

Submission to the public consultation process on the review of the Gender Recognition Act 2015

The Irish National Teachers' Organisation (INTO) is the largest teachers' trade union in Ireland. It represents the interests of teachers at primary level in the Republic of Ireland.

Members of the INTO teach 560,000 pupils in the country's 3,300 primary schools in all parts of the country and regularly interact with their parents and other family members. This active engagement with families in the education of children gives the INTO an exceptional insight into matters affecting children of primary school age.

The INTO makes the following observations in the context of the review of the Gender Recognition Act currently underway in respect of arrangements for children under 16 years.

The INTO notes that there are currently no provisions in legislation for persons under the age of 16 years to legally change gender. Nor are there any provisions to allow a person to apply to live in a preferred gender other than that of male or female.

Nevertheless, the INTO is aware of a small number of instances where a pupil enrolled in primary school, with the consent of their parents, has sought to be recognised in the school community as a different gender and to be known in school by a different name.

There are currently no provisions to enable a primary school to meet with such a request. There are no guidelines available to teachers or boards of management on how such requests should be handled.

At present school records record the gender and assigned names of children in accordance with their birth certificates. There is no facility for schools to accommodate any request to be known as a different gender or to be known as a different name.

The INTO is of the view that notwithstanding that such requests at this level may be rare, the Department of Education and Skills be required to produce guidelines for schools on meeting the needs of children who identify as a different gender.

Such children require appropriate support in schools from teachers and other adults and a first step is to inform and upskill teachers so that they in turn can ensure that pupils receive appropriate support.

In particular, school management requires support to ensure that the policies, practices and climate in schools can support such children effectively ensuring that they are not isolated.

The Gender Recognition Act confers rights on individuals from a certain age. However, in many instances an individual's wish to have their preferred gender choice recognised

does not simply begin when they pass the age of 18 or even 16. For a small number of children this happens during primary school.

The Department of Education and Skills should be given the responsibility to ensure that school boards, teachers and other staff are aware of this. Resourcing schools to support pupils in such instances should be a function of the Department of Education and Skills.