to deliver and maintain gender equality within three years, to be  
16 reviewed and updated annually. This should encompass:
      - 17 ○ the curriculum, extra-curricular activities, and all aspects of their environment and culture,  
18 including wall displays, assemblies, performances and presentation events. Women's  
19 voices and experiences will be studied proportionately to the percentage of women in the  
20 population.
      - 21 ○ Language and terminology which should be gender equal and inclusive, removing  
22 historic biases.
    - 23 – Require education inspectorates to report on progress on achieving gender equality as a  
24 core section in inspection reports.
    - 25 – Require teacher training providers to cover gender-equal teaching.
  - 26 • Fund:
    - 27 – the development of in-depth gender-balanced lesson resources to support schools in  
28 moving to a gender-equal curriculum.



- in-school gender equality teacher training.
- the facilitation of local equality networks to help teachers collaborate and share best practice.
- Ensure that all educational institutions including Academies and Free Schools are accountable to a national body on matters of inequality, discrimination and unconscious bias, and provide an appeals process after a parent has exhausted the school's existing complaints policy

### **Motion rationale:**

Educational institutions are key in shaping young people's minds, attitudes, and understanding of the world. Pupils should leave school understanding historic and current gender inequalities, yet most teach a male-centric curriculum, normalising and reinforcing sexism.

The curriculum is explicitly excluded from the Equality Act<sup>1</sup>, leaving a gender-equal curriculum to the discretion of individual schools and exam boards.

GCSE and A level exam boards frequently exclude women from the curriculum. Little evidence exists that teachers lobby for change. It was left to 17 year old Jessy McCabe to secure change in 2015 when finding 63 male composers but 0 women, on her A level syllabus<sup>2</sup>. In 2020 Teach First found no woman's names in the GCSE Science curriculum<sup>3</sup>.

At Key Stage Three, the Maintained Schools' national curriculum is broad, with mostly advisory content, so much scope for choice. Academies and Free Schools can set their own curriculum. Yet most secondary schools still choose white male authors in English and Drama or feature male protagonists; History focuses on male power struggles, explores events without considering the differential impact on men and women, or misrepresents men's gains as women's. Women's experiences are optional student topics or left to individual teacher discretion. Sadly most institutional sexism in schools is not illegal. Most schools will not change voluntarily<sup>4</sup>. Most parents who challenge will fail. Studying women, or women's works, should be mandatory, explicit, quantifiable, accountable.

The Equality Act 2010 requires public bodies to publish equalities objectives<sup>5</sup> every four years, and annual progress. Few schools do. Ofsted's equality objectives<sup>6</sup> include inspecting and reporting on non-compliance, but actually inspecting for this is rare<sup>7</sup>.

School accountability is almost non-existent. In Academies and Free Schools, there is no right to appeal to any external body beyond the school's complaints process. Parents can take legal action if they can find a legal argument, but that is not practical for most. The lack of oversight on gender and equality within schools means that the baseline position is unknown. Schools can discriminate

<sup>1</sup>[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/315587/Equality\\_Act\\_Advice\\_Final.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/315587/Equality_Act_Advice_Final.pdf) - see page 14

<sup>2</sup><https://www.theguardian.com/education/2015/dec/16/a-level-music-female-composers-students-campaign-jessy-mccabe-edexcel>

<sup>3</sup> [https://www.teachfirst.org.uk/sites/default/files/2020-02/teach\\_first\\_steminism\\_report.pdf](https://www.teachfirst.org.uk/sites/default/files/2020-02/teach_first_steminism_report.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> <https://ukfeminista.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/Report-Its-just-everywhere.pdf>

<sup>5</sup>[https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/sites/default/files/psed\\_essential\\_guide\\_-\\_guidance\\_for\\_english\\_public\\_bodies.pdf](https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/sites/default/files/psed_essential_guide_-_guidance_for_english_public_bodies.pdf) - see pages 9-10

<sup>6</sup>[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/860514/Ofsted\\_s\\_equality\\_objectives\\_2017-2020\\_gov\\_for\\_publication\\_Annex\\_A-amd.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/860514/Ofsted_s_equality_objectives_2017-2020_gov_for_publication_Annex_A-amd.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/ofsteds-equality-objectives-2016-to-2020/equality-objectives-progress-review-2018-to-2019>



60 with impunity. We believe an organisation like the Equalities and Human Rights Commission, with  
61 the relevant expertise, would be best placed to deliver this.

62 WE recognise that it will take national leadership to deliver real change in a reasonable timescale.  
63 Tokenistic “one-offs” must cease, replaced with a whole-school strategy approach<sup>8</sup>, encompassing  
64 all aspects of a school’s life and creating a culture where equality is the norm. This will include extra-  
65 curricular activities, the names of school houses, all the way to everyday language and addressing  
66 teachers in a gender-equal way – no more Sir and Miss. A national programme to co-ordinate  
67 guidance, advice and the development of a comprehensive lesson plan library and other resources  
68 for schools will be necessary.

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<sup>8</sup> Examples include the Mayor of London promoted Gender Action Award requiring development of a whole school strategy <https://www.genderaction.co.uk/> See also Equaliteach Equalities Award (<https://equaliteach.co.uk/for-schools/equalities-award/>)